Eye of the Storm
by KiyaSama

Summary

Her silence is unnerving, yet Jon Snow realizes the mysterious tenant in Apt 1803, just might be his ticket to getting out of the cesspool that is King's Landing....

...if she doesn't kill him first.

However, to help her gain control of the Seven Kingdoms, he finds himself drawn into a world of sin, decadence, and inevitable danger where falling in love is never an option and all is never as it seems.

Notes

A multi-chaptered story?? The world's gone mad I tell you.
But here we go!
I see lots of shenanigans with this; hence the male/male, female/female tags, because yes...I can and will probably go there in the future. Different partners etc., but the endgame remains the same.

Hope you like and as always kudos/comments/feedback are always more than welcome!
*bows gratefully*
“Like what you see?”

Her voice dripped like honey and he swallowed; head bobbing up and down like a puppet dangling from barely stable strings. He couldn’t make out her features despite the flash of disco-neon lights around them. Not that it mattered in the grand scheme of things. All he cared about was the sexy display before him; the way her hands ran down her ample bosom (damn they were huge!) and how he longed to suckle on those tits until she screamed his name. Salivating with desire, he crawled closer; not bothering to question why he was actually on his hands and knees in the first place. She had cast a spell over him, and he didn’t care if he died tonight in her arms. He wanted her – no…he needed her like a drug.

“I want you,” he whimpered as he reached out to claim what could be his.

She giggled and slowly stretched out a long leg in his direction. He moaned as her sole met his forehead and when she pressed lightly, he was sure he was going to come there and then.

“Then beg, Jon Snow,” she whispered in her most seductive tone yet. “Beg like the dog you really are.”

Pride flying out the window, he parted his lips to do just that, when something slammed at the back of his head.

_The fuck?!_

It wasn’t enough to hurt, but it jarred him all the same.

“Wake up, asshole!” came the muffled cry from behind him.

Jon cursed beneath his breath again and pursed his lips in irritation; while forcing his attention back
to the stripper. This was no time to wake up. She was almost his for crying out loud!

“You really should go now, Jon,” she was saying in a voice that seemed to fade in and out. It was almost as if she was disappearing from sight. No good. No good at all.

Jon, feeling the panic rising within, shook his head and reached for her again. “It’s okay! It really is. I’ve got time! Please come back! Please…!”

“WAKE UP!”

This time he was pushed so hard, he rolled out the bed and fell to the floor with a loud thump. His lashes flew open; the combined emotions of sleep and fury causing him to reach for the nearest object to toss in the direction of his tormentor. He ended up grabbing one of his sneakers, only to look up and into the scowling visage of his boss/relative.

“…Uncle Benjen?” he groaned and lowered the shoe; shoulders sagging in weary resignation. Shit.

“You know what today is,” Benjen Stark said with a thinning of his lips. He was usually of good disposition and a hoot to hang out with (especially with a couple of beers in him), but on days like these, Jon knew better than to piss off one of the few relatives that could stand his presence.

“Sorry,” Jon muttered as he rose unsteadily to his feet. He shook his head to clear out some of the fog; the last whispers of his dream stripper fading from mind. He blinked at the rays of sunlight to filter through the thin curtains and winced at the time on his alarm clock.

Almost nine – no wonder his uncle was pissed.

“Sorry,” he repeated as he gave his uncle another weak smile and reached for the pair of jeans crumpled in the corner of the room. He hopped into them and spoke hastily as he dressed; desperate to find at least one clean shirt in the chaos that was his bedroom. “I’ll get to it immediately. I swear.”

“You better,” Benjen replied with a sigh of exasperation. He shook his head; the waves of disappointment stabbing through Jon’s heart at the sight. “Make sure you try to get as many of them before they leave. You know how they are.”

“Yes, sir,” Jon replied as he finally settled on a black tee-shirt with a faded The Crows insignia on it. He ran his fingers through his mess of black curls and dashed into the bathroom to at least get a little more decent.

Twenty minutes later, he was standing before his uncle’s office desk; staring down at the lowered head of black (with a sprinkle of grey) hair before him. His uncle was running down the list of those yet to cough up their monthly rent as the three-day leeway was over. Jon’s job was to go door-to-door to get them by any means necessary aside from physically assaulting anyone. Good thing it wasn’t that large of an apartment complex or Jon felt this job wasn’t really for him. He was good when it came to confrontations, and had been in his share of fights over the years, but he’d rather not have things come to that if he could help it.

“They like you better,” Benjen had admitted after the first couple of months on the job. “Must be your looks because they sure as hell don’t treat me the same way, and I’m the nicest landlord out there for fuck’s sake!”

He wasn’t exaggerating either. Compared to the other landlords in Kings Landing, Benjen Stark was one of the ‘good guys’. He was tolerant and almost too nice to a fault. It was any wonder he made any money with how many of his tenants had the tendency to give him excuses when it came time to pay up. There were times when Jon wanted to shake his uncle and tell him to be a little tougher, but
Benjen would look at him with something akin to pity before replying,

“…some of these people just need a little more time, that’s all. In case you haven’t noticed, Kings Landing ain’t exactly paradise.”

_No kidding_, Jon thought bitterly as he accepted the folder with the list of names and apartment numbers to go hunting down. To say he loathed this city would be an understatement, but it was his stepmother’s wish for him to ‘gain-some-knowledge’ in the South, and what better way than to be shipped down here to spend some quality time with his dead father’s younger brother?

Anyone with a brain could tell it was simply Catelyn’s way of getting rid of him. After all, with Ned’s untimely passing, she was finally able to do something she had always wanted to do anyway. There was no love lost between Jon and his stepmother. The knowledge that he was the product of infidelity was enough to have him on her most-hated list. It was a miracle he had survived the past twenty-two years in her company, and he knew it was all thanks to his half-siblings who at least treated him with some decency. If not, he was sure he would have jumped off the balcony of their massive home in Winterfell to end it all.

He missed them all, especially his little sister, Arya. She was the closest to him, and he genuinely enjoyed her company. Hell, if it wasn’t for her lady parts, Arya was more than content to be his little brother because she sure as hell wasn’t exactly as ladylike as her mother or older sister – Sansa – would have preferred. Jon had lost count of how many times he and Arya had raised hell in their home, either by staying out late with friends or skipping out on family matters. Arya was a free spirit, and it was a trait Jon admired greatly. Maybe, in some ways, he was a little envious, for though he let loose once in a while, there were moments when he felt he had to restrain himself –

_(…so she can like me a little bit)_

He could almost laugh at that naïve little boy who was so desperate for Catelyn’s approval. He was never going to get it, no matter how many As or awards he received in school. All that praise and adoration was reserved for his older brother, Robb, whom he loved and respected despite the favoritism.

Robb was the typical jock; the guy who got all the girls, who had the looks, and could do no wrong in whatever sport or activity he decided to pick up. Though they were separated by only a couple of months, Robb never failed to act like an older brother. He was always quick to impart his ‘wisdom’ to a wide-eyed Jon, who listened and soaked it all in like a sponge. Thanks to Robb giving him a good kick in the pants, he finally lost his virginity at fifteen (Robb had lost his two years earlier apparently), and never looked back. Robb taught him how to appreciate women, and despite the many that were more than willing to keep his bed warm, Jon still felt inhibited and almost shy in dealing with them – especially the more forward ones. His sexual escapades could be counted on one hand, while Robb was more than willing to list just about half the women in the entire North he had slept with.

_More power to him_, Jon thought with a rueful smile, as he gulped down the last of his coffee and took a deep breath. _Showtime._

Robb was now in charge of his father’s business, and from what he had heard, he was doing quite well keeping things running smoothly. He really did have to give Robb a call to catch up on things. Bran – his younger brother – was a freshman at a rather prestigious college in Oldtown getting his PhD in Bioengineering. A certified bookworm/nerd and avid daredevil (the combo was almost a paradox), Bran was…_interesting_…to be around. He wasn’t much of a talker, and when he did talk, Jon sometimes felt himself dozing off in the middle of conversation. Must be something to do with the flat affect of his voice or his penchant for never really getting to the point on time.
The baby of the house was Rickon, who was still in high school and wasn’t quite sure of what he wanted to do with himself once he graduated. He had asked Jon’s opinion over a phone call last week, and after half-an-hour of trying to convince him to do something…anything! at all with his damn life, Jon gave up and rudely suggested he become a male prostitute. Rickon had laughed at that before sobering up and saying, “I just might do it.”

Jon wasn’t sure if he was kidding or not, but imagining the mortification on Catelyn’s face if her precious baby ended up fucking random women (or men) for money, was enough to put him in a good mood for the rest of the day.

“Good morning, Mr. Thorne,” he greeted as the elevator doors opened to reveal the familiar face of one of the tenants. “Great day, isn’t it?”

Mr. Thorne, who might have been pushing a hundred for all Jon knew, tipped his hat and waved his walking cane in the young man’s direction. He grinned; revealing pink gums and yellowing teeth before shuffling his way out the front door. He might have muttered a greeting in return, but Jon was so used to not understanding whatever the hell he was talking about, he simply nodded and bound up the stairs two-at-a-time. It might have been easier to use the elevator, but he needed the extra exercise.

Whistling beneath his breath, while making mental notes of the cracks along the wall and on the landing itself – he dreaded having to call Yoren to get these re-plastered and painted, but maybe his uncle could get the crotchety old bastard to do the job without bitching continuously about it.

He came to a stop before 1201 and rolled his eyes at the sounds of Tchaikovsky filtering through the green door. Damn hipsters pretending to be classical music enthusiasts.

He rang the doorbell and counted beneath his breath. At thirty-five, the door finally creaked open, letting out an undeniable waft of hashish, before a green-eye peered at him with feigned caution.

“Joooon?”

“Hi Olivia,” Jon greeted with as big a smile as he could muster, while trying not to cough. He had once made the mistake of accepting an invitation to one of their smoke-fests, and goodness knows he wasn’t going to repeat that again. The hangover was the worst, and he was sure he had been high for days afterwards. “Petyr home?”

“Noooo,” she drawled and opened the door a little wider; a knowing smile now on her visage as he cursed beneath his breath and forced himself to look at the folder.

She was naked except for a pair of sexy black stilettos.

Seven hells.

“You owe the rent,” he managed through clenched teeth. He tried to take a step back as a jeweled hand reached out for him. Her fingernails were a kaleidoscope of colors, and would have been pretty if it wasn’t for how claw-like they looked. “It’s three-days past due.”

“Oh really?” she pouted and moved closer still until she was almost in the hallway. Jon darted a quick glance around to make sure no one else was coming, before making the mistake of reaching out to push her inside…on her left breast.

Goddamn it!

“Oooh! Naughty!” she giggled and caught him with a surpassingly strong grip around his wrist. “I
know you’ve been eyeing me, Jon darling. Let’s have a little fun before Petyr comes back.”

“Not today,” Jon replied with a grit of his teeth as he pulled back so hard, he nearly stumbled over his feet. He tore his gaze away from her; wishing she didn’t have such a great body despite the myriad of tattoos dotting it. Her features weren’t bad either, and with the piercings on her ears, nose, and tongue; her multi-colored hair and glazed expression, she was ripe for a good hard fuck or at least a tongue bath. Jon wasn’t blind. He could literally see her juices running down her thighs.

Fuckfuckfuck.

“I need the rent, Olivia,” he stated firmly; forcing images of spiders crawling all over him into his mind. “Do you have it or not?”

“Urgh. You’re such a buzzkill,” she complained and rolled her eyes. Taking a drag of her weed, she blew a cloud of smoke in his face before turning away and sashaying into the apartment.

Jon – despite his better judgement – studied every sway of those hips with an ass that just wouldn’t quit. He felt himself getting hard(er) and forced those damn imaginary spiders – his greatest fear for whatever reason – to crawl around his dick.

When she returned with the envelope in her hand, she waved it before him; a teasing smile on her lips. “You’re not going to get it until I get a kiss from you.”

“Olivia…”

“I’m just asking for a little kiss, that’s all,” she whined and leaned closer with red-painted full lips pouted and ready to go. “Pretty please?”

“Just one kiss, right?” Jon replied with a raised brow.

Her breath quickened and she nodded eagerly. “Yes…just…one…”

He moved so quick, she barely had the time to think. The kiss was a warm one on her forehead, just as the envelope was snatched away from her hand at the same time.

“Thanks, sweetheart,” Jon said with a smirk and mock salute as he walked away backwards. “See you next month.”

“You asshole!” she screeched as he dashed up the stairs; nearly laughing until he got to 1305 and composed himself.

Lucky for him, Mr. and Mrs. Martin were not much of a hassle. The older man apologized profusely; complaining about not being able to finish up a book he’s been working on and things have been so chaotic lately. His publishers were giving him a hard time with deadlines and all that crap, but he did have the check ready.

“Well good luck with your novel,” Jon said with a smile. The poor guy looked hassled, and if that white beard and frazzled expression was any indication, the book he was writing must be an epic of sorts.

“Thank you, Jon, and feel free to stop by anytime for a cup of coffee, eh?”

Jon thanked him for his kindness, but doubted it. If he wanted to be bored stiff, he’d call Bran and listen to him drone on about his latest thesis on some weird engineering thing he had concocted in class.
By the time he got to the topmost floor, Jon had dealt with three more passes from lust-filled women; including old Mrs. Tyrell who kept pretending she was deaf, but only wanted Jon to come into her apartment until she slapped his ass and commented on how ‘delicious he was enough to eat’. He would have been freaked out at her daring, but a part of him couldn’t help admiring her boldness. From the pictures dotting her walls, it was clear O. Tyrell had been one hell of a babe in her younger days. She wasn’t afraid to speak her mind, and he could appreciate her brute honesty.

Two others were not available and he had left the pink notices tacked to their doors, while one had insisted on speaking to his uncle to request an extra week.

The last apartment, on his list, was 1803 – conveniently tucked away at the end of the hallway as if it was an afterthought. Uncle Benjen did say he had once considered using it for storage, but figured with a little ingenuity, he could convert it into a loft for some desperate student.

And desperate student’s name was… Dany S.

Jon blinked at the name. Dany? Was that some cool hipster way of calling himself?

Great. Another one of those.

He stopped at the red door and listened. It was quiet. No sounds of music or a T.V. or even the cooling system. Jon couldn’t even remember when someone had actually moved in here, though it might have been sometime in the past month, because he was sure he hadn’t been here since this Dany’s arrival.

*Probably not home*, Jon thought as he pressed the doorbell, while desperately praying it was the case. He was running out of his ‘charm’ for the morning, as all the other adventures had taken a toll. All he wanted to do now was take a smoke break, have a beer, and possibly call up Ros – his on-again-off-again girlfriend – for a quick pick-me-up. If he was lucky, they could have a quick fuck without her yapping into his ear about something banal or –

The door creaked open –

“Hello,” Jon began on autopilot, only for the words to die out as he found himself staring at the muzzle of a gun pointed right at his forehead.

HolyshitI'mgoingtodie!

“What do you want?” came the muffled voice from behind the door.

Jon couldn’t trust himself to speak, and when the hammer clicked, he rushed out a desperate, “I just came to get the rent, that’s all. I swear. I’m not doing anything else. Please don’t shoot me.”

There was a heartbeat of a pause, where Jon was sure the person was going to blast him away anyway, when the door promptly slammed shut…there was the jerk of the chain locks opening and then –

“Ah!”

He was dragged in by the scruff of his t-shirt, with gun still pointed squarely at his temple, and the door slammed shut behind him.

It was a miracle he was still clutching the folder like a lifeline (somehow the stupid thought of his uncle being upset that he lost all the checks was suddenly more important than his life on the line), as he was forced to face his attacker. He was prepared to blubber out some other plea for mercy, when
he found himself doing a double-take.

*What the…?*

“Are you the landlord?” came the curt question.

Jon was so gob smacked at the sight of the petite female (pretty despite her rather haggard appearance) that he barely felt the cold hard object still stuck to his temple. She was slightly shorter than him, but with her stance and stern expression, it was clear she was not one to be messed with. She was barefoot, but clad in a pair of black sweatpants and matching hoodie which covered most of her face. However, it failed to hide the thick braided ponytail with hair so white it almost shimmered like silver when she moved.

And her eyes…*whoa*.

He had never seen eyes that shade of purple or was it lilac or maybe violet -

“Are you the landlord?” she barked out impatiently, and this time he nodded quickly.

“Well not really,” he explained. “I’m Jon Snow. I work for him…the landlord that is. He’s my uncle. Uncle Benjen? He’s the one with the long hair that’s always in a ponytail and he looks like he’s pissed, but he’s not…”

He realized he was blabbing and forced his mouth to keep shut.

Her eyes narrowed. She studied him as one would study a cockroach about to be stomped before she lowered her gaze to the folder. Jon was sure he wasn’t breathing; the only sound being the thundering of his heart and the undeniable pressure forming in his bladder. The last thing he wanted to do was pee himself in terror, but if he was going to die in front of her –

“Don’t move,” she finally said after what seemed like an eternity. “If you do, I’ll kill you. Understand?”

He nodded again; not trusting himself to speak.

She pulled away slowly; gun still trained on him. He held her gaze and swallowed; a part of him hoping she would bump into the chair behind her, giving him some time to escape or better yet kick the gun away. However, one, he wasn’t about to fight a woman, and two, he had spent too much time imagining he was a secret agent –

*Or maybe she’s the one who’s a secret agent,* he mused as she turned and disappeared into a room. *Maybe she’s a member of the Kingsguards! Holy shit…or maybe…maybe she’s a drug dealer or…*

He scanned the apartment, perhaps hoping to see a pile of cocaine or heroin stacked there. To his dismay, there was absolutely nothing to give her away. If anything, the apartment looked as if no one had lived here in a while. There was just a hint of lemon in the air, but otherwise, it was free from the familiar stench of smoke or rotten food he had come to associate with the other tenants. Everything was neat and with its monochromatic theme of white and blacks, there was a stark neatness that was slightly unnerving. The walls were adorned with abstract paintings that made no sense to him, but did make for a pleasing aesthetic. The furniture choices weren’t cheap either. We were talking fine leather and an entertainment center that was to die for. It had all the latest devices with a flat screen T.V. that could rival a movie theater screen.

*Fucking awe -*
“Here you go,” she said as she appeared again with an envelope in hand. Luckily, the gun was not exactly pointed at him, but it was still clutched in her hand anyway.

“Than…thanks,” Jon replied with what he hoped was a smile, but she didn’t respond in kind. He cleared his throat. “Uum…do you mind if I borrowed your counter?” He pointed to the kitchen island with its marbled top. “I just need to sign a few things and give you the receipt.”

She said nothing, and taking that as a ‘yes’, Jon walked carefully toward the kitchen and struggling not to display his nerves, scribbled out the receipt after making sure that the check was for the right amount. He was quick to note that there was a pot of coffee and a mug with “PRINCESS” written on it to indicate that she at least lived here, so that was promising. Other than that…

The seconds ticked by endlessly.

She was too damn quiet, and it was beginning to bother him.

He wondered what he could talk about. Dare he ask who she was or where she came from? Should he start with something as inane as the weather? Though he was sure she’d shoot him just for boring her to death. As he struggled to think up something good, he was spared when the sudden chime of a phone ringing interrupted the silence.

He looked up with a half-smile. She stared back with no expression on her…

(damn she really is pretty)

…visage.

“…uum…that’s your phone I think,” he finally said with a light shrug. “You going to answer it or…?”

Without missing a beat, she whipped out the device from the pocket of her hoodie and not tearing her gaze from him, she spoke curtly into it. “Talk to me.”

*Yikes.* She was definitely a Kingsguard. No doubt about it. He had heard stories about how ruthless they were, but to think that one of them would be living here? How improbable was that? She was probably on some secret mission and he might have jeopardized it by showing up to –

“…that’s unacceptable,” she was saying as she paced away from him to walk to the window. The hood fell off her head to reveal the rest of her hair, and Jon’s breath caught at the sight. If it had shimmered before, now it seemed to literally glow beneath the sun’s rays. There was something decidedly ethereal about this woman, and when she spun around again; the luminescence of her lilac eyes caused a whole other sensation in the pit of his stomach.

He cursed beneath his breath and gathered up his papers with hands that slightly trembled.

“…midnight,” she continued. “Got it. I’ll see you there.”

She hung up and tucked the phone into her pocket. The mask was on again, and it was clearly time for him to hightail it.

“Thanks again,” he mumbled as he handed her the receipt.

She accepted it, and with the slight brush of their fingers, Jon felt a rush of blood to his face and groin that was almost painful. Fuck this. He’d blame it all on Olivia later.
He couldn’t tell you how he managed to make it out of her apartment, but once in the ‘safety’ of the hallway, he was just about to let out a deep breath of relief, when her voice halted him again.

“You saw and heard nothing here today, Jon Snow.”

“Huh?”

Her brows met in the middle and she repeated the words slowly. “You saw and heard nothing here today.”

He got it.

“I…yeah…I saw and heard nothing,” he repeated with his heart lodged somewhere in his throat. That urge to let go of his bladder returned, but when her lips curved into the faintest of smiles, that other undefinable emotion slammed into his chest.

…but to match the slamming of the door in his face.

Damn.

_Guess that’s that_, he thought with mixed feelings of dismay and gratitude, as he made his way downstairs where he finally let go of the breath he had been holding as he clutched a balustrade for support.

_Heard and saw nothing, huh?_

He pursed his lips and looked up at the ceiling for a long time.

What would his little free spirited sister, Arya, do in a situation like this?

//Midnight. Got it. I’ll see you there. //

He glanced at his watch and felt the first stirrings of excitement racing through him. He might end up getting his ass shot if he was discovered, but hell! It was probably going to be worth it if he learned just what a member of the Kingsguard was doing here. Besides, he was sure Arya would want to hear all about it when he saw her next time (if there was a next time). She did always have a fascination for that mysterious group.

“Midnight it is,” Jon whispered as he bounded down the stairs double-time.

Suddenly, his day had gotten just a little bit better.
As you might have noticed, the setting is Westeros, but with modern amenities (it's such a rich world!)
As I also mentioned in my last note, there are going to be several pairings in this, although the endgame remains the same, so yes, there might be Jealous! Jon and Jealous! Dany creeping up here and there, who knows?
I appreciate those who have taken the time to leave a comment or kudos for this story so far, and I hope I can update as quickly as possible (I work nights, so it's tricky). *cries*
Enjoy!

By midday, Jon felt dangerously close to torching Flea Bottom and every son-of-a-bitch that lived in it.

His hair was a wet mop on his head, his jacket long discarded in the back seat of his uncle’s truck leaving the tee-shirt to cling to his body like a second skin. The AC had died with a clunky whimper sometime last week, and despite promises of getting it fixed ‘soon’, Jon felt his uncle was torturing him in some sick way. Why else would he be sent to make these deliveries in a truck that was barely functioning? Hell, even the radio sputtered and seemed to cry out for mercy whenever Jon fiddled with the buttons in a desperate attempt to get some form of entertainment.

With a drop of sweat trickling down his nose, he slammed a fist against the steering wheel to give a long loud blast of his horn. At least that was working fine. With a last suck of his cigarette, he tossed it out the window and stuck his head out to bellow in frustration:

“Come on, man! Move it!”

“Fuck you too, asshole!” came the predictable response from the culprit responsible for causing the traffic in the first place. The guy was easily ten times Jon’s size, and with this scowling and horribly scarred visage, he looked ready to take on any of the other angry drivers or pedestrians honking and
hooting for him to move his overturned truck filled with excitable live hens. Between the overturned crates of eggs, flapping wings and fluttering feathers, the square looked like a tornado had ripped through it.

*I'm never getting out of here,* Jon thought with a groan as he leaned his forehead against the steering wheel. It was almost lunchtime and with the growl of his stomach, he prayed his friends hadn’t started without him.

As if on cue, his cell phone buzzed beside him. A weary hand reached out to grab it without looking up.

“‘Sup?” he asked.

“Where are you?”

*Hell,* Jon mused with a wry smirk. Still, he sat up and forced himself to focus on the scene; grateful that at least some members of the City Watch were finally arriving to settle the chaos.

“Almost there, Sam,” he replied. He blinked away the sweat from his eyes. “Hope you guys haven’t started eating yet, goddamn it.”

“Dude, we can’t wait forever. Gendry’s almost finished with his first burger. Hmmmm…smeeeeeells gooooood too!”

“I’m almost there!” Jon nearly cried out in frustration. “Tell him to cool it!”

Sam laughed and would have replied when there seemed to be a jostle of the phone – two voices arguing and snickering – before his other friend’s voice drifted over the line.

“If you ain’t here in the next ten minutes, it’s all gone, my brother,” Gendry taunted. “So if it means you breaking a couple of laws, move your ass over here, Snow!”

“I hate you guys,” Jon groaned, though he couldn’t help the reluctant smile as his friends continued to rib him in good fun.

One of the City Watch officers pounded the side of his truck and waved his hand for Jon to move ahead, and ending the call quickly, Jon did just that with an exaggerated sigh of gratitude. He gave one last look at the calamity behind him, noticing that the chicken farmer was now getting a citation, and with the way he raged and stomped his foot; someone was definitely not happy.

Chuckling, Jon wound his way down Flea Bottom’s narrow streets and alleys; the now familiar sights and sounds weirdly soothing to his senses. Although he had lived in King’s Landing for almost a year, and knew most of the locale and what each had to offer, there was always something about this rundown pit that spoke to him. Maybe it was the grit and grim of its occupants or the no-fucks-given attitude of those who considered this place home and would not trade it for any other place. Every other shack was either an automobile or appliance shop. The thick stench of hot oils, grease and steel intermingling with the sweat and toil of its laborers, filled the air. The buildings, themselves, seemed to lean into each other; as if desperate to occupy whatever little space was left. Clothing lines filled with colorful or rag tag laundry fluttered between old stone and brick structures; windows flung open to reveal curious children or full-bosomed women hoping to get some reprieve from the summer heat.

His destination was a restaurant tucked between an inn and a shop that specialized in weapons of all kinds. *Bobby B’s Hammer and Chain* was one of the busiest and most loved shops in all of Flea Bottom (if not King’s Landing). Its familiar yellow flag – with a black stag and crown – fluttered
proudly in the non-existent afternoon breeze, and as Jon leapt out of the truck, he could make out its boisterous owner—Robert Baratheon—trying to sweet-talk two potential customers into purchasing what appeared to be machine guns. Why anyone would want those was a mystery, but not wanting to catch the big man’s attention; Jon ducked into the restaurant and out of the blistering heat. He almost sighed in pleasure at the waft of cold air to hit him; though it was short-lived when he noticed how crowded the place was. He couldn’t blame them. Hot Pie’s cooking was legendary around these parts, and as Jon spied his friends holding court in the corner of the room, he weaved his way between chattering tables and benches to get to them.

“Look who finally decided to show his ugly mug,” Gendry greeted with a wave of a chicken leg in Jon’s direction. “We were about to give up on you, man.”

“Fuck you too,” Jon replied with a smirk as he plopped down in the space beside him. He nodded once to the heavy-set man across them. “Hey, Sam.”

Samwell Tarly grinned and nodded around a spoon of gravy, which he shoveled into his mouth before washing it down with a swig of beer. He belched and spoke, having to raise his voice as the cacophony around them increased. “Hi Jon! Order something already.”

“You’re still paying, right?” Jon asked with a raised brow as he motioned for one of the pretty waitresses.

“Gendry is,” Sam argued as he pointed to the dark-haired man beside Jon. “Daddy’s been good to him today.”

Gendry snickered and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. His blue eyes glowed with mirth and something akin to mischief. “Guess all that time learning how to work with steel and metal finally paid off,” he said as he flexed his hand. It was calloused and no matter how many times he washed it, there was always going to be that tinge of soot caked beneath his fingernails. Not that it bothered a man like Gendry Waters (who had chosen to take his mother’s name for some reason Jon was yet to discover). It was only a sign of how hardworking and devoted he was to his craft, and like his father, Robert Baratheon, he loved making and owning as many weapons as he could.

“Dad gave me a raise for making a war hammer,” Gendry bragged and puffed out his chest. He was fit in all the right places; something Jon had witnessed firsthand with their initial meeting. “You know how heavy that shit is?”

“Don’t care,” Jon mumbled and smiled at the brunette now hovering at their table. He placed his order; making sure he got one of the more expensive meals on the menu. Of course this prompted Gendry to complain, while Sam laughed at Jon’s obvious payback for the last time the blacksmith pulled a similar stunt.

“Oh, by the way,” Sam said several minutes later as Jon dug into his bowl of chicken pot pie with gusto. He couldn’t remember when anything had ever tasted this good. “Here’s the brochure you asked me to get.”

Jon looked up as the piece of paper landed next to his bowl. For a moment, it didn’t quite make sense, until the words “KINGSGUARD” caused his pulse to quicken.

_Dany S._

“What’s this all about?” Gendry asked as he blinked in confusion at the brochure Jon had snatched up quickly. “Ain’t that a recruitment thing?”
“Maybe Jon wants to finally make something of his life,” Sam teased, though curiosity lurked within his dark eyes as well. He sucked on a chicken bone and struggled not to ask the million questions that raged through his mind. After all, getting a random phone call from his best buddy to find out information about recruiting for the Kingsguard, of all things, was pretty weird to say the least.

Jon felt the heat creep up his neck as he raised a middle finger in response to that. It was a rather simple brochure; no flash or bells and whistles as others might have done to get more attention. On the cover was a picture of a gold crown surrounded by seven swords and the letters ‘KG’ beneath it. On the back was the picture of a proud Kingsguard in the royal colors of white and gold with his back to the reader. With a sword in one hand and a gun in the other, there was nothing more imposing yet cool to a potential applicant.

Inside was a brief introduction by the famous Lord Commander Jaimie Lannister, who described the task of becoming a member of the Kingsguard as ‘the-greatest-honor-in-one’s-life”…

“To become a Kingsguard is to devote oneself to the Crown and country. You are the white shadow that protects the realm from all harm. You are invaluable in more ways than one; a treasure that can never be tarnished.”

Wow.

Jon could definitely see the appeal and why his sister, Arya, was so enamored with this group of elite officersfighters. They were hardly seen on the streets, but when they did show up, they commanded such respect it was awe-inspiring. While some were more obvious with their duties – as in protecting the King and his family - there were others who worked in the shadows; spies and assassins whose job was to keep the peace in the only way they knew how.

And she might be one of them, Jon thought as he glanced at the address and phone numbers left for potential applicants to sign up. Recalling how steady Dany’s hands had been with the gun pointed at him; that expressionless face that knew so much yet gave nothing away, was enough to have his heartbeat quickening again.

He glanced at his watch. It was only two-fifteen. He still had a couple of errands to run, but his hope was that he’d be done on time to begin his stakeout. He had no plans to miss Dany tonight, and if she was really a member of the Kingsguard…

Then what? a part of him screamed. What do you plan to do then? Gush and praise her for being such a badass? Offer to protect her? Get real, Jon Snow. If anything, she’s probably going to laugh in your face or really kill you for interrupting a mission.

“…have to be smart and shit to get in?” Gendry was asking as he snatched the brochure out of Jon’s hand. “You won’t get accepted, man.”

“What?” Jon blinked in confusion.

Sam snickered. “I heard you have to pass several tests and shit like that to get in. It’s not easy to join those guys. That’s why they’re elite.”

“No shit,” Jon replied with a snort. “I never said I was joining.”

“So why did you ask me to get it?” Sam asked with a raised brow. “You should have seen the look
on the recruitment officer’s face when I showed up to ask for info. I’m sure he wondered if I was putting him on. I definitely don’t look the part.”

Jon opened his mouth to give an automated response, but as he stared at the only two people he could really consider ‘friends’ in this hellhole, he wondered if he ought to tell them the truth. Sam might come across as fat and slow to most, but to Jon, he had proven to be the kindest and bravest nerd he’s ever known. He wasn’t a fighter – physically at least – but when it came to the mind, he was quick on his feet and could rattle of stats and mindless trivia info like no one else. He was loyal to a fault, and after Jon had saved him from a bunch of gang members trying to mug him that fateful night, Sam was practically a brother to him.

Gendry, on the other hand, was more of a take-charge, fight-first and think/talk later kind of guy. Jon had met him in a street brawl (no one really remembers what the hell they were fighting for, but it had been after a soccer match and obviously bloods boiled as one team couldn’t handle the loss). Gendry seemed to favor using a baseball bat or any other object around, to knock his opponents senseless. However, he was no slouch in hand-to-hand combat, and it was after the fight, when both men were nursing busted foreheads and swollen jaws, did they reluctantly admit they were evenly matched and could be buddies.

It had taken Jon a long time to open up to anyone, but when these two wouldn’t give up on him and insisted he join them for whatever shenanigans they had planned, Jon gave in with a reluctant thrill of pleasure within. Suddenly, King’s Landing didn’t feel as miserable and lonely anymore.

Yet…

I can’t tell them, he thought as he captured his lower lip between his teeth. I can’t betray Dany considering I don’t really know what she’s up to. Besides, the last thing I want to do is drag them into something potentially dangerous.

“It’s for Arya,” he said aloud with what he hoped was a reassuring smile. “My little sister. She’s dying to join them, and I promised I’d get info for her.”

Gendry shrugged at this and continued his meal, though Sam held his gaze a little longer as he wasn’t really buying it. When he noticed Jon wasn’t flinching, he sighed and dragged his spoon around his plate in random circles.

Such was the way with Jon motherf*cking Snow. The guy could be as mysterious as he was gregarious…at least in their company. He could only hope his best friend wasn’t getting into something that could be very risky.

The contrast in weather was sometimes a shock to Jon. While he had been sweating like a stuck pig during the day, at night he was forced to hug his varsity jacket tighter around him. It was nowhere as cold as it gets in Winterfell, but after living in King’s Landing for this long, his body had adjusted to the heat of the South. Hell, he was even getting a tan for crying out loud.

He sighed and sank lower in the seat of his car; a classic Camaro he had financed with Uncle Benjen’s aid. The car had been a wreck; a near-rusty bucket parked in Tobho Mott’s mechanic shop. Jon could still remember how much they had haggled over the price; the greedy bastard wanting more than it was worth. They eventually came to a compromise, and Jon remembered working extra
hard those few months to get enough money for it. Between two jobs plus working for his uncle, he
managed to scrape up the cash to make his first major purchase.

Sam and Gendry had ribbed him to death over it, but like champs, they had done their parts in
helping to restore the car back to its former glory. If it wasn’t for Gendry’s street smarts and knowing
just the right people to talk to (or threaten), Jon would never have gotten the parts needed. If it wasn’t
for Sam doing his research on where they could get the cheapest accessories, Jon would have really
been in the red.

The finished product was a beauty that was now painted black with white strips that went across the
hood. The seats weren’t made of genuine leather, but it was good enough for what he could afford. It
had a great stereo system and the AC worked. Thank the gods. Several long personal trips, joyrides
with his buddies, and a make-out session or two in the backseat, Jon loved his car with a passion
only car enthusiasts could understand.

11:10pm

Stomach growling with hunger, he glanced toward the top floor of the building for the millionth time.
He was parked about a mile away; tucked between a large grocery store truck and an alley (the truck
obscured him perfectly), but he had a clear view of Dany’s apartment from here. For the past two
hours, he had watched it for any sign of activity. Unfortunately, her curtains had been closed
throughout. Even as the shadows fell and darkness came, there was nothing. Jon was beginning to
think he had made a mistake; that maybe he got the day wrong or she had already left. However,
with a shake of his head, he’d convince himself otherwise and recall every single moment of their
meeting again. From her stunning eyes to that hair to the way she moved –

(like she floats…almost)

She fascinated him, and not even Ros’s angry phone call about ignoring her again, could make a
dent in his decision to do this. He rubbed his chin in thought, the scruff of his beard reminding him
that he needed a trim soon. He found that having the facial hair gave him more respect in the street…
that and he didn’t look like such a ‘kid’ without it. He hated being considered a baby face.

“Where the hell are you?” he asked with mounting frustration. His legs were beginning to cramp
from being in one position for too long.

Meanwhile, the once busy street was now slowing to its nighttime crawl; where only the derelict and
outcasts came out to play. The neon lights of Pavlar’s nightclub flashed about a quarter of a mile
away, and even in the cocoon of his car, Jon was sure he could still hear the drunken or stoned
laughter of its occupants. Earlier, Olivia and Petyr had staggered out of the building dressed to the
nines – probably high as all fuck, Jon thought in amusement – as they headed to their obvious
destination. Earlier, Olivia and Petyr had staggered out of the building dressed to the
nines – probably high as all fuck, Jon thought in amusement – as they headed to their obvious
destination.

Any other night, he might have dragged Ros with him to the club, while suffering her flirtations with
other men as she craved so much attention. She was a beauty; a red-headed temptress he had met
during a night out with the boys. Jon had figured their relationship was going to be a one-time deal,
but after the third random late night bedroom antics, Jon figured she might as well be a ‘girlfriend’
until she (or he) got tired of each other.

Had that time finally come?

He smirked and cupped his hand around his cigarette to light up again, barely paying attention to
what was happening across the street until –
SCREEECH!

The fuck…?

He looked up quickly; the flame from the lighter nearly singeing his fingers as he gawked at what was suddenly happening before him.

Dan…Dany?!

One, she was outside! Two, gone was the sweatpants that had covered up her entire body that morning. She was now dressed in a black mini-leather skirt that showed off toned legs finished off with ankle-high boots that clicked loudly on the asphalt as she walked determinedly toward…him?

Wait…what?!

She was withdrawing something from the black leather jacket, and as Jon felt his heart slam hard within his chest and the pit of his stomach begin to crawl with fear and anticipation, he realized it was a gun; the same one she had pointed at him that morning. He gripped the steering wheel and prepared to turn the key in the ignition, when the car that had screeched to a halt – a black sedan with tinted windows – flung open its doors to reveal two large men wearing the strangest gold masks with what appeared to be horns. They, too, whipped out their guns and in what could only be described as a scene from a really bad action movie, shots rang out like firecrackers; causing some of the innocent bystanders to scream or duck in fear.

Holy…shit!

They were shooting at Dany!

His fingers tightened around the steering wheel until his knuckles turned white. She was dodging and firing back as quick as she could; her reflexes almost mesmerizing as she would dive to her haunches or spin with a grace of a feline in an attempt to avoid getting hit. Jon noticed one of the men flinch as if he had been struck, and though Dany was still a distance from him, Jon knew what he had to do.

He couldn’t, in a million years, tell you what possessed him to do this, but as he set his jaw in determination and narrowed his gaze in concentration, he drove out of his hiding place with such speed, the wheels of his car screeched loudly in protest while letting off plumes of white smoke in its wake. He skillfully bypassed a Dany who looked toward him with surprise –

(so she hadn’t noticed him in the first place)

- and rammed straight into the two men who had also turned to see what was coming for them.

There was a sickening thud of bodies denting his hood (and a part of him cursed at how much that shit was going to cost to get fixed), but he didn’t wait to find out if he had killed them or not. He spun back to where Dany was and leaned across the passenger’s seat to open the door.

“Get in!” he called out.

She blinked at him with such an innocent gaze of disbelief, and probably anger, if the sudden flash of her beautiful violet eyes were any indication – that Jon felt something hard stir within him at the sight.

However, a shadow moved before him causing an unwanted distraction. It was one of the masked men standing up albeit slowly and reaching for his weapon again. Behind them were the blinking
lights of the City Watch on their way – and this seemed to galvanize Dany into action.

Without another word, she dove into the passenger seat and slammed the door shut behind her. Her billowing silver hair framed her flushed features as she stared at Jon for a heartbeat.

“You little piece of shit,” she finally whispered as Jon allowed a smirk to come to his lips at the insult. She would have said something else, but the sudden splinter of glass as the masked man took off the Camaro’s side mirror, caused Jon to curse beneath his breath and put the car in reverse.

He considered ramming into the man again and finishing him off for good, but Dany was reaching out to cover his hand; her head shaking vehemently. Her eyes were like flints, and the fury roiled off her body in waves. If looks could kill, Jon was sure he’d be dead by now.

“Drive on, Jon Snow,” she commanded with ice in her voice. “And don’t stop until I tell you to.”
The silence was deafening.

It stifled the air until she felt crushed by its pressure. Yet, she trudged on; through knee-high sludge of mud and decay adorned with skeletal remains and bloodied pieces of human flesh congealing rapidly. Accusatory eyes followed her every move; some rolling angrily within sockets as dark as night until they leaked trails of blood down leathery flesh. They called her names not worthy to be repeated, but she gritted her teeth in determination. Her face was a mask of steely resolve. She would not let them get to her.

Slut! Whore! Foreign bitch! Go back to where you came from! We don’t want you here!

It could be so easy to break down into tears and crumble in defeat, but she knew she had one goal in mind and she could not back down now. She was going to take back what was hers, no matter how many more bodies she had to add to the thickening sludge.

One day, it will choke me. It will keep rising until I probably drown in it and di–

BZZT!

She froze at the odd sound, before reality came crashing back with a vengeance. A slender arm shot out from beneath the pale blue comforter, her hand nearly knocking down the paraphernalia on the side table before slamming hard on the clock to keep it silent.

With a groan, she burrowed herself beneath the covers again, but the cobwebs of sleep had vanished much to her dismay. With pillows and linen and bedding this soft, she never wanted to leave.
However, duty called and if she didn’t drag her ass out of bed, a few people were going to be upset. *Fuck them,* she thought as she eventually threw off the covers and stumbled to her feet while stifling a yawn and stretching aching limbs.

Her too-long silver hair was a billowing mass around her face; a face she pouted at when she stood before the mirror in the bathroom.

*Smile more, Daenerys Stormborn,* she urged the reflection as she placed her fingers on either side of her mouth and tried to move it upwards. Hadn’t Tyrion mentioned something about her being such a grumpy puss most of the time?

Hah…grumpy puss. What a term. Compared to being called a foreign whore, being considered grumpy was the least of her worries.

Still she missed her companion and wished he was here to keep her company instead of simply shipping her off with the ominous warning of “it’s best you stay here for a while until things settle down.”

*For how long?* She mused as she sat on the toilet seat and buried her face within her hands. So yes, she had fucked up big time with her impatience, but wasn’t it worth it? Hadn’t they at least gained some ground in her quest to claim what was hers? Her older brother had tried but failed; his gruesome death a reminder of his failures as a leader. Didn’t they realize how long she had waited for that opportunity, and to see it all go to waste –

*Urgh!*

She could scream in frustration.

Still, it was a nice little apartment. Buried somewhere in the middle of King’s Landing, it blended so well with every other structure, the chances of anyone (her enemies) assuming she’d choose to live in such a place was slim to none.

Tyrion had seen to the particulars about renting the place, while Jorah Mormont had been the ‘face’; pretending to be the one hoping to live there. Dany remained hidden in a wooden crate lunged into the apartment on moving-in day. No one would have guessed it contained a human body, but then again, considering how ‘small’ she was; she could have easily fit into any box they were willing to toss her into. It wasn’t exactly the most comfortable hiding spot, but she was used to worse.

“What do you think of it?” Tyrion had asked that first night as she paced around her new lodgings.

“It’s all right…but the city stinks.”

She paced to the window and peeked through the curtain. She was on the topmost level. Good. It gave her a good vantage point of the street below and the surrounding buildings; more apartment complexes with whispered stories to tell in every foundation and bricked layer.

Tyrion laughed; his voice sounded slurred over the phone. Dany was sure he was already drunk. The man did like his liquor. “It’s the best I can do, my dear. Give me a week at least to get things together and I’ll get in touch, okay?”

Dany pursed her lips and took a deep breath. Way below she could make out a trio of young men lifting some boxes into a pick-up truck. One of them was rather heavyset and looked ready to collapse, the other two were more fit and appeared to make fun of him…in a good-natured way at least.
She closed the curtain and walked into the kitchen.

“A week?” she prodded and opened the fridge to see that it was well stocked. Jorah had done a good job in making sure she was comfortable. He even had her favorite smoothie drinks! Yes!

“A week,” Tyrion promised.

And yet… a month later, she was still stuck here almost going out of her mind with not only frustration but worry…and maybe a tinge of fear. It wasn’t as if she could leave the apartment to find some form of entertainment to stave away the boredom, and she could only watch T.V. for so long without wanting to smash it to bits with the inane brand of programming filtering through the screen. Tyrion’s communication had become sporadic. However, Jorah had done his best to keep her updated. He would visit now and again with news…or no news…and between his weak attempts to engage in small talk or woo her, she was more concerned with what was taking place across the sea.

His blatant flirtations and need for her attention could be tiring, but he was a good man, and she wasn’t sure how else she could let him know that she would see him as nothing more than a friend and much-needed mentor. She hated to see him crushed, but sometimes one had to be cruel to get the point across.

She was in the middle of nursing a cup of coffee and glaring at her phone in the hope that someone would call and give her something good to work with, when the knock on the door had her looking up with a frown. Her body tensed like a coiled spring. It was only ten in the morning. Jorah wasn’t in King’s Landing as far as she knew, and she doubted Tyrion or any of the others would show up in broad daylight.

Pulling the hoodie over her head, she hopped off the stool and reached for the gun hidden within one of the drawers. Making sure it was loaded, she tiptoed to the door and peered out the peephole; her heartbeat a snare drum in her chest. Yet she was calm about it all; a sudden stillness filling her being as she switched her mindset into the ‘cold’ persona she had to be to survive. For a moment, she could make out no one, until he came back into view. It was a young man about her age with curly black hair – which looked rather unruly (as if he had run his fingers through it so many times it stuck out in weird angles), a scruffy beard – as if still unsure of whether to shave or let it grow out – and an expression that was borderline weary and irritated. He was gripping a bulging folder in his hands, and Dany figured it was possible to hide a weapon in it.

If he’s one of them…

She braced herself and opened the door with caution. She loathed to have to kill anyone first thing in the morning, but fortunately, all that happened would prove that this guy was nothing more than what he claimed to be; the landlord’s lackey.

He was good-looking though. She’d give him that much.

While he was busy calculating the rent – Jorah had been kind enough to leave it behind – her phone rang.

“…uum…that’s your phone I think,” the lackey – no…Jon Snow, was it? Said with that rather boyish small smile that could be considered endearing. “You going to answer it or…?”

Resisting the urge to tell him to mind his business, she answered curtly into the device. “Talk to me.”

“Change of plans, my dear,” Tyrion’s answered in a tone she had not heard in quite a while. If she was feeling tense before; it grew tenfold. Forgetting for a moment that Jon was still there, she paced
to the window; her fingers tightening around the device as her pulse quickened.

“Looks like Drogo’s on the move again,” Tyrion was saying. “They found some of his men headed down kingsroad toward Mud Gate, and it doesn’t help that those bastards from Meereen are trying to get into his good graces. We might find ourselves outnumbered soon.”

“That’s unacceptable,” she replied as a cold weight settled in the pit of her stomach.

She should have known better than to trust a supposed noble. It appeared as if Hizdahr had failed to keep his end of the bargain.

And I fucked him for nothing, she thought angrily. All those nights submitting to his sick perversions and making empty promises…ah, to get her hands on him again. She’d do a whole lot more than just suck his cock. She would chop that thing off and hang it around his neck.

“I just got into town,” Tyrion continued. “So I suggest we rendezvous at the old marine warehouse at Blackwater Bay around midnight. The others will be with me, and we can discuss what steps to take next.”

“Fine. Midnight. Got it. I’ll see you there.”

With further instructions on who would be picking her up, she hung up the phone and let out a soft rush of breath. She squared her shoulders, but the slight noise behind her was a reminder she wasn’t alone.

This Jon Snow was still hovering around, and if the expression on his face was any indication, he had listened in to the conversation. Had she said too much? Did she give anything away? Besides, what could he do? Still she couldn’t take any chances. Anyone in this city could be purchased at the right price. What made this man any different?

“You saw and heard nothing here today, Jon Snow,” she warned; fingers tightening around the weapon in her grip.

His confused reaction would have been cute, but she was too embroiled with thoughts of what was to happen tonight, her patience was wearing thin. She frowned and repeated her warning, hoping it would sink into his skull.

At the dawning in those brown eyes, and his subsequent nod of understanding, she felt a little more at ease. She would have to trust he wouldn’t do anything stupid. It was the last thing she needed at this point.

By the time she was ready, all thoughts of Jon Snow was forgotten.

Jorah had called to say he would be arriving in less than ten minutes. He would be parked across the street in an unassuming white truck with “BEAR GROCERY” written on it.

She knew it was probably going to be chilly outside, but after being cooped indoors for a month, she was ready to feel sexy and desirable again instead of the boring tee-shirts and sweatpants she
lounged around in. With a final dab of blood-red lipstick on her lips, she smacked them together and blew a kiss at her reflection. The Dany staring back at her was no longer forlorn and miserable and gone was the pallor that had accumulated from being tucked away from the sun for so long. With a little make-up, the vixen that sent quite a few men to their knees over the years had returned with a vengeance.

Hello, Daenerys Targaryen.

She smirked and tucked the gun within her purse before making her way out the window and down the fire escape.

It was a brisk night and as she hugged the jacket tighter around her, she spied the truck with Jorah waiting for her. With a small smile tugging at her lips, she quickened her pace; barely registering the black Camaro parked beside it. Traffic was surprisingly light at this hour, but it was clear most of the folks still out and about preferred to walk anyway. There was some night club in full swing about a half-a-mile away, and though Dany would have loved to stop in for a drink or two –

**SCREEECH!**

She spun around at the sudden loud shriek of tires on asphalt; her body not responding at first to what was happening until the doors to the sedan opened and two unmistakable members of the Sons of the Harpy darted out with their guns; their mission quite obvious.

*Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! They know I’m here!*

She ducked behind a car; flakes of metal and glass flying over her as she returned fire. She barely remembered whipping out her gun, but that gut instinct and all those years of training had kicked in at the right moment. Cursing beneath her breath, while hoping Jorah would be quick to help eliminate these guys, she was definitely not prepared for what happened next.

The Camaro seemed to appear out of nowhere.

One minute, she was firing for her life, the next, it flew out of the darkness like a demon on wheels to slam right into the Harpies without missing a beat.

Dany’s eyes widened in disbelief. Who the hell could it be…?

“Get in!” came the loud invitation as the car swerved in front of her and the door opened to reveal its occupant.

It was the landlord’s lackey! Jon…! What the fuck was he doing here?!

She glanced toward the grocery truck and noticed Jorah stepping out with panic and anger on his features. However, coming down the street were two cars belonging to the City Watch—sirens a-blazing. This was no time to reconsider her decision. She would have to go with this bastard until they were safe. Besides, it looked like one of the Harpies was rising to his feet again.

*Fuck it all!*

She dove into the car and slammed the door shut behind her. Her heart thumped loudly in her chest; the adrenaline nearly causing her knees to weaken. She knew it was a terrible time to get horny, but there was always something about escaping the clutches of death that did things to her.

Still this guy –
“You little piece of shit,” was all she could muster when she could finally trust herself to speak.

His smirk was just as annoying, but she hated to admit that he did look somewhat...different tonight. Maybe it was the darkness. It seemed to suit him – made him appear dangerous and sure of what he was doing.

When the Harpy shot at them again, Jon appeared to want to ram into him, but she shook her head. There was no time for that.

“Drive on, Jon Snow,” she commanded with ice in her voice. “And don’t stop until I tell you to.”

He didn’t need to be told twice thank goodness. With an expertise that was quite impressive – if she wasn’t too busy looking over her shoulder to see where Jorah was – Jon spun the car around and away from the incoming dual dangers of the City Watch and the Harpies. She could only manage to catch a glimpse of the puzzled expression on the older man’s face before Jon made the sharp turn into the heart of the city.

Goddamn it!

She reached for her phone to begin dialing; hoping he’d pick up.

“Where are we going?”

She looked up with bemusement. Jon’s gaze was trained before him, but his expression was one of quiet intent…and maybe excitement too. He was feeling it just as much. She could tell. The heat between her legs pooled, but she shook her head to focus. This was definitely no time for a random hook-up. The temptation to force him to park the car somewhere and to ride him until she was satiated was nearly overwhelming, but she had a rendezvous with some very important people and fucking Jon Snow was not an option. Yet.

“Blackwater Bay,” she replied curtly. “Do you know where the old marine warehouses are?”

Jon nodded. “Bristol? Yeah, I’ve passed it a couple of times.”

“Good. Take me there.”

Her phone rang. It was Jorah.

“Sorry, sorry,” she began immediately. “I know…it’s all fucked up. Who is he? I don’t…the landlord’s kid or something…Jon Snow…yeah. I swear I didn’t plan it. I don’t even know how he knew.” She glared at Jon as she said this and was rewarded with another eat-shitting grin that nearly had her smacking it off his face. He was infuriating, but clearly enjoying himself. Did he think this was a joke?

“Yeah…we’ll meet you there….doesn’t look like I have a choice, do I? Besides…how the hell do the Harpies know where I am?!” She realized her voice was rising, but the culmination of nearly being killed and knowing her anonymity was no longer guaranteed was grating.

Drogo was on to her and soon enough there would be nowhere else to hide.

Jorah’s stammered response did not help and with a snort of irritation, she hung up and sank back against the faux leather seats. Her head was pounding, and as she rubbed her forehead, she was finally aware of the warm wetness dripping down the side of her face. It wasn’t a deep cut, but she
dug into her purse to find a handkerchief to try to control the bleeding all the same.

“Sorry about that,” Jon finally said into the silence. “I mean…I think I might have fucked up your mission, but I had to do something. They were trying to kill you.”

She held the handkerchief to her temple and looked at him; the bemusement growing at his statement. Why would he concern himself with her safety? What was his problem?

“How did you know?” she finally asked carefully. “Were you waiting for me?”

“Not really…I mean…” He blushed so hard, it was all Dany could do not to laugh. This guy wasn’t very good at masking his emotions, was he?. “It wasn’t as if I was stalking you, but…” He cleared his throat and squirmed in his seat. “I mean I know you’re probably a member of the Kingsguard and want to keep it all a secret, so I didn’t want to interfere…really.”

Dany raised an eyebrow. Kingsguard? What was he talking about? Weren’t they supposed to be ‘protectors of the realm’? Trusted guards of the King and all that bullshit? In fact, Tyrion’s older brother was the Lord Commander, wasn’t he? She had heard stories about the elite fighting group, but she had no interest in them. If anything, they were her enemies.

“…well congratulations,” she said aloud. “You did ruin a mission. Our Lord Commander won’t be too pleased with you when I give him the report.”

Jon’s panicked look made her lie all worth it. She tried to hide a smile and lowered her head to fuss over the warm gun still on her lap.

“I swear I didn’t mean it,” Jon was saying as her phone rang again. This time it was Tyrion. His panicked query was tempered with her reassuring response that she was almost there. She did not really know the layout of the city, but she trusted that Jon wouldn’t take her to the wrong location. His honor was proven when he made another turn to take them down the winding road just opposite a rather lovely view of the sea on her right. Cargo ships, fishing boats, and yachts were docked along the bay; their silhouettes a melancholy sight to the shimmering waters accentuated by a pale moon. It might have been a beautiful sight on any other night, but right now…

She had a lot of explaining to do.

“That grocery truck’s been following us,” Jon was saying as he frowned into the rearview mirror. “I could lose him if you want.”

Dany shook her head. “He’s with us…a member of the Kingsguard as well.”

Jon’s lips pursed and she could swear she heard the wheels spinning in his head. Poor guy. She almost hated lying to him. Almost.

“Guess I really did screw up, huh?” he said quietly as his knuckles tightened around the steering wheel. “Am I going to meet the Lord Commander? Is that where we’re going?”

“You ask too many questions, Jon Snow,” she replied.

“You can just call me Jon you know,” he interrupted with a wry smile. “And I could call you…?”

Her lips curved at his attempt to be charming just as the abandoned warehouse came into view. There were two cars parked there and with the bright headlights, it was easy to make out the dwarfish figure of her mentor and best friend, Tyrion Lannister. He was walking toward her as well
as two other people – a young caramel-hued woman with curly black hair and a bald young man with a rather stern expression on his visage.

“Just call me Dany,” she replied as he finally pulled to a stop. She knew she ought to send him on his merry way; tell him to get away from it all before it became too late, but as she caught his rather penetrating gaze again, she had a faint feeling he wasn’t going to leave without a fight. There was something about this guy that was really beginning to worry her. He couldn’t be left alone now. He knew too much or was likely to.

Besides, he did save her life.

_Damn it._

She sighed and shook her head in resignation. Fuck it. It was his funeral.

“Come with me, Jon,” she invited with a small smile. “Guess it’s time to introduce you to the _real_ Kingsguard.”
Phew! Long chapter with lots going on (and fun to write actually)!
Enjoy, and as always, your comments/kudos are very much appreciated. :D

The real Kingsguard? What the hell did she mean by that?

Jon stepped out of the car; his mind whirling with so many questions he thought he might explode if they weren’t answered soon. So far everything he’d experienced with Dany only left him more confused and intrigued; the latter emotion swelling to a near fever pitch as he took note of the silent trio waiting for them.

A dwarf, a beautiful dark-skinned woman, and a similar-hued male with an expression that didn’t look too welcoming.

Could this night get any weirder?

Apparently not, for the grocery truck, which had tailed them throughout the trip, pulled up with a slam of its brakes; as if its driver was just as impatient to get things started. Jon wasn’t sure of what to expect, but when an older man with strawberry blond hair tinged with flecks of gray at the temples, leapt to the ground with an agility that could rival anyone ten years younger, Jon had a feeling this was not a person he wanted to piss off anytime soon. It didn’t help that the guy had a scowl on his visage as he walked toward Jon, forcing him to take a hesitant step back. If things had to get physical, Jon felt he had best be prepared. He settled for balling his hands into fists in the pockets of his jacket. He tried to smile, but was rewarded with another scorching glare before mystery man focused his attention on an excited Dany who was all but jogging toward the dwarf and his companions.

“Issa jorräelagon raqirossa! Nyke emagon missed ao sîr olvie,” Dany greeted with arms outstretched. She engulfed the younger couple in a warm embrace, and for a minute the three
chattered in that foreign tongue which had Jon scrambling to figure out exactly what was being said. King’s Landing was a smorgasbord of cultures; a mish-mash of people from all over Westeros and beyond, so it wasn’t surprising to hear a different language uttered here and there. However, unlike his brothers – who might have been quick to discern where Dany and her companions were from – Jon hadn’t really paid that much attention to such lessons during his school days at Winterfell. He was always more interested in the war stories; the famous warriors and conquerors. Hell, at some point he had assumed he’d join the Northern army, but –

*(things change)*

He burrowed his hands deeper into his pockets and shuffled from one foot to the other. Done with greeting the couple, Dany was now focused on the dwarf, and though her tone was still light-hearted, it was now a bit more business-like and brusque. She was speaking the Common Tongue again, but with the wind now picking up, it was a little hard to make out what was being said. Unfortunately, knowing they were all looking at him as she spoke, made him more uncomfortable. If they really were members of the Kingsguard (the *real* one according to Dany), then who knows what punishment awaited him for daring to screw up something rather important? He bit his lower lip and longed for a cigarette to ease the tension building within, but the thought of going back to the car to search for his pack – at a time like this – seemed quite rude and inappropriate. He sighed and ran a hand through his hair restlessly, deciding to focus on their surroundings instead.

The old wharf was a relic now; a reminder of the grand old days when this side of Blackwater Bay was the hub of industry and power. According to the history books, the old kings had used Blackwater Bay as an important port for the transport of not only their soldiers during times of war, but splendid ships filled with gold, silver, silk, fine perfumes, and countless other treasures from countries as far as Yi Ti, would dock daily to spread their wares around King’s Landing. Once impressive structures of steel and stone now lay in ruins; their skeletal remains stretching to an open sky with no answers to their silent prayers. Abandoned machinery including rusty hulks of once massive ships dotted the landscape, and though there were a few fishing boats and shoddy shacks along the bay, it was a graveyard.

*Perfect location for a secret meeting,* Jon deduced as he forced his attention back to the group. He stiffened as he noticed the dwarf was now approaching, and unaware of doing this, he took a deep breath and tried to straighten his posture as if hoping to make a good impression. There was something rather stately about the way the man walked, and as he stepped away from the glare of their vehicle’s headlights, his features became more evident.

For one thing, he was not dressed in shabby rags – like some of the dwarfs that loitered around Flea Bottom. He was clad in a well-tailored black suit complete with a red handkerchief tucked in its breast pocket. His dark blond hair was a curly mess on his head, and he had a thick beard that was rather impressive. It was his eyes, however, that had Jon stumped into silence. There was a *knowing* in those piercing green eyes; a wisdom that spoke of a man who had seen his share of hardships and pleasures over the years. His face wouldn’t be considered handsome especially considering the ugly scar to run across it, but it was an arresting profile all the same. Whoever this guy was, he was clearly the brains of the operation. Perhaps he was a deputy Lord Commander or something; not that Jon understood the rankings in the Kingsguard.

“Hmm,” the dwarf said with a nod as he came to a stop before Jon. There was a small smile on his lips as he studied the younger man for a long minute. “Interesting. What is your name, young man?”

“Jon…Jon Snow,” came the stilted reply.
“…that accent,” the older man said with a rub of his chin. The smile hadn’t faded yet. He seemed amused by something and Jon was failing to see what it could be. “You are a northerner, yes?”

Jon raised a brow. He was about to make a wisecrack about it being too obvious, but he settled for a polite nod. “Yes…I was born and raised in Winterfell.”

“Winterfell,” the dwarf replied with a grin of genuine delight. “Ah good times. I remember the last time I visited that place, not exactly the warmest of places, is it?”

“…it is the north,” Jon replied carefully. Was this guy putting him on? Or was he…?

At the twinkle noted in the other man’s eye, Jon could feel the twitch coming to his lips as well. Perhaps the dwarf was simply trying to lighten the mood by making a joke. His shoulders relaxed a little; and he was aware of how much tension he had built up in just these last few minutes being scrutinized by his companion.

“Yes, it is the north indeed,” the dwarf continued; a wistful expression on his face. “A land of not just ice and snow, but of hard knocks and the most stubborn bad asses this side of Westeros. Tell me, Jon Snow, who was your father?”

“Ned Stark,” Jon replied with a wry smile. He braced himself for the next question about his surname. Of why he wasn’t named ‘Jon Stark’, but at the dwarf’s mere nod, Jon’s brows furrowed in bemusement.

“Figured. I see him in you,” the older man said with a small smile. “I only got to know him briefly, after all, we were in competition with his business, and my father was more than eager to purchase the Stark Corporation for a hefty sum. Your family might have lived the rest of your days in peace – never wanting for anything ever again.”

Jon’s smile was bitter. Robb would have been a better companion for this particular line of conversation as he was now in charge of said corporation. However, Jon had been aware of the conflict his father had dealt with regarding a certain rival CEO – after all Tywin Lannister was nothing more than a ferocious lion eager to devour anyone and anything in his path. Everyone knew of how ambitious the Lannisters were, and the rumors were that aside from the now extinct Targaryens, the Lannisters practically owned Westeros. God forbid anyone get in their path.

But wait…had this man said something about ‘we were in competition’? Did that mean…?

Jon’s frown deepened. “How do you know about that? My father wasn’t exactly public with his business dealings, so-”

“Yet, I know it all and saw it all being stuck in boring meetings and conference calls. You see, father was always eager to remind me of how I’d never be good enough to control the company, but that’s another story for another time. I haven’t even properly introduced myself. How rude of me.”

He held out his hand; the twinkle not fading from his eye. “Tyrion Lannister at your service, Jon Snow of Winterfell. Perhaps this could be the start of a wonderful relationship.”

Dany watched Jon hesitate at the offer, before slowly reaching out to accept the firm handshake.
Unaware of the breath she was holding, she let it out with a soft *whoosh* and wondered why it would concern her that Jon be accepted by Tyrion.

“Who is he?” he had asked after their quick exchange of pleasantries. “And why is he here?”

“He rescued her,” Jorah replied with great reluctance as he stole another glance at the younger man. “He appeared out of nowhere and knocked over the Harpies with his vehicle.”

“Why?” Tyrion asked with bemusement.

Dany explained their first meeting with a sigh. “I think…maybe he overheard our conversation on the phone and he decided to stalk me. Creepy now that I think about it. Besides, he thinks we’re members of the Kingsguard for whatever reason.”

The brown-skinned woman gave an unladylike snort at this. Jorah looked perplexed. Tyrion amused.

“Can he be trusted?” the young man, named Grey Worm, asked as he took a step forward as if hoping to interrogate Jon himself.

“I hope so,” Dany replied as she studied Jon’s profile again with her lips pursed in thought.

He didn’t look threatening, and despite his moments of intensity, there was an ‘innocence’ about him that was a rarity in the men she had known over the years. A cruel part of her had the sudden urge to violate and taint that innocence. It was an anomaly. He was an anomaly. She wanted to open his eyes to the harsh reality of her world; of how crude and disappointing it could be. Yet, a tiny and more desperate voice within wished to keep him at arm’s length.

He didn’t belong with them. He would never fit in. He would be devoured by the monsters that chased her daily, and she would hate for him to lose his life over her myriad of problems. Still –

“…you don’t think he’s working for the Sons?” Tyrion pestered with a tap of his foot. He didn’t look too convinced.

“Doubt it,” Dany replied. “Either way, this is fucked up, Tyrion. If they know I’m here, there’s an informant lurking around. I’m not safe in King’s Landing anymore.”

“So you suggest we head back to Essos?” Tyrion asked with a hint of impatience. “With Drogo and his army right there?”

“I’ve got the Unsullied,” Dany replied through clenched teeth and a nod toward Grey Worm.

“Not good enough. We need more allies. Drogo mocks our measly attempts to gather an army. You know this.”

Dany scowled and would have said something else, but a gentle hand on her arm stopped her from doing so. Missandei, for that was the other young woman’s name, gave a warm smile and whispered into Dany’s ear.

“Patience, my Queen,” came the husky words to send shivers of pleasure down her spine. “Save your anger for another time.”

Dany fought back a groan as her best friend punctuated her advice with a tender kiss to her temple. She closed her eyes and sighed; her body thrumming now with the reminder that it had been so long since she felt the warmth of another against her flesh. She craved the act of intimacy, and the sooner they came up with the next plan of action - so she could at least satiate her desires - the better.
She lifted her lashes to send the silent message. The response was a knowing smile to full pink-tinted lips and a flash of matching passion in her brown eyes. Missandei was more than capable of pleasing her Queen whenever she was needed after all.

“I’ll speak to him and learn more about his motives,” Tyrion was saying with a firm nod. “A wise man once said that the best way to know a man’s innermost thought is to engage in conversation over fine wine and a hearty meal…or to find the best brothel. Nothing loosens a man’s tongue faster than a woman draped all over him.”

Dany, Missandei, and Grey Worm (even Jorah) rolled their eyes at this and settled for keeping their thoughts to themselves. If they could list the number of sayings from this so called ‘wise man’ Tyrion had preached to them over the years, they could write a tome or two.

“There is no time to go gallivanting off to some brothel,” Dany began with a sigh of exasperation, but Tyrion ignored her and walked off to speak to Jon leaving her nearly stomping a foot in frustration.

“Are you hungry, Jon?” Tyrion asked.

Jon blinked in confusion at the seemingly random comment. He might have denied it, but his stomach chose that moment to growl; a reminder that the last thing he had really eaten was a beer and a sandwich nearly six hours ago.

“I think that answers my question,” the dwarf replied with a loud laugh. He moved closer to slap Jon on the back – at least his lower back – but it was enough to nearly send him toppling over. For a short guy, Tyrion probably didn’t even know his own strength.

“What say we all go out and have some fun, eh?” he invited with a nod toward the quartet watching him with various expressions of bemusement, irritation or just plain annoyance. “After such a troubling night with our unwanted attackers, I think it’s best we all relax and try not to think too much for the rest of the night.”

“But…what if they’re more of them?” Jon asked with a raised brow. He looked toward Dany, and was pleased to note that she was nodding vehemently at his query. “We can’t just go wandering around in the open. They might catch us.”

“I like the way you think, Jon, but you fail to realize that we are the Kingsguard of the night.” Tyrion winked. “We are the shadows…and besides, I doubt you’ll want to be seen with that for a while.” He pointed toward the front of the Camaro. “The City Watch will be looking for you and that is going to be a glaring evidence of your crime, young man.”

Jon winced. He hadn’t even noticed it while he was so busy trying to deal with this eclectic crew. There was a noticeable dent on the hood of his precious car, and there appeared to be a light streak of blood across it as well.

Fuck his life. How was he going to explain this to his uncle or his friends?!

“Not to worry,” Tyrion was saying as he nodded toward Jorah. “My good man there knows a place to take it to. We’ll have your car looking brand new in no time.”
“I…I mean…I don’t have the money to pay-” Jon stuttered in disbelief.

“You’re money is no good to us,” Tyrion interrupted with a tsk and a wag of his finger. “You just have to promise to have a good time with us tonight as we frolic around this godforsaken city. I promise you a night you’ll never forget. Won’t we, ladies and gentlemen?”

Jon swallowed as he looked toward Dany and her crew. The beautiful brown-skinned girl was now just about draped over Dany in a possessive way. She was pressed against the silver-haired woman from behind, arms wrapped around the slender waist with her chin resting upon Dany’s shoulder. Her hooded eyes spoke of sinful promises and Jon could feel the surge of blood rushing to his groin. Dany arched into the touch; a taunting smile to her lips as she kept her heated gaze on him. Jon couldn’t help giving a breathless gasp when the young man leaned in to steal a hard kiss from the woman’s lips. He smirked as if aware of just what kind of a relationship the women had before spinning on his heels to walk toward the car.

“No, Grey Worm,” Tyrion instructed sharply. “Jorah takes the Northerner’s car to Syros’s… the rest of you take the truck, and I’ll follow in the car. That should throw off anyone trying to follow us.”

“So where do we go first?” Dany asked as she captured her partner’s arms and giggled like a little girl. “I’m horny as fuck. It’s been a while.”

She punctuated this by raising the other woman’s hands to her lips, and Jon cursed beneath his breath; forcing himself to look away. He felt his entire being was being dipped in lava or its equivalent, and despite the cool breeze; beads of sweat broke out on his brow and forehead.

He knew he had zero reasons for acting this way. It wasn’t his first time watching girls making out with each other. Ros seemed to have a thing for that as well, and Gendry had quite a collection of lesbian porn he made them watch on occasion. Still, there was something decidedly hot about watching Dany and her girlfriend tease each other as they laughed and jogged toward the back of the grocery truck.

Grey Worm was heading toward the driver’s side and Jon – figuring he’d sit shotgun – was suddenly yanked away from his destination with a firm tug on his arm.

“You are coming with us,” Dany crooned; with a fire in those lilac eyes that sent his heartbeat racing with excitement and anticipation.

He didn’t dare protest; only stopping to toss his keys to Jorah, who definitely didn’t look like he was enjoying the change of plans. Jon watched as Tyrion pulled him aside to speak to him. He would have loved to hear (and know) where they were taking his car, but the girls were now shoving him into the truck, which was thankfully empty except for a couple of empty overturned crates.

Dany had to hop a little to reach the handle of the elevated door, and it was a reminder of how petite she really was despite her large personality. Jon would have reached out to help, but she finally got it and pulled it down with a loud slam before bolting it shut.

They were immediately engulfed in darkness, and with Grey Worm revving up the engine and setting off, they all bounced into each other; laughing breathlessly at the contact as they struggled to maintain their balance.

Jon eventually pulled out his cell phone to turn on its flashlight feature. It was bright enough to illuminate their flushed faces as they grinned at each other.

“I didn’t get a chance to introduce you,” Dany was saying as the truck bounced again nearly sending
her careening into Jon. She braced herself with a hand against his chest, and not for the first time, Jon felt the jolt of electricity filter into his nerve endings at the contact. He wasn’t sure if Dany felt the same, because she pulled away from him to lean into the other girl who was studying him intently.

“She’s Missandei from Naath,” Dany said and leaned in to place a hard kiss on her friend’s cheek. “She’s my best friend in the world, and an even better fighter.”

“You lie, My Queen. We all know you’re the best fighter,” Missandei replied, though she lowered her lashes in a bashful way.

My Queen? Jon raised a brow and finally decided to sit his ass down or he was likely to slam against the sides of the truck and injure himself. Besides, he couldn’t trust his legs any longer. He was so hard, it hurt.

He leaned against a crate and watched the girls do the same across him. Missandei was now fussing over the cut on Dany’s temple before digging into her purse to whip out something that looked like a salve. With a tenderness reserved for lovers, she applied the ointment to her partner’s wound, whispering something in that foreign language that Jon could not understand. However, watching Dany’s expression was enough to have him biting his lower lip as a gamut of emotions ran through him.

Envy? He wasn’t sure. Did a part of him wish he was the one whispering into her ear? Yeah… perhaps. Did he wish he could make her moan and part her lips before slowly licking them…just for him? Why the hell not? He was a simple man with simple needs, and the underlying awareness that Dany might not really be into men…

Shit. Life wasn’t fair sometimes.

“He’s watching us,” Missandei whispered in Valyrian to Dany.

Dany smirked and reached out to cradle her companion’s cheek. She caressed the smooth skin and not for the first time, wished she had such beautiful complexion. “Let him watch. He has to know what it’s like to really love another.”

“You feel he does not know love?”

“Look at him,” Dany urged as her lips brushed against Missandei’s. She glanced at Jon, who was failing miserably at pretending to be interested in something else. Dany chuckled and moved in to deepen the kiss; sighing as Missandei reached up to cup her right breast as if weighing it before squeezing gently.

Damn. It really had been too long.

“He is flustered,” Missandei gasped when they pulled apart for air. She groaned as Dany trailed her lips down her neck to suckle hard on her flesh. “He squirms and tries to look away.”

Dany did not reply; choosing instead to push Missandei unto her back. The floor of the truck wasn’t exactly squeaky clean, but neither woman seemed to care.

“Then let him look,” Dany stated firmly as she straddled Missandei’s hips and ground hers slowly.
She stopped when she heard the low sound to escape Jon’s lips and turned to study him.

She wasn’t sure of what she had expected to see, perhaps the usual pitiful expressions of pining from the men she had known in the past. She was ready to smirk, scoff and probably laugh in his face, but all thoughts of that died promptly when she met the feral glint in those usual docile brown eyes.

_Ah._

There was no smile on Jon’s face, but that now familiar quiet intensity that spoke volumes. Dany felt the heat flood from the tip of her toes to the root of her hair; barely registering Missandei’s wandering hands on her hips as she held Jon’s gaze and nearly dared him to look away first.

_How dare he?_ Her mind screamed as she swallowed and struggled to catch her breath.

_How dare he look at me like he wants to own me? Possess me? Or rip me to shreds? Damn him!_

With a frustrated growl, she tugged on Missandei’s shirt to pull her up, claiming her lips in a kiss so hard it left them both gasping for breath when they finally pulled apart.

“You pleasure him,” she commanded as she got off Missandei and glared at Jon, who now had a smug sneer on his lips. He knew he had gotten to her and she hated knowing she had lost this particular fight.

_Damn him to hell and back._

Missandei looked at her with bemusement. “My…Queen?”

“She wants to see him beg for mercy.”

They both looked at the obvious growing tent below Jon’s waist and exchanged knowing smirks of mischief.

“You will not join us?” Missandei asked as she got on her hands and knees and began to crawl toward a Jon who simply raised a brow in silent query at just what was taking place.

Dany sat back and shook her head. No, she would not partake this time. She wanted to study Jon as he gave in to temptation. She wanted to punish him for his non-verbal challenge; for she considered it as such. She had had her share of men who felt they could use her for their selfish desires, but no more. She would take charge of their every emotion even if it meant trampling all over their libidos.

They were all scum anyway. At least most of them.

Jon looked mesmerized. Missandei leaned into him and appeared to pop something small and white into her mouth. Dany watched as she slid her hands down Jon’s waist and when he let out a gasp at the intimate contact, she pressed her lips against his and transferred whatever she had into his mouth.

The effect was almost immediate. The tension which once had him clenching his fists in a desperate need to control his arousal, was released with a low groan as he threw back his head and gave in to the pleasure now surging from the talented tongue now wrapped around his stiff cock. When she had even unzipped him, he had no idea. She was just that quick and sure of what to do.

Dany bit her lip and struggled not to touch herself at the sinful sight they made, and as Jon’s breathing grew more shallow and uneven, when his hands sank into Missandei’s hair to keep her steady and every toned muscle tensed with his impending orgasm, Dany closed her eyes and looked away.
She would tell herself that the dull pang to fill her chest was nothing more than a meaningless emotion she had longed learned to ignore.

After all, all men - well most of them - were scum.

It was a strange buzzing sound which had Jon grimacing and reaching out to stop whatever the hell it was. For a moment, his hand scrambled across the softness of sheets before grabbing onto the annoying device.

“…llo?” he croaked when he finally managed to discern that it was his phone. His voice sounded like a frog with a bad cold. His tongue felt like it was coated with balls of cotton and with his eyes still closed (he couldn’t trust himself to open them yet), the world’s greatest drummer was doing a great set in his skull at the moment.

“Good grief, man!” Robb’s too chirpy greeting seeped through the device. “It’s almost noon and you’re still asleep? Wake the fuck up!”

Jon might have muttered a “fuck you” but he couldn’t be sure. He burrowed deeper beneath the blanket and prayed for the headache to go away. He was going to die…probably. This was really the mother of all hangovers.

“…town today to see ya.”

Huh?

Jon finally forced his lashes open and was rewarded with a sharp wave of pain to nearly slice his head in two.

_Holy shit._ He _really_ was going to die from the mother of all hangovers.

“What did you say?” he asked slowly. Every word sounded like it took an effort to get out. He licked his lips and struggled to sit up. “You’re coming to…King’s Landing?”

“That’s right,” Robb was saying with a laugh. “I haven’t seen you in almost a year and face timing isn’t enough. We need to catch up. You’re coming to pick me up at the airport, right?”

Jon blinked and forced himself to focus. The world spun as he buried trembling fingers into his hair. Robb. In King’s Landing. Today.

_Today?! Fuck!Fuck!Fuck!

This wasn’t good. He squinted at the mess that was his bedroom, let alone the rest of the apartment. He wasn’t ready. He wasn’t even sure he had anything edible in his fridge. Beer didn’t count either.

“You could have called me yesterday or last week or something,” Jon protested as he stumbled to his feet, and nearly fell to the floor as the world swam again. He was clad in only a pair of boxers - not that he remembered how the hell he got into them or how he even got home in the first place.

The last thing he remembered was –

(...a brothel...an expensive one at that...lots of naked women...dancing...grinding...touching...shit
ton of wine...food...something we smoked that was not like hashish or even regular weed...)

Fuck...what the hell happened?

“...but Uncle Benjen said he was going to be busy,” Robb was still prattling as Jon tried not to hurl. His stomach was queasy. It felt like everything he had eaten (or not eaten) was going to fly out of his mouth at any second.

“So you’re coming to pick me up then?” Robb insisted.

“Yeah...yeah...I...”

“Good morning!” came the chirpy greeting as someone walked past him.

On autopilot, Jon responded with a raspy “good morning” and would have continued searching for a tee shirt to wear, when the anomaly of what just happened slapped him like a block of ice.

He spun around quickly; nearly losing his balance as he stumbled into his living room and toward his kitchen where the most disturbingly sexy sight had him nearly choking or passing out...or both.

Da-Dany?!

She was in his fucking apartment! Her hair in a single braid and wearing nothing but his favorite black “Crows” tee; sipping nonchalantly on a cup of coffee while browsing her phone at the same time. She looked for all the world like she had been living with him for a while, and why that sudden image of having her as a permanent girlfriend had him blushing hard -

“But Jon? You there, brother?”

Was he? He pinched the bridge of his nose and squeezed his eyes shut; trying hard to reconcile what his mind was telling him and what reality was presenting.

She couldn’t be here. She wasn’t here. Maybe this was just a side effect of the booze and drugs... yeah, definitely drugs...he had taken last night, because there was no way Dany was in his goddamn apartment acting like they had just...just...

Wait! Did they...?!

She seemed to sense his panic because she finally looked up again; a playful smirk on her visage.

Jon felt faint.

“Joooon?!”

“What?!” he finally snapped into the phone. Everything was happening too damn fast. He needed the time to think things through. He needed...

(why the hell does she look so fucking cute and sexy at the same time? I should be pissed off for what she did to me yesterday...but...)

“Geez, if you can’t pick me up, I’ll take a fucking cab,” Robb snapped back. “Sorry for wanting to see my long lost brother...”

Jon shook his head and glared at Dany before turning away. “No. It’s fine. I’m...I’ll pick you up. I promise.”
“...don’t want to intrude on your personal time-”

“Shut the fuck up, Robb. I said I’ll pick you up!”

“Love you too, little bro!” Robb laughed and made playful kissing sounds before rattling off that he would text over the information for pick up times etc. etc.

Jon was still staring at his phone as if it was a foreign object when her warm breath and voice caressed his bare arm. “Who’s Robb?”

Jon leapt back as if stung; his pulse quickening as he met the innocent expression trained on him. He gripped the phone and shook his head slowly.

So many fucking questions.

First off…

“...did we?” he asked in a strangled voice; wanting desperately to know. “You and me...we didn’t...did we?”

Knowing they might have fucked and not remembering a thing was going to be infuriating, but when she rolled her eyes and turned away, he resisted the urge to pull her into his arms and kiss her into submission or spank her…whichever came first.

“You wish,” she replied and hopped back onto the kitchen stool. “I needed a place to crash so...here I am. Besides,” she nodded toward his torso. “Nice tat and scars. Tells a story. I’d love to hear it someday.”

Jon looked down at what got her attention. On his abdomen – on either side of his belly button - were two snarling heads of grey direwolves. It was a representation of the Stark sigil and a tattoo the brothers had gotten the day before he left for King’s Landing. Not surprising, Catelyn had not approved of it (at least for her precious babies), and as usual, she had blamed Jon for trying to corrupt her children.

Whatever.

As for the scars, they were two crescent shaped marks around his sternum which had come from fights engaged when he was younger. He had ended up in the hospital for almost a month after that altercation.

Stories? Sure he had a shit ton to tell anyone who cared to listen.

“Wanna see mine?” she suddenly asked.

“Huh?”

“My tat,” she said with a small smile.

And before he could stop her, she stood up again and turned away from him, but only to lift the shirt up slowly; revealing that she was one, thankfully not completely naked and was clad in a pair of white cotton panties that were considerably tame compared to the fiery woman within, and two, on her lower back was the unmistakable sigil of the once great syndicate “House Targaryen” - the three-headed dragon in blood red. It was a beauty.

Before they were kings and queens, the Targaryens had ruled the most of the Western world, an
alleged ‘crime’ syndicate so powerful, existing realms bowed to them to gain favor. How they were wiped out is still the talk of legend, and it wasn’t surprising to know that Dany was a fan of their history. His sister, Arya, definitely was.

“A Targaryen fan, huh?” Jon asked while resisting the urge to reach out to touch it…her…all of her…

Nononononono…no!

He formed a fist and took a trembling step back to control himself.

“Fan?” She looked innocently confused for a second before bursting into the most infectious laughter. “You could say that.”

He couldn’t help the reluctant smile to come to his face at the unbridled joy on her features, and he would have said something else – maybe something stupid like “you’re really beautiful when you smile or laugh”, but he was spared from making a fool of himself when the hard knock on his front door had them looking toward it in unison.

“Jon Snow?! I know you’re in there! Open the fucking door!”

Ros! Fuck!

Dany’s eyes widened as she pretended to be shocked. “Who’s that? Girlfriend?”

“You have to leave…hide…something!” Jon whispered harshly as he began pushing her toward the bedroom. “If she sees you -”

“I can kill her for you if you want.”

“You are not killing anyone, goddamn it! Get in there and shut up!”

He shoved her into his closet and would have slammed the door shut, but opened it again to glare at her. “Besides, we’ve got a lot to talk about. I’ve not forgiven you for last night.”

“JON?!?”

“Go meet your precious girlfriend,” Dany replied; the jovial expression fading into that now familiar blank expression he was beginning to loathe. “I’ll be a good little girl and keep quiet. You won’t even know I’m here.”

And with a hard shove against his chest, Dany slammed the door in his face. Unfortunately, she failed to hide the brief flash of pain to fill her eyes; an expression that would burn within Jon’s mind as he braced himself to meet the fury that was his so-called ‘girlfriend’.

Jon’s clothes smelled like…
She sank slowly to the floor; wincing as something soft fell on her head. She reached up to snatch it off, but realized it was one of his hooded sweatshirts; a black (he seemed to favor that color of clothing for some reason) and gray piece that looked well worn-in. She couldn’t make out the logo as her fingers traced over the faded script, and with the little light filtering through the narrow blinds, it was hard to make out anything in this cluttered space.

Out there, she could hear the ‘lovely’ couple bickering; their voices muted as she was sure Jon had closed the bedroom door for added ‘protection.’

She drew her legs to her chest – pushing aside several piles of shoes (mostly sneakers) in the process. Her nose wrinkled at the ripe smell to seep from them, but then again, guys weren’t always known to air their shoes as was required. Or keep themselves tidy for that matter. It was a miracle she could maneuver around his apartment at all.

While Grey Worm and Jorah had dumped the comatose Jon in bed, in the wee hours of the morning, she had surveyed the disaster that was his living space with disapproval. Her immediate instinct had been to start cleaning up a little, and despite Jorah’s plea for her to return to her apartment; or to at least head back with them to another location, Dany refused.

“I’ll stay here a little longer.”

And she’d probably hate herself later for doing so.

“I’ll send a couple of my boys to stand guard around the building. We’ll secure the perimeter,” Grey Worm had offered in Valyrian; having grown weary of speaking the Common Tongue for the benefit of the Northerner. For a man who had spent the better part of the night drinking his share of hard liquor, he was still as coherent as ever. But then again, compared to the wines of the Free Cities, King’s Landing had a rather tame selection.

She thanked both men for their service and wished them a goodnight; doing her best to ignore the worried glance Jorah threw her way before giving a reluctant bow and bidding his farewells.

Dany buried her face against the sweatshirt and inhaled his scent with a faint longing she could not explain or want to acknowledge.

She had taken it upon herself to undress Jon; hardly finding it strange to do such a task considering the life she had lead so far. Being subservient to some men made the job easy, and as she slowly stripped away his sweat and alcohol-stained clothing, she would take the time to marvel at the hidden strength trapped within a body designed by the gods. There was not an ounce of spare flesh upon him; every sinewy muscle stretched within a slightly tanned skin that was marred here and there with fading bruises or scars. Her fingertips had traced the ones on his torso, wondering what must have happened to cause them. Even more fascinating was the intimidating, yet regal, tattoo of the snarling wolf heads.

A Stark…whose name is Snow.

“He’ll do,” Tyrion had said at the brothel over a billowing cloud of the finest opium. The golden hookah was passed around the bevy of exotic and scantily-clad women draped around him, and though Dany was surrounded as well, she barely felt their attention for her gaze was trained on the dark-haired man lavishing in the affections of two females desperate for his approval.

“What do you mean?” Dany asked with a small frown.
“He comes from the powerful Stark family who just about run the North,” Tyrion explained. He seemed to remember where he was and with a sharp clap of his hands, and a smile of great sadness to his pouting beauties, they glided away to leave the duo to their devices.

“If we can get his allegiance to us,” Tyrion continued with his voice lowered as he leaned closer to Dany. “We’ve already doubled our hold on Westeros.”

“…but he’s nothing more than his landlord’s lackey,” Dany replied with a light snort.

Jon was laughing at something one of the women was saying; his handsome features flushed with the delights of the evening so far. Dany worried he was consuming just a little too much.

“Doubt it,” Tyrion was saying. “The one who runs the apartment complex – as well as a series of others is none other than Benjen Stark, Ned’s baby brother. He’s got just as much influence as anyone and is likely to give us audience to Robb Stark…Jon’s older brother who now runs the family business. Although…we might have a little problem with Catelyn Stark – their mother.” Tyrion rubbed his chin in thought. “She might prove to be a difficult nut to crack.”

“Would they want to join the syndicate after all that’s happened? History hasn’t been too kind to the Starks, has it?” Dany mused as she raised the glass of wine to her lips.

One of the girls was now dragging Jon to his feet and he followed willingly, his hands on her hips in a possessive manner which had Dany tearing her gaze away with a light frown.

“If the threat of Drogo is relayed to them, then I have no doubt they’ll want to join us.”

Dany sighed and slid sensuously amongst the large cushions of silk and lace. On her left, she could see Missandei and Grey Worm lost in their own little world. A stab of envy laced through her at their love; one so pure in such a world of tainted madness. They deserved it though, and she swore she would do all she could to make sure they were never apart until their dying day.

“I still worry about him,” Dany said aloud as she studied the ripples in her glass. “I don’t think he should be one of us. It’s too…dangerous.”

Tyrion studied her for a long moment until she was forced to meet his gaze with a nearly irritated “what?”

“Oh nothing,” Tyrion replied with a light shrug. He helped himself to the bottle of champagne and drank straight from it. “You barely know this man and you already feel he’s not worthy of being on our team.”

“I want to keep him away from all this,” she stated firmly. “The fewer innocents we drag in, the better.”

“And what qualifies him as an innocent?” Tyrion sneered. “You underestimate the Northerners, my dear. Trust me. We are going to need him in more ways than one.”

But I will destroy him. It is my nature after all, her mind screamed as she looked up from the sweatshirt. Their voices were getting louder. Were they coming into the bedroom? Was she ready to deal with some crazy bitch about to accuse her of something she hadn’t done – no matter the temptation?

And oh what sweet temptation it had been.

He wasn’t ‘small’ despite being rather short compared to the other men she had ever known (with the
exception of Tyrion of course). Missandei had confirmed her assumptions as well. He was definitely all man, and as she wiped his body with warm water and a washcloth before tucking him beneath the covers, Dany’s body had waged a private war. To take advantage of the sleeping man or to wish him farewell and slip away into the night.

…but his apartment was a pigsty.

And before she could control herself, she ended up picking up his clothes from the floor, washed the pile of dirty dishes in the sink, and tucked away opened video games or discarded magazines. Surprisingly none had contained images of lewd or naked women, but were geared toward machines…cars to be exact.

*Typical.*

Two long hours later, she was somewhat satisfied with all she had done, and had managed to change into one of his tee-shirts to get more comfortable. A promise to herself to have a quick nap on his living room couch before tiptoeing back to her apartment had been the deal, but when she opened her eyes almost four hours later, she knew there was no way she could slip out without drawing his attention…especially when she could hear him talking on the phone in the sexiest husky Northern drawl yet.

*It would be nice to hear him say ‘good morning’ to me in that way,* she thought. However, her errant thoughts were cut short when there was a sudden *thump* against the wall and then a silence that spoke volumes.

Shouting matches usually ended up that way, didn’t it?

*What a bore,* she thought with a frown as she rose to her feet and shrugged into the sweatshirt. Monogamous relationships were tedious and wearisome for the most part. Why tie yourself to one person when you can learn to love indiscriminately?

*He will never fit in with us.*

With her decision made, she tucked her braid behind her and lifted the hoodie to cover her head and face before carefully opening the closet door. The moans were a little louder now, and though she could hear Jon’s desperate “not now, Ros”, Dany knew she couldn’t stay another minute. Besides, she was getting a little tired of seeing other women around him

…and not that it bothered her in the slightest.

She pushed open the window; the hot afternoon breeze nearly sending her back on her heels. The stench of King’s Landing assailed her senses; but with a lithe leap she was onto the fire escape and soon out of sight.

*It didn’t matter what Tyrion said.*

*Jon Snow was no longer going to be a part of her world.*
Translation:

Issa jorrēelagon raqirossa. Nyke emagon missed ao sīr olvie.

My dear friends! How I’ve missed you!
One week.

Tendrils of smoke drifted to the heavens as he closed his eyes and exhaled softly. Ash filtered from the tip of the cigarette; a reminder that this was the last in his possession. A resigned sigh escaped his lips.

One week, two days and probably a couple of hours...

The loud flapping of wings had him cracking an eye open. A couple of pigeons had flown toward his resting place; neither caring for the brooding young man lying on the concrete ledge. They pecked at random crumbs of leftover pastries or seeds they might have forgotten from the last time they were here; their croons of delight adding to the muted cacophony of the city below. When one got dangerously close to the still figure, a hand shot out to wave it away. The pigeon squawked as if offended, but chose to simply hop to another location. Seven hells, even the birds of King’s Landing did not fear humans.

Jon chuckled at the notion of the creatures giving him the stink-eye. However, the brief moment of mirth faded away as another wave of miserable realization hit him.

She’s gone.

Something hard twisted within his heart, and he subconsciously rubbed his chest as if hoping to soothe it away. It really was stupid to feel this way considering their encounter, and everything afterwards, had taken place within the space of twenty-four hours –give or take.

...the most exciting twenty-four hours of his life...

All the same, just what had he expected? That the brief scene of feigned domesticity would become a reality? That she’d fall on her hands and knees and beg for forgiveness for drugging and dragging him to some brothel (well…maybe that was all Tyrion’s doing), where he probably did unspeakable
sexual acts with random exotic whores? I mean, he had heard of some of the freaky things those women did – for Gendry had some tales to tell – but never would he have imagined he’d end up in such a situation. Had he enjoyed some of it? From what he could remember, yes…especially what happened at the back of the grocery truck.

Damn.

Jon groaned and covered his eyes with an arm.

Missandei was beautiful. Any man with functioning eyes could very well see that. However, Dany’s decision to have her best friend give him a blowjob had sent him in a spiral of denial and reluctant gut-wrenching desire. There was no doubt she was good at what she did (probably even better than Ros), but a small part of him had wished for someone different performing the act. He had closed his eyes and briefly imagined a head of silky white hair below him instead of the tight dark curls. He had wished seductive violet eyes would peer up at him as she worked on his throbbing flesh; her tongue lavishing hungry licks that would eventually send him over the edge.

Great fantasy to have, but the reality was so much different. For whatever reason, all he had seemed to do was make her upset and though he struggled to recall what he might have done to make her feel that way, nothing was forthcoming.

Or maybe his presence alone was an annoyance. Maybe she just couldn’t stand him.

So why the hell did she sleepover at your apartment? his mind screamed. Why did she take the time to pick up your laundry and do your dishes? What was the point of all that?

Why indeed.

It was strange to finally notice the change in his apartment – long after he finally managed to convince Ros to go home. Between dealing with the realization that Dany had spent the night at his place and Ros’s impromptu visit, it would eventually sink in that things looked…different. It wasn’t as if he was a complete pig, and he did try to clean up once in a while, but there was no mistaking Dany’s magic touch around the place. Spaces he hadn’t even realized he had, were now exposed with her careful rearranging of his books and magazines. His kitchen, which had always felt tiny and claustrophobic, now seemed lighter with things finally put in their proper places. He wished he could say Ros had done the same the couple of times she had visited, but her job seemed to only keep his bed warm before slipping out before he even woke up. She had never taken the time to attend to his personal affairs, but here was this strange woman - with the passion of a warrior - exhibiting a domestic side that was almost endearing.

And she might have stripped me to my boxers as well, he thought with embarrassment as his cheeks suffused with color at the idea that she had seen him almost naked. Not that it mattered, for she had given him a rather tantalizing view of her lower back, hadn’t she?

He moaned at the memory.

He’s lost count of how many times he’s fantasized about taking that damned step forward to touch her pale skin…to trail kisses down her back until it stopped at the tattoo of the red dragons. She might have been petite, but those blasted white cotton panties had barely covered an ass and hips that were full and curved in all the right places.

He cursed as his pants got a little tighter. Flicking the butt of the cigarette to the ground, he turned on his side and struggled to think of something else besides her. He wanted to muster up his anger and frustration at her disappearance.
Couldn’t even fucking say ‘goodbye’.

When he finally got Ros out of the apartment, he had all but dashed into the bedroom to see her again. However, the sight of the opened closet and window was enough to tell the story. Disappointment, like a dagger, had stabbed right through him. However, his pride made him sulk for the rest of the day; choosing not to chase after her. Perhaps a part of him assumed he would see her again anyway, besides, he had his brother to deal with. Dany would have to be pushed to the back of his mind.

Pity it all came racing back when he went downstairs and noticed his Camaro waiting for him. He had almost forgotten Jorah had taken it somewhere to get it ‘fixed’, and as Jon ran his fingers over the new hood, he marveled at the workmanship. Whoever that Syros guy was, he had done an awesome job restoring the car to its original state, complete with a new paint job! Jon couldn’t wait to drive it to the airport to show off to Robb. The reaction wasn’t disappointing. There weren’t many things that could get ‘perfect’ Robb jealous, but his gushing over the car made it all worthwhile.

And so, between catching up with big brother, hanging around town with him and simply basking in his presence, Jon felt he could get over not seeing Dany or thinking about her.

However, by the fourth day, Jon’s concern grew tenfold.

He knew she couldn’t leave the apartment as often as she’d like – after all those masked assassins called the ‘Harpies’ were out for her life, weren’t they? However, whenever he was outside, he would give surreptitious glances at her windows, desperately hoping for some sign she was still around. But there was absolutely nothing. The curtains had always remained closed, and even at night, there was no visible glow of lights to indicate anyone was even living there. Was she choosing to completely remain in the dark?

I don’t care. I don’t care. I don’t fucking care, he would tell himself as he went about his business. I’m glad she’s gone. I don’t need the drama anyway.

Yet, by day six, he was standing before her apartment – his heart racing as he wondered what he could say if she did open the door. He knew she had left still wearing his tee shirt and he was missing one of his favorite hoodies, so he could always say he came to collect them while returning her clothes which he held in an old shopping bag.

He pressed the doorbell and waited. Five minutes later, he knocked and waited some more.

Nothing.

He pressed his ear to the door and knocked a little louder. It was almost seven in the evening. He was sure she would be around at this time. However, the eerie silence was becoming more unnerving.

This was too strange. Had she left after all? Did she and her so called ‘Kingsguards’ just disappear from King’s Landing? He didn’t claim to be as smart as Sam or his brother, Bran, but he did know that after the night spent with that group, they were anything but the members of the realm’s Kingsguards. For one thing, those uptight elite fighters wouldn’t be caught dead frolicking around brothels getting high or drunk while on duty no matter if they were secret assassins.

Whatever they were, they did have a Lannister working for them – and that alone made them quite a dangerous group. It was also clear they held Dany in high esteem; considering Missandei had addressed as her ‘Queen’, while their body language had shown that they would protect Dany with their lives if need be. None more so than that Jorah Mormont, who was clearly enamored with the
silver-haired woman. If looks could kill, Jon was sure he would be six feet under by now.

He knocked again and with a shake of his head, dug into the pocket of his jacket to pull out the set of skeleton keys for the building.

_Fuck it,_ he thought as he found the right key. He knew he was about to violate one’s personal space especially since permission wasn’t given, but this was no time to worry about being sued or yelled at. He had to know what happened to her, and though a part of him worried that maybe she was no longer alive…

_Those masked men might have climbed into her window and killed her in her sleep or something_, his overactive imagination took flight; sending his fingers trembling as he struggled to open the lock. _Shit. What if she’s been dead for the past few days and—_

He just about shoved the door open; his breathing uneven as he stepped into the cool room and tried to adjust to the gloom. He switched on the light and blinked at the brightness of it. Closing the door behind him, he took a deep breath to gather himself. Thankfully, there was no sign of intrusion. In fact, except for the T.V. remote control sitting on the sofa, there was absolutely nothing out of place. The apartment was still as impeccable as ever. The kitchen looked untouched; not even her ‘PRINCESS’ mug was there to show signs of life. The faint smell of lemon – and some other sweet scent he would now always associate with her – still lingered in the air.

“Da…Dany?” he called out tentatively.

His voice sounded too loud in the quiet, and as he walked further into the apartment, he had a feeling he was going to be disappointed.

The door to the bedroom was ajar, and as Jon pushed it open - his heart a staccato in his chest - he braced himself for a gruesome scene of Dany’s bloody body on the bed and perhaps the words ‘GOT THE BITCH’ written in blood on the walls or something. Kicking himself inwardly for having watched one too many slasher movies, he was rewarded with an empty bedroom with a well-made bed and not much else.

He flung open the closet doors and would have given a soft cry at the sight of a few clothes hanging in there, butsettled for sagging his shoulders in relief. Most were business suits, however, but the drawers held the more personal items, though there wasn’t much. It was just enough to show that someone did live here, but not enough to satisfy his curiosity. He dug around the rest of the cupboards, not sure of what he was looking for, but there was nothing else of significance to give him more insight on who or what she really was.

There wasn’t even a personal photograph.

_It’s like she chooses not to exist at all_, he mused as he made his way to the bathroom and was faced with the same emptiness.

By the time he stepped out to the hallway – he chose to leave the bag in the apartment in case Jorah or anyone else returned to pick the rest of her things – Jon felt a heaviness and misery cloak him at the thought of never actually seeing her again.

She had come and gone like a flash of lightning; giving him a day and night he’d never forget. He guessed he ought to be glad he experienced such a thing, but he still wished their farewells had been a little more meaningful. It’s not as if he wanted to be her boyfriend, but…a simple friend might have been nice. For despite all her acts of bravado, and Jon had no doubt she was good at fighting, that flash of pain he had seen in her eyes before closing the closet doors, was a reminder that beneath the
veneer of coldness was a young woman who was probably going through a lot. Hell, even hearing her burst of laughter at his suggestion that she was a fan of the Targaryens was a sound he would have loved to hear over and over again. He squeezed his eyes shut and clenched his jaw until it ached.

*I miss her.*

“Is that you Jon?”

His lashes flew open and he looked up; his hand frozen on the doorknob as he mentally prepared some quick explanation for why he was caught coming out of someone else’s apartment at this time of the day.

“Littlefinger?”

It was Petyr Baelish – or Littlefinger as he liked to be called by his ‘close friends’ – and after spending that night with him and Olivia, Jon had ended up in that select circle for whatever reason. It wasn’t as if he didn’t like the guy. Petyr was a decent human being for the most part and kept to himself, but there were times when Jon felt those beady dark eyes would stare at him just a little too long – as if hoping to rip into his soul and discover what’s beneath. And then there was that knowing small smirk or smile he gave most of the time. If ever he did laugh, it was not a real pleasant sound, and it seemed to mock the other person in the room. Besides, Jon was still to learn of how Petyr got such access to great recreational drugs. That shit was expensive.

“What are you doing up here?” Jon asked as he cleared his throat and stepped away from the door.

“Oh just paying a visit to a good friend down the hall,” Petyr replied with hands clasped behind his back. He wasn’t a very tall man, but his black silk Mandarin jacket gave him an elongated look that was slightly intimidating. He glanced behind Jon and at the door to Dany’s apartment. The small smile returned. “Visiting someone yourself?”

“Ah…yes,” Jon stuttered. “Just dropped in to say hello.”

Littlefinger nodded and seemed to rock back on his heels. “It’s good to see you care for your tenants. Just like your uncle. It’s an admirable trait.”

Jon kept silent, wishing he could slip past this meaningless small talk and make his escape. Robb was waiting for him anyway. They had made plans to go to a nightclub on Muddy Way.

As if on cue, his phone buzzed forcing him to whip it out with an apologetic smile at Petyr. It was Robb.

**WHERE R U?!!!**

*Phew. Saved.*

“An important date?” Littlefinger pestered.

“Yeah, my brother.”

“Ah, Robb, right? I met him the other day. Charming fellow.”

“He’s all right,” Jon replied with a wan smile as he prepared to walk past the older man. “I’ll catch you later, all right?”
Littlefinger gave a mock salute in farewell. However, what he said next would have Jon frozen in his tracks.

“Shame about the girl,” came the cryptic words. “I do hope she’s all right.”

Jon’s heart skipped a beat. He looked back to Littlefinger, noticing the man was still studying Dany’s apartment with a pensive expression on his visage.

“What do you mean?” Jon asked slowly.

“Oh, I meant the other night when the shootout happened,” Littlefinger explained with a wave of his hand as if in dismissal. “Olivia and I were on our way to Pavlar at the time. Terrible state of affairs. Those masked men were quite scary. In fact…” He paused and placed a finger against his chin before frowning at Jon as if recalling something. “A car came out of nowhere to take her away. Now I could be wrong, but I was sure it was your Camaro.”

When Jon’s lips thinned and a dark look filled his eyes, Littlefinger held up his hands as if to surrender. He laughed quietly. “Ah, forgive me. It was probably someone else. It was a rather chaotic scene. It could have been anyone. Yes?”

“That’s right,” Jon replied with a grim smile. “Could have been anyone.” He gave a show of looking at his watch. “Look. I’ve got to run, all right? I’ll see you later.”

Littlefinger gave a light bow in response, and though he spun on his heels to leave, Jon’s skin prickled in awareness for he was sure the older man was still watching him. The nagging feeling did not leave him all night, and he failed to enjoy himself as much as he should have despite Robb, Sam, and Gendry doing their best to keep him entertained.

Littlefinger was up to something, and if it was what Jon thought it was, he knew he was going to be in a lot of trouble.

“There you are,” came the breathless words to force Jon’s eyes open from his daydreams.

A flushed and sweaty Sam was approaching his resting place on the rooftop.

“Been looking all over for you, or rather Robb has. He says you’ve been avoiding him.”

Jon rolled his eyes and closed them again. Couldn’t a man enjoy his peace and quiet without being bothered continuously? He had spent the past week keeping his brother occupied. He deserved a break once in a while, didn’t he?

Sam plopped to the ground beside him and gulped in some much needed air.

“Yoren still working on the elevators, huh?” Jon asked.

“Of all the days,” Sam complained and mopped his brow with a handkerchief. “I was cursing you the whole way up here. Just wanted to let you know.”

Jon’s lips curved into a smile. “You didn’t have to come. I’m up here for a fucking reason.”

“Yes, yes, to be left to your brooding hour. Aren’t you done for the day?”
Jon lifted his middle finger in response.

Sam chuckled and leaned against the low brick wall. He stretched out his legs and seemed eager to just relax, though there wasn’t that much shade here. At least there was some breeze and it helped. If he could peel off his shirt to get some more fresh air, that would be ideal, but he burned easily; and the last thing he wanted was to end up all red and itchy from a sunburn.

“Robb says he’s leaving in a couple of days.”

Jon gave a low grunt in acknowledgement.

“He’s a great guy,” Sam continued with a wistful expression on his visage. “So much fun to hang out with.”

“He’s a rock star, all right.”

“Hey, I didn’t mean it like that,” Sam retorted quickly. “I meant to say…well you know.”

“I know,” Jon replied with a wry smile. “I lived with him most of my life, remember? I know the effect he has on people, so I’m not pissed or anything.”

“…yeah, but you should have been upset with the way Ros was all over him at the club the other night. Sheesh. I thought you two were dating.”

“We’re not,” Jon replied with a shrug. “We’re basically fuck buddies.”

“Ah…” Sam seemed to think this over before sighing. “Wish I had a fuck buddy.”

“Aren’t you still with Gilly?”

Gilly was a mousy girl with a loud mouth; not in cursing per se, but in being too damn curious about everything. Jon had made the mistake of joining her and Sam for lunch one day, and he almost slit his throat at her persistent query into every aspect of his life. Still, it was nice to see someone love and respect Sam for what he truly was. She was damn protective of him.

“Yeah, I’m still with her,” Sam stated as if offended at the assumption. “But every once in a while, a man likes to try other things. It gets boring sometimes.”

“Don’t let her hear you say that,” Jon replied with a shake of his head. “She’ll slit your throat. Northern girls are no joke.”

Sam laughed. “Yeah, that’s why we love ‘em, eh?”

Jon shrugged. He hadn’t been particularly attached to any girl back home, so ‘love’ was too strong a word to attach to any of the flings he’d been involved with. Ros wasn’t a Northerner, but she had enough passion for at least two of them.

And I don’t think Dany’s a Northerner, he mused. With that hair and those eyes…if I didn’t know any better, I’d think she was actually a Targaryen.

“…don’t exist anymore anyway,” he said aloud before he could control himself.

Sam’s ears perked at that. “What’s that?”

“I was saying how all the Targaryens are gone,” Jon replied as he opened his eyes. A plane – so tiny it looked like a gray dot in the sky – was flying overhead. “Weren’t they all killed?”
“I think so,” Sam replied with a slow nod; his brows furrowed in thought. “At least that’s what the history books tell us.”

“They used to have really white hair and purple eyes, didn’t they?” Jon continued. He was faintly aware of his pulse quickening for some odd reason. Things might be clicking into place…jigsaw puzzles…fractured moments spent in her presence that struggled to form one coherent picture.

“Not all of them,” Sam explained as he fell effortlessly into lecture mode. He was in his element now. “It is true that it’s common among the Targaryens, but there were variations over the years. Some ended up with dark hair like Ashara Dayne or Aegor Rivers…well he was half-Targaryen, but still! There are some people in the Free Cities that have silver hair especially in Lys. I’ve seen tons of pictures of people like that. They are stunning.”

No shit. I can barely breathe when she’s near me, Jon agreed inwardly as the memory of Dany’s face consumed him. The gnawing ache within him was getting stronger. He had to find her. But…how? Where could he even begin to search for her?

“…and that some of them were believed to be descended from dragon blood…”

Tuning out Sam’s rambling about magic and superstition, Jon tried to think back to possible starting points in his search. He doubted going back to the old wharf was going to yield any results, and he couldn’t really remember what brothel they had gone to that night. He had no idea where Tyrion, Jorah, Grey Worm or even Missandei lived…if they lived here at all.

Wait!

Jon’s eyes widened as he recalled something important; something Tyrion had said about his car to Jorah.

(Jorah takes the Northerner’s car to Syros’s…)

Syros!

Perhaps this person would have some information about them. If Dany’s group was familiar with his handiwork, and he was obviously trusted with such quick jobs like these, it was clear he was either a part of their network or aware of their existence. It was a long shot, but it was something.

“Sam?”

“…and the old lords…what?”

“Could you do me a solid?”

“What’s that?”

Jon sat up; an intense expression on his visage which had Sam leaning back in slight awe. For as long as he’d known his friend, Jon only got this way when something exciting was about to happen. A strong hand fell on his shoulder as Jon leaned in to state in a firm yet quiet voice.

“There’s a particular mechanic I’m looking for. He’s probably going to be in Flea Bottom – goes by the name of Syros.”

“…oh?”

“Think you can sniff him out for me?”
“Well, you could just use a search engine on your phone to do that -”

“Somehow I don’t think this guy wants to be found,” Jon replied with an enigmatic smile. “Just go search for him and let me know what you discover, okay?”

“Who’s he though?”

Jon shrugged lightly. “I heard good things about him, that’s all. Could do a little more work on my car.”

“Speaking of which, your car looks like it just got a new paint job. Much better work than Tobho Mott.”

Jon feigned innocence though he hated to lie to his friend. “I guess so. Or maybe I just really washed it well.”

Sam pursed his lips. He opened them again…closed…seemed to reconsider before blurring out in a rush. “You’ve been acting weird the past couple of weeks, Jon. I mean I know I’m not as close as your brother, but you are like a brother to me anyway, and it hurts that you won’t share whatever you’re going through with me.”

He shut up as he realized all he had blabbed out; his features reddening with embarrassment. He couldn’t look at Jon directly, and after a tense silence in which he was sure Jon would tell him to mind his own business, he found himself suddenly engulfed in a hug that was nothing short of warm and understanding. Sam’s eyes stung with unshed tears as he hugged back just as tight.

“I’m sorry, Sam. Just trust me when I say it’s better you don’t get involved,” Jon whispered into his ear. “I promise I’ll let you know everything eventually, but right now…just trust me, all right?”

They pulled apart but just long enough for Jon to pat his friend’s cheek and give him a smile of reassurance. “You’re always going to be my brother. No matter what.”

Sam, not trusting himself to speak, settled for nodding and taking a deep breath. He’d do anything for Jon if need be, but God knew he was ready to kill anyone if his life was ever in danger.

Jon drained the rest of his beer and gave a loud belch of satisfaction. He smirked at the grossed out expression on his brother’s visage, before lowering the window to toss the empty can into the curbside trashcan.

Robb was still nursing his first drink. Besides, he was the driver so he couldn’t afford to get drunk. Either way, both men knew they were stalling for time as they remained sitting in the car while a popular rock song serenaded them from the radio.

At twenty-three, Robb was already considered the patriarch of the Stark estate; a role he hadn’t exactly planned for when their father passed away three years ago. Jon could still remember the many nights he’d hear his brother crying softly in his sleep; the pressures of having to maintain a dignified face to the world while the burden of continuing his father’s legacy had fallen upon his shoulders.

“I wish you’d just come back,” he finally muttered as he stared sullenly at nothing in particular.
Reeking Lane was bustling with activity, yet the brothers felt they were cocooned in their own world. Jon had missed private moments like these, even if they were sharing the same apartment for now. “Mom’s not as pissed anymore.”

“That’s because I’m not there,” Jon reminded him with a bitter smile. “Of course she’ll be happier.”

“Don’t talk like that,” Robb protested. “She realizes I can’t do it all, and though she’s trying her best, she’s not getting any younger either.” He took a deep breath and another swig of his beer. “She’s been sick a lot lately, and I think…I think she’s dying,” he finished in a strangled whisper.

Jon kept his expression neutral; not particularly sure of how to feel about that news. Perhaps he ought to feel more upset about it, but after being treated like nothing more than a pesky cockroach for as long as he could remember, all he could manage was a soft ‘sorry’ in response.

Robb nodded in understanding. “I’m not saying this to guilt you to come back, but…I really do need your help, Jon.”

“What about Mr. Cossel…or Mr. Luwin? They were Dad’s partners…they can help you, can’t they?”

“Mr. Cossel’s too busy dealing with White Harbor matters, and Luwin’s just about on his death bed. The man’s older than dirt for fuck’s sake.” Robb ran restless fingers through his hair. “Bran seems to think Oldtown is his home for the rest of his goddamn life. Rickon’s still in high school. Sansa…college too and really doesn’t want to think about taking care of family matters at this time and then there’s Arya who’s already signing applications to join military schools down here.”

Jon raised a brow at that. If Arya would move to King’s Landing to live with him that would be awesome! However, seeing Robb’s miserable features curbed his excitement.

“I…” Jon struggled to say something. “I don’t think I’ll be much help, Robb. I’m no good at the family business, you know that. Dad knew it too. That’s why he felt I’d be better in the army. I would have joined but -”

“Yeah, you just had to end up in that fight that almost took your life,” Robb sneered. “You are such a hothead, Jon. How you survived is a goddamn miracle.”

“He had it coming,” was all he could muster, for the pang of guilt came back with a vengeance. It was while he was in hospital that his father had died just several rooms away from him; the victim of a mysterious hit-and-run accident that took his life and that of his secretary on their way to work. When Jon had finally opened his eyes, it was to see Arya and Robb crying over him while breaking the terrible news to him. It was a sight he never wanted to see ever again.

“At least promise you’ll think about it,” Robb finally said with a heavy sigh. “The North needs you, Jon. You don’t belong in this hellhole. I can see why you hated from the start.”

With a frown of distaste, Robb stared at the yellow flag with the black crowned stag fluttering in the breeze and shook his head lightly.

“Hard to think this guy was Dad’s best friend,” he muttered as he lowered his gaze to the glass doors leading into Bobby B’s Hammer and Chain store. Though it was almost five in the evening, and the streets were filled with people, the store didn’t appear to be crowded. He groaned and rubbed his forehead. “Do I really have to see him?”

“You’ve got a letter from Catelyn for him, don’t you?” Jon asked with a small smile. “I’m not going
in there by myself. He’ll never let me leave.”

“Well, you’ve got to be my buffer,” Robb pouted. “If he starts rambling about he and Dad’s glory days, you jump in and say something like…the apartments on fire so we have to go.”

Jon smirked and shrugged. “Sure…whatever.”

Robb Stark – the usually confident, handsome as the devil, all-Northerner – now looked like a petulant ten-year-old forced to meet his headmaster for doing something wrong in class. Ignoring the appreciative glances he received from passing females (and a few males), he led the way into the shop and forced a big smile on his visage.

“Uncle Bobby!”

“As I live and breathe!” came the boisterous greeting from the giant of a man behind the counter. He had been polishing a sword, but tossed it aside in delight. “If it isn’t Robb Stark of Winterfell! Ned’s oldest son! Come here, boy! Let’s take a good look at you!”

While Jon slipped into the aisle of pistols to hide, he couldn’t help laughing as his brother was all but engulfed in a giant bear hug. Robert Baratheon was a big man with a gut as round as he was gregarious. His long brown hair flecked with gray and a thick bushy beard made him intimidating to most at first glance. His voice needed no amplifiers, as evidenced from his popular T.V. commercials. His was a distinct boom that spoke of a man who had lived and loved his life in every way possible. Rumor had it he had fathered several bastards because of his frivolous ways.

In fact, Gendry was one product of such infidelities. Something he had finally admitted to Jon after his persistent prodding.

Pity his friend was out of town running some errands for dear old Dad, Jon mused as he studied the array of weapons with interest. Pistols, machine guns, rifles, swords, machetes, you name it, Robert had it. Why anyone would need swords in this day and age was still baffling. He knew the City Watch and Kingsguard wore it for only display purposes, and maybe cosplay enthusiasts or history buffs would want to collect them, but as he caressed the hilt of a sword with what looked like a wolf’s pommel, he shuddered and turned toward the row of handguns along the wall.

*Impressive…hmm?*

He frowned as he noticed one in particular. It was a black Glock 17; the same brand Dany had pointed at him that fateful day. He removed it from its display case; feeling the weight of it in his palm. He had never actually shot at a person before, though he had hunted for game with his Dad and brothers while growing up. However, they had used hunting rifles; long, cumbersome weapons he hadn’t really enjoyed. He did like using a crossbow, and Bobby’s shop had a collection of those as well. Pity he couldn’t purchase one though. They were too fucking expensive.

“Don’t move or I’ll shoot,” he whispered as he raised the gun to eye level; holding it out as he remembered Dany doing.

She had held it with confidence and had shot nearly precisely that night against the Harpies. He wondered who had taught her how to use it and just how many people she had killed. Hadn’t she even offered to kill Ros? As if it was the easiest task to do?

*She probably kills people with her eyes closed,* Jon mused with a smile. With her small stature, it was easy to picture her leaping out of the darkness like a ninja and taking out her enemies without them ever noticing. He sincerely hoped he never pissed her off enough to earn her wrath…
The chime of the front doors to the shop had him looking up as new customers arrived. Jon would have dismissed them and continued his study of the weapon, but there was something unique and quite intimidating about the two tall bronze-skinned men dressed in well-tailored suits striding in with purpose. With their long black hair and trimmed beards accented with gold rings, eyes darkened with kohl, and a smell of rich oil emanating from them, they surveyed the room with cold, critical eyes.

One of them appeared to look toward Jon’s direction, but quickly dismissed him as Bobby and Robb returned from the backroom still chattering loudly about something regarding boar hunting and how ‘Ned had always chickened out at the last minute’. However, the raucous laughter stopped at the sight of the newcomers.

“Ah, my good friends,” Robert greeted with a clap of his hands, while Robb had a perplexed expression on his face. Did he know who they were?

“You’re a bit early, but better than never. If you gentlemen will step into my office, I’ll be with you shortly.”

Once the men were gone, he turned to Robb and pat his shoulders. “As for you, boy, I insist you come to dinner tonight! Bring that brother of yours who never seems to want to see me… and Benjen if you must, though he can be a boring conversationalist. There is so much more I want to hear from you.”

Robb gave a dutiful reply and accepted another crushing hug before making his escape. Jon would have dashed after him, but Robert was still watching him leave with hands on his hips as if appraising a son he wished he could have.

However, what happened next would have Jon cursing beneath his breath.

Robert was now locking the doors to the shop before flipping the ‘CLOSED’ sign for any other potential customers. His once jovial features were now a thunderous scowl, and Jon ducked as the big man appeared to glance in his direction before heading to his office.

Now what? Jon thought with beads of sweat breaking out on his brow. He could hear the voices in the backroom, and curiosity getting the better of him, he began to tiptoe in that direction until he was close enough to make out what was being said.

“…more time needed?” Robert was bellowing with a pound of his fist on the table. Jon shivered. He had never heard the man sound so angry and spiteful. He could only picture how his face looked at the moment. “How much more time do you Dothraki bastards need? I’ve provided all the goddamn weapons he needs to begin his invasion, and you tell me you cannot find one measly Targaryen bitch?”

“The Khal has his eyes on the streets,” one of the men was saying in a thick accent that was unrecognizable to Jon. “We almost got the girl last week -”

“Almost is not good enough,” Robert sneered. “I am going to take control of the Syndicate. That was the deal we made. He eliminates the Targaryen bitch, we take control of Westeros, and I sit on that godforsaken seat the Lannisters have been hogging for far too long. If she’s still alive and busy building up her fucking army, how do you think I’m going to manage that?!”

Jon failed to hear what the other men was saying, but it was now clear who the ‘fucking-Targaryen-
bitch’ was.

_Fuckfuckfuckfuck. Dany. He’s talking about Dany._

He slapped a hand over his mouth to control the cry that would have escaped him; his heart a jackhammer in his chest. He was beginning to tremble; mixed emotions of fear and anger racing through him at the thought of this son-of-a-bitch willing to murder his opponents just to gain power. If he truly was behind the _coup d’état_ against the once reigning Targaryen Dynasty…then he was responsible for the countless murders of Dany’s relatives.

_Dany is a Targaryen._

She is the last living Targaryen, which means she’s probably doing all she can to take control of her family’s birthright.

Suddenly her cryptic statements were beginning to make sense:

“A Targaryen fan, huh?”

“A fan?” Her amused laughter. “You could say that.”

“Come with me, Jon. Guess it’s time to introduce you to the real Kingsguard.”

Those jig-saw puzzles…still in scrambled pieces in his mind…were at least beginning to form a picture that was now laced with blood and death.

He had stepped into something more dangerous than he could have possibly imagined, and as his cell phone suddenly buzzed within his pocket, he fumbled with it in a desperate attempt to silence it before he was caught. However, it was the simple message delivered that would nearly have him passing out.

MTG @ THE OLD WHARF – MIDNIGHT – T.L.
Jon IV

Chapter Notes

Thanks sooooooooooooooooooo very much for the great feedback for the last chapter! As much as I appreciate the kudos, it's always great to actually read commentary, so please always feel free to leave a line or two. And dam if my chapters aren't getting longer. I swear I start with a basic outline, but when I actually begin writing, the plot takes on a life of its own. But I ramble! Here you go, dear Readers! I hope you enjoy! *bows gratefully*
P.S: We'll be hearing from Dany in the next chapter. I've missed that little troublemaker. :(

T.L.

Tyrion fucking Lannister?!

Jon gawked at the message, wondering why he had actually tapped on it. Usually ‘UNKNOWN’ senders were immediately deleted as they were almost always random bullshit he didn’t need to read. Perhaps it was his precarious situation that caused him to accept without thinking. Or perhaps it was the realization that his damn phone buzzing had probably gotten the other men’s attention plus the likelihood of being caught and having to come up with a suitable explanation of why he was spying on them, had eventually sent him over the edge.

Bottom line, he was fucked.

He took a tentative step backwards; his heart still pounding like a drummer on acid, as he kept his eyes on the set of double-doors leading to the back office. The men were still talking, though their voices were a little lower now, and it was a little difficult to understand what was being said. Either
way, Jon knew it was time to bail and fast. He had heard more than enough. If he could get to the front doors and open them without alerting -

(well those damn chimes are likely to go off, aren’t they?)

Shit! He was really going to have to think of some other way to escape without being seen.

He took another step back; eyes still trained on the doors.

Precarious situation aside, it was bewildering to have received the message in the first place. One, how the hell had Tyrion gotten a hold of his phone number and two, why in seven hells would he want to see him at such an inopportune ti-

CLANG!

Jon felt his heart literally stop as the display of an authentic (allegedly) House Bolton shield crashed to the floor thanks to the heel of his boot bumping against it. The noise was thunderous compared to the relative quiet.

Fuuuuuck!

He gave himself no time to second-guess his next decision. Luckily, the store was large enough for him to dash down the aisle of swords and shields toward the handguns and rifles section. He kept low as he ran, being careful not to bump into anything else until he ducked behind two large steel bins filled with bullets and magazine clips. From this vantage point, he had a rather good view of the back doors.

His phone vibrated again, and as the two Dothraki stepped out with the most wicked-looking weapons he had ever seen in their grasp, Robert Baratheon was glowering after them with an irritated, “What the hell are you looking for? It’s not uncommon for items to fall around here. Don’t you see how cluttered the store is? There’s no one else in here.”

The men said something in their native tongue to each other, and Jon didn’t need an interpreter to know they did not believe him.

He glanced down at his phone to see who the new message was from.

Robb.

WHERE THE HELL R U???

Typing as fast as his trembling fingers could muster, Jon replied back.

IN STORE! NEED TO GET THE FK OUT OF HERE! NOW!

Robb’s reply seemed to take forever. Jon glanced up to take note of where the men were. One of them was walking slowly down the opposite aisle; the small sickle-shaped weapon raised with a glint of pure murder in his eyes. Jon sucked in a harsh breath and closed his eyes.

pleasepleasepleasepleasepleaseRobbcomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeoncomeon -

Another vibration. His lashes flew open.

I’M COMING IN.
No!

With a feverish shake of his head, Jon sent his response as a bead of sweat broke free from the tip of his nose to drop onto the screen.

**DISTRACT. BACK OF STORE. DON'T WANT THEM TO SEE ME LEAVE.**

His chest was tightening and it was a struggle not to give away his position. However, a collection of fearsome-looking clubs sat in a row beside him. If push came to shove, he was going to have to take matters into his own hands. Good thing they were in a store chuck full of ammunition.

Robb replied again. **ON IT.**

Thank the gods for his older brother understanding without asking too many questions. It only made sense as he had had to bail Jon out of trouble, quite a few times, back in Winterfell. Sometimes words were never really needed between them.

“This is a fucking waste of time,” Robert was still complaining. “I do have cameras in here if you’re that eager to see if we’re not alone. I have a business to run too! I need to open up again or I’m losing money!”

Shit! Cameras! Jon winced. How could he have forgotten all about that?!

He looked up with dismay; now taking note of the tiny devices stuck in the corners of the ceiling. Unless he burned down the store, there was no way Robert wasn’t going to know he had been here all this time.

Jon rubbed his forehead in growing distress. How stupid had he been not to think through this? And as if things couldn’t possibly get worse, the man with the sickle was just a few feet away; though his gaze was not trained in Jon’s direction. All the same, Jon felt his fingers slowly wrap around the handle of the club. He talked himself into concentrating and breathing evenly; memories of fights he had gotten into reminding him of what tactics to take. To his advantage, he was quite fast and relatively ‘small’ compared to the hulking Dothraki. One good swing at those legs, and Jon figured he could dash away before he was caught.

His fingers tightened around the club. The man was now looking away; his broad back to Jon. All he had to do was turn around and he would see the mass of black curly hair hiding behind him. However, Jon was ready. He would swing with all his might, and if it meant having to kill someone else then so be it.

Robert, for his part, was about to take the other Dothraki back to the office when the sudden sharp rapport of what sounded like gunshots had them all freezing in shock.

**BANG!BANG!BANG!BANG!**

It was coming from the back of the building, and it was enough to have Robert cursing up a storm as he grabbed the nearest object – which happened to be the largest steel hammer Jon had ever seen. Wielding it so effortlessly, it wasn’t hard to picture him in his youth, where his legend as one of the most fearsome fighters in all of Westeros, still lingered on the tongues of many.

“Goddamn it! I’ve had enough of those brats!” Robert thundered as he led the way accompanied by the Dothraki who were now more than eager to get into whatever potential melee awaited them.

Jon finally saw his opportunity. Once the last man was through the doors, he dropped the club and leapt to his feet; all but sprinting toward the entrance where he frantically tried unlocking the doors
until he kicked himself inwardly and forced himself to calm down. Panicking wasn’t going to get
him anywhere, and as he stepped back to examine the locks properly; he was able to figure out it.
One lock at the top which he yanked downward, one at the bottom, and then the ones to the sides.

As predicted, the chimes went off, but Jon did not stick around to see if any of the other men were
going to come out to catch him…or perhaps he shouldn’t have made the mistake of giving one last
look. Just as he did so, the back doors flew open again, but instead of Robert, it was one of the
Dothraki – the one with the sickle who had pursued him earlier. For a heartbeat, both men stared at
each other; the darkened eyes of the foreigner widening before they narrowed with a knowing that
sent a trickle of fear down Jon’s spine. That emotion was tenfold when, with a quick flick of his
wrist, he flung the sickle-like weapon in Jon’s direction with unbelievable speed.

_Holy shit!_

Jon, his body moving on pure reflex, dodged the incoming attack; only to curse beneath his breath as
the weapon missed him by barely an inch. Wisps of his hair fell to the floor and, for a moment, he
stared dumbly at the intricately-designed weapon now lodged in the wall next to him. How it had
missed the glass doors was a fucking miracle. Talk about precision.

“_Hale, little mahrazh,_” the Dothraki said with a smirk as he took a step forward and beckoned to Jon
with both hands as if to say ‘come here’. “_Athessazar tih az._”

If there was anything Jon hated, it was to be patronized, and at this moment, the Dothraki’s smug
attitude had him gritting his teeth and forgetting the quest to make his escape.

“Oh?” the man said when he noticed the change in body language. His dark eyes glinted with
bloodlust. “You want battle?” he continued in broken Common Tongue. “Come, _naqis lajak. We_
fight now.”

“Fuck you,” Jon growled as he grabbed the handle of the weapon and yanked it out with a grunt. He
almost missed because it was lodged in that deep, but once in his grasp, he prepared to toss it right
back, when a loud honk of a car horn behind him forced his attention away from his potential
opponent.

“Get the fuck in here!” Robb yelled as he opened the door to the passenger side. “I think we started a
fire, so we need to hightail it now!”

Jon didn’t need to be told twice. He spun on his heels and dove into the waiting car, almost falling
out when Robb swerved out of the curb with a speed that was likely to get them both killed. Jon did
manage to shut the door before sagging limply on the seat; his heart still racing as if he had run a
marathon. He could feel the damp patches of sweat beneath his armpits as he closed his eyes and
tried to catch his breath.

_I’m alive. I’m alive. I’m alive. I’m –_

“Thank the gods those kids were willing to take only a couple of pennies to set those firecrackers
off,” Robb rambled on as he wove his way down the narrow streets. “I swear King’s Landing brats
are savage…what the hell are you holding?” came the bemused question which had Jon snapping his
eyes open.

He would stare dumbly at the weapon still clutched in his right hand before gulping in disbelief. _Shit._
The Dothraki’s sickle…or whatever the hell it was.

“Uum…” he began, but Robb was already shaking his head.
“Don’t bother. You’ve got a lot of explaining to do when we get back to the apartment and none of your bullshitting either, Jon. You tell me everything, got it?”

Jon looked like he was about to protest, but at the familiar big brother glare he received, he sank lower into his seat and closed his eyes in weary resignation.

“Fine. I’ll tell you everything.”

Unfortunately for Jon, the excitement wasn’t over yet; for as Robb pulled into the parking lot of the apartment complex, there was a City Watch car sitting patiently in the driveway.

Their Uncle Benjen was engaged in conversation with the rather pleasant-looking officer, who was clad in the familiar gold and black uniform of the law-enforcement establishment. He was scribbling something in a notebook, but when both men spied the incoming Camaro, the officer’s curiosity was piqued. The officer pointed toward the car, they saw their uncle nod, and then the officer scribble something more in his notes.

Robb raised a brow, and without looking at his brother, commented warily. “Please don’t tell me you’re in trouble with them too.”

“I haven’t done anything,” Jon protested weakly. “I -”

What could he possibly say? That all this stemmed from curiosity about some random girl he was attracted to? Goddamn his decision to help Dany that night. It now appeared that his rash decision was coming back to bite him hard in the ass. He could be looking at jail time at this point. Why else would the City Watch be here?

“Ah, Petyr’s here too,” Robb was saying, and at the sound of that name, Jon stiffened; his guard going up as he noticed the older man standing to the side of the building as if he wasn’t a part of the proceedings. He was in the same garb he seemed to favor; the black Mandarin jacket with the silver bird brooch/clasp at the neck.

Was it possible that bastard had reported him? He wouldn’t put it past that sneaky son-of-a-bitch. Jon felt the first stirrings of anger suffuse through him. He was unaware of the tightening of his grip around the weapon until Robb tapped his hand quickly.


Jon did as he was told by shoving it beneath the car seat. He forced a smile to his lips, though it felt as insincere as anything he had ever done. The officer knocked on the glass and motioned for Jon to lower the window, which he did with the polite smile still stuck on his face.

“Hallo, boys,” the officer greeted as sharp blue eyes studied the car even as he continued with a pleasant tone. “You wouldn’t mind if I asked you both a couple of questions, would you?”

“Is there a problem, Officer?” Robb asked.

“Oh no, no, at least we hope not,” the man replied with a laugh and a tip of his hat. “Just a couple of routine questions.”
He stepped back, allowing Jon to step out of the car. He darted a quick look at his uncle, who was studying him with mixed expressions of concern and annoyance. Littlefinger was still loitering around, though Olivia had joined him – as well as a few other tenants who apparently found it interesting to observe the boys being interrogated.

“Nice ride,” the officer was saying. According to his badge, his name was Jacelyn Bywater, and he was a first lieutenant. “Souped it up yourself?”

Jon nodded; his hands clasped behind his back, though they were clenched into tight fists. “Yeah… took a couple of months.”

“I’ll bet,” Jacelyn whistled as he walked slowly around the car; his perceptive study of the vehicle continuing. “Take it to the shop recently?”

“Just to get an oil change,” Jon replied, which wasn’t a complete lie. It was the last thing he had done the day before he met Dany.

“Uh huh, that checks out,” Jacelyn said with a smile. “Tobho Mott did say you came in for that.”

So he’s been to Tobho’s already? Damn, Jon thought with growing panic, though he kept his features as neutral as possible. He could see Littlefinger studying him, and it took all of his self-control not to sneer at the older man. That shit-eating small smile was on his face, and Jon was definitely sure Petyr had something to do with all this.

That fucking piece of-

“So I’ll cut to the chase, Jon…it is Jon, right?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Jon Snow, eh? Northerner.” There was something about the way he said the word ‘northerner’ which had the Stark men bristling. It was no real secret most Southerners didn’t care much for their Northern counterparts. If history was anything to go by, the Northerners were always considered barbaric and uncultured.

“I’ll cut to the chase,” Bywater repeated as he tapped his notebook and pretended to be in deep thought. “You heard about the shootout that happened about…oh…nearly two weeks ago?”

Jon stole another quick glance at his uncle, whose eyes screamed for him not to fuck anything up. Jon swallowed and replied with a nod. “Yeah, I heard about it.”

“Terrible thing to happen in the city,” Jacelyn replied with a shake of his head. “We can’t keep having these foreigners showing up to mess things up, can we?”

Jon wasn’t sure if he wanted an answer to that, so he settled for keeping silent and shrugging lightly.

“That thing is,” Jacelyn continued as he came to a stop before the car and tapped the hood lightly. “In the midst of all the chaos, eyewitnesses swear they noticed a Camaro – just like yours – helping one of the participants in the shootout.” He looked up from his examination to pin a piercing no-bullshitting gaze on Jon. “So I guess the question is…where were you on the night of August the 15th, Jon Snow?”

Jon could feel Robb’s eyes on him…hell; everyone’s eyes were on him, yet all he could see –

(Dany ducking and weaving like a gazelle as she fought valiantly against her attackers; her beautiful
“I was home,” he said aloud; surprised at how steady his voice was. “I was just finishing up with my uncle’s paperwork…we just re-ordered a couple of fixtures for some bathrooms and he needed me to tally ‘em up.”

Another incomplete lie. It was what he had done earlier that evening before beginning his stakeout, and as Jacelyn continued to study him, Jon held his gaze; not flinching as if daring the officer to call his bluff.

“This true?” Jacelyn asked Benjen without looking away from Jon.

Benjen moved closer; his nod validation to Jon’s story. “Yeah. The kid’s slow at the math stuff, but he was here…working for most of the night. I eventually had to kick him out of the office around one in the morning. He was drooling all over the goddamn desk.”

“Hmm.”

Jacelyn appeared to want to say something else, but settled for giving a curt nod and scribbling something else in his notebook. “I guess that’s that then,” he finally said with a smile; the charm back in full effect. “There are several other Camaros in the city, so the search continues, eh?”

He reached out to pat Jon’s shoulder. “You be good now, Snow. Don’t want to have to book you some day for doing something you shouldn’t,” he added with a playful wink despite the ominous warning. “I will tell you this though: the good thing to come out of all of this, whoever was in the Camaro did us a favor in taking out some really bad dudes. Ever hear of the Sons of the Harpy?”

Jon shook his head in denial. “Who are they?”

“Bunch of thugs and mercenaries from Meereen,” Jacelyn replied with a sneer as if disgusted. “I swear they’re all heathens from over there, and more and more of them are coming. We have to be on our toes. Even the Kingsguards are on the watch too. Times are a-changing, that’s for damn sure.”

He tipped his hat and turned to the rest of his audience. “You all be on the lookout for suspicious foreigners. I’ve left our hotline number with Mr. Stark here.” He pointed to Benjen. “You have any information, don’t hesitate to call us. You’ll be doing your part to protect the realm. You all have a good night now.”

Once he was gone, Benjen all but glared at Jon to follow him as the rest of the tenants dispersed with mumbles of disgruntlement. They had at least hoped for someone getting arrested.

Once in the safe confines of his claustrophobic office, Benjen plopped Jon in his chair and both he and Robb towered over him with arms crossed.

“You want to tell us what the fuck’s going on, Jon?” his uncle asked carefully.

“I didn’t do anything,” Jon began, but when he met both disapproving stares, he lowered his gaze and clasped his hands tightly.

Where the hell did he even begin?

Dany…it all begins with her.
He took a deep breath and glanced at the wolf-shaped clock on the desk.

7:15pm

He had about five hours before his rendezvous with Tyrion…if these two would let him leave that is.

“Jon?” Robb prodded. “If you’re in trouble…maybe you should just come back home with me. I can purchase an extra ticket no problem.”

“No,” Jon interrupted quickly. There was no way he was leaving. Not now. Not with the knowledge he had.

(not without seeing her one last time)

“I’m not leaving King’s Landing…at least not yet.” He took a deep breath and held their gazes; a frown on his features now. “If I tell you everything…you promise not to interrupt or ask too many questions? Because God knows I’m just in need of answers as well.”

8:10pm

By the time he was done – being careful not to mention the events of the night with Dany and her crew - they were all nursing drinks; Benjen more so as he helped himself to more vodka much to his nephews growing concern. They had never seen their uncle consume this much alcohol in the space of an hour. Though he was often considered the ‘wild’ brother thanks to his decision to join the toughest military unit – the infamous Night’s Watch – in his youth, he was still smart enough to know his limits.

While Ned Stark had eventually become patriarch of the estate, Benjen had traveled the world, only stopping by Winterfell once in a blue moon to visit his beloved nephews and nieces. The children admired and loved him, and Jon had considered him an otherworldly figure; someone so full of knowledge that paled in comparison to the dusty books in their library. While their father was a sage and deliberate in all he did, Benjen was more outgoing and spontaneous; though managing to maintain the Stark stoic nature.

“I don’t believe it,” Robb finally muttered as he shook his head in disbelief. “Robert Baratheon is trying to control the Syndicate again? Why? Didn’t Dad say it no longer existed? That the coup d’état at the Trident dissolved any such thought of needing that organization?”

“I guess,” Jon replied; not having paid that much attention to the history of the Syndicate to be honest. All he knew were the stories of them being in control of the realm and being the forces behind the government. Nothing too detailed.

“I mean,” Robb continued; his features wrought with confusion. “A majority of the people praised him for single-handedly defeating the so-called dark forces of corruption, and you remember that speech he gave on T.V. – the one they keep playing every fucking year during Realm Freedom Day - where he’s like “and now begins a new era for Westeros, where the thought of all power being in the hands of one family is no longer acceptable. We must choose a democratic government…blah, blah, blah.” Robb had tried to mimic Robert’s sonorous voice, and it was all Jon could do not to laugh at how ridiculous he sounded. He figured this wasn’t exactly the right time to be jovial.
“To now think he’s actually trying to take control behind the scenes?” Robb ran his fingers through his hair; his eyes wide and almost too large for his face. “It doesn’t make any fucking sense.”

“It’s what I heard. I’m not making this shit up,” Jon defended himself before turning to his uncle for help. “What do you think, Uncle Benjen? Do you think-?”

“You should both go to bed,” came the sudden statement which had the brothers blinking in surprise. Benjen drained the rest of his drink; his features ashen.

“Did I stutter?” he asked when neither made any effort to obey. His voice was raised though his words were slightly slurred. “Didn’t you hear me?! Go to bed!”

“We’re not fucking kids anymore,” Robb grumbled, only to cry out in pain and surprise as he suddenly found himself grabbed by the scruff of his shirt and slammed hard against the wall.

“Uncle Benjen!” Jon cried out as he leapt to his feet and tried to break the two apart.

His uncle’s features looked positively haunted, and Robb’s face was turning an ugly shade of blue.

“You’re going to fucking kill him! Leave him alone!” Jon tried to wrench his arm away, but his uncle was bigger and stronger, and seeing as he was going nowhere, Jon cursed and reached for a nearby plaque (one of the many awards the City Council had given Benjen for ‘Best Landlord’ or whatever) to slam it hard against the back of his head.

The plaque shattered into pieces and that seemed to do the trick. The haunted expression slowly faded to reveal widening brown eyes that were now filled with remorse.

“Oh God,” he whispered as he released Robb with a quick jerk. “What…what was…Robb? I’m…I’m sorry…I don’t…I’m…”

Robb was on his hands and knees coughing up a storm as he tried to gather much-needed air into his lungs. He tried to speak, but their uncle was staggering away as if unable to remain in their presence. He ran trembling hands down his face before leaving the office without a look back.

However, instead of going upstairs to his apartment, he stumbled out of the building and into the darkness leaving the brothers looking at each other in terrified silence.

“What the fuck?” Jon asked slowly as he fell to his knees beside Robb. “What the fuck is going on? What did we say?”

He got no answer except for his older brother wrapping an arm around his shoulder and motioning for them to get up. He would remain that way as Jon led them upstairs, both ignoring some of the curious looks they received from a few other tenants.

Once in Jon’s apartment, Robb examined the bruises around his neck in the bathroom mirror and cursed; his voice a raspy croak that sounded awful.

“I’m sorry,” Jon began in a small voice. “Maybe I shouldn’t have said anything.”

Robb shrugged and waved a hand in dismissal. “He can be a jerk sometimes. What else is new?” he whispered hoarsely. He began to take off his shirt. “I’m taking a shower and getting some sleep.”

“Want some tea or something? For your throat?”

Robb stopped unzipping his pants to look at his brother; and perhaps for the first time all day, he realized just how exhausted and miserable Jon looked. He could only imagine what was going
through his mind at the moment, for Jon was as mysterious as he was loyal to a fault. It was what made others think he was an aloof bastard, but Robb knew that beneath the brooding veneer was a heart of pure gold. He just wished Jon would reveal that side a bit more.

“Come here,” he motioned for his brother to move closer, which Jon did only to find himself engulfed in one of the best hugs he’d received in a long time. The sudden urge to burst into tears overwhelmed him, but Jon settled for burrowing his face against the crook of the bruised neck; hoping he wasn’t aggravating the injury. Robb’s scent was a mixture of sweat, his aftershave, and the lingering smell of Winterfell as he had left it all those months ago. Poignant memories of a childhood spent with his siblings, and a father who gave a shit about him, made his eyes water. He realized how much he really missed meaningful human contact. It was something random hook-ups could never fix, and after the shitty day he’d had…this was something he desperately needed.

“Get some sleep,” Robb whispered as he placed a hard kiss on Jon’s forehead. “Let’s not think about any of that shit tonight, all right. In the morning…we’ll deal with it. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“Besides,” Robb added with a small smile. “Remember the Stark motto.”

Jon returned the smile albeit wearily. “Winter is coming.”

“Winter is coming,” Robb repeated.

Jon wondered if he ought to mention the meeting at the wharf tonight, or to reveal that he had actually met the ‘Targaryen bitch’ Robert had spoken about. His story to them had skimmed over the details of the shootout, choosing instead to say that he had only noticed the guys in the masks shooting and all he had done was try to take them out with the car. He had no idea why he was keeping Dany’s real identity from them, but Jon felt it had been for the best. If Dany was in hiding, it wouldn’t do to blab about her to anyone…not even if they were family. However, seeing as Robb was already turning away to peel off the rest of his clothes, Jon excused himself and slipped into his bedroom with a close of the door behind him.

For the next two hours, he lay on his bed and stared blindly at the ceiling; headphones over his ears as he tried to get lost in the angry lyrics from his favorite band, The Crows. He tried not to think of what the meeting could be about, though he sincerely hoped it would be a chance to see Dany again.

And have I got something to tell you, he’d say while imagining her face would light up with excitement. I know who was behind your family being murdered. It’s Robert Baratheon. We should kill him now and the war is over. You’ll be in charge of the Syndicate again and…and…

And what?

If the situation were really that simple, wouldn’t things have ended by now? The Lannisters were in the top positions of power at this time, and Jon had no idea how Dany intended to take over when they had such an iron grip on everything. It was going to take more than just assassinating Robert. He really did have to stop thinking that everything could be solved with one slit of his throat.

It’s that sort of naïve thinking that will get you killed, Jon, his father had warned several times during training. You must learn to outthink your enemies and to do that is to think like them first.

Think like the enemy, Jon mused as the eleventh hour finally struck and he rose to his feet. Easier said than done.

Being careful not to make too much noise, he changed his clothing; choosing a pair of black jeans
and a white tee-shirt with the inscription ‘Shit Happens’ on it. He wished he had his favorite hoodie, but seeing as Dany had ‘stolen’ it…

“I’m going to have to get it back sooner or later,” he said with a small smile as he tied the laces of his boots. It was probably going to smell like her when it was returned. Not a bad trade off. He might never wash it again.

He rose to his feet and eyed his reflection in the mirror while running fingers through his curls. He really needed a trim. It was beginning to get into his eyes, and so rummaging through the drawer for a rubber band, he pulled the hair away from his face to form a short ponytail. He blinked at how much older he looked with this hairstyle, and almost laughed at himself.

He knew he was channeling his dead father with the look, but as he shrugged into his leather jacket (patting the pockets to make sure his phone, keys, and extra pack of smokes was in there) and opened the window carefully, he figured his father was probably watching the unfolding events and shaking his head in disapproval.

_Sorry, Dad_, he thought with a rueful smile as stepped into the waiting night life of King’s Landing. _Some things just have to be done… even if it does kills me._

Making sure he stayed within the speed limit – for paranoia had him thinking the City Watch were still on his tail thanks to Officer Bywater’s visit - Jon assumed he would be there early; as he gave himself enough time to arrive with at least ten minutes to spare.

However, at the sight of the waiting sedan, he felt his pulse quickening as the rush of memories from the last time came flooding back. He stubbed out the cigarette and took a deep breath while running sweaty palms down his thighs.

_She’s here…she’s here…shit…what the fuck do I say?_

A wave of shyness hit him so hard, it was almost crippling. After over a week of pining and hoping to catch a glimpse of the woman who was indirectly making his life a living hell, the notion that she was just a few feet away…

He gripped the steering wheel. “Get a fucking hold of yourself, Jon Snow. It’s just Dany and she’s into girls, remember?”

_Right._

With that sobering reminder, he gathered himself and stepped out of the car, just as the other car’s occupants stepped out as well. It wasn’t hard to make out Tyrion, who was dressed in yet another well-tailored suit, but this time it was a maroon number with gold stripping. A gold handkerchief sat in its breast pocket, and as he lifted a hand to wave in greeting; flashes of gold flickered off the rings on his hands. Say what you will about the Lannisters, they really did know how to impress in the fashion department.

“Jon Snow,” Tyrion greeted with unpretentious pleasure as he reached out to shake Jon’s hands with both of his. “Good to see you again, my boy.”

“Good to see you too,” Jon replied.
He glanced behind Tyrion to notice the figure approaching. Unfortunately, it wasn’t a female much to his dismay. It was Grey Worm, who only gave a curt nod in greeting. Unlike Tyrion, he was dressed a bit more casually, if you could call the black well-fitted black slacks and white dress-shirt ‘casual’. Grey Worm had the tendency to make the most basic clothing look sophisticated. Maybe it was the way he carried himself; head held high and no fucks given.

“I’m sure you’re wondering why I’ve called you out here tonight,” Tyrion continued as he stepped to the side and waved a hand for Jon to follow him. Without waiting to see if the younger man was following, he led the way down aged and weathered jagged stone steps leading to the shore.

“It did cross my mind,” Jon replied trying not to sound sarcastic.

Tyrion noticed and chuckled. “I can assure you it’s not a waste of your time. In fact, you could say this meeting is one of mutual benefit.”

He stopped at the bottom of the steps and took a deep breath as if inhaling the salty sea air. “Ah, King’s Landing. No matter how many times I come back here, it never fails to fill me with utter revulsion. But, enough about me and my worries. This is all about you, young man.”

He clapped his hands and turned to face Jon, who was now sitting on a step and studying the dwarf with interest. “What about me?”

Tyrion walked closer. Despite the limited lighting around here, it wasn’t hard to see that his features were now serious. “It appears you might end up being an invaluable piece in our Queen’s quest to reclaim the Syndicate. Will you help us, Jon Snow of Winterfell?”

Jon stared into the earnest green eyes for a long moment. He eventually sighed and dug into his pocket to pull out a cigarette. Two long puffs later, he lifted his gaze to the heavens and stared blindly at the twinkling stars within the inky darkness. Out here, by the bay, they were easier to see than in the city.

Beautiful.

“Where is she?” he finally asked.

“She is safe.”

“Where?”

“Somewhere safe, that is all you need to know,” Tyrion insisted.

Jon lowered his gaze to the shorter man and raised a brow in skepticism. “You want me to help you and you won’t tell me anything about your goddamn Queen? Why the fuck should I help you? You know what kind of a shitty day I’ve had because of your fucking Queen?”

Tyrion remained silent; as if realizing Jon needed this moment to let it all out.

“Because I tried to help her, I got a visit from the fucking City Watch and for all I know, my car’s probably on the watch list and if I fuck up just one time, I’m looking at spending the rest of my fucked-up life behind bars! Oh, and if that’s not bad enough, I almost got killed by some goddamn Dothraki at Robert Baratheon’s shop, and only because I happened to overhear that he’s the one thinking of taking over the goddamn Syndicate! And while we’re on that subject, why the hell didn’t you tell me she was a Targaryen?! Maybe that information would have helped from the beginning and I would have stayed the fuck away from you all! Now what? You want me to get involved with all of this? Why? Why should I stick out my neck for you guys? What’s in it for me?”
“…to discover the real truth behind the murder of your father.”

Jon, who had risen to his feet during his rant, froze at this statement. He felt the world spin for a second; forcing him to take a staggering step back. He shook his head as if unsure of what he heard.

“What…what are you talking about?” he finally croaked. “My father was killed in a car accident…it was…an accident…that’s what the reports said -”

“Yes. An accident. A well-crafted one,” Tyrion agreed with a sad smile. “Let’s just say Ned Stark had a lot of leverage that some people did not want him to have, but…here I go again getting ahead of myself.” Tyrion cleared his throat and tugged at the lapels of his jacket. “So I take it you won’t be helping us then?”

Jon tried to suck in some air…this was all too much. “You…you can’t do that shit to me,” he growled. “You can’t just dangle that sort of fucking information in my face and then expect me to not want to know more!”

“Then all you have to do is say ‘yes’,” Tyrion encouraged. “We simply need a face to represent us in King’s Landing, and that face is yours. We would have preferred you remain in the North, but time is of the essence. Since you’re down here…we could use you down here.”

“Like hell-”

“So that’s a ‘no’?”

Jon cursed and spun on his heels to storm off for a few yards before whirling around to glare at the still smiling Tyrion. “I want to see her.”

“Who?”

“You know damn well who I’m talking about.”

“But she doesn’t want to see you.”

Jon blinked. “What?”

Tyrion shrugged as if just as bemused. “Our Queen can be quite…temperamental. If I recall her exact words, they were “I don’t want to see his stupid face ever again. He’s dead to me.” Or something along those lines. I forget the exact text.”

“But you just said she needed my help?”

“Yes, she does, but she doesn’t realize it. She’s just as stubborn as you are. In fact, she doesn’t even know I’m here.”

Jon threw up his hands in disbelief. “You’ve got to be fucking kidding me.”

“Yes. It is all so very complicated,” Tyrion agreed with feigned regret. “But! You can make things easier on all of us by just saying yes. Who knows? You might end up seeing her again all the same.”

“Bullshit,” Jon sneered.

“I’m a man of my word,” Tyrion insisted with a small bow. “If you agree, I will take you to her. I might get scolded, but it will be worth it. Besides, now that you’ve met the Dothraki and know of Robert Baratheon’s plans…”
Tyrion paused causing Jon to step closer to him; features creased in concern. “What? What’s going to happen?”

Tyrion pursed his lips in thought. He studied Jon for a minute longer before nodding to himself. “Hmm…yes…it might be the best plan for now.”

“What the fuck are you talking about-?”

Tyrion clapped his hands. “It’s settled then. Your brother is still in town, yes?”

“He’s leaving tomorrow.”

“Excellent,” Tyrion said with a nod. He walked up to Jon and reached up to place a hand on his chest. “Do me a favor, Jon. For the next twenty-four hours, do all you can not to get yourself in trouble. If it means locking yourself in your apartment, then so be it. In the meantime, this is for you.”

He snapped his fingers and Grey Worm approached. In his hand was a new phone; the latest model that was quite expensive.

“This is yours,” Tyrion was saying as Jon accepted the device. “It’s going to be receiving direct communication from me or any of us in the Queen’s service. It’s untraceable, so if by any chance you get your ass in trouble, you destroy it immediately. I will contact you sometime tomorrow with more instructions. So…can I trust you to keep your end of the bargain?”

“I haven’t decided yet-”

“Yes, yes, until you see Daenerys again, correct?”

At the sound of her full name, Jon felt inexplicable warmth fill him. A brief image of Dany clad in flowing silk gowns, as most ladies of nobility were prone to wear, seared through his mind. It was a beautiful name, but he could see why it would be a mouthful after a while.

Daenerys Targaryen…rightful Queen of –

“If I could interrupt your no-doubt lust-filled daydream,” Tyrion said with a knowing smile causing Jon’s cheeks to suffuse with color. “Can we shake on this then?”

Jon looked like he was going to complain again, but at the flash of impatience within Tyrion’s eyes, he sighed and accepted the handshake. “Deal.”

“Wonderful,” Tyrion enthused. “And now I shall take my leave. I have given you a lot to think about, but you must promise not to reveal any of this to your brother or uncle. He might have a good heart, but loose lips and all that.” He began to make his way up the steps after Grey Worm, but stopped to turn back to Jon. “You didn’t tell them about the meeting of the Dothraki and Robert, did you?”

Jon could feel his cheeks burning. He couldn’t even think of lying.

“I had to,” Jon argued. “They…they are family.”

A brief pained expression crossed the older man’s face, but it was masked just as quickly. “Well, I guess it’s a good thing your brother is leaving King’s Landing then. The sooner the better.”

“What does that mean?” Jon asked as his breath caught. There was something worrisome about Tyrion’s statement and considering how his Uncle Benjen had acted earlier…
Tyrion managed a small smile. “Pardon an old man’s concerns. Perhaps it’s nothing but my paranoid tendencies seeping through. Now, I suggest you drive back home and do as I’ve said. Speak to no one else and wait for my instructions. Goodnight, Jon.”

He gave a quick two-fingered salute, which Jon returned with a frown. He remained in that position until their car drove away, before turning around to walk toward the sea. He stopped as the gentle waves licked at his boots. A slight breeze cooled the warmth of his skin. On the horizon, blinking lights from distant oil ships or yachts flickered like fireflies, and Jon was sure he could hear faint music coming from one of them...a party or celebration of some sort.

Lucky them.

He stared at his new cell phone for a minute before turning it on. He wasn’t sure of what to expect; perhaps some ominous emblem representing Dany’s crew or something of the sort. However, all that showed up was a simple plain blue background and some basic apps. Nothing too exciting.

He tapped the contacts – not expecting to see anything there – especially if the phone was supposed to be so ‘secret’. However, at the sight of the initials listed, Jon’s brow raised in disbelief. G.W was obviously Grey Worm. T.L. Tyrion Lannister. M. –probably Missandei, J.M – Jorah Mormont and others like L.V, T.G, Y.G and a few more...others who had obviously pledged themselves to...

D.T

“Daenerys Targaryen,” Jon whispered as if testing the weight of the name on his tongue. The temptation was great. All he had to do was tap her initials and he’d hear her voice again.

(I never want to see his stupid face again. He’s dead to me)

“...is that right?” he smirked and closed off the screen with an effort. Tyrion might have been lying, but it also sounded like something she’d say if she was really upset, especially when it came to him.

He burrowed his hands deep into the pockets of his jacket and began to walk aimlessly along the shore. It was a great place to think and go over all he had experienced today so far. And as he kicked at a random rock, he figured he’d behave himself and do as Tyrion had instructed.

Besides, if he played his cards right, he’d soon find himself standing before their precious Queen again.

Only this time, Jon knew he’d have a few choice words to share with her.

Translations:
Hello, little mahrazh. Ahtessazar tih az.

(Hey, little man. Return my blade)

naqis lajak

(small warrior)
Dany II

Chapter Notes

As always my thanks for your feedback/kudos! *bows gratefully* Enjoy!

Gossamer curtains of white lace fluttered with the gentle whisper of a mid-morning breeze. Through opened doors of cypress and glass, rays of sunlight filtered in to cast golden shadows upon the two writhing bodies lost in the throes of passion.

The King-sized bed, adorned with the finest silks, metallic threads, and jewels, caressed their sweat-slicked flesh as they moved in unison; both now familiar with what was likely to send them over the cliffs of ecstasy. Their moans and breathless gasps permeated the air already thick with musk, and as she seductively slid down her lover’s body to pry her legs apart, deep brown eyes looked up to meet amused violet ones in silent request.

Dany smirked and slowly sank her fingers into the tight curls. She massaged Missandei’s scalp with such tenderness, her handmaiden was unable to stop the low purr of pleasure to escape her lips. She whimpered in desperation and placed a gentle kiss on her Queen’s inner thigh; the glistening wetness and warm heat radiating from her desired destination teasing and taunting her mercilessly. With a soft chuckle at her lover’s display, Dany gave a gentle nudge of acquiescence. Her sigh was like a song as she closed her eyes and arched into the sensation of Missandei’s tongue finally dipping into her quivering folds to feast for as long as she liked.

It felt good.

It would always feel good.
Yet there was something missing; something that’s always been missing for as long as she could remember.

*(absolute satisfaction)*

She lifted her lashes and allowed her hooded gaze to drift toward the opened doors which led to a veranda with a breathtaking view of the Summer Sea. In the courtyard, tall palm trees cocooned the private residence accentuated with a kaleidoscope of exotic foliage while the soothing sounds of miniature waterfalls filled just one of the many pools around the estate. There was something quite nostalgic about being here, but as Dany closed her eyes, dusty and reluctant memories came flooding back with a bitterness that settled heavily on her tongue.

It was the roundhouse kick to her stomach that finally did the trick.

She crashed against the pile of garbage bags; grateful it was a relatively ‘soft’ landing. Still, the white hot pain to lace through her body caused the meager breakfast she’d eaten to gush out of her mouth…that and some bloody mucous. The coppery taste was more than familiar to her at this point, and as she checked her teeth by running a tongue over them, she was glad nothing was loose…yet.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” came the exasperated sneer from her opponent. “I wasn’t even going at full strength! Get up!”

She staggered to her feet; a trembling hand reaching up to wipe her mouth. She wanted to clutch her aching stomach (that and every other part of her that was throbbing in agony), but she wasn’t going to give him the satisfaction of chickening out now. She blinked away the trickle of sweat to fall into her eyes and tried to fall into her stance; fists raised again. She took a deep breath – even her chest hurt to do that – and recited the desperate mantra in her head.

*I’m ready I’m ready I’m ready-

He lunged for her again; his snarl vicious and barbaric in its fervor. She held up her arms to block the attacks; wincing and holding back her cries as he continued to rain blows upon her.

“Fight back!” he grunted when she continued to block him as best she could. He was getting angrier, and that wasn’t a good thing. If she didn’t do as he commanded, she was sure she’d end up in the ER again.

“Fight back, you stupid cunt!” he yelled and lifted his leg to swing at her head this time.

Now!

Though her vision was blurry, and her head and stomach were already heaving in agony, she had the sense to duck and slide to her left. It gave her the opportunity to kick out with her right leg, and to finally make contact was the greatest feeling in the world. Her kick drove him back several feet, but he didn’t fall to his knees. It did surprise him though, but if she had expected any praise for her skill, it wasn’t forthcoming. His features darkened with fury, and Dany knew now that she was due for yet another visit with the good doctors and nurses in whatever hospital would take them this time.

She closed her eyes and waited for the welcome darkness, but when she heard his indignant cry, she lifted her lashes (her right eye was swollen) carefully to see what was taking place.
“You must stop for today, Viserys,” Jorah was saying with a frown on his features. He had his arms beneath her brother’s armpits as if about to lift him off the ground. “The sparring session is over.”

“The session is over when I say it’s over,” Viserys snarled and tried to release himself. “Let me go!”

“Not until you agree to end it for the day. She’s already been defeated. You should be satisfied.”

Viserys looked back at the panting girl before him. He seemed to regard the mousy-figure with her too large t-shirt – which was now torn in several places and stained with blood – to the pair of tight jean shorts that failed to cover the scabs and bruises on knobby knees and legs. Though her hair was in a tight braid, tendrils had escaped to stick against her battered face. The right side looked like it was going to swell like a tennis ball soon and there was an ugly purple discoloration forming around her jaw. She was a wreck, and he was proud of what he had accomplished today. Unfortunately, his ire returned when he noticed the blatant defiance in her eyes.

Her body might have been broken, but that damn look…that fucking look she always had in her eyes; as if no matter how many times he tried to belittle and destroy her, she would never give in. It pissed him off every time.

“You bitch,” he finally muttered beneath his breath. “You’re lucky today.”

He looked up to Jorah with displeasure. “I’m going to get cleaned. Let me go.”

The older man studied the frowning kid for a moment longer. When realizing Viserys was actually being honest this time, he released him and stepped back; though he braced himself for any potential retaliation. He wasn’t averse to knocking some sense into the little brat, but as Viserys spun on his heels to leave - not before spitting in disgust toward his sister’s direction - Jorah was finally left alone with his real ward.

He dashed forward as Dany’s knees finally buckled; cradling her trembling body in his arms. Dear gods. She was already skin and bones, yet she allowed herself to be put through these so-called sparring sessions with a brother who was more than happy to send her to an early grave. With her eyes closed and her features pallid, Jorah felt a shiver of fear run down his spine.

“I’ll take you to the clinic,” he whispered as he rose to his feet, still carrying her limp form within his arms. Dear gods. She gave no response, but at least she was still breathing; so that was a good thing. “Hopefully, we won’t get too many questions or we might have to move again.”

He could only lie so many times to the authorities, for the gods knew he’d rather die than allow them to keep her shackled away in a foster system that never cared.

One year later…

“I want to get even stronger,” she said as she balanced nimbly on the narrow stone ledge. Her arms were spread to the sides; her left leg hovering in the air as her right foot remained in position. “I need to defeat Viserys.”

Jorah sighed and rubbed his jaw. “Won’t you rather join me for an ice cream and cake? It is your thirteenth name day, Your Grace.”
“I don’t care about that,” she replied and switched legs with a delicate hop. “I almost took him down the other day. Did you see the way I leapt in the air and kicked him in the back? He was so surprised!”

She failed to mention that Viserys had also rewarded her mini-victory with a pummeling which left her unable to move for the next two days.

“You were magnificent, Your Grace,” Jorah replied with a sad smile.

She chuckled; a light sound that seemed so out of place in their miserable surroundings.

To the outside world, the grand estate of Magister Illyrio was paradise on earth, but for Jorah, it was a reminder that this innocent girl’s world was about to change in the most drastic of ways. His ulterior motives for the Targaryen children were hardly a secret, and his connections to the underworld were beneficial to Viserys’s quest. Jorah wished he could slow the events about to take place, but Viserys was ambitious as he was desperate to reclaim the power his family once had. Despite Jorah’s many lectures on how dangerous it was to try to re-establish something as complicated as The Syndicate, Viserys shut him down with rants about the Targaryens and their destinies.

No one was going to stop him; not even if it meant aligning with once sworn enemies of his ancestors.

An allegiance with the Dothraki, Jorah mused as he watched Dany leap off the ledge to dash toward the sea. His heart broke a little more at her childish laughter; her bare feet splashing against the waves that seemed to dance with her. Her beautiful silver hair trailed behind her as she ran and did cartwheels; a tomboy at heart despite her whispered dreams of eventually becoming a grand lady of nobility someday.

If only you were born in a different time and era, my Queen, Jorah thought as he walked after her lingering shadow. Maybe things would have been different. Maybe you should be the one bringing back the glory of your ancestors; not your hateful brother.

She was benevolent to his stinginess; kind-hearted to his wickedness. She took pleasure in the littlest of things, like butterflies fluttering to her, while he crushed them between his fingers and smeared their blood in disgust. The little things were of no concern to him and they never would.

She loved to read, and despite not having a formal education, Jorah did all he could to fulfill her insatiable desire for knowledge. He’d take her to libraries and bookstores or purchase workbooks she could study in her spare time. He couldn’t claim to be the world’s best teacher, but he did the best he could with what little they had. Besides, it helped that she was a natural genius. She was now devouring literature far advanced for her age.

“…Aegon Targaryen,” Dany read as her fingers traced over the text in the history books Viserys always lugged around during their journeys. “He was the one to establish The Syndicate and bring all the different factions together. Right?”

“Yes, your Grace,” Jorah would reply; their voices hushed whispers as they studied beneath the blanket of darkness and a flashlight. Viserys – for as much as he liked to lecture his sister on their family’s history – did despise anyone touching his precious books. She only gained access to them whenever he was fast asleep or out to enjoy himself in town with some of Magister Illyrio’s henchmen.

“They were considered Kings and Queens,” Dany would marvel as she studied the illustrations of
her forbearers; silver or golden-haired warriors with distinguished features full of pride and strength. She had even been named after the daughter of Aegon the IV and staring at the painting of her namesake; Dany shivered at just how similar they looked. It was as if she was staring at her twin; but a version of her that had lived over a hundred years ago. “Why were they Kings and Queens though? They weren’t officially proclaimed as such, were they?”

“It’s because they were considered good, wise, and strong by the people they protected,” Jorah explained patiently. “You see, the original intent of The Syndicate wasn’t to rule and control people, it was to bring peace to a region fraught with wars between different factions.” He pointed to the map of Westeros; his finger moving along the different regions. “Over here, you have the Iron Islands and they were always at war with the Riverlands and so on and so forth. Aegon the Conqueror came in and changed all that.”

“So, he formed The Syndicate to bring peace.”

“That’s right. All the different factions would unite beneath the umbrella of The Syndicate; with the vow never to start meaningless wars and to maintain stability in the region. There would be a democratic leader as voted by the people; one who would control the realm and its government; though there would also be checks and balances. It was a system that worked for many centuries, though it is true that Targaryens did control those branches of government for the most part, but it was because they were trusted and loved…until…”

Dany’s eyes widened with curiosity. “Until what?”

“Well…ever heard the saying ‘absolute power corrupts absolutely’?”

Dany nodded.

“Well, some of your ancestors began to abuse their power and they lost trust with the people… needless to say some of the other factions began to voice their disgruntlement and wished to break away. They began to claim that The Syndicate was becoming too powerful, and the religious heretics became more vocal with their disapproval of the Targaryen way of life.”

“Huh?”

Jorah cleared his throat and tried not to show his discomfiture. “The incestuous relationships, your Grace.”

“Oh…they married each other and the like, right?”

“That’s correct.”

Dany shrugged and studied the picture of Visenya Targaryen, who looked regal in her battle armor. “If they loved each other, what’s the problem? I wouldn’t care if I ended up marrying Viserys, but he’s such an asshole. I could never bear his children. I’d rather die or live alone. Or maybe one day, I’ll kill him myself.”

She looked up; her gaze distant though a wistful expression filled her eyes. Jorah felt his heart stir at the sight, for he knew what she was going to say next.

“But if I killed him…then I’ll be all alone,” she whispered as her fingers absentely caressed Visenya’s face. “I’ll be the last Targaryen in the world.”

(what a terrible lonely existence that would be)
“You will never be alone, your Grace,” Jorah vowed as he bowed his head in servitude. “For as long as you’ll have me, I will always be by your side.”

Dany studied the lowered head for a long minute before asking quietly. “Do you really think I can be a real Queen?”

Jorah looked up and nodded firmly. “If it is what your Grace wishes…then I have no doubt you can make it happen.”

An unreadable expression flitted across the young face, before the next words out of her mouth would send a chill down his spine. “I must get stronger then, Jorah. To be a Queen, I must take away my obstacles and there’s only one person standing in my way now. Will you help me?”

Jorah struggled within himself; for though a part of him wished she wouldn’t choose the same fruitless path Viserys was taking, another part was willing to see Dany prove herself to the rest of the world. He took a deep breath and bowed again.

“As your Grace wishes. I will do everything in my power to get you there.”

Dany’s hips quivered with pleasure.

Missandei could barely hold on to her thighs now as she sucked harder on her Queen’s clit while two fingers thrust in and out of the slick canal wet with her juices. She was pleased her mistress was enjoying herself, however, as she dared to steal a peek; she was dismayed to see the familiar distant expression on Dany’s face. It was clear that her body was simply going through the motions, for her eyes looked like they were a million miles away.

A part of her wished to stop; to simply leave and allow Dany to her tormented thoughts. However, duty and an unquestionable love for her best friend kept her in place. Only she would know of the many nights she had listened to the Queen cry out in her sleep either in fear or with a deep-gutted sorrow that tore her heart to pieces. Missandei knew she was merely a substitute for the real lover her mistress deserved, for watching Dany’s associations with other men, over the years, proved that no one was capable of fulfilling the gnawing void within her.

Or wasn’t there?

Missandei prided herself on being able to read most of the men who had courted Dany’s affections in the past. Though she hadn’t been there when she was married to one of the most dangerous drug lords in all of Essos, Khal Drogo, she had seen enough to know just what kind of men turned Dany on.

First criterion – they had to be strong; not just physically but mentally as well. They had to be able to keep up with her passions, which included and were not limited to bedroom activities and psychological mind games. Seeing as she planned to regain the helm of The Syndicate, she would need a man who was able to rule by her side or accept her higher status should he be unwilling to accept the responsibility.

Second – they had to be loyal. Nothing pissed off Dany more than men who betrayed or used her for their selfish means, and goodness knows there had been a couple of them during their many travels.
Third – they had to be able to keep up with her, sometimes, insatiable desire for sex and intimacy… or better yet, be able to keep her entertained enough in the bedroom. She was usually a giving lover and open to experimentation, but boredom could quickly creep in especially if they insisted on repeating the same routines or giving her lame pickup lines.

However, an important criterion Missandei might have missed was Dany’s deep-seated desire to have a man who was simply…good. Not a naïve fool immune to the harsh realities of the world, but one who could at least try to see the world with the glass half-full. It wasn’t as if she expected a complete saint – those never existed in her opinion – but it would have been nice to come home to a man who didn’t expect so much from her. She wanted a man who could rub her feet at the end of a long day, or lay his head on her lap and bitch and moan about the shitty day he had at work. She wanted a man who would take her for long walks along the beach and talk about stupid things like the movie he last watched or ramble about his favorite sports team. She wanted to share meals with him even if she was a terrible cook; and hell if he was a good cook, that was even better. She didn’t want to hear flattering compliments about her beauty until it made her nauseated. She didn’t want to hear about bribes, wars, or squabbling factions all vying for her attention (or death). She didn’t want to be constantly reminded of her ‘obligation’ as a fucking Targaryen.

Sometimes she just wanted to be left alone.

“Such a man doesn’t exist,” she would tell Missandei in their private moments. “I only project my innermost desires onto those I do meet, and when they fail to meet my expectations, I punish them with my cruelty. I’m the worst, aren’t I?"

_No, you’re not my Queen_, Missandei thought as Dany’s legs trembled again. She could feel the inner muscles tightening with her impending orgasm. _You have every right to wish for a man who could love you…all of you like I never can. And I do hope you find him someday, or perhaps…_

She looked up as Dany sighed and arched again – at least it appeared she was returning from whatever daydream she had drifted off to.

_…perhaps there is someone already out there waiting for you. You just haven’t realized it yet._

“Oooh,” Dany gasped and tensed as the first waves of pleasure shot through her. Her fingers tightened within Missandei’s hair and her toes curled into the sheets. “Fuuuuck.”

The near primal groan caused a smile to Missandei’s face. Her fingers thrust faster and deeper; her lips suckling hard on the shivering nub of sensitive nerve endings. Dany’s hips lifted off the bed and with a muffled cry buried into the pillow, she gave in with a collapse upon the bed; her entire body heaving with satiation. Skin flushed with the rush of the act, Dany finally lifted her lashes to stare drunkenly at her lover, who was now licking her swollen lips with gratification.

“Did I please you, my Queen?” she asked as she slid back up Dany’s body; her full breasts caressing the entire length until they were face-to-face again.

Her response was the rough seizing of her lips in a hard kiss that took her breath away; tongues clashing and struggling for supremacy until Dany flipped them over with a hook of her leg around Missandei’s.

“Mmm…you might get a good reward later tonight, jorrāelatan mēre,” Dany whispered against her lips where she could still taste herself. “Thank you.”

“It was my pleasure,” Missandei managed to gasp out with a shy smile.
She watched as Dany rose up and swung her legs off the bed in one fluid motion. Her hair cascaded down her back in soft silver waves; almost kissing the tip of her buttocks as she stretched her arms above her head in a pose of relaxation.

“I feel like walking outside naked,” she taunted as she looked over her shoulder to her still lounging lover. “Should I do it and give those boring Dornish men a good show?”

Missandei giggled. “I have no doubt Prince Oberyn and his wife wouldn’t mind. The way they’ve eyed you since we arrived has been nothing short of scorching, my Queen.”

Dany snickered and rolled her eyes. It was no secret that the Prince and his wife had a rather open relationship. They loved indiscriminately. Men, women, and everything in between; if they were willing to keep their beds warm, they were all invited for one of their many infamous orgies. Hell, they had tried desperately to get Dany involved with the one they had hosted a couple of nights ago. Dany had refused as politely as she could manage; perhaps some other time she might have partaken in the sinful activities, but not that night. She was so-so-so sorry.

Not.

She reached for the sweatshirt, which had been tossed over a chair the night before, and shrugged into it. Missandei raised a brow at the sight.

“…you are wearing that again, my Queen?”

Dany, now attempting to get her hair into a loose braid, nodded in agreement. “Yes. Why?”

“It’s just…it’s almost a hundred degrees outside,” Missandei began carefully. “And you seem to enjoy wearing that outfit… a lot. It’s not even yours.”

Dany huffed and lifted the hoodie to cover her head. She burrowed her hands into its pockets and curved her lips into a smirk. “So? I think it’s very comfortable. Anyway, can you grab us some breakfast, my darling? I’m starving.”

She playfully jogged up to Missandei to place another light kiss on her lips before padding out to the veranda with cell phone in hand. The sweatshirt was just big enough to fall a little past her knees, but as Dany sat on a chair and raised her knees to her chest, Missandei chuckled and shook her head at her friend’s daring. Sure no one might notice she was completely nude beneath the outfit, but all it would take was Dany forgetting where she was, spreading her legs apart and giving the wandering guards a fantastic view of her still wet thighs and flushed womanhood.

Still, as she got off the bed and searched for a robe, Missandei wondered if Dany was aware of exactly what she was doing.

*Oh, this old thing?* She had replied to Missandei’s query about the sweatshirt she was clutching when she and Jorah had picked her up from the apartment. *It belongs to…and well…that idiot. I was going to return it, but you all came so quickly, I didn’t have the time to drop it off.*

It was a terrible lie; given away by the flood of color to fill Dany’s cheeks as she tried to sound flippant about the whole thing. It was almost adorable how attached she had become to the ‘old thing’. She found any opportunity to wear it, even going as far as sleeping in it with its hoodie on… as if seeking to be cocooned within its warmth and protection.

*(or its owner’s)*

*Jon Snow, Missandei mused as she went into the bathroom to clean herself. Jon Snow of Winterfell,*
wasn’t it? Such an interesting young man.

Just the other day, Tyrion and Dany had almost gotten into a shouting match about the handsome northerner. Tyrion had seemed convinced having Snow in their corner would gain them better allies, but Dany – for whatever reason – had vehemently refused; declaring she wanted nothing more to do with Jon.

“We can try to convince his brother,” she had offered. “Perhaps he will help us. Or even his uncle. What about him?”

“Yes, we could try to convince Robb or Benjen Stark, but what makes you think they’ll listen to us? We already have an idea of what Jon is like, and if we are able to get him in our corner, it would be much easier for him to speak to his family. It takes steps, your Grace. One step at a time.”

“I don’t have time for steps and ladders or whatever,” Dany had brushed aside. “Drogo is breathing down my neck. You heard what Varys said. He’s not being patient any longer.”

“Indeed I did, and there is no one more concerned about the situation than I am. Which is why we must convince Jon to work for us…or at least get into the good graces of my family in King’s Landing.”

“Bullshit,” Dany sneered. “What makes you think a Stark is going to work for a Lannister? I know of the history between your families. I’m surprised he hasn’t even ignored you yet. I was sure he would throttle you that night.”

“Perhaps he cannot be bothered with petty family squabbles,” Tyrion had reasoned. “It’s a long shot, Your Grace, but one worth taking. Give me some time to come up with something feasible.”

“As long as it’s not about Jon Snow, I’m good with it.”

Tyrion had looked like he was about to erupt into a slew of curses, but at Dany’s steely gaze, he settled for a shrug of his shoulders and a polite. “As you wish. I’ll keep him out of it.”

Except Tyrion’s trip to King’s Landing was taking much longer than expected. He was supposed to spend at least a week there, but two agonizing weeks had flown by with no additional information from him. Missandei had a feeling his promise to Dany was going to be broken with whatever plan he had conjured up, but the lingering fear that something terrible had gone wrong was just as concerning. Besides, Grey Worm was his traveling companion, and if she lost him…

With a melancholy sigh, she reached for her toothbrush and tried to keep her thoughts positive. Whatever the outcome, Missandei sincerely hoped that whatever was to come wouldn’t cause a rift in an already fragile situation.

Goodness knows they needed all the help they could get.

Dany scrolled through her messages with growing annoyance.

There was absolutely nothing from Tyrion and his so-called quest to find more supporters. She hated sitting around here doing nothing, but it was for her ‘safety’ – as usual. His suggestion that they move to Dorne was not that surprising. The Martells had always been ‘rebels’ to the realm and all it
stood for, so their willingness to accept her as a guest was a relief. All the same, being shipped all over Westeros like baggage was exhausting. Her suggestion they take over Dragonstone – her birthplace – was still too risky.

One step at a time, Tyrion would say in that tone that was almost patronizing.

She sighed and shook her head. At this rate, she wouldn’t be surprised if he next suggested she move up North.

(the cold hard north, where it’s always winter)

But I’ve never even seen snow before, came the wistful thought as she deleted yet another random video, her friend, Theon Greyjoy sent to her. Usually, he sent cheesy videos to keep her entertained, and this time it was of two kittens ‘fighting’, though they simply looked like they were playing.

Cute.

Feeling a little better, she wrapped her arms around her knees and rest her chin upon them. Before she knew it, she was searching for images of snow and winter, while trying hard to ignore the surge of warmth to fill her at the beautiful pictures of stark white landscapes and mountains.

So much snow…and it looks so cold...how do they survive it?

I live in the North, Jon had said in that weird but rather sexy accent of his. What more do you expect? Trust me, I tend to freeze my fucking balls off sometimes.

He was speaking to Missandei at the time, though she had eavesdropped on their conversation.

It snows about seventy percent of the time, but we do have lovely springs when they come around. Here…I’ll show you some pictures.

Dany hadn’t seen the pictures, not even as Missandei ‘ooh’ and ‘aahed’ over them in the gloom of the grocery truck. They had both been so lost in each other – hey, a good blowjob can do that to you – that neither had felt the need to invite her to their private conversation.

Not that she cared about his dumb home pictures anyway.

Yet, her fingers went typing the letters to ‘WINTERFELL’ in the search engine and she was presented with images of the enormous estate Jon had spent most of his childhood. There was something beautiful yet ‘cold’ about its high brick walls and towering turrets; after all it was a castle that was built several centuries ago, and Dany was sure maintaining such a place in this day and age was expensive as shit. Funny thing was Jon didn’t come across as wealthy, but if the pictures of his family were any indication, they weren’t scraping the bottom of the barrel either.

Archived online photographs of the Stark family showed a rather good-looking bunch; led by the now deceased Ned Stark, who lost his life in a car accident about three years ago. He looked like a man who exuded loyalty and strength, and Dany felt her heart stir with longing. It made her wonder if her father had even an ounce of such dignity in him. Sure she had seen the official portraits of her parents; but while she was more sympathetic to her mother’s plight, she had felt absolutely nothing when looking at the pictures of her father. Maybe it was because he looked so much like Viserys, where the familiar expression of disdain and hate would forever be associated with him. Her other brother, however, was a different story all together.

“Catelyn Stark,” Dany read to herself as she studied the beautiful photo of a red-head woman with somewhat stern features. “Wife to Ned Stark and mother to Robb, Sansa, Bran, Arya, and
Rickon…”

She would have skimmed over it, when she noticed the glaring omission.

She read it again just to be sure. “Wife to Ned Stark…and mother to Robb…Sansa…Bran…Arya… Rickon…”

Jon was not listed.

_Duh_, a part of her screamed. _You didn’t realize he was called ‘Snow’ for a reason?_

He was either a bastard or an adopted kid; though Dany was leaning more toward illegitimacy.

It would explain why there weren’t a lot of pictures of Jon whenever it came to the Stark family online. They were quite popular in the North, as many considered them ‘royalty’ in some way. Most of the headlines leaned toward their exploits, and it was clear Robb was the star of the family now.

_Handsome too_, Dany mused with interest, as she browsed through more photos of the eldest Stark child. His hair was just as curly as Jon’s, but his features were clearly more aligned with his mother’s. He looked taller and stronger, but where his attitude could easily be one of conceit and entitlement, he came across as cheerful and outgoing.

Also compared to his other siblings, Robb was into the social media scene. His Illustrogram account was easy to find, and Dany wasn’t surprised to find he had so many followers.

**robbstark**

550 posts – 158k followers – 153 following

Robb Stark – the Young Wolf. Entrepreneur. Lover of Life. Winter is coming…

Curiosity getting the better of her, she browsed through the collection of photos in his account. Most of the older ones were rather boring. The usual ones of him posing with his car or with his rather majestic hound (looked like a wolf actually) called Grey Wind or with his friends and siblings. He seemed to have the perfect life; being captain of the football team and excelling in school work before becoming one of the youngest CEOs in all of Westeros. It could be easy to fall for a guy like him, and considering the bevy of single women all trying to attach their names to his, was it any wonder he was considered the most eligible bachelor around?

_Whore, whore, mega-whore_, Dany thought as she scrolled through images of some of the women Robb had dated over the years. He seemed to have a type; dumb-looking bitches with long faces. He could do better.

However, Robb and his dating patterns were of no concern to her, for as she scrolled – and was beginning to feel pangs of disappointment – she was eventually rewarded with a set of pictures of Robb with his brother, Jon. The oldest one was a picture taken about a year ago, where the boys were clearly in Winterfell; buried beneath piles of jackets and scarfs, but still managing to mug for the camera.

#goingtowatchthefinalfootballgame

#werulethenorth

#makewaybitches
So stupid, Dany thought with a smile as she scrolled to the latest images. These were taken just a couple of weeks ago – about the time she had left King’s Landing. One was of the boys at the airport, with Robb’s arm around Jon’s shoulder, where Jon managed to look pleased, shy, and downright embarrassed all at once. The hashtags didn’t help either.

#starkbrothersreunionbaby

#wetakingoverKingsLanding

#loveyoulittlebro

#winterisherebitches

She also noticed he had tagged some friends and family members, but there was nothing for Jon. Perhaps he didn’t have an Illustrogram account…that wouldn’t be surprising. He seemed more chill than his gregarious brother anyway.

More photos were of the boys with their proud uncle in various settings, and another with two young men Dany couldn’t recognize although one of them was quite heavyset with a jolly expression. There were a couple more showing them having a blast at a club of some sort, including a group picture with the four men and their dates. Dany raised a brow at the sight of the beautiful curvy redhead stuck between the brothers.

(#boysattheclublivingitup #thegirlsweresmokingtoo @samwelltarly @gendrywaters @gillycraster @rosthevixen #thanksforagreatnight)

Was she Jon’s girlfriend? Although with the way she was posed, she seemed more interested in Robb. Dany rolled her eyes and would have closed out the page when her fingers stilled at a particular photo. It was Robb and Jon, dressed in beach shorts with goofy hats on their heads. It wasn’t so much that they were both half-naked and had matching tattoos of the wolves on their toned abs; it was Jon’s expression that caused a weird flutter in her stomach.

He was laughing.

So yes, she had only known him for about twenty-four hours give or take, but during that time, she doubted she had seen him crack more than a strained smile or laugh at the expense of a hallucinogenic. Even in the other photos, with his brother and friends, Jon never seemed to show his teeth. But in this one, he was clearly happier than she had ever seen him. Laughter suited him, and as Dany’s face burrowed deeper against her knees, she saved the picture to her phone; while making sure she cropped out Robb’s face.

Maybe in some other life, they could meet again and she’d make him laugh and laugh and laugh until he –

“Breakfast!” Missandei’s voice chirped cheerfully.

Dany yelped in surprise at the unexpected interruption; the phone nearly slipping from her fingers in her desperate quest to close out the pages before she was caught. She lowered the device to the table and stuck a smile on her face; trying hard to ignore the burning of her cheeks as Missandei raised a brow in silent amusement.

“Looking at naked men again, my Queen?”
Dany rolled her eyes and reached for a piece of buttered toast. She took a bite, gave a playful wrinkle of her nose, and wailed to the heavens in mock misery.

“As if! All men are grooooooosss!”

Fortunately, Prince Oberyn Martell was anything but gross, though his tendency to want to show off could get annoying after a while.

“Are you sure you will not dance with me today, my Queen?” he asked as he twirled the wooden spear in his hands. “I think our last lesson was a productive one, was it not?”

“It’s too hot,” Dany complained as she squinted at the sky.

She was now dressed in a pair of shorts and a tee-shirt, with the sweatshirt tied around her waist. She was appreciative of the weather reminding her of better days in Essos, but there were moments when she wished she could just sit beneath the shade and do nothing but sleep off the heat.

Oberyn laughed; a genuine sound of amusement that was infectious. Clad in only a pair of yellow silk pants, he cut a rather impressive figure. His chest gleamed with a light sheen of sweat, and when he moved, one had an idea of how strong yet graceful he really was. His features were pleasing to the eyes; thanks to his thick head of black hair, deep-set eyes and trimmed facial hair that was a signature of most Dornish men. He was called the Red Viper for his brilliant fighting skills, and after only one session of training with him, Dany could appreciate the reason why.

“Did I go too hard on you the last time?” Oberyn taunted as he twirled the weapon over his head. “I promise to go easy -”

“I don’t care if you go all out with me,” Dany replied with a shrug. “I’ve had worse. Trust me.”

“Ah yes…you did serve under Khal Drogo, didn’t you?” Oberyn smirked. “Serve under him in more ways than one if the rumors are true.”

“Yes, we were married,” Dany quipped with impatience. “And yes, I learned a great deal from him and his khalasar.”

“So I guess I should address you as Khaleesi then?” came the taunt which had her bristling.

“I am no longer his wife,” Dany stated with venom in her voice. “So do not address me by that term anymore.”

With a swift kick of her leg, she lifted the extra spear off the ground and fell into her stance; violet eyes narrowed yet now blazing for battle. Oberyn grinned at his mission accomplished, and with a loud cry, he charged toward her. Their spears collided with a loud thwak, and though he was bigger and taller; he marveled at the strength she displayed by not backing away.

“Not bad, my Queen,” he grunted with effort, the smile not fading from his visage. Admiration filled his eyes; and not without a dose of desire as his gaze roamed over her petite figure in appreciation. “You will make an excellent fighter yet.”

“Wrong, my Prince,” Dany replied with a smirk as she pushed him back and did a back flip to fall
back into her stance again. “I am already an excellent fighter. I’ve been trained by the best, remember?”

“The best?” Oberyn cried out as if hurt. “You dare to compare me to the pitiful Dothraki? Then I must prove you otherwise! Come now, rightful Queen of Westeros! Let’s see how you fare against the Red Viper!”

They charged at each other again, and for the next several minutes, they thrust and parred; bodies moving with a speed that was quite impressive to their captive audience.

It was to this ‘battle’ that Tyrion would arrive to accompanied by Grey Worm. On the terrace, Ellaria Sand – Oberyn’s beautiful wife – sat sipping a glass of wine dressed in what one could only consider a slip of a silk gown that revealed her cleavage and long legs. Next to her was one of her daughters – Nymeria – who favored their father’s features and was dressed in similar fashion. Prince Doran – Oberyn’s older brother – was also in attendance; though it was difficult to read his expression as he acknowledged Tyrion’s presence with a polite nod. Missandei remained standing behind the Prince; though her smile of pleasure at seeing Grey Worm again was tempered by the troubled look on his face.

“How long have they been at it?” Tyrion asked as he sat at the table and helped himself to a glass of wine. God knows he needed it.

“Almost thirty minutes,” Ellaria replied with a roll of her eyes. “My husband will not accept that she is almost as strong as he is. She is definitely a dragon, that one. Where did she learn to fight like that?”

“Everywhere,” came the cryptic response from Jorah who had walked out to join the party. He nodded at Tyrion in greeting. “The Queen is a willing and fast learner when it comes to combat.”

“As it should be,” Doran stated firmly. “If she does plan to control The Syndicate again, she’s going to need to be more than just good with the gun or her fists. It’s all in here.” He tapped his temple and frowned at the duo in the courtyard. Dany was holding her own despite Oberyn’s fervor. “What news do you bring from King’s Landing, Lord Tyrion?”

Tyrion drained his drink and cleared his throat. “There seems to be a change in plans, my Prince. However, I do believe it would be best if Daenerys was with us, so I could tell you all at once.”

Doran nodded in understanding and with a sharp clap of his hands, he called out to his brother. “Enough with the fight, Oberyn. Tyrion has returned from his journey and wishes to speak to us.”

Dany lowered her weapon at the sound of the name. Though flushed and damp with sweat, she grinned with pleasure at the sight of her trusted friend. “About time you got back,” she said, but was quick to flick her wrist to strike the spear hard behind Oberyn’s knees which sent him toppling to the ground with a cry of surprise. She grinned and stood over him.

“I win.”

“Cheat!” he complained, though laughing as she held out her hand to help him up. “Good move though.”

“Thank you.”

One of the servants delivered fresh towels for them to wipe their faces; Dany making sure she picked up the sweatshirt that had fallen from her waist during the spar. She frowned at the dirt and dust on it. She’d have to get it washed again soon.
"Tell me you have some news I can use, Tyrion," she said as she sank into a chair and accepted the cold bottle of water placed before her. "Do we have anyone else pledging to our cause?"

Tyrion cleared his throat again and forced himself to meet the expectant violet eyes trained on him. He had always prided in being able to foresee possible scenarios to avoid the most trouble, but now –

"It appears word of your return is gaining traction in the underground, Your Grace," he began carefully. "According to Lord Varys, someone has been spreading the rumors that you plan to usurp the current government and as you can well imagine, the City Watch and Kingsguard are on even more high alert. They seem to be performing random searches around the city; looking and arresting – or murdering – anyone remotely associated with us. Of course, most of these ambushes are masked under the shield of ‘protecting-the-realm-from-foreign-invasions’. These foreigners are determined to destroy the Westerosi way of life and the propaganda in the media is alarming. It appears my father has done his homework and has paid them off to denounce these so-called ‘terrorists’." Tyrion paused; his features filled with grief and dismay. "He’s turning public opinion against you, my Queen. And as of today, public polling shows that over sixty-percent of the people wish to see you arrested or eliminated."

There was a tense silence around the table, until Prince Oberyn broke it with a heated curse beneath his breath in his native tongue. "That snake, Tywin Lannister," he growled with his hands forming fists. "He always seems to be one step ahead."

"He is a formidable opponent," Doran agreed. He turned to Dany, who had an unreadable expression on her visage. She was staring at nothing in particular, though her gaze seemed trained on the bottle of water in her grasp. "Well, future Queen of Westeros? What do you plan to do now? Invade with what little army you have or wait until Tywin is dead?"

"There is no time for that," Dany responded in a voice devoid of emotion. If anything was to give away her inner turmoil, it was the tightening of her grip around the bottle. "If I may speak to you in private, my Lord," she said to Tyrion as she rose to her feet suddenly.

Not waiting to see if she was being followed, Dany strode into the inner hallways of the building. Her heart was a staccato in her chest; unshed tears of fury and frustration making her eyes burn.

They already hated her. She knew it was a possibility, but actually hearing it was still painful. This was all stupid, wasn’t it? She should just pack her things and return to Essos and forget about ever taking over The Syndicate. She should just –

"No!" she cried out with a slam of her fist against the wall once she was in the safety of her private office – a small but elegant room just adjacent to her bedroom. She had come this far, and she wasn’t backing down just because some old bastard felt the need to assassinate her character.

Tyrion winced at the anger on her visage and clasped his hands behind his back. He waited for the onslaught while eyeing the tantalizing bottle of Dornish wine sitting on her desk. How he longed for a taste...

"Your family," she growled as she paced around the room. "Your fucking family! Ooooh I could…I could...urgh!"

"I am more than aware of how despicable they are," Tyrion agreed with a sad smile. "It is why I pledged my allegiance to you, Your Grace."

"Hmph!"
“…and it is why I was desperate to seek the help of the person you wished for me not to see.”

Dany spun around at that; though her features were now laced with confusion. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

Tyrion braced himself again and took a deep breath. “I met with Jon Snow.”

Dany felt as if she’d been punched in the gut; her breath caught and this time the color on her cheeks had nothing to do with anger. Or maybe it did, for realizing Tyrion had gone against her wishes -

“What did I tell you?” she began in a deceptively quiet tone as she walked slowly toward him. “I told you not to get him involved, did I not? He has nothing to do with this!”

“As much as I wish I could protect him as well, Your Grace,” Tyrion defended himself quickly. “It appears his situation is now quite dire.”

“What do you mean?”

Tyrion explained Jon’s eavesdropping on the meeting between Robert Baratheon and the Dothraki, and how he had almost lost his life in the process. Dany was unaware of her hand caressing her stomach as if in pain, until she paced away from Tyrion to gather herself. She shook her head slowly.

It’s all my fault, she thought as she stepped out to the veranda and stared blindly at the courtyard where several children from the city were splashing around in the pool. If only I didn’t get into his car that night. He wouldn’t be involved in all of this. I should have stopped it before it got too far. Goddamnit!

“…but there’s more,” Tyrion’s voice seeped through her muddled thoughts.

She looked back with disbelief. “More? What more could there possibly be?!”

Tyrion’s eyes lowered to the floor. “I was planning to bring him here with me…”

“To Dorne?” Dany asked breathlessly; the brief image of seeing Jon wandering around the hallways and gardens of this city was almost too much to imagine. She struggled to control the rush of heat at the thought and shook her head. “He’s not here, is he?”

“No, he isn’t.”

She squashed down the pang of disappointment and told herself it was a good thing. The further he was away; the better.

“Not because he didn’t want to,” Tyrion added quickly. “But because a series of unfortunate events have forced him to remain in King’s Landing.”

“What series of unfortunate events?”

Tyrion looked up with a sad expression in his eyes. “It appears his uncle was murdered, Your Grace. His body was chopped into pieces and left in a garbage bag in front of the apartment complex last Thursday. Needless to say, Jon is in no mood to travel and his determination to find the person responsible for his uncle’s death has changed him in more ways than one.”

Dany’s legs trembled and she had to turn away to clutch the railing.

How cruel. How fucking…cruel.
She could list the number of potential enemies Jon now had and how his life was no longer going to be as easy-going and carefree as it once was. His mistake had been to engage with the Dothraki, and she was also sure some Harpies might have been watching him on the night of the shootout. He was clearly in the sights of those who wished for her death, and there was simply no escaping his fate now. Just one fuck up and it was all over.

*I have to go back,* she thought as she dug her fingernails into her palms. *I have to speak to him...get him out of there...anything!*

“I would recommend remaining here, Your Grace,” Tyrion interrupted as if reading her thoughts. “It is better for you at this time.”

She said nothing.

“I realize you wish to save him, but I’ve advised him that once he’s gotten his uncle’s affairs in order, it’s best he return to the North. His family will need him more than ever now.” When Dany remained silent, Tyrion took a step closer. “Your Grace?”

“I heard you, my Lord,” she replied in a voice that was steady and did not betray the flood of emotions running through her. “I thank you for your counsel as always. May I be left alone please?”

Tyrion looked like he was going to say more, but he settled for a small nod and let himself out.

Dany closed her eyes and lifted her face to the heavens. The sun felt warm on her skin, and as the brief image of warm brown eyes, which could flash with a feral gleam of defiance or anger, filled her mind – she knew she would have to go against her counsel’s wishes.

*I’m sorry. I’m so-so-sorry…*

The sudden buzz of her cell phone had her opening her eyes quickly. Hoping it wasn’t someone else to give her more bad news; she tapped it on and stared in confusion at the ‘UNKNOWN’ staring back at her. A frown creased her brow.

This was a phone used only by those in her inner circle. UNKNOWNS were not accepted, so who in the world could it be?

Against her better judgement, she tapped on the window and sincerely hoped Tywin Lannister hadn’t found a way to hack into their system. However, when the simple message glared back at her:

**I WANT MY SWEATSHIRT BACK.**

Initial shock turned to a helpless smile.

*That fucking northern idiot.*

How he had gotten a hold of this number was surprising, although she guessed Tyrion had given him a phone as well. She wasn’t sure of what to reply back to him, but when she noticed more dots showing he was typing again, she held her breath and waited with an eagerness that would have surprised anyone watching her at this moment. Gone was the anger and mask of bothersome leadership; now she was simply Dany, a young woman, desperate for something good to happen in her life.

It came in the form of three words that would make her final decision.
I MISS YOU.

Translation:

jorrâelatan mère

(loved one)
I MISS YOU

The words mocked him as he swayed on the ledge of the rooftop; a dangerous position to be in, but logic wasn’t exactly cooperating with him at the moment. Through the haze of his fourth (or was it fifth) beer, and the steady drizzle of a chilly night rain, he blinked twice as hard and tried to make sense of what his fingers had typed – again – before his muddled mind could really process what he had done.

Fuck.

Hadn’t he sent this message a couple of days ago? He hadn’t planned on sending it. He hadn’t even planned on texting her at all. Yet here he was, two in the goddamn morning, getting ass drunk and repeating the same mistake to someone who definitely didn’t give a shit about him anymore.
She hadn’t replied the first time, so what made this any different?

Seven hells, how long has it been since he last saw her? About a month? And all his dumb brain could think of was his stupid sweatshirt and rambling about ‘missing her’. Pfft! What a joke. He’d bet she was laughing at him right now. Probably even called her dear ‘friend’ Missandei or Grey Worm or that geezer, Jorah, to show them his text.

What a loser, she’d say…probably.

Well fuck her and her asshole friends. He didn’t need them. He didn’t need anyone!

“Fuck you, Daenerys Targaryen!” he bellowed as he threw back his head and let it rip; a raw sound of barely restrained anger and frustration straight from the gut. “Fuck all of you! And you too, you godforsaken city! Fuck you, King’s Landing! Fuuuuuuck yooooou!”

He raised the bottle to his lips and took another long swig. The warm beverage coated his burning throat as he teetered toward the edge again; the lights of the passing cars below like tiny glowing ants to his blurry vision. The only good suit in his possession was plastered to his body like a second skin; the black tie hanging askew around his neck and barely hanging on. The top two buttons of the white dress shirt was undone leaving him slightly more exposed to the elements. The rain was falling a little harder now, but he hardly felt it. Everything ached, and it had nothing to do with being involved in physical confrontation. He took a trembling step along the ledge and giggled at the idea of simply letting go and falling flat on the asphalt below.

Just do it, Jon Snow, a sneering voice – which sounded oddly like Petyr’s – whispered in his head. Do it. It’s the only way.

That’s right. Maybe things would be easier that way. He would get the hell out of everyone’s way and no one would miss him.

Not even Miss. D.T. – the stealer of sweatshirts.

He raised the phone to his face; a tiny part of him hoping she’d reply; even if it was with something as insulting as ‘FUCK OFF’. He’d take it. It would at least prove she was still out there somewhere.

“Like she gives a fuck,” he slurred and took another shaky step forward. “Like anyone gives a fuck.”

He gripped the phone tightly and raised it over his head; his intention to fling it as far away as possible. However, the sudden image of Tyrion’s concerned visage had him rethinking his decision. Out of all the sympathizers he had dealt with since ‘that day’, Jon felt that the most sincere feeling of remorse had come from the dwarf…and maybe Sam and Gendry. Tyrion had texted him the day after, as promised, with a message for them to meet again at the wharf in a couple of days. However, with the clusterfuck of events that happened soon after, Jon was understandably unable to keep to that promise. Tyrion, though disappointed, had proven to be an unlikely friend in the midst of the chaos.

Cheers to the somewhat decent Lannister, he toasted bitterly.

Of course there had been the lovely conference call with his family; a call Jon wished he could erase permanently from memory. Boy, had that been interesting. A bitter laugh erupted from his lips. He drained the rest of his beer before giving a loud belch and flinging the empty bottle away. It shattered against the concrete, and Jon hopped off the ledge to stagger toward what was left of the six-pack he had brought with him.

Two more, he bemoaned as he twisted off the cap and began drinking with a thirst that would never
be quenched.

He didn’t stop until it was empty, and with an extra loud belch of satisfaction, he tried to take another step, but suddenly found the ground racing toward his face at an alarming rate. He tried to control his momentum, but failed miserably. The pain was almost welcomed as he collided with the concrete surface; a low groan getting lost in the rain as he closed his eyes and allowed the jumbled fragments, of the most terrible two weeks of his life, to come rushing back with a vengeance.

It was Mrs. Martin’s loud shriek of terror that kicked off the surreal chain of events.

She, and her husband, always enjoyed early morning walks, for they believed it was crucial to firing up his writing muses. Unfortunately, this morning would change all such perceptions.

At first the couple wasn’t quite sure of what to make of the large black garbage bag sitting right in front of the glass entrance doors, and Mr. Martin was ready to call the City waste management department to put in a complaint. However, it was his wife’s urgent tugging on the sleeve of his shirt which would have him turning back to her with a frown. He had stared at her features with confusion; wondering why it seemed to be getting longer and paler as if she was struggling to hold back a scream. When she simply continued to point and open her mouth like a fish, Mr. Martin finally took a good look and promptly let go of his stomach contents.

That was enough to have his wife shrieking like a banshee; and Jon – who was dozing in his uncle’s office at the time – nearly fell to the floor at the piercing sound.

On autopilot, he reached for the baseball bat Benjen usually kept in the corner of the room and prepared to deal with any possible muggers or troublemakers trying to disturb his tenants. However, as he stepped out to the lobby – where more tenants (some still in their nightwear or dressing robes) were trickling out to see what all the fuss was about – Jon did his best to convince them that he had everything under control.

Or he would have, if he didn’t step outside to finally see what awaited him.

Not real.

He should have guessed by the putrid stench to immediately assail his senses.

Not real.

He should have guessed with the dark and almost sticky pool of blood forming around the base of the garbage bag.

Not real.

He should have guessed with the growing cloud of flies buzzing around it, and yet he couldn’t get his feet to move for almost five whole minutes. The world had slowed to a gradual standstill; the noises behind him fading into oblivion as a cold certainty filled his heart and chilled his bones. He couldn’t hear a thing despite the concerned tenants pestering and asking a million and one questions around him.

“Is it a dead animal?” Mr. Martin was asking. “Good Lord, who would do such a thing?! And
someone please call an ambulance! My wife’s fainted!

Not...fucking...real.

The last three days have been hell; not just because Robb was back in Winterfell and that overwhelming feeling of loneliness and homesickness had returned, but he had spent most of that time searching desperately for his missing uncle. Jon had called or visited his usual hangouts and friends, but no one could tell him anything. It was as if Benjen had vanished off the face of the earth, and in his restless dreams, Jon would always remember how haunted and even terrified he had looked after his attempt to choke Robb. Whatever he said that night had triggered off something in his uncle, and Jon had nursed the guilt that he was acutely responsible for his disappearance.

In the interim, someone had to deal with all the pressing responsibilities of being a landlord to five considerable properties around King’s Landing; and Jon had suddenly found himself having to perform twice as much as he usually did on a daily basis. He knew his uncle worked hard, but he had no idea so much went into the job. Everyone wanted a piece of him; contractors demanding discussions about building expansions, the City Council wanting updates on building codes and future safety inspections, seemingly hundreds of bills that still had to be paid, and of course dealing with tenants whose complaints about every little thing seemed endless.

Sure he had his assistants, but they had wondered where their real boss was. It wasn’t as if they didn’t like Jon, but he was still green to the intricacies of the role. Fortunately, salvation would come in the form of Davos Seaworth, an old friend to Benjen, who was actually responsible for talking his uncle into becoming a property owner in the first place.

Davos, though older than Jon imagined him to be, had an energy that was rather inspiring. With his wizened features and gray beard, which could look intimidating at first, his kindness and integrity came through with the warm glint in his eye and his thick Flea Bottom accent. According to the former ‘smuggler’ (and Jon hadn’t wanted to know exactly what he smuggled because he was sure it must have been illegal contraband), he had left King’s Landing for the Free Cities as a retirement vacation of sorts.

So what brought him back?

“Call it an old man’s hunch,” Davos had said with a small smile as if still surprised at his decision. “I just suddenly felt the urge to come back and visit old friends. If I had any idea I’d be dealing with all this…” He shook his head and sighed. “Well, can’t be helped I guess. We’ve got to find yer uncle and fast, eh?”

So while Davos took on the other four properties, Jon was left to at least manage the one he was most comfortable with. Despite the decreased workload, it was still a hassle. His days and nights rolled into one, though he managed to get some sleep – an hour or two here and there – wherever he could manage it. Hell, his uncle’s office had turned into his second bedroom, and Jon couldn’t remember the last time he had a decent shower.

He looked like death wormed over, according to Gendry at least.

“What are you doing?” came a shriek from behind as Jon suddenly began walking toward the bag with purposeful strides.

“Don’t open it!” someone else screamed, but Jon wasn’t listening.

The world rushed by his ears; his vision laser-focused on what he planned to do. He fell to his knees and all but ripped the bag open; hardly blinking as the warm gush of blood coated his hands and
stained his clothes. The stench was now overpowering, and the flies scattered in protest though some dared to return as if hoping to stake their claim. In the background, the shrieks of horror from the other tenants almost had him bursting into maniac laughter. What were they scared of? It was only their precious landlord in here. Didn’t they want to see him for the last time? He dug within the bag; the chopped up pieces of his uncle still slightly warm as his fingers caressed skin, muscle, slimy intestines and whatever else was stuck in there. It came to a stop when he felt the matted hair and with a fierce yank, Jon pulled it out to stare into the pallid features of a man he had once loved with all his heart.

At least his eyes were closed, so thank the gods for that little mercy.

“Oh gods! Put it away! Put it away!” came the wails of dismay, but Jon was too far gone to pay attention now.

He rose to his feet with the head still clutched in his fist, as if hoping the morbid display of his relative’s fate would make it all seem more real to him. He wanted them to see it; every single one of them especially fucking Littlefinger, who stood to the side with Olivia trembling in his arms. Furious brown eyes met tepid black ones, and for a second, Jon wished he could project all the hate and anger he felt onto the older man. Somehow it was all Petyr’s fault. He wasn’t sure how, but deep down inside, Jon was sure the slimy bastard had something to do with this.

You fucker, he thought with a snarl he wasn’t aware of giving. The insane urge to toss the head toward Littlefinger overwhelmed him. You son-of-bit…

“All right, son,” someone was saying as a hand suddenly fell upon his shoulder. “You can let it go now…whoa!”

Jon had spun around so fast, with a fist raised to punch the lights out of the asshole who had dared touch him, he ended up spraying blood on his face and that of the City Watch officer before him.

Great. It just had to be Officer Bywater, didn’t it? Jon lowered his fist and braced himself for whatever bullshit the other man had to spew. For whatever reason, his tolerance for that was at an all-time low.

“Adding potential assault on an officer too?” Bywater was saying as he wiped his face with a handkerchief. “Let’s not make this any more difficult, son.”

“I am not your son,” Jon spit out coldly.

Bywater raised a brow and then frowned. He had always thought there was something wrong with the kid, but tonight…he literally looked like he could kill someone with his bare hands. He cleared his throat and nodded slowly.

“Look, I know this is difficult for you. I liked Benjen too, but what good is it going to do to stand around here waving his head about and scaring your tenants? Come on…give it here and we’ll have a little talk at the station, okay?”

He tried to reach for Jon, but Jon took a step back with a shake of his head. He could see three other officers approaching.

“I want to help you, Snow,” Bywater cajoled. “I want to find the fuckers who did this as much as you do, but you’ve got to help us.”

Jon’s lips curled in distaste. “Sure you want to help me.” He stepped back again as the other officers got closer. “No one fucking touch me. I’ll go myself!”
“You going to get into the car with that thing still in your hand?” Bywater asked with barely controlled irritation. “We are going to need it for evidence, and you want to be extra careful now, Snow. I might end up having to lock you for insubordination.”

“Fuck you,” Jon muttered beneath his breath, but did not resist when another officer pried the head from his hand and another – with a sympathetic smile Jon wanted to smack off – gently led him into a waiting City Watch van.

As the doors slammed shut behind him, Jon’s last view of his uncle would be of the officers tossing his head back into the bag and gathering the other pieces as if he was nothing more than…trash.

And just like that, the fight and rage dissipated leaving him depleted and hollow. His shoulders sagged and his head lowered to his chest; the enormity of the situation now hitting him harder than he realized. With a painful hitch of breath, he broke down into tears; loud harsh sobs of misery that seemed to be wretched from deep in his soul. His uncle deserved to be treated better than that, but no one would ever understand.

Absolutely no one.

The incident made the local news.

Several nosey reporters had come by to ask questions, and Davos had sent them away with polite ‘no comments’ on behalf of Jon, who was currently living like a recluse in his apartment. Some tenants were so traumatized by the events, they moved out within the next few days. Davos had taken care of that. Oddly enough, the complex had also gained notoriety, and more potential tenants showed interest in renting apartments.

White Castle Apartments was officially the hottest thing in town.

“Hate to say that it’s been a boost,” Davos was saying to Jon during his many visits to his apartment – more to make sure the young man hadn’t committed suicide. “But we’re booked solid. Even with losing three tenants last week, we have more renters wanting to move in.”

When Jon remained silent, Davos gave an exasperated sigh and rose to his feet. He stalked to the windows and threw the curtains open; allowing the brilliant rays of sunlight to filter into the once dark (and dank) apartment. Good grief, but the man needed a wake-up call. Empty pizza boxes, bottles of beer, two ashtrays filled with cigarette butts including a half-empty box, and unfinished Chinese noodles lay askew on the coffee table or on the floor. There were clothes everywhere, and Jon himself was sprawled on the couch; looking somewhat gaunt…and filthy. His hair was a tangled mess of curls around his face; his beard no longer kept in its neat trim, and Davos was sure there were pieces of food stuck in there as well. He was dressed in nothing but a pair of boxer shorts and a stained tee-shirt. His breath smelled like he hadn’t brushed his teeth in days.

“You’ve got to be shitting me,” Davos growled at the sight for Jon was whining and about to burrow himself beneath the blanket he had dragged over himself. “Get up for fuck’s sake, Jon! You can’t keep hiding yerself in here for the rest of yer life. We’re all in mourning, yer know. You’re not the only one suffering, but we need you more than ever now. You hear me!”

He tried to tug the blanket off, but Jon – still surprisingly strong – shoved Davos away; his eyes burning with hate and distrust despite the pallid features.
“Don’t fucking touch me,” Jon growled; his voice husky with disuse.

Davos gritted his teeth and rose to his feet. “Ah, I see that’s how it is then. You’re just going to live the rest of your life hiding in here while those who killed Benjen celebrate their victory at breaking ye, eh? Is that it?”

Jon’s eyes narrowed, but he remained silent.

“I know the City Watch said it was probably those fucking foreigner terrorists,” Davos continued unrepentantly. “But you and I know it’s not the case. You know something Jon, and that something is likely to get us to the bottom of why your uncle was murdered, because that wasn’t any ordinary random terrorist killing. Someone’s trying to send you a message, and I think it’s time you told me everything.”

Jon rolled his eyes and covered himself with the blanket again. A muffled ‘fuck off’ could be heard, but Davos wasn’t giving up.

“Guess who’s been calling for you?” Not expecting an answer, he continued. “Robert Baratheon.” A small smile came to his lips as he noticed the body language beneath the blanket. He had the man’s attention now. “He came by to visit the other day. Looked so distraught and concerned for you. He wanted to kno-ufff!”

Jon had moved so fast, Davos barely had the time to gather himself. One minute Jon had been cocooned in his shell, the next he was clutching a fist full of Davos’s shirt and nearly lifting him off the floor. Davos had thought he had seen the full range of Jon’s anger, but it was nothing compared to the fury within those usual indifferent brown eyes.

“Robert Baratheon was here?” Jon asked coldly.

“That’s what I said,” Davos grunted. He could feel his air circulation cutting off and with a raise of his brows and a point of his finger at Jon’s hand, Jon got the message and slowly eased off. “Phew… thank goodness for that,” Davos muttered as he rubbed his neck when Jon staggered away slowly.

“What did he want?” Jon asked.

“Like I said…he came to give his condolences,” Davos replied. “Seemed real distraught too.”

Jon scoffed at that; his laughter derisive and dismissive. He reached for a bottle of beer, raised it to his lips and groaned as he realized it was empty. *Fuck.* He was sure he was completely out at this point. Maybe he could bribe Sam or Ros to buy more for him.

“I’ll bet he was reaaaal distraught,” Jon drawled as he stumbled toward the kitchen. He opened his fridge and eyed the empty space glaring back at him. Save for a loaf of slightly moldy bread… nothing. He slammed the door shut and leaned against the fridge for fear he’d fall. His legs felt weak. “I’ll bet he was reaaaaaaally sorry for what happened, right? Right?!”

“…yes…”

Jon nodded and smirked. “The asshole.”

“What?” Davos’s brows furrowed in confusion.

Jon waved a hand over his head and pushed himself away from the fridge. He began opening the cupboards to find something to eat. His stomach was growling.
“Robert fucking Baratheon is an asshole,” Jon repeated and shook a couple of nearly empty boxes of cereal. “And he’s lucky I don’t see him myself or I’ll kill him with my bare hands.”

Davos couldn’t hide his surprise. “Are you suggesting he knew something about Benjen’s death?”

Shoving his hand into the box of frosted flakes, Jon helped himself to a few and while crunching hard on the stale treat, he nodded and recanted the events of the night with Robb to Davos. He spilled everything including the meeting with the Dothraki and his plans for a certain Targaryen rebel.

When he was finished – with his story and the cereal – Jon tossed the box to the floor and stretched. “Anything making sense to you, Seaworth? Think you can figure out why my uncle was killed?”

Davos opened his mouth to respond, but the shrill ring of his phone had reaching for it with an apologetic look at Jon. He blinked at the name, but then shook his head slowly as he replied.

“Hello, Robb.”

Jon stiffened and eyed his dead phone on the coffee table with a hint of guilt. He had turned it off a couple of days ago and had failed to charge it. He wondered how many phone calls he had missed by now.

“….yes, he’s still alive…barely. Uh huh…I know…tonight you say? Well, I wouldn’t really…uh huh…she insists? All right…I’ll see what I can do…okay, I’ll let him know….yes, thank you…I’ll do all I can.”

Davos hung up and eyed the apartment before turning to Jon who was now looking at him with arms folded across his chest as if ready for another confrontation.

“That was your brother,” Davos began carefully. “He wants to speak to you…face-time…well actually it’s Catelyn who wants to speak to you.”

Jon’s brows shot up at that; unable to mask the surprise at this news. His stepmother wanted to speak to him? A chill went down his spine. He had not spoken to the woman in almost a year and now she wanted to see him? As much as Jon wished it was going to be a loving reunion, he already knew what this was going to be about.

“Not doing it…” he began, but Davos was not having it.

“I might not be a relative,” he insisted with a stern frown on his features, “but you’re going to get yerself cleaned up, look presentable and speak to your bloody family, Jon Snow. It’s the least you can do for your uncle’s memory, and no matter your feelings about Catelyn, you’re all still family. Now get yer damn ass in that bathroom and get yer shit together. I’ll be back in an hour.”

When Jon opened his mouth to protest, Davos held up a finger and repeated sharply.

“One hour.”

_Fucking Davos._

He was like the nagging grandfather you never really realized you needed, and as Jon ran the comb
through his hair and tugged at his blue dress shirt, he couldn’t help the small smile on his lips. He could hear Davos and Sam setting up his laptop in the living room, and as he stepped out to join them, he wasn’t surprised that the two men had hit it off from the moment they met. They had even helped clean up the place.

“Heeey, look who’s human again,” Sam teased as they noticed Jon. “Good to see you back in the land of the living.”

“Fuck off,” Jon replied with a sheepish smile. He met Davos’s nod of approval and felt an immense well of gratitude fill him at the sight. It was amazing what a long shower and shave would do. It had given Jon plenty of time to rethink a few things.

Davos was right. He couldn’t afford to live the rest of his life hiding away in here. He did have a mission now, and even if it meant having to take out a few people in the process, he wasn’t going to stop until he found out the reason his uncle was killed –

(and the truth behind your father’s accident)

Two Stark brothers killed for seemingly no reason, or rather for whatever secrets they held within.

As Jon sat behind his desk and faced the computer screen, he hoped his fears and concerns weren’t etched on his features as he waited for the call to come through. In the pit of his stomach, a nervous flutter began in earnest; his fingers were clasped tightly on his lap as he took a deep breath. It wasn’t so much as fear of seeing Catelyn again, but rather recalling childhood memories of seeing that disapproving frown or disgust leveled at him all the time. He struggled to remember any time she had given him a warm smile of acceptance…for anything, but came up painfully blank.

She had never found it in her heart to love him. Why was anything to change now?

“Hey, little bro,” came the warm greeting as Robb’s face soon filled the screen. Davos and Sam had excused themselves, gratefully giving him the privacy he needed.

“Hi Robb,” Jon began, but someone suddenly pushed Robb to the side, and Jon’s heart soared at the familiar sight of his precocious little sister. “Arya!”

“Jon!” Arya cried out in delight and blew kisses at the screen. “Oh my God! You look so different!”

“Look who’s talking,” Jon replied with a chuckle. “You must have grown a couple more inches… and what kind of hairstyle is that?”

“Like it?” Arya asked with a grin as she tried to model her cropped hair that was almost like a crew cut. She had always favored looking boyish, and Jon could only imagine how horrified her mother must have been at the drastic change. It looked good on her actually.

“I colored it too-”

“Riveting conversation,” Robb chimed in as he tried to take over the screen again. “But this isn’t the time for that, remember?”

Arya’s face fell and she looked sadly at her older brother. “We heard about Uncle Benjen.”

Jon nodded. His grip tightened. What the fuck could he say to them? It felt as if they had trusted him to take care of their uncle and he had failed them all.

Robb was looking at him with a pensive expression. His eyes had the unspoken question, and Jon
could only give a slight shrug as he closed his eyes and struggled to gather himself. He could hear Catelyn’s voice in the background, and the nerves came back with a vengeance. He suddenly felt the urge to vomit, but he controlled himself as best he could.

“All right, Mom,” Robb was saying. “Yes, he can see you…yeah…okay…Jon? You okay?”

Jon lifted his lashes and found himself staring at a face he figured he’d be rid of for the rest of his life (if he could manage it). Aside from looking a little pale and maybe skinnier than he remembered, Catelyn Stark still managed to look as regal and detached as she always did. Her long fiery red hair was held back from her face in a loose ponytail; her blue eyes still cold and unforgiving. The black turtleneck sweater made her look even more austere, but it was eased a little with the presence of the silver dire wolf brooch above her right breast.

“Hello, Catelyn,” Jon greeted with a polite nod.

“Jon,” came the quiet greeting that was enough to freeze steam. “Has Robb discussed what the plans are?”

So much for a ‘how are you?’ or ‘are you doing all right?’ Pleasantries were never in her repertoire when it came to him after all.

“What plans?” Jon asked.

“I tried calling him, but could never get through,” Robb was saying in the background. “Sorry.”

“Not surprising,” Catelyn replied with a shrug of her shoulders. “Irresponsibility follows him wherever he goes.”

Jon’s jaw clenched but he kept silent. His fingernails were digging groves into his flesh all the same.

“I am sending Cassel and Poole to King’s Landing to pick up your uncle’s remains,” she continued in a tone that clearly said she was not in the mood for an argument. “We will give him a proper Stark burial no matter what state his body’s in.”

“What plans?” Jon asked.

“Can Jon come to the funeral?” Arya asked hopefully.

But Jon already knew the answer to that before his stepmother could reply. “No. His duties remain in King’s Landing. He at least has to take care of Benjen’s affairs. Isn’t that right, Jon?”

Jon nodded. “Yes.”

Catelyn’s lips thinned, and as Jon dared to really look at her; he could see it all now.

The blame.

The silent, suffocating accusation that would follow him for the rest of his life. It was all his fault. It was the same expression she had in her eyes when he returned from the hospital three years ago; that look that spewed all her hate at his survival while her husband had bled to death just down the hall. And now, another family member was dead because of his incompetence. Why couldn’t he just die instead? Why did the hands of Death always skip Jon? Why was it her family suffering in his stead?

Ah, how cruel the gods could be.

“They will also be present for the reading of his last will and testament,” Catelyn continued. “Whatever has been left for my children will be discussed with our lawyers. I trust you have no plans
to dispute them."

Jon managed a thick, "No," which seemed to satisfy the woman.

"Good. Now, if you’ll excuse me. I have to plan for Benjen’s arrival."

She rose to her feet and said something to Robb before leaving. Arya fell into her seat and made a face. "Sorry about that, Jon," she whispered. "She’s just been really sad and all."

"Don’t apologize for her," Jon replied. "I’m used to it, remember?"

So why the fuck did he still feel like crying?

"I wish I could be there with you," Arya said as she sniffled and wiped the tear to slide down her cheek. "I miss you so much."

Jon swallowed the lump forming in his throat and nodded. "Me too. But hey! You’re applying to military schools down here, right? Maybe we’ll see each other again soon."

"Yeah!" Arya perked up. "But guess what though? I got selected to join the Prestige in Braavos!"

"Holy shit! Really?! That’s like the…best school in the whole world."

"I know, right?! I couldn’t believe it either!"

Jon pouted. "But Braavos is far…across the sea and shit."

Arya laughed. "Doesn’t matter. I’ll still come visit when I can and we’ll talk over the phone and send emails and texts and all that. I’m going to see the school in a couple of weeks with mom and Robb, so wish me luck?"

"You know I do," Jon replied as he formed a fist and bumped it gently at the screen to match the greeting by his sister. "You go kick some ass over there, you hear me?"

"You know I will." She made as if to leave, but paused and stared hard at her brother. "Jon?"

"Hmm?"

"Are you happy?"

Jon blinked at the simple question. "Well…not right now. I mean…"

"Not about Uncle Benjen…about everything else. Robb says he doesn’t really think you’re happy in King’s Landing. You can always come back home even if you don’t live in Winterfell…we’ve got plenty of houses up here. You can live in one of them, right?"

That stubborn lump grew harder. "That’s nice, Arya, but…I can’t. I’ve got to take care of some stuff here first, okay?"

"You have a girlfriend at least, right? Someone to take care of you? So you’re not lonely?"

_Goddamn it_, Jon wailed inside as he balled his hands into trembling fists. Why wouldn’t she just give it a rest already? It didn’t help that he looked up and could swear – for just one wonderful moment – a certain silver-haired rascal was sitting at his kitchen counter, dressed in his t-shirt with a cheeky smile on her face.
What are you looking at? Never seen anything this beautiful before? her mirage teased before slowly fading from sight. Jon’s eyes burned.

Fuck.

“Jon?”

“I’ll be fine,” he said with what he hoped was a convincing smile. “Don’t worry about me. I’ve got plenty of friends.”

Arya didn’t look as if she believed him, so she settled for moving closer to the screen until her body covered it completely. Jon would soon realize she was hugging the entire computer, and the tears he had struggled to hold in finally broke free. He would cut off her quiet “I love you”, as he slammed the laptop shut and burrowed his face within his arms on the desk.

He had never felt more alone in his life.

“Told you he was up here,” Sam panted when he and Gendry arrived on the rooftop; nearly taking out the door in their desperate haste to open it.

“Holy shit,” Gendry gasped as he dashed toward the prone figure. He fell to his knees and leaned closer to see if Jon was still breathing.

“Is he all right?” Sam queried with concern on his features.

“Yeah,” Gendry replied. “Smells like cheap beer, but he’s okay…well bleeding.”

“What?!”

“Looks like he hit the ground pretty hard. Come on,” he grunted as he began to tug on Jon’s legs. “Let’s take him in.”

“I got it,” Sam insisted as he hoisted Jon’s comatose body over his shoulder in a fireman lift. “Grab his cell phone.”

Like Jon, they were dressed in their best suits – remnants of a long day of ‘celebration’. Benjen’s friends had insisted they hold a funeral even if his body wasn’t going to be there. It was a lovely ceremony all things considered. The sept had been full of well-wishers, and the septon had given a lovely eulogy about the goodness of Benjen Stark’s heart, while managing to disparage the evil terrorists who wished to strike fear in the hearts of the good people of Westeros.

Though Jon had done his best to be present during most of the events, both Sam and Gendry could see that he was just going through the motions. His smile seemed a bit too fake; his eyes just a bit too ‘dead’ despite the brief flash of anger to flicker within them when they noticed Robert Baratheon approach to shake his hand. If Gendry had noticed his friend’s reaction to his father, he kept it to himself. In fact, any attempt he had made to talk about his father was met with a stony silence that was baffling. If he didn’t know any better, he would also swear that Jon was avoiding him in some way.

“All right,” Sam huffed as he lay Jon carefully on his bed. “Better get him out of his wet clothes. He
might catch hypothermia.”

Gendry nodded and set to it, while Sam made his way to the bathroom to get some hot water to attend to Jon’s wound.

“Poor guy,” he was saying. “What a day, huh?”

“Poor?” Gendry snorted as he unzipped Jon’s pants. “He’s fucking loaded now. Uncle Benjen really looked out for him, didn’t he? Can’t believe he left everything in Jon’s name. He now owns five goddamn properties worth millions!”

Sam shrugged as he returned with a basin, washcloths, and a first aid kit. He studied his pallid friend’s features with a sad smile. “He doesn’t look any different to me. Still the same ol’ Jon who is prone to self-destruction.”

“Can you blame him? If your uncle got his head chopped off, wouldn’t you feel the same?”

Once Jon was stripped to his birthday suit, he was wiped dry, new boxers donned, and tucked beneath warm blankets. His wound – which was a narrow gash over his right eye – now had strips of narrow band aids holding it together.

“Who taught you how to do that?” Gendry asked with a raised brow in reluctant admiration.

“I read it in a book,” came the simple reply. “You staying with him or am I?”

“I’ll stay,” Gendry offered as he peeled out his wet jacket. “You go back to Gilly. She’s still waiting remember?”

“Right.”

Sam looked at his friend one last time; a surge of warmth racing through him at how innocent and peaceful Jon was when asleep. It was a far cry from the Jon he now knew; the one with the now seemingly permanent look of distrust and simmering anger in those usually kind brown eyes. Jon hadn’t been much of a ‘smiler’ in the first place, but these days, it was a chore to get him to do so. If he did smile, it was a mere motion of lips that didn’t last for longer than a minute. He was ‘colder’ somehow…almost distant and detached from his reality. It was as if the real Jon had died that night with his uncle, and the one they were now forced to live with was nothing but a husk. He buried himself with work and would refuse offers to spend some downtime with his friends. As for Ros, she was now no longer a factor. Whatever relationship those two had was now a farce. Jon’s disinterest and eventual separation had been taken in stride.

At least we can still be friends, was Ros’s deduction even as she appeared at the funeral on the arms of her latest beau.

However, Gendry was right in his assessment of Jon’s current financial status. Jon had invited them to the reading of his uncle’s will, and though two older men had been there on behalf of Catelyn Stark, to read the simple statement from Benjen was almost a slap to their faces. A man of few words, Benjen Stark had simply declared:

*I, Benjen Stark, being of sound mind and memory…*

*Do hereby bequeath all properties and financial holdings to…*
Sam would have laughed at Jon’s flabbergasted reaction, even one of the Stark family representative had asked the lawyer to repeat what he had just read…which he did gladly. Since Benjen had never married or fathered any children – a decision Jon said his uncle had made when he was much younger for some obscure reason – there would be no other living relative to dispute the will. Not even Catelyn, who was nothing more than a sister-in-law with a tepid relationship at best.

Jon was polite through it all; not flaunting his new status before the other men. However, it wasn’t until they were cracking open a bottle of beer in front of his car in an abandoned parking lot, did he let his true feelings show.

“Well, at least Catelyn can go fuck herself,” he said with a smirk as he raised his bottle in a toast to his uncle. “Thanks, Uncle Benjen! I hope you’re giving them all hell in heaven! And say hi to Dad for me too!”

Sam was happy for Jon. It now meant he could never lack for anything if he chose to invest wisely, but Jon had never really been concerned about money or wealth in general. It was one of the many reasons he admired him, and Sam was sure when Jon was more settled, he’d give some of the money to charity or share the wealth with his siblings.

He was just that selfless.

“Goodnight,” Sam said aloud with a wave to Gendry who was now setting up the sofa to sleep in. “See you later, okay?”

“’night,” Gendry replied with a two-fingered salute; his attention was already on the grindhouse movie playing on T.V.

Sam had no idea how Gendry could stand watching that shit form of entertainment, but that was the least of his concerns now. He left the building with a hum beneath his breath, his face breaking into a grin as he noticed his girlfriend still waiting patiently in the car. With a wave, he jogged toward it; wincing as he got wet all over again. Damn rain hadn’t let up yet.

And as he hugged his girl and gave her a hard kiss, he failed to notice the four masked figures sitting in a black sedan parked just a few yards away.

He was on the ledge again; only this time…it wasn’t alone.

She stood a few feet away; arms outstretched to either side as if walking on a balance beam. She was dressed in a short lilac Grecian gown that revealed her lovely arms and legs, while the clasps on her shoulders were silver three-headed dragons dipped in garnet. Her hair was done in intricate braids, though a few tendrils were loose to frame her features as she frowned in concentration. Now and then, she would stick out a tongue from the corner of her mouth as she took a step closer.

Don’t come here, he wanted to say, but the words were trapped in his throat. He could hear himself speak, but his lips weren’t moving at all.
You’ll fall, he begged, and if you do, I don’t think I’ll be able to catch you.

Silly Jon, she replied; her voice as breathless as the wind. Of course you’ll catch me.

She pretended to teeter; her right leg hovering in the air as she swayed. She giggled at his gasp of panic and lowered her leg again. Her feet were bare with flecks of dirt and mud; as if she had been walking for miles without shoes.

You shouldn’t trust me so much, he argued weakly. His heart was a pounding drum in his heart and he felt he couldn’t breathe. I’ve failed those I care about, and I’ll probably break your heart too.

And I’ll break yours…or break you, she said and took a step closer. But Life is all about taking chances, isn’t it? Why should that stop us now?

The air was becoming stifling. His chest felt tight, but she was close…oh so very close. He was sure he would be saved by simply taking her hand and leaping off this damn roof together. They wouldn’t die; no…they would simply fly away from all this – with no more cares about taking over Syndicates or masked men trying to get her (or him) killed.

She looked up shyly then as if reading his thoughts, her arms now behind her back as if she was a child seeking his approval. Her eyes shone like twin orbs of amethyst, and as clichéd as it sounded, Jon was sure he was going to drown in them. He would never need to be rescued again.

Come with me, Jon Snow, she invited, and to his surprise, she was the one to reach out to him now. Her arm pale in the inky darkness surrounding them. Come let me take you to paradise.

Paradise?

Yes, she whispered in his ear; her breath a warm caress to his flesh. Only this paradise is paved with fire and blood. It is not going to be an easy journey, Jon, but I need you with me. I realize now how foolish I’ve been. I cannot fight this alone, so please…come with me…

Her fragrance – of wild flowers and sunshine – had him closing his eyes. He longed to respond; to tell her that he would go wherever she wanted him to. Unfortunately, that tightness on his chest was getting worse, and it now felt as if his circulation was being cut off.

What the hell is going on?

He opened his eyes, and to his dismay, noticed she was now further away though there appeared to be fear etched on her features.

Dany? Dany! Don’t leave me!

He reached out in desperation, and she was doing the same while shouting something he could not hear. It sounded eerily like his name and the words ‘wake up!’ but he couldn’t be sure.

However, when something sharp and incredibly painful sliced through him, he looked down at the blossoming red dot spreading around his stomach with almost comical bemusement.

What the fuc…k?

“ARGH!”

The loud grunt would have his lashes flying open, and this time, Jon would barely make out the glint of the dagger on its downward descent, before moving his body away on pure reflex. His sudden
motion would throw off his attacker, and the knife buried itself into the pillow where his head had just been.

Fuckfuckfuck! A Harpy?!

Still slightly unsteady; no thanks to his head pounding from a hangover he didn’t need, he ducked again as his attacker dashed after him and swung the dagger in a sweeping arc. Jon crashed into his dresser; wincing as the protruding handles dug into his back. His stomach was still on fire, and he could feel the blood pooling into his boxers, still he managed to duck again as the masked man came for him. The dagger lodged into the wood with the force of his thrust, and Jon took the opportunity to deliver as hard a blow as he could muster into the bastard’s stomach, sending him toppling back to the floor with a grunt of surprise. Jon gripped the intricately-designed hilt and yanked it out. Not giving himself the time to think, he spun on his heels and buried it deep into the man’s throat; hardly flinching as his face and chest was immediately sprayed with the thick warmth of the man’s blood.

He would look up at the loud commotion coming from the living room, and getting off his attacker - not before pulling out the knife to use as a weapon - he tried to make his way there, when his peripheral vision caught sight of another Harpy climbing through his bedroom window.

The hell?! Just how many were there?!

This one was much bigger than the first, and though Jon tried to strike, he was blindsided with a roundhouse kick which had him slamming hard into his closet. He heard the loud crack of the wooden sidings as it caved in beneath his weight, and he groaned as white hot pain raced through him. The man was coming again; dagger held above him in readiness to strike. Jon tried to move, but it felt as if every part of him was being split in two especially his abdomen. He was losing a lot of blood and his vision was getting hazy. However, if he didn’t move soon, it was all going to end here.

Fuck… I’m going to die here…and it’s all because…huh?

Something or someone had moved behind the Harpy; something or someone much smaller, but still agile enough to almost leap and slice his neck in a move so smooth and quick, if he hadn’t seen the man crumple to the floor with his hand clutching his throat, Jon might have imagined the whole thing.

He would only have a moment to notice the flash of familiar violet eyes before the black-clad figure sprinted into the living room to end whatever commotion was going on there.

No…it can’t be…was his weakening thought. She…she… can’t be here.

However, as he felt himself fading from consciousness; he could swear she was at his side again, only this time the black ski-mask, she had covered her head with, was removed to reveal her beautiful but concerned features.

Dany? What are you doing here? Why are you looking at me like that?

Hang in there, Jon, she was saying in a voice that sounded a million miles away. Please hang in there!

He would have loved to give some wiseass or cool response, as they did in the movies, but reality was so much more cruel as he slipped into a darkness that welcomed him with open arms.
*sings off key* Clooosoer and cloooosoer...
Seriously though, my sincere thanks to those who take the time to leave feedback/comments/kudos!
As always, you're the mojo to my muse, *bows gratefully*
Enjoy!
P.S: To any clever wordsmiths out there, I've been wracking my brain trying out what possible Westerosi equivalents of YouTube/Facebook/Twitter might be. I've already switched Instagram with Illustrogram, so if you think you've got a good name for the others, feel free to share your input for consideration!

She was sitting on the veranda; an untouched plate of buttered toast, two boiled eggs, and a glass of orange juice before her. Several local newspapers were stacked on the table; many with headlines that did not favor her cause. Perched on top of these was a black laptop with the familiar red three-headed dragon sigil, though a screensaver of colorful floating butterflies was all anyone could see.

However, none of this seemed interesting for her gaze was trained on something beyond the Summer Sea; something Tyrion would never see. Her lovely features were pensive; a most unfortunate expression for one so young to have. He longed for the day she could truly laugh and be herself, but they were amid a ‘war’, and until there was victory in their daunting task to change the world…

(I fear your burden is much to bear, my dear Queen)

“There you are,” he announced himself with a light cough while knocking on the door to her private quarters. “I was sure I’d find you in your usual spot…watching over him like a concerned Mother Hen, but alas, there is life beyond his bedroom walls.”

Her only reaction to this was a stiffening of her shoulders, though he was sure he could make out the
bright spots of color to fill her cheeks at his blatant observation. A wry smile tugged at his lips. She could be so easy to read sometimes.

“Do you mind if I join you?” he asked as he pointed to the empty chair across the small table.

“If you do not plan on lecturing me,” she replied.

“Ah…so that’s why you’ve been avoiding me since your impromptu decision to run off without my knowledge,” he commented; not without a trace of bitterness. “Imagine my surprise when I woke up that morning; requesting an audience with the Queen, only to be told she was miles away in King’s Landing. Not that it didn’t take some prodding to get the answer. Missandei can be quite evasive.”

She sighed and closed her eyes. “Tyrion -”

“It is perfectly all right,” he interrupted with a wave of his hand in dismissal. He reached for the pitcher of orange juice and helped himself to a glass. Though he would have favored something different for refreshment, he did have to admit the freshly squeezed beverage was delightful to the tongue. “I only wish you would remember you made me your Hand, my dear. I might have suggested some other plan, but I wouldn’t have stopped you.”

She lifted her lashes to give him a wary glance. “Really?”

Tyrion shrugged and leaned back in his chair. Below them the courtyard pools were already hosting several children from the city; their happy voices drifting to their lounging spot.

“It was something I would have recommended. In fact, it was my hope to convince him to do the exact same thing. However, the question remains.” He pinned a hard look in her direction. “Why did you go in the first place? You know how dangerous the situation is, yet you took a significant risk.”

Dany took a deep breath and lowered her gaze to her hands.

Why had she gone?

_I miss you._

That just three little words had made her toss away all caution? That for the first time, in as long as she could remember, she was finally doing something without having to second-guess herself at every second?

It seemed ridiculous to admit such a thing, but the past forty-eight hours had been spent mulling over everything that happened, and she still couldn’t believe how things had turned out. Just one mistake and everything would have been for naught.

“I only went to speak to him,” she confessed. “I wanted him to know just how dangerous the situation was and to offer an alternative means of protection.”

“And yet, he is here…in Dorne with a stab wound and a possible concussion,” Tyrion stated dryly.

“Trust me, I would rather he not be here,” she said in earnest as if desperate to convince him. “But there was no time to think. I just…I did what I felt was necessary.”
Prince Doran had thought otherwise.

“I’m sorry,” came the confused query as thick brows furrowed at her query. The cobwebs of sleep were still etched on his flabbergasted features. “You want to what?”

“To make use of one of your private jets,” Dany repeated carefully. “There’s someone I have to see in King’s Landing.”

“And you cannot call or email this person? You need to fly there in my private jet…at this ungodly hour?”

The ungodly hour being almost two in the morning, and the Prince still wondering why Dany, Missandei, and Grey Worm were standing at his bedroom door bothering him with such an odd request.

“Couldn’t this wait ‘til daytime at least? It takes some time to get the planes ready and-”

“I will be back by this evening,” Dany promised. When she noticed the thinning of his lips and the squaring of his shoulders, she reached out to placate him with a gentle touch on his arm.

“Please, your Grace,” she cajoled. “You’ve been more than a hospitable host, and I am forever in your debt for your kindness. However, this is something a mere phone call or email cannot adequately convey. I have to see this person-”

“Despite the perils of being in King’s Landing at this time?” the Prince argued with a frown. “Does Tyrion know about this?” Something in her expression must have given it away because he sighed and shook his head. “This is foolhardy, Daenerys.”

“Like I said,” Dany replied with impatience slipping into her tone. “This is something that’s to be quick and painless. I do not intend to go on a vacation, and I’ll be in disguise. I beg you, your Grace.”

Begging? The use of the word seemed to be the key to unlocking his skepticism, for anyone willing to go that far really must be desperate enough. He studied the young queen’s face for a moment longer; wondering yet again, why he had made the decision to let her stay. She was a strange one all right. Almost as strange yet fascinating as her older brother Rhaegar.

“Fine,” he grumbled and shuffled out of the room, while tightening the sash of his silk robes as he led the way to his office. “But if anything should happen, I do not take responsibility. You are on your own, your Grace. Understand?”

I’ve always been on my own, Dany had thought even as she boarded the plane about an hour later with Grey Worm and three of her trusted Unsullied – Stalwart Shield, Hero, and Brave Heart. With a quick wave to a concerned Missandei, who had watched their departure from the runway, Dany sank into plush leather seats etched with the familiar sun and spear sigil of the Martell family.

She closed her eyes and tried to control the pounding of her heart; wondering what she would say to Jon when they did meet again. So yes, she could have sent him a text or called, and all logical thinking (or Tyrion) would have suggested she do just that. However, a selfish part of her just wanted an excuse to be in his presence again. She had lost count of how many times she had read and re-read his text message, and each time only did more to convince her she was doing the right thing.

I just wanted to give my condolences on the loss of your uncle, she recited in her head. It was a terrible way to go, and…I’m leaving three of my Unsullied with you as bodyguards. Don’t worry
about them being invasive. You’ll hardly know they’re around, but I’ll feel much better knowing you’re protected. I mean…this is sort of my fault, but yours mostly…I mean you shouldn’t have come after me in the first place, but then again, I shouldn’t have encouraged you and...

“And I’m being stupid,” she whispered with a fierce shake of her head. The black bob wig and dark sunglasses made her unrecognizable, but considering they were going to be in King’s Landing in less than an hour, her early morning visit shouldn’t attract that much attention.

She hoped.

“The coast seems clear,” Grey Worm announced as their rented car slowly pulled up to the familiar apartment complex.

It was hard to believe she had lived here over a month ago, and she couldn’t help feeling a slight pang of nostalgia. Pity she hadn’t been allowed to fully enjoy the amenities of a rather nice facility. So, used to back doors and fire escapes, she gazed at the inviting entrance with a wistful expression. Maybe there would come a day when she wouldn’t have to hide so much from the rest of the world.

“Do you want us to wait here for you?” Grey Worm asked as they approached the back of the building. The rain was finally letting up, though the wet and relatively quiet streets gave off a rather gloomy ambience.

Dany took a deep breath and nodded. “I’ll call you when it’s -”

“Jurnegon!” came the hushed whisper from Stalwart Shield. He was pointing upwards. “Harpies.”

Dany felt her blood run cold at the name; widening violet eyes staring at the unmistakable shadows of her nemesis darting up the steps with an agility that never failed to fill her with dread. A quick mental calculation proved they were heading to Jon’s apartment – after all she had used the same route in her escape once.

Shit!

Her soldiers stiffened in readiness for attack, while Grey Worm cocked his gun; a stern frown on his features. “We take them out now, your Grace?”

Dany shook her head. “No guns. We don’t want to attract any attention. I’ll go. Cover me.”

Grey Worm looked like he was going to protest, but she was already stepping out of the car. She motioned to one of the men in the backseat with the command. “Your ski mask and dagger.”

Donning the extra protection and tucking the weapon in the waistband of her jeans, she sprinted after the shadows; her breath a harsh sound that almost drowned the thundering of her heart.

Please don’t be too late, she prayed fervently. She could vaguely hear Grey Worm behind her, but all she could think of and pray was that Jon would be awake enough to protect himself. If he was fast asleep and they killed him that way -

Don’t think about that, Daenerys. Do not…!

She heard the commotion long before she stepped on the landing, and though her heart leapt with hope – as the noise meant he was fighting back – her guard was still up; for it was easy to witness a completely different scenario.

Do not think when you kill, Drogo’s voice suddenly filled her head as she climbed through the
window and surveyed the scene with a critical eye; all her senses heightened in awareness. *Your mind must be clear. Second guessing yourself in this moment is not an option.*

She moved then; her blade slicing through flesh and muscle in one swift motion.

Thank goodness for her many ‘lessons’ with the Dothraki.

She would only have a moment to study Jon’s current state, and what she saw almost made her resolve falter. He was still breathing but covered in too much blood. However, there was another Harpy dead, so he must have been responsible for that killing.

*You’ll make a good assassin yet,* she thought with reluctant admiration as the noise from the living room forced her attention away. Dashing into the room, it was to witness two of the Harpies engaged in a fight with a stocky young man that looked oddly familiar. Though he appeared to be bleeding in several places, he was holding his own as best he could. However, this was no time to stand around admiring his fighting skills, the quicker they got things over and done with, the better. She and Grey Worm moved in unison to take them down.

Assuming they were also his attackers, the man spun around in ready confrontation. It gave Dany an opportunity to take a good look at him. Now she remembered that face. He was in those pictures Robb Stark had taken at the night club, so he wasn’t an enemy. All the same –

“Who are you?” Gendry was asking with widened eyes frantic with fear and anger. His fists were still raised as he looked to both Grey Worm and Dany. “What the hell are…urgh!”

He crumpled to the floor at the sudden blow to the back of his head. He hadn’t even seen Grey Worm move.

“We kill him?”

“No. He is no threat to us,” Dany replied as she ran back into the bedroom. Her main concern was there and with the pallor of his features and the blood loss, she felt her heart sink.

*Oh, dear gods.*

“Hang in there, Jon,” she urged as she took off the mask and grabbed any nearby piece of clothing to control the bleeding. “Please hang in there. Don’t you dare die on me, you annoying piece of shit.” She turned to Grey Worm who was hovering at the doorway. “Get the car around to the front! We have to get him out of here!”

Grey Worm was already on his phone giving instructions to the others. Soon they had Jon wrapped in his blankets, and with Hero keeping guard at the front door, Stalwart and Brave Heart carried him down the elevators and into the waiting car. They were lucky enough not to alert any of the tenants, though there was a lone janitor scrubbing the lobby floors, who openly gawked at the sight the group made. He would no doubt have a story to tell later.

“To the airport?” Hero asked as he got behind the wheel.

Dany was torn.

Jon’s head lay on her lap, his lips muttering incomprehensible words. His pallid features were now alarming, and the blanket was already getting soaked with his blood. It would take them another hour to get back to Dorne, and she couldn’t risk him bleeding out without seeing a doctor.

“To Syros,” she whispered with a nod to Grey Worm to contact their underground ally. She brushed
away the sweat-slicked curls from Jon’s forehead with tenderness, and he seemed to respond to her touch for his head turned in her direction though his eyes remained closed. He might have whispered her name, but she didn’t care. His skin felt clammy, and that sinking sensation in the pit of her stomach worsened.

*You can’t die here...not yet,* she prayed for the first time in seemingly forever. *So please...live...if just for one more day, Jon Snow. You must live.*

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“Syros found us a doctor who worked for the underground,” Dany finished quietly. “He was able to keep Jon stabilized enough to bring him here.”

She was now leaning against the railing, absently watching the children frolicking in the pools. How free and joyful they were. She wished she could bottle up their happiness and take a dose of that every morning. She turned to Tyrion then, her hands burrowing into the pockets of the sweatshirt, whose owner now lay in one of the many rooms in the Martell estate.

“So? Are you going to admonish me?” she asked her Hand with a small smile. “Do I get a scolding?”

Tyrion sighed and shook his head. “Not today, Your Grace. What you did was indeed rash, but necessary and quite understandable. However, have you considered his reaction when he wakes up? I doubt he’ll like the idea he’s in a foreign place. He’s got quite a responsibility in King’s Landing, and I’m sure his friends or allies will be hunting for him.”

“As well as his enemies,” Dany argued with a shrug. “All the same, I don’t intend to keep him here. Once my Unsullied have taken out the rest of the Harpies, he can leave.”

“And you think that will solve the problem?” Tyrion asked with a raised brow. “You forget that Robert Baratheon and the Dothraki have him in their sights as well. I also doubt the Sons are responsible for Benjen’s butchering. That definitely looks like the handiwork of your ex-husband’s goons.”

Dany’s lips thinned with irritation. She turned away. “I will deal with Drogo when the time comes. For now, we eliminate the Harpies. I think it’s about time I had a little talk with those asshole masters in Meereen.”

A knock on the door had them looking toward it in unison. It was Missandei, and she had a rather sheepish expression on her features.

“I’m sorry to bother you,” she began with a light bow, “but...he’s awake.”

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Jon blinked slowly back to consciousness.

He found himself staring at what appeared to be a golden roof, but as he turned his head to the side, he had to do a double take at what was before him.
He doesn’t remember King’s Landing having palm trees outside his windows. In fact, he wasn’t exactly sure why his windows looked different. He was staring at ornate glass doors that were opened to a pleasant view of foliage worthy of an exotic location. He could smell the sea, but unlike the slightly putrid stench of King’s Landing’s bay, this smelled…cleaner…fresher…much different.

*I’m dreaming…probably.*

He raised an arm to cover his eyes, but promptly winced as his abdominal muscles protested the movement. It forced him to look down, and aside from the silk and intricately-designed sheets covering him, his torso was completely wrapped in thick white bandages. He stared dumbly at them and desperately tried to wrack his memory to recall how and why he was in such a state.

*I was drinking on the roof that night…and then…then what?*

He groaned and held his aching head in his hand; his brows furrowed in thought. His mind was a jumbled mish-mash of images, and as he squeezed his eyes shut and struggled to form a cohesive story; he found himself dealing with random flashes of masked men and a wicked-looking dagger and then –

*(those eyes…she was there!)*

His lashes flew open at that memory; his pulse quickening as he darted frantic eyes around the room. He hadn’t imagined that whole thing, had he? Dany had shown up to rescue his almost dead-ass from those fucking Harpies, hadn’t she?

So, where the hell was he?

He surveyed the bedroom with mingled emotions of awe and confusion. For one thing, this was definitely not his apartment. This looked like something out of the pages of boring history books with their fancy furniture that hardly looked comfortable. Yet the canopy bed with its jeweled silks and elegant carvings of naked women and men wrapped around each other spoke of fine craftsmanship. The bed itself was so comfortable, Jon – on any other day – might have never wanted to get off it, but he was too concerned about his whereabouts, and he didn’t think remaining in it for a moment longer was conducive.

He flung the covers aside and swung his legs over, but nearly cried out in agony at the fast motion. He clutched his stomach and sucked in a harsh breath. It didn’t help that the world spun for a moment and he had to steady himself against one of the posts, so he didn’t fall flat on his face.

Goddamn stabbing bastards, he thought with a groan as he closed his eyes and counted to ten while waiting for the wave of vertigo to pass. At least he had killed one of them, though he had to be concerned that his murder count was rising rather rapidly.

Guess that’s what to expect when you find yourself dealing with Targaryens.

Gods, but she had moved like lightning that night. Not only was she good with a gun, but she could wield a dagger too. Impressive to say the least.

When he was sure the world had stopped spinning, he rose slowly to his feet, still holding onto the post for leverage. He noticed he was wearing odd-looking black pants with a gold sash. They were comfortable if a little too big for him, but as he took one shaky step after another, his destination was the veranda where he was sure he could hear children laughing outside.

*Or am I high on pain killers?* He mused with bemusement. Not that they were working anyway with how shitty he still felt.
Once outside, he blinked to get used to the brightness of the day, and though there was a cool breeze, the temperature was much warmer than King’s Landing. He tottered toward the railing and gripped it for dear life before looking down. Sure enough, there were children there; mostly dark-skinned and splashing each other in large pools with miniature waterfalls. There was something rather anomalous about the sight; considering the closest King’s Landing had to a public pool was an old castle with barely running baths. This place looked like paradise, and as Jon closed his eyes and inhaled the fresh air with a hunger he was not aware he craved, his stomach chose that moment to growl. It was a reminder he had not eaten since…

*How long have I been out?*

“Oh. You’re awake.”

He spun around at the sound of the new voice, almost losing his footing in the process. For a second, his mind could not register Missandei staring back, for her comical expression of surprise would have had him bursting into laughter. She was holding a basin and dressed in a pretty lilac and gold gown that shimmered as she walked. Behind her was another woman, dressed in similar fashion. She, too, looked as if she had seen a ghost. She was holding onto medical supplies – more bandages and ointments, and it was clear they had come to take care of his wounds.

“Morning, ladies,” Jon finally croaked in a voice that sounded huskier than usual. He cleared his throat. “Anyone care to tell me where the fuck I am?”

Missandei appeared to struggle within herself for a moment before managing a small smile. “You are at Water Gardens…in Sunspear.” When Jon still looked confused, Missandei added in a wary voice. “…in Dorne.”

_Dorne_. Jon’s brows furrowed. _Dorne_. _Dorne_… _Dorne_?! Wasn’t Dorne further south of King’s Landing? Wasn’t it at the fucking end of Westeros? What the hell was in doing in _Dorne_?

“How…?” he began, but Missandei was already walking quickly toward him.

“Let’s attend to your wounds first,” she insisted before he could continue. “I’ll answer all your questions later.”

He opened his mouth to protest, but when his stomach gave another embarrassing growl, the second woman smiled and bowed. “I’ll prepare some breakfast for you, sir. You must be starving.”

She fled the room, leaving Jon and Missandei alone. As she helped him back to the bed, his damn traitorous body (and mind) reluctantly raced back to the night she had pleasured him. It didn’t help that the gown she was wearing had a rather appealing décolleté, and she must have realized the effect she was having, for a small knowing smile came to her lips as he averted his eyes and struggled to control the color creeping up his neck.

“Drink this first,” she urged as she placed a small blue vial in his hand.

“What is this? More drugs?”

She rolled her eyes. “Yes, but not that kind. This is milk of poppy, and it should help ease the pain. Now drink and stop being such a little bitch.”

Ah, there was the Missandei he had thought missing beneath the veneer of politeness. He smirked and did as told; allowing the slightly bitter liquid to coat his tongue. The effect was almost immediate, for the pain was now a dull throb that was barely perceptible.
“…so how long have I been here?” he asked as she first attended to the cut above his right eye.

“Two days. Drifting in and out of consciousness.”

*Two whole days? Seven hells!* Did anyone in King’s Landing know he was missing? How was Davos doing? Had he tried calling?

“So?” he prodded when she fell silent again. “You want to tell me how I got here?”

“Magic.”

“Missandei,” he growled in warning.

She chuckled and motioned for him to raise his arms, which he did with no protest. “You were saved by our Queen. What else do you need to know?”

“I figured as much, but why the hell did she bring me to Dorne?” He looked outside as if to really make sure he wasn’t hallucinating the whole thing.

“For your safety,” Missandei replied.

She was on the last few layers, and Jon couldn’t help making a face at the pungent stench of his wound. It wasn’t infected, at least it didn’t look that way, but it was an ugly shade of red and yellow – with some drainage the gauze padding had done their best to control. The skin was puckered to highlight just how deep the dagger had gone. Compared to his other two scars, this one might end up being the worst. Shit. He was slowly turning into a human pin cushion.

“My safety,” Jon replied with a snort of derision. “Right.”

Missandei remained silent. It was as if she could sense Jon’s growing displeasure, and the last thing she wanted to do was fuel his wrath. She wiped his wound carefully.

“There might be more of them there,” Jon insisted. “What makes her think keeping me here is going to help anything? If I go back, there’s bound to be more of those fuckers showing up at my door.” He paused. His eyes widening as the realization hit. “She doesn’t plan to keep me here permanently, does she?”

“I do not know what my Queen plans to do,” came the quiet response. “Perhaps it’s best you speak to her.”

“Oh, you bet I will,” Jon stated with a firm intent that sent shivers down Missandei’s spine. He wasn’t sure what Dany had really don’t to incur his anger, after all…

“What did you say?” Jon asked at her muttered words.

Missandei bit her lower lip, before sighing. “I realize you’re upset, Jon, but this has not been easy for her either.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Missandei tossed the soiled bandages into the wastebasket and began opening the new packs. Her features were creased in thought as she spoke. “You must understand that Dany is…well, after all she’s been through, it’s sometimes hard for her to really express herself. To others she might come across as cold and calculating…but she’s got a good heart. She is kind and caring.” She looked up to stare directly at Jon as if hoping her words would sink in. “She rarely cries, but on that night…when
she came back here with you, I heard her weeping at your bedside. She refuses to believe in gods, but I think I heard her pray for the first time in her life. She needed you to live.”

She slapped the gauze filled with salve onto his wound; ignoring the look of disbelief – and something else she couldn’t quite fathom – fill his eyes then. She unrolled more of the bandages and began to wrap them around him.

“She took care of your dressings; changing them often. She would not leave your side except to have meetings with her council. She even slept on that chair.” She pointed toward an uncomfortable-looking recliner pushed toward the side of the bed. “Wearing that damn sweatshirt of yours.”

Jon felt his heart skip a beat and he lowered his gaze in embarrassed amazement. She had really done all of that…for him? Why? It didn’t make any sense. For someone who seemed adamant to get rid of him, she was acting like…

“It’s her sense of justice,” Missandei interrupted his tumultuous thoughts. “She hates to see people suffer on her account, so she will do all she can to make things right.”

Oh…well that explained that, Jon deduced with a feeling of deflation. If he had thought or even entertained for one moment that she might have developed those kinds of feelings for him…

Dream on, Jon Snow. Don’t forget that people like Daenerys Targaryen are way out of your fucking league. Don’t forget she’s not really into guys either.

He shook his head a little as if to completely clear away his disappointment and errant thoughts. However, any other question he might have asked was stopped with another knock on the door and the maiden returning with a tray of what smelled like heaven. Talk about a meal fit for a king. Jon could swear bacon and eggs with a side of sausages and buttered toast, had never tasted this good. He nearly got drunk on the milk; marveling at how rich and sweet it tasted. The maiden swore it was fresh from their farms, and Jon could believe it.

An hour later, he felt like a new man – so to speak. Two other lovely maidens had given him a quick bed bath (much to his embarrassment), though they didn’t seem to mind their task. His hair was brushed into some semblance of normalcy and his beard trimmed to make him more presentable. Sweet-smelling flaxseed oils – a staple for the Dornish apparently – were rubbed on his skin in what one could only consider the most sensual full-body massage he had ever received. How he had managed to control himself throughout the act was a miracle. He had never thought harder about naked old women in his life. For clothing, he was presented with black silk pants and a white cotton shirt with billowing sleeves. It reminded him of the clothing nobility wore back in the day, but it was lightweight and comfortable; a fitting attire for the kind of weather down here. He wasn’t too fond of the way it revealed the top of his chest, especially when he moved, but it was a small price to pay for being treated like goddamn royalty.

But then again, considering he was in an actual palace, why did he expect anything different?

He marveled at the Dornish architecture and interior décor as he was led to the courtyards by one of the maidens and two intimidating guards. Their uniform hadn’t changed much from the old days, for their heads and faces (except for their eyes) were covered with a white scarf to protect them from the elements. They carried bronze spears and shields; though Jon failed to see their usefulness today. He figured they were more ceremonial than anything.

“You wait here,” the maiden said with a warm smile when they arrived in what appeared to be a sun room.
Shaped like a rotunda, complete with a glass domed ceiling that seemed way too high but with a breathtaking view of a cloudless blue sky, hanging vines and exotic plants of all shapes, colors and sizes adorned the glass walls. There were intimate benches and tables where one could either eat or read or simply gaze at the gorgeous sea outside the set of opened glass doors. He stepped through them and onto a patio with a great view of elegant water fountains surrounded by well-tended gardens below him. The grass was so lush and green it looked surreal. On either side of the patio, were two winding flight of stone steps leading to the gardens, and Jon might have continued his exploration of the grounds, when his breath caught at the sight of her.

Dany.

She was dancing. No, not dancing, though with the way her body swayed in effortless rhythm, it was easy to see how one could mistake it as such. She held something slender – like a spear – in her hands; twirling it every now and then while allowing her body to spin around and within the weapon as if they were one. Her hair was a silver stream of light kissed by the sun as she moved; gossamer tendrils floating in the wind as she spun on her heels with the grace of a seasoned ballerina. He could almost picture her in the silk gown Missandei had worn, but she wasn’t in anything that frilly. Instead, black skin-tight leather pants hugged her legs and hips like a second skin, and like his shirt, hers was just as white and comfortable, though high enough not to reveal her breasts. Her feet were bare (like in his dream), and it seemed to help her move faster, for the spear was now a blur in her hand as she twirled it above her head.

She hadn’t noticed him yet, but the thought of calling out her name died with a whimper in his throat. He could only grip the weathered stone railing and bite his lower lip; all the words he had promised he’d say once he was in her presence fading into oblivion.

At that moment, the sun chose to cloak her with its golden rays, and Jon could swear he was almost blinded by the sight.

Wow.

How unfair it all seemed; for one to be so close yet so out of reach.

“Breathtaking, isn’t she?” came the sudden husky whisper in his ear that nearly had him jumping in the air. He tried to turn to see his companion, but a strong arm was placed across his shoulders and he was pulled closer to a much taller, stronger, and handsome bronze-skinned man whose gaze was trained on Dany as well.

“You should see her in combat,” he continued as if not aware of the puzzled younger man beside him. “Though her footwork is a little…how we say…shoddy, she is still a capable warrior.”

Jon raised a brow and would have tried to dislodge himself from the proximity of this man who smelled like opium and aftershave (the strongest kind), when that task was mercifully done for him.

The newcomer pulled away and grinned; revealing perfect white teeth. “How silly of me not to introduce myself. Prince Oberyn Martell at your service. And you must be Jon Snow of Winterfell.”

“How silly of me not to introduce myself. Prince Oberyn Martell at your service. And you must be Jon Snow of Winterfell.”

“Hello,” Jon replied warily as he accepted the firm handshake. Prince Oberyn, huh? He had heard rumors of the playboy prince from the South who was prone to sleeping around with anything that moved, and with the way Oberyn was currently studying him like a prized cow, Jon could feel the heat of embarrassment creeping up his spine.

“Stop harassing our guest, darling,” came the sultry croon from behind them. “You must forgive my husband. He can be quite crass sometimes.”
Jon turned to notice the beautiful olive-skinned woman approaching with two younger women who looked just like her, though hardly dressed like their mother (one would assume). While they favored more masculine clothing – like the one Dany was wearing – their mother was more comfortable in what could only be considered as next-to-nothing. The gold gown was very low cut and had slits on either side to reveal her long legs as she walked.

She stopped before Jon and held out a bejeweled hand, which he politely accepted and kissed in greeting. When he looked up, it was to see the same appraisal in her arresting hazel eyes; as if she was sizing him up for something. She must have liked what she saw, for she licked her lips slowly and seemed to share a look with her husband.

“The north does tend to produce some really good men,” she said aloud with a warm smile. “They tell us you are from Winterfell. That’s a long way from here, isn’t it?”

Jon couldn’t agree more, and might have made a wiseass remark to that when she continued with a wave of the girls to come closer. “I am Ellaria Sand, and these are my daughters – Nymeria and Dorea – they are about your age and quite good fighters.”

“Mother,” Nymeria groaned as if realizing just what Ellaria was trying to do. She rolled her eyes and folded her arms across her chest while glaring at Jon. “Don’t listen to what she says. I am not interested.”

Neither am I, Jon would have loved to say, but was interrupted by the sight of Tyrion and a distinguished man, in a wheelchair, with features just like Oberyn, if only slightly older. He couldn’t help smiling a little when Tyrion clapped his hands and broke into a welcoming grin.

“We meet again, Jon Snow,” he said as he reached out to shake Jon’s hand. “It seems we tend to meet in the oddest of places. I trust the Martells have already introduced themselves. They have been our most gracious hosts.”

“Thanks for your…help,” Jon managed, not sure if to bow to the frowning man still watching him with a critical eye. “Sir.”

“That’s Prince Doran,” Tyrion introduced. “He’s the head of the household and tries his best to keep everyone in order.”

“To no avail,” Oberyn teased with a loud laugh. He walked toward the railing and waved his hands. “Oh, Your Grace! The gang’s all here, so you might want to stop practicing for a minute or two. Not that it would help. I’d still beat you any day any time.”

Perhaps he shouldn’t have said that, for the next thing Jon knew, the spear was hurling through the air and heading right for Oberyn’s head. However, the man proved to be just as agile, for he ducked just barely – and caught the weapon; his grin not faltering.

“Phew. One of these days, she’s going to take off my head in my sleep,” he whistled in awe as she jogged up the steps to them.

She still hadn’t noticed Jon as she accepted a towel from a passing servant, but as she wiped her face - with a small smile directed toward Oberyn - her movements and smile faltered as she met familiar brown eyes filled with a warmth she thought she would never see again.

She blushed.

She knew she was blushing for that damned heat wouldn’t stop suffusing her cheeks, and she was slightly grateful that others might assume it was just from the exertion of her workout. It was the
reason why her pulse was quickening, and not because of the slight upturn of his lips in what could pass for a smile. She had tried to convince herself that she would be ready for this moment; that even with Missandei’s announcement that he was finally awake, she would be ready to confront him. Yet, here she was trying hard not to resort to the excitable teenage girl she had been at the sight of his text message.

She was a queen. She had to hold herself to a standard especially in front of these people, who were probably now waiting for her next move.

“It’s good to see you up and about Jon Snow,” she finally said in a voice that was surprisingly steady. “How do you feel?”

Jon looked down at himself and gave a wry smile. “Still standing…thanks to you, I guess.”

Their eyes met and held again, and this time Dany was sure breathing was becoming a little more difficult. She could not read his expression, but it felt as if he was stripping her down to the core in the hopes of finding something she had longed locked away. She had vowed never to give anyone that access ever again, and she wasn’t about to cave into that temptation anytime soon.

“Then it’s settled,” Oberyn declared with a wave of his hands. “The celebration of life is an excuse to have a celebration of any kind-”

“We are not having a goddamn orgy,” Doran snapped impatiently. “Especially not this weekend-”

“I’m not talking about an orgy, dear brother, as tempting as that is,” Oberyn insisted with a playful wink in Jon’s direction. “I say we throw a party for our good friend here, Jon Snow, and for the Queen. We never did throw a proper welcome party for you, did we?”

“You really don’t have to,” Dany began quickly, but Ellaria was clapping her hands in delight and already making plans. “A party! Just what we need to lighten the mood around here. It’s all been doom and gloom lately, so I’m all for it. Nymeria darling, what say you and I go get those invitations out there and Dorea, you are my party planner extraordinaire. I say we go with a masquerade ball theme…what do you think?”

She grabbed her daughters’ hands and continued chattering away as they went into the palace, leaving the others staring after them in disbelief. Oberyn was unconcerned. He lit up a sweet-smelling cigarette and noticed Jon staring at it with longing. “Want one, my boy? Try it. Only the finest blend in all of Dorne.”

“This is ridiculous,” Dany was saying as she stared at Tyrion aghast. “We can’t have a party. What’s to celebrate?”

“Life,” Tyrion replied with a wistful smile. “And besides, you need to take a break, my dear. You’ve been under a lot of pressure. The same with you, Jon.”

Jon, who was trying not to cough up a lung as the powerful nicotine swam through his bloodstream, managed to look up with a frown. “What?”

“You’ve been under a lot of strain, and after the terrible events of the past few weeks, you need to relax for a bit. Besides, I’m sure you’ll want to let your friends in King’s Landing know you’re all right. However, when you do call,” Tyrion warned. “Please do not mention your location. Make use of the private phone we gave you. Remember it’s untraceable.”

Jon nodded in understanding. From the corner of his eye, he watched Dany plop into one of the many wrought iron chairs with a rather cute pout. The sudden image of him kissing it away had him
turning away with a muttered curse. He took another long drag of the cigarette and tried to adjust to the taste or perhaps smoke away fantasies that would never come true. He could barely hear what Oberyn was rambling about now, though he did catch the tail end of what Tyrion was telling Dany.

“…sent the various locations possible Harpies are staying. Varys was definite about them.”

He was presenting a printout to Dany, who studied it with a frown.

“Five different bases, you say?” she asked.

“Yes, Your Grace.”

“And he’s absolutely sure about this. I’m not about to send my Unsullied into potential ambushes, Tyrion.”

“It’s a risk we’re going to have to take, but I have no doubt Grey Worm and his team will see to a successful raid. You wanted to flush them out, this is the way to do it. Varys and his little birds are quite meticulous.”

Dany took a deep breath. She seemed to study the printout a minute longer, before lifting her gaze to Jon. He couldn’t quite make out the expression in those violet eyes, but they seemed to study him for so long, he had to square his shoulders as if waiting for an admonishment he wasn’t sure he deserved.

“The Sons of the Harpy have five bases around King’s Landing,” she finally began quietly; still holding his gaze prisoner. “I plan to send my Unsullied to those bases to take them all out. Do you think it’s a good idea?”

Jon felt something hard slam in his chest at the sudden question. Was she asking for his advice? He could feel Tyrion, Oberyn, and Doran’s eyes on him, and if Jon had felt a weight of responsibility at taking over his uncle’s business, it was nothing compared to the sudden realization that this woman – this potentially most-powerful woman in the world – was asking for his measly advice.

Seven hells.

As if to remind him of exactly what those Harpies were, his abdominal muscles contracted with pain, the milk of the poppy’s effects finally wearing off. He gritted his teeth and took a shuddering breath, and not breaking eye contact with her, he replied carefully.

“To be honest, it’s not going to be easy. I can’t say I know King’s Landing that well, but if this Varys person is reliable enough, then we go in and take those assholes out.” He was unaware of his hand forming a tight fist as he continued. “They tried to kill me, and I’m sure they had something to do with my uncle’s death. Better you than me to finish the job.”

Something flickered within her eyes, and Jon didn’t dare to hope it was admiration. She gave a curt nod and turned to Tyrion – allowing Jon the opportunity to breathe again. “Give the order, my Lord.”

Tyrion, who had listened and watched this exchange with interest – and a reluctant pang of worry – gave a polite nod and excused himself with the promise to return with any news from Grey Worm and his team.

Doran excused himself as well, claiming he had some unfinished business with some of his small council members, leaving Dany, Jon, and Oberyn alone.
“You must forgive my older brother,” Oberyn explained with a smile. “He can be churlish, but he’s got a good heart. Considering the history with your fam…” He stopped himself and cleared his throat. “Well! I’ll leave you two lovebirds alone to catch up on old times and all that.” He failed to notice the duo’s features flood with color at the wrong insinuation.

“I can definitely see why you’d want to go all the way back to King’s Landing just to rescue him.” He winked and waved a hand over his head as he made his way into the palace. “Don’t hesitate to join us in an orgy someday, my dears. You will both make wonderful partners.”

The silence left after his departure was so awkward, thanks to Oberyn’s erroneous implications, Jon could barely look past his shoes. Goddamn Oberyn Martell and his perverted nature.

“Dear gods,” Dany groaned. “I do hope no one else assumes we’re a couple.”

Jon bristled at the dismissive tone; looking up sharply to see her studying her hands with interest. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

She shrugged. “I mean, I don’t want anyone assuming we are together. It could…make things weird.”

“Well?” Jon scoffed and waved his hand around him. “What’s weirder than me being miles from home in fucking Dorne, living in a house full of fucking perverts?”

“These fucking perverts are the rulers of Dorne! You will show them some respect.”

“Oh, I respect them as much as they deserve to be, but I’m still not sure why I’m here.”

“You’re here because you’re alive all thanks to me,” Dany snapped irritably and rose to her feet.

“You want an award or something?” Jon bit back. “Hey! Where are you going? We’re not done talking yet.”

She was storming down the steps and toward the garden where she was training earlier. Jon jogged after her; getting more pissed off by the second with her sudden 180 change in attitude.

“Don’t walk away from me, goddamn it,” Jon growled and reached out to grab her arm. She spun around then, her hand almost hitting his cheek, if he hadn’t ducked away in time.

However, from seemingly nowhere, four of her Unsullied surrounded them with threatening expressions on their faces. Jon got the message and released her slowly; arms raised to show he wasn’t going to harm their precious Queen.

“It’s okay,” Dany said in Valyrian to her bodyguards. “This is a private conversation. You may leave.”

They seemed to do so reluctantly, but eventually obeyed their orders with a warning last look at Jon who almost stared back in defiance.

Once they were alone again, Jon desperately wished for a cigarette to calm his frazzled nerves. He paced away from Dany and toward the edge of a faux cliff complete with jagged rocks and moss to mimic the real thing. The sea was a tranquil blanket below them; not that he cared about the aesthetics at this time.

He hated getting into arguments especially ones that weren’t necessary; and yet every time a part of him felt she was looking down on him, it rubbed him the wrong way.
“You are upset,” Dany finally said to break the tense silence. “And I understand, but I had no other choice. I could not leave you there to -”

“Thank you,” he interrupted with a heavy sigh that almost got lost with the slight gust of wind.

Dany stared at his back; blinking hard as if unsure of what she had heard.

“I don’t know what made you decide to come that night, but…if you hadn’t…I might not be here right now,” Jon continued quietly. He ran his fingers through his hair and squared his shoulders before turning back to face her. “So…thanks for saving me. You didn’t have to, but you did, and I owe you my life.”

His eyes were filled with an expression she did not want to acknowledge; it was an expression she refused to acknowledge.

_I am a queen. I am a queen. I am a queen, and queens do not… cannot…_

“You saved my life first, remember?” she said aloud with a small smile while hugging herself and taking a subconscious step back. She would have to control this pounding heart of hers; this silly restless heart that chose not to behave when it came to this northerner. “I was only repaying the favor.”

He raised a brow at that. “Oh yeah…that’s right. I did save your ass one time, didn’t I?”

She rolled her eyes and shook her head. “Let’s…let’s not try to make it a habit, okay?”

“I won’t if you won’t,” he replied with a slight frown. “I’m serious, Dany.”

_I am a queen. I am a queen. I am a queen, and queens do not…_

“I live a dangerous life, Jon Snow, haven’t you figured that out by now?” she said with a tremble in her voice. “To be with someone like me is to live everyday like it could be your last. I don’t wish that for anyone.”

_Especially not you._

“So, once you’re healed or at least after this stupid party they’re throwing for us is over, you will return to King’s Landing with some of my Unsullied as bodyguards. At least do me this one favor of accepting without argument.”

“Are they going to protect me forever?” Jon asked with irritation.

“Until I gain control of the Syndicate.”

“Right.”

“…you don’t think I’ll get there?” She frowned.

He threw up his hands in exasperation. “Is your whole life going to be defined by this goddamn Syndicate? Why do even want to be there in the first place? To me it’s nothing more than a pain in the ass for power-hungry assholes. You’re not like that! You’re better than that!”

“And that’s why I’m going to be there,” she snapped back. “To change the way things are done. I’m going to break the fucking wheel, Jon Snow, and remind everyone in Westeros what real leadership is like.”
“At what cost?” came the quiet, but firm question as he took a step closer to her. “How many lives have to be lost to claim that prize? My father was probably killed because of it. Uncle Benjen’s already taken a hit. I might have been next, and maybe…maybe one morning, I’ll wake up to see the headlines ‘Last Targaryen Butchered by Weird Men in Masks or Crazy Dothraki led by Robert Fucking Baratheon!’ Do you think that’s something else I want to deal with?”

What was wrong with him? Why was he so upset over this? She couldn’t understand. She took another trembling step backwards.

“I am of no concern to you,” she retorted with a shake of her head. “Once you’re gone from here, that’s it. Your role in all of this is over.”

“Like hell it is,” Jon replied and with one swift step, he had her trapped against one of the many decorative columns coated with hanging vines. She gasped at his proximity; her brows furrowing despite the widening of her eyes at his daring. However, she was powerless to stop her gaze from drifting to his lips, and she fought back a moan at how full and damn kissable they looked. Well, she had always thought they were that way, but being this close was –

_I am queen goddamn it._

“What do you think you’re doing?” she finally asked in a voice cold enough to have him frowning this time. He seemed to reconsider something before curving his lips in a small smile.

“It’s all right,” he replied; his husky northern drawl low in his throat as his heated gaze roamed over her with a hunger that made her shiver in awareness. “I know you’re not going to enjoy this, and it’s probably going to disgust you, but for curiosity’s sake…consider this a proper thank you for saving my life.”

“What are you talk…?”

Oh…my…

Whatever else she might have said was lost in the gentle pressure of his lips against hers. It wasn’t a demanding motion, but one of silent permission…of needing her final say-so before he could satisfy his so-called curiosity. She closed her eyes and struggled with the Dany that wished to shove him aside and kick him in the balls for being such a jerk, while the other Dany – the quieter, excited-to-see-his-text-message Dany – seemed to roar to the surface with a breathless sigh as her lips softly parted in welcome resignation.

Oh…my…

She had no idea why he’d think she would not like it, or be disgusted by it, but his low groan of desire, as his tongue met hers, was enough to send the butterflies fluttering in her stomach and her knees trembling with greedy anticipation. She slowly unhugged herself and reached for his shirt; clutching fistfuls of it as she leaned in to deepen the kiss.

He tasted like Dornish tobacco and sweet fruit wine; his tongue rough and demanding as his strong hands found and held onto her waist. They finally broke apart to catch their breaths, but just far enough for him to capture her lower lip before gasping into her mouth as she pressed against him.

“Fuck…” he panted as he pulled away completely to stare at her flushed visage. Confusion was a permanent mask on his features, though every fiber of his being begged to continue. Her swollen lips were wet with his kisses and almost pouting as if seeking his again. However, he had to clarify one thing, and with the way she was responding, he didn’t dare to hope that she might be into him…well
men after all.

“I thought,” he stuttered, his heart a jackhammer in his chest. “I mean…aren’t you…?”

She lifted her lashes; the world spinning a little as she tried to regain her focus. What? What was he saying? Why was he staring at her like that? Had she done something wrong?

Oh, dear gods.

Of course! Throwing herself at him like this must have cheapened her status, and he was now having second thoughts about everything. Humiliation, like a douse of ice, had her lowering her gaze to the ground.

How stupid could she be?

With an effort, she shoved him away; wincing as he grunted in pain with the force of her rejection. He clutched his still throbbing abdomen and blinked at her in bemusement.

“Why…Dany…?”

“That should not have happened,” she said curtly as she pushed herself away from the column and took a deep breath to compose herself. “I sincerely apologize for my actions.”

“No wait-”

“Trust me when I say, it will not happen again.”

She spun on her heels and made her way back to the palace; hugging herself again as an inexplicable chill settled into her bones. His flame had almost – just almost – attempted to thaw that piece of her today, but she had to remember the words she had imprinted into her mind to keep her sane amidst the lies and deceit of her reality.

I am the dragon queen, and my heart belongs to no man.

Translations:

Jurnegon! - Look!
The Tyene used in this chapter is based on the book version and not the show version. Well shoot, most of you most have figured this out already *lol* And thanks to those who take the time to leave their feedback! It’s very much appreciated! *bows gratefully*
P.S: Thanks to WriteVWrong for suggestions on my query from the last chapter! And now, enjoy! *runs off to work*

“You know what your problem is, Jon?”

“No…what?”

“You think too much.”

“Huh?”

Robb peeled out of his sweat-soaked football jersey and tossed it to the floor. His eyes were lit in amusement as he studied his sullen half-brother. There was really no reason to be that way, considering they won the game, but that was Jon for you. Smiling was a chore ninety percent of the time.
“You think too fucking much,” Robb repeated and playfully poked Jon’s forehead. “I mean, you’ve got the one of the hottest babes in school coming up to you and what do you do? You stand there like a fucking moron trying to figure out if she’s only messing around with you.”

Jon had the grace to flush at the memory. “Why shouldn’t I think that? She’s never spoken to me before and all of a sudden she wants to hang out? That’s…weird.”

Robb paused in the process of unzipping his pants and blinked in genuine surprise. He was sure Jon was kidding, but with the way his features were contorted in consternation, there was no doubt his kid brother was damn serious.

“Seven hells,” he muttered and shook his head. “You really need to lighten up, man. Feelings - especially the ones between a man and a woman - shouldn’t really be some deep, thought-provoking thing at this age. This is the time to live it up. Have fun! Enjoy it while you can.”

Jon pursed his lips; his fingers slowly unbuttoning his shirt as he mulled over that line of thinking. “I don’t know,” he finally mumbled, “I think if you really like a girl, you should-”

“Throw caution to the wind and enjoy every single moment with her,” Robb interrupted with a throw of his hands in the air. “No one is asking you to fall in love with her, but that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t love her all the same. Does that make sense?”

When Jon remained stubbornly silent, Robb sighed and sat beside his brother on the narrow bed. He wrapped an arm around Jon’s shoulder to stare intently into perplexed brown eyes.

“You’re a passionate guy, Jon. I know you are because I’ve seen how heated you become when it comes to fights and shit, and that’s great and all, but you’ve got to bring that same devil-may-care attitude to your love life. I’m not saying you have to become a male slut and sleep with anything that moves, but when you do manage to find a girl that shows even an inkling of interest in you - or you feel something in return - don’t sit around trying to question or dissect her every move. Just let it flow naturally, and if she turns out to be the one…then lucky you. If not, move on. Got it?”

Got it, Robb.

Except he had blown it again – and it couldn’t have come at the worst possible time.

Shit. Shit. Double shit!

He groaned and lowered his head between his raised knees; a cloud of smoke escaping his lips from the nearly finished cigarette. Before him the Summer Sea stretched into majestic oblivion; the fading sunlight casting picturesque hues of gold, amber, and sepia. Several children and their parents walked along the shore; their happy laughter almost mocking his melancholic mood. They were like miniature dolls from Jon’s vantage point; a jutting section of rugged cliffs about a mile from the Water Gardens palace. The wind was gustier up here, but he liked it that way. It was much cooler; and though it was nowhere near as cold as Winterfell, it was much better than the searing heat of midday.

He took another long drag and flopped onto the grass; his gaze trained at the expanse of sky above him and the flock of birds probably on their way to King’s Landing.
When you get there, Jon mused with a wry smile, make sure you tell Davos, Sam, and even Gendry that I’m still here…still in Dorne…trying to get better. It’s a great place actually, but I do miss them.

He did, at least, contact Davos who had been out of his mind with worry. According to him, the City Watch had just about made his apartment a crime scene, and Gendry – when he finally awakened – would only tell them that two mysterious people had shown up to save his life and that was all he remembered. Naturally, he had wanted to know where Jon was, but doing his best to appease the older man, all he had said was “I’ll be home soon. Just take care of things for me until I get there. I promise.” Thank the gods Davos was smart enough not to ask any further questions.

Jon tucked his hands beneath his head. Another set of seagulls went squawking into the clouds as if eager to hear the rest of Jon’s silent message.

Tell them I was saved by a beautiful Queen who just so happens to be a kickass fighter. Tell them I finally got a chance to be that close with her…hell, I’ll say it, I kissed her. I actually fucking kissed her…and guess what? She responded. She fucking responded! I wasn’t imagining things. I know I wasn’t. And how was it? Perfect. How did she taste? Like heaven…or I think that’s what heaven must taste like. I can’t really explain it. It felt so…sweet yet hot, you know? Like how summer wine tastes after you chill it for a while and then take the first sip. Only ten times better. And phew…you should have seen the way she moved against me…like she wanted to mold her body to mine…and…and it would have been so perfect. So fucking perfect…if I hadn’t opened my fucking mouth to ask the wrong thing.

(That should not have happened)

He winced at the memory of her cold words; of how they had doused him with the cruel reality that she was slipping away and nothing he could say was going to bring back that feeling of intimacy again.

That gnawing ache shot through his heart again and he squeezed his eyes shut; wishing – and not for the first time since that day – he could turn back the clock and do things all over again. This time, he would take Robb’s advice. He would throw caution to the fucking wind and kiss the living daylights out of her. He’d make her scream his name and never want to let go. He didn’t even care if she was lesbian or not. She had responded and that was all that mattered.

(Trust me when I say, it will not happen again)

Unfortunately, the finality of those words had done a number on him. It caused conflicting feelings of misery and anger at her dismissive attitude. Yet, a part of him was sure he had noticed dismay and maybe, just maybe, that same flash of pain he had once seen in his apartment. Missandei’s words about Dany putting up a front for everyone, and only revealing her true side in her quieter moments, caused his brows to furrow in thought.

So was it all another act then? Did she really mean for him never to make another move? Or was she just testing him?

Gods, if only women were less complicated.

Not that she had given him a chance to even explain himself since then. It’s been the longest two days of his life since that fateful kiss, and despite Jon’s attempts to talk to her in private, Dany almost always found ways to keep herself occupied (cooped up in her quarters) or stuck in the company of others (training with Oberyn or being in private meetings with Doran and Tyrion et al). She made it near impossible for them to ever be alone, and even with her polite greetings, Jon’s feelings of frustration grew.
In the midst of this, the plans for the party were in full effect. Tomorrow was the big night, and the palace was already decked out with flamboyant decorations which made it seem as if they were about to celebrate New Year’s Eve. Jon had never seen so many balloons and streamers in his life. Even Catelyn – who did tend to throw one or two parties back in Winterfell – had nothing on Ellaria Sand and her creative daughters. Speaking of which, one of the many daughters – Jon would soon come to know that most of them were bastard children like himself and were considered ‘Sand Snakes’ – had taken an interest in him.

Tyene Sand, who had only arrived the day before for the festivities – was the third of the eight girls and almost seven years older than Jon. She was a junior professor, teaching Pharmacology, in the same college Bran was attending in Oldtown. With her long blond hair and piercing cerulean eyes, her features reeked of an innocence that was rather charming. According to her baby sister, Dorea, many men were apparently lining up to claim her hand in marriage, though it appeared to Jon that Tyene had no interest in tying the knot anytime soon. It seemed to be a trait with the Martell women. They were much too independent and strong-willed.

They were introduced at dinner last night, and she took it upon herself to show Jon around the city since no one else had done so. Jon would have politely refused, but she insisted; her positive attitude almost contagious. She even sat next to Jon at the large dinner table, asking questions and wanting to know more about his family, especially Bran, while expanding on her studies and what she hoped for the future. She was apparently following in Oberyn’s footsteps. Who would have thought that old pervert was actually a wizard when it came to drug interactions and their usefulness? However, all of this would have been riveting conversation if Jon wasn’t too busy trying not to scowl at how much attention Dany was paying to Jorah and Prince Oberyn at her end of the table. They could have been miles apart for all their interaction throughout the dinner. There had been that damned polite “Good evening, Jon” and that was pretty much it.

It was with that mindset that he had agreed to the sightseeing tour with Tyene, and despite telling himself he wouldn’t enjoy it, it actually turned out to be quite fun. He learned that the Water Gardens was just a summer residence for the royal family, and they actually lived in Sunspear for most of the year. She showed him the local sites including a small museum, an art gallery, and one of her favorite record shops with some classic favorites rarely seen in King’s Landing or Winterfell. They had lunch at her favorite restaurant, though the food was not exactly to Jon’s taste. She appeared to be watching her weight and insisted on eating a lot of veggies while Jon poked at his plate wondering why it looked like he was about to consume something akin to octopi tentacles.

She was pleasant company all around, but he found himself - on more than one occasion - wishing she was someone else. Jon figured that was another fantasy that would never come true; for the image of he and Dany spending an entire day together…just doing normal couple things was too far-fetched. That feeling of longing was only intensified at their next stop.

They made a quick visit to the local zoo, where there was a popular exhibit of the largest komodo dragons Jon had ever seen. With the appearance of being giant lizards, they weren’t exactly the prettiest of reptiles. Still, there was something rather fascinating about them. Capable of growing as long as ten feet, they were ferocious beasts likely to even eat humans.

“Almost makes you wish we had real dragons, huh?” Tyene had said with a smile as she noticed Jon studying the creatures. “Some say they might even be descendants of the real thing. Why else would they be called dragons?”

Why indeed, he wondered as he rest his arms on the protective barrier to watch the cumbersome creatures lumber around their habitat. I’m sure she would have gotten a kick out of seeing them.
After all, the Targaryens did believe they were forged from the blood of those fantastical creatures.

A wistful smile came to his lips as he watched a green and bronze-tipped dragon try to burrow itself back amongst the rocks as if bored of being the object of curiosity. Another was cream with gold-tipped scales, and it seemed content to bask beneath the sun; hardly moving despite the activity around him. The biggest of them all, a black one with red tips on its scales, turned its head to study Jon and much to his surprise, it began to walk toward him; not stopping until its nose bumped against the wired barrier. Jon could almost reach in to touch it, but a sign clearly stated “DO NOT REACH FOR ANIMALS” and he wasn’t about to get his hand eaten.

“Hey, big guy,” he whispered so as not to get Tyene’s attention. “You’re a rare one, aren’t you? And you know who would have liked meeting you? No? Well her name’s Daenerys Targaryen…or Dany for short. She’s got a thing for dragons. Her family sigil and all that. I think she might like you.”

The creature merely blinked its reptilian eyes slowly as if understanding Jon’s rambling. It flicked out its long tongue before turning away to seek its brothers; perhaps to regale them about the strange human he had just met.

“Maybe someday I’ll take her to the zoo and introduce them to her…in my dreams,” Jon whispered to the darkening skies as dusk drew fast. The temperature had also dropped a little more, and it was now to his liking. He tossed away the finished cigarette and was about to reach into his pocket to pull out another, when light footsteps had him sitting up quickly.

“Figured I’d find you here,” Tyrion stated dryly as he marched up to Jon before coming to a stop beside him. “I usually come here to brood, but seems like you’ve beat me to the punch, Snow.”

“I wasn’t brooding,” Jon muttered, but Tyrion interrupted with a wave of his hand in dismissal.

“Considering you haven’t smiled much the past couple of days, and you still have a scowl on your face, I think it’s safe to say that you’ve definitely been doing your share of it for the both of us.” He sighed and stared out to the sea. His lips downturned as if seeing something he disliked.

“What are you morose about?” Jon asked with a raised brow. “Wasn’t the raid successful?”

He didn’t try to get into Dany’s affairs especially since he had all but told her wanting to be leader of the Syndicate was going to be impossible, but there was no way he wasn’t invested in this anyway. Grey Worm wasn’t back yet, so it was clear they were still stuck in King’s Landing.

“It’s going according to plan,” Tyrion replied with a slight nod. “Nothing to worry about. We will get rid of all of them. You can be rest assured.”

“Yeah,” Jon replied with sarcasm dripping in every word. “Then we all live happily ever after, right?”

“If you wish it,” Tyrion replied; ignoring the tone. “That’s all she ever wanted for you. For you not to be involved with this.”

“Too late for that now,” Jon retorted before sighing and shaking his head. “She just…I don’t understand her sometimes,” he finally blurted out in frustration. “One minute she acts like a complete and total bitch, the next she’s taking care of me like I’m some orphan kid she has to protect. Which is the real Daenerys Targaryen?”

“All of it…none of it…who knows?” came the cryptic response. “She’s an enigma…a wonderful, powerful enigma I’ve pledged my allegiance to. Best decision I ever made, I believe.”
“Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why did you pledge your allegiance to her? You’re a fucking Lannister. You’re supposed to be her enemy.”

“Hmm.”

“Your father, your brother, and your sister practically control the very government she’s hoping to take down, yet you’re on her side,” Jon stated with a raised brow. “It doesn’t make any sense.”

“Since when does the concept of family make any sense?” Tyrion asked with a sardonic smile. He finally turned to Jon; his green eyes penetrating in their stare. “Tell me, Jon Snow…you are considered a bastard, yes?”

Jon’s jaw clenched at the term he had long come to regard as an un-washable stain to his existence. Though he was glad most of the people in King’s Landing hadn’t made it a big deal, back in Winterfell, it was all anyone could focus on especially if they met him for the first time.

Here comes the bastard son of the honorable Lord Ned Stark – whose mother was probably some cheap whore. Hurrah.

“What’s that got to do with anything?” Jon asked more harshly than he intended, but it didn’t deter Tyrion.

“It’s a name you detest, isn’t it?” the dwarf acknowledged with a nod. “It’s a blemish on your existence and it clings to you whether you like it or not. You are hardly considered worthy of your father’s name, and many consider you a burden especially dear Catelyn Stark. She was never much of a mother to you, was she? How sad.”

“Enough of my wonderful childhood,” Jon replied through clenched teeth. “I asked what that’s got to do with you working for Dany.”

“Like you, Jon Snow, I too was considered a stain on my father’s quest for the perfect family.” He pointed to himself and then waved a hand from head to foot. “Look at me. A dwarf with features that would hardly make the pages of the fashion magazines. I was this grotesque and deformed creature who was the cause of my mother’s death. Father never forgave me for it. I should have died, not her, and I have no doubt he has said that curse a million times over in his dreams…oh wait, he’s actually said that to my face several times. So there you go.”

Jon winced and lowered his head. He could relate. How many times had he overhead Catelyn speaking to her closest friends about his demise; wishing he had died in the arms of whatever whore Ned had slept with that night.

“Knowing that,” Tyrion continued. “I did all I could to make something of myself; to show and prove to dear old Dad that I could be better than what he assumed I was. I was never going to be as tall, beautiful, and brave as my brother Jaime; who – believe it or not – was the only one who dared to show me any affection.” At this Tyrion seemed to get choked up, and his words stuttered.

“…you miss him, huh?” Jon asked quietly.

Tyrion said nothing to this; though his wistful expression said it all. “No matter. I made up for my deficiencies in other ways. I became a ferocious reader; soaking and absorbing any and all
information I could find. If I couldn’t become a member of the prestigious Kingsguards, then I could at least ‘fight’ in board rooms and council meetings to help him rule a successful government. Alas, even that wasn’t enough for dear old Dad.”

“What did he do?”

“What else?” Tyrion said with a bitter laugh. “Assigned me to meager operations around Westeros; giving me the unenviable job of closing down struggling small businesses, and giving desperate families the terrible news that their lives now belonged to the Lannisters. I ended up being one of the most hated men around. Many would see my car pull up the driveway and they’d have their shotguns ready to take me out.”

“Ouch.”

“Ouch indeed.”

“So…how did you end up with Dany?”

“Fate,” came the quiet reply. “One day, I simply had enough and bailed. You see, not only does my father hate my guts; my sister is no saint either. Gods knows how many times she’s tried to get me killed, and eventually she tried hiring the Faceless Men to complete the job. Thanks to Varys, I was able to escape and I ended up in Meereen…and the rest as they say is history.”

Jon had a feeling Tyrion was skipping over a lot of details, but with the moon now peeking over the horizon, he felt it better to get the general gist of their alliance.

“You doubt my allegiance to her,” Tyrion said with a small smile. “You still wonder if a part of me wishes to gain my father’s trust by betraying Daenerys. I won’t blame you for assuming as such. However, when you’ve come to know the Queen like I have through our many journeys…that thought is never going to come to fruition. She might be young and naïve in some ways, but she’s got a strength that I admire greatly. One has to remember she’s never really had a normal childhood. She had no siblings who could truly love her, like you did, not even parents who could shower her with the affection she deserved. She came from nothing, Jon Snow, and look at her now; just a few more steps to reclaiming what was wrongly taken from her family. I will help her get there, even if it costs me my life.”

He turned to Jon again, and this time, his expression was one of determination and almost defiance. “With Dany at the helm, I truly believe Westeros can become the great nation it once was. Right now, its people cry out for a real government that cares for them, not the ones filled with greedy politicians who only care about their pockets instead of their constituents. She has gathered a strong team around her, and slowly but surely we will weed out the rotten fruit and cleanse the Red Keep. With or without your help.”

At that, Jon’s eyes widened. It almost felt as if Tyrion was accusing him of something, and he wasn’t sure of what –

“She was quite hurt by your lack of faith in her abilities to rule,” Tyrion continued as if reading his thoughts. “She might not have mentioned your name, but when she asked me the other day, if I thought all she was doing was simply a waste of time…it was clear whatever you said must have gotten to her. She rarely tries to show her self-doubt, but you’ve planted those seeds again, Jon Snow. It’s something we cannot afford to have at this time.”

“I was just being honest,” Jon defended himself; though he could feel his heart clench at the image of Dany thinking she was a failure because of his blunt manner of speaking.
Goddamnit.

“She…” He swallowed and struggled to find the right words. “I just didn’t want her to get corrupted like the others. I just felt…I-”

“Your heart might have been in the right place, but your words did not sound that way,” Tyrion replied quietly. “So I guess you have to make it up to her soon. Speak to her…really speak to her, Jon. Get to know more about this Queen you can’t seem to understand as well as you’d like. You’d be surprised by what you find.”

He made a show of looking at his watch.

“And now if you’ll excuse me, I must return indoors.” He took a deep breath and stretched his arms above his head. “I’m glad we had this talk. I feel so much better now. Thank you, Jon.”

And with a pat on Jon’s knees, Tyrion spun on his heels and trotted back to the palace; leaving Jon staring out to the sea with a million and one thoughts racing through his mind.

“I can’t believe Ellaria talked you into wearing that gown, my Queen. It’s simply scandalous.”

Dany chuckled and arched her neck; her eyes closing as the rhythmic strokes of Missandei brushing her hair almost lulled her to sleep. Her body was still slightly sore from the intense workout with Oberyn earlier in the evening, but it was a necessary evil.

Sometimes, one had to channel their anger and frustration somewhere.

“Have you ever tried saying ‘no’ to that woman?” Dany asked. “It’s impossible. She somehow manages to twist her words around and before you know it, you just want her to shut up and you accept whatever bullshit she feeds you.”

She lifted her lashes to eye the flimsy shimmering Haute Couture gown hanging against the closet doors. Though it was long-sleeved and high-necked, its design left little to the imagination. Strategically crafted lace covered the chest and hip areas, and that was it. Everything else was a thin layer of iridescent see-through chiffon, which gave the illusion that she was nude or at least dipped in stars. Her back was also going to be exposed, and it would give everyone a good view of the tattoo on her lower back; as if to remind them of exactly who she was. It was sexy as hell, if she was going to be honest, and it had been a while since she’d worn anything that revealing. She looked forward to seeing their faces when she made her grand appearance –

*(especially his)*

…but with everyone planning to wear masquerade masks, maybe the effect wouldn’t be that dramatic.

Lucky her.

“I’m sorry Grey Worm won’t be there,” Dany said aloud with an apologetic look to her friend. “I’m sure you two would have made a lovely couple.”
Missandei gave a small smile and shrugged. “I should be used to it. It’s what I signed up for when I agreed to be his partner. We both know the risks, and I can only pray he returns to me safe and sound.”

“They were able to take two of the bases so far,” Dany tried to reassure her as she rose to her feet and tied the sash of her dressing robe. “Three more to go and the mission is over.”

“And I’m sure it’s going to be a success,” Missandei stated with a pump of her fist.  She followed Dany out to the veranda, and from their vantage point, they could see the palace staff putting the finishing touches to the gardens below.

“Wow…Ellaria really outdid herself, didn’t she?” Missandei whispered in awe as she wrapped her arms around Dany’s waist from behind and rest her chin on her shoulder. After the long hot bath and being soaked in some of Dorne’s finest fragrances, her hair was a thick fluffy silver mass that smelled great as Missandei inhaled greedily. “The palace looks so beautiful all around.”

When she got no response, she cocked her head to look at her friend; only to notice that something had caught Dany’s attention. Following her line of sight, Missandei could make out two people talking amongst the shadows of the many trees that lined the gardens. However, as they stepped into the light, and her bubbly laughter reached them, Dany’s visible stiffening was enough to tell Missandei the story.

It was Tyene – one of Ellaria’s daughters; the one who almost looked like Dany except for the different shade of her eyes – and Jon Snow. Tyene appeared to be tugging on Jon’s hand and leading him into the palace, and it was at that moment he choose to look up – perhaps sensing they were being watched.

Missandei, whose arms were still around Dany’s waist, almost found herself releasing Dany; as if afraid to incur Jon’s wrath at touching something that belonged to him. However, she chided herself for thinking in such a way. It wasn’t as if he and Dany had that sort of a relationship, though with the way he was now frowning a little, and Dany’s matching expression –

“I’m going to bed,” Dany suddenly announced as she spun on her heels to enter the bedroom. Missandei was smart enough to know that when her friend was in this ‘mood’, it was best not to ask questions.

She could only watch as Dany all but ripped off the robe and climbed into bed like a petulant child. She didn’t even reach for her favorite sweatshirt. Come to think of it, she hadn’t worn that thing in the last two days. Was it because the owner was actually in the palace and it was no longer needed? Or was there something else going on? Missandei assumed she and Jon would have had several conversations by now, but from all she had noticed, Dany appeared to be doing her best to avoid him, and when Missandei had tried engaging in small talk about something silly Jon had done or said during wound dressing changes, Dany would snip the topic in the bud; not wanting to hear anything about the northerner and his antics.

*When she cares too much, she pushes away,* Missandei deduced as she let herself out of the room. *Once bitten, twice shy.*

A sad thing really; for she had come to really like the brooding young man from the North, and would have wished for nothing more than her best friend to finally find someone who would treat her with the love and respect she truly deserved.
The entire day was a series of intimate tea parties with visiting (curious) nobles, culminating in the ultimate celebration that everyone was sure would be the talk of Dorne for years to come.

Given that all of this had been planned in a week or less, the Water Gardens had been transformed from a tranquil place of relaxation, to a dazzling extravaganza of colors, lights, and sounds. The usual silent grand hall and ballroom was now adorned with floating golden silk lanterns from Yi Ti amidst a gazillion rainbow-hued balloons that kissed the elegant ceiling or were kicked and tossed around by excited guests. Exotic flowers lined the hallways, accentuated by long gilded tables laden with enough food and drink to feed a small country.

There were whole roasted pigs, some still on spit fires, coated with thick gravy and potatoes. For fans of seafood, large platters of fresh salmon, tilapia, or catfish (considering Dorne was that close to the sea and it had a thriving fishing industry) along with garnished crabs, oysters, lobsters as big as cats, dipped in olive oil and sprinkled with fine herbs were there for the taking. The pastries were to die for. Freshly baked pies, cheesecakes, chocolate eclairs and coated strawberries in whipped cream were a sinful decadent alternative to the large baskets of juicy grapes, oranges, apples, peaches, figs and dates; many of which were shipped from across the Narrow Sea.

Live music blasted from every hall; bands from as far as Lys all performing for the myriad of guests dressed in their finest. Feathers and lace, jewels and silks all amongst colorful masks-ranging from the simple to the most elaborate - mingled amongst each other; everyone trying to out laugh the other over the cacophony of merriment. Jesters from Sunspear juggled and acted the fool for entertainment, while scantily-clad women from Pentos dangled from the ceiling as they spun and danced to their brand of music. Alcoholic beverages of every kind flowed freely; as waiters – dressed like harlequins – weaved in and out of the crowd with trays filled with crystal and gold glasses above their heads.

The driveway was a constant stream of expensive cars pulling up and doors opening to reveal the country’s finest nobility. Flashbulbs from cameras would go off with greedy intensity; many of the local media on hand to capture this moment for posterity. Journalists stuck their microphones or recorders in the faces of those who yearned for the attention. Though the most pressing question in everyone’s mind was this –

_Was THE Daenerys Targaryen really here?_

There was no doubt many of the guests had come simply for that reason. The stories of the ‘rebel’ across the sea who had managed to ‘conquer’ the major cities of Slavers Bay were almost legendary and impossible to comprehend. Many had thought all the Targaryens were defeated after the deadliest coup d’état in the country’s history, but if the rumors were to be believed…could this be another turning point for Westeros? Many could only dare to hope in secret.

“It’s going to be fine, my dear,” Ellaria was saying as she helped adjust Dany’s mask on her face. “You look absolutely gorgeous. I knew that dress was going to be perfect for you.”

She stepped back to eye the finished product and sighed in pleasure.

“Now you look like the queen you really are.”

Dany looked at her reflection in slight awe. She had no idea who was looking back at her, for this Dany had the appearance of someone not of this earth. The gown fit like a glove yet it was actually comfortable. As she walked, she could feel the breeze against her skin, and knowing that only a pair of nude-shaded panties stood between her and this flimsy excuse for a dress, made her feel incredibly
sexy, powerful, and confident. The exquisite white and gold mask hid most of her face except for her lips. The intricate design was of Dornish origin, and according to Ellaria, was to bring good luck and peace to whoever wore it. Large white and gold peacock features jutted from either side of the mask, and her hair was let down tonight, though two braids held it away from her face so the mask could fit.

Dany turned to Missandei as if asking for her silent approval, and Missandei – who looked just as beautiful in a silk aqua gown with gold trimmings – nodded and motioned for Dany to pose for a picture…and a few selfies which had the women giggling in delight at how ridiculous they were being.

“Pity you don’t have an Illustrogram page,” Missandei pouted as she took one more picture of her friend. “This would have gotten you a shit ton of followers, my Queen.”

Dany shrugged and reached for the light shawl, which she draped over her shoulders as Ellaria began to lead the way to the party. The Dornish Queen was also dressed to impress, for the black bodysuit – made of leather and lace – accentuated every curve of a killer body. An orange and red cape – highlighting the colors of her House – flowed over her shoulders and dragged along the floor as she walked. Black thigh-high boots with six-inch heels, and a matching black and gold mask, completed the dominatrix look. Needless to say, she turned a lot of heads as they came to the top of the winding staircase leading to the grand ballroom. However, she was glad for the audible gasps heard when she stepped aside to let Dany take the spotlight. Some men’s jaws literally dropped.

Mission accomplished.

Dany, for her part, suddenly felt her feet frozen in place as all eyes now gravitated toward her. She could barely feel Missandei’s gentle squeeze of her hand in reassurance, or Ellaria’s whispered words of “this is your time to shine, Your Grace,”.

She was not ready for this.

She could feel them all judging her; this foreign whore who had come to take over their country.

I don’t care, she vehemently thought as she struggled to take a deep breath and control the pounding of her heart. I don’t care what they think of me. I am the dragon queen, and I have come to –

Her thoughts were promptly distracted when she saw him.

This time her heart skipped a beat for a whole different reason.

It was strange how she was able to recognize him despite the crush of humanity and how he was dressed in similar fashion like most of the men in the room. He was in only a simple black tuxedo, which fit him quite well and made him look different…more assure…confident and dare she say regal. In a suit? It was almost laughable, yet with one hand in his pocket and his casual lean against the wall, he did give off those vibes, whether he meant to or not.

He is the son of nobility after all, was her errant thought. Why would it be strange to think he would act in that way whether he realizes it or not?

His mask was a simple black one, which still did nothing to hide the usual doe-like brown eyes still holding hers prisoner.

She wondered what he was thinking, while a part of her desperately prayed for him to look away so she could catch her goddamn breath. Unfortunately, the spell was broken when someone moved closer to him, and despite the green and gold mask, it wasn’t hard to mistake Tyene whispering
something into his ear to force his attention away.

That was enough to bring Dany to her senses.

She shook her head a little and closed her eyes to gather herself, before lifting her lashes again to pin a smile that felt too plastic.

*That’s right. It was my decision to keep him at bay. Besides...he’s found someone else to keep him entertained and –*

“My darling Queen Daenerys,” came the exuberant greeting as Oberyn walked up the steps to grab her hand. He placed a hard kiss on the back of it and bowed; looking dashing in an exquisite gold and purple robe adorned with glittering jewels. His matching mask sat upon his head like a hat. “You look absolutely ravishing, my dear. I would consider it an honor if I escorted you to meet the other guests. They’ve been dying to meet you.”

Hardly waiting for her response, he led Dany down the steps where the guests parted ways; many with looks of awe on their faces. Some even bowed or curtsied; something Dany found strange yet a bit exhilarating. In Meereen, the closest they had come to bowing was when the Great Masters had signed over the declaration of independence to their newly elected democratic leaders. One of her greatest achievements yet, but that was another story for another time.

“...and this is Lord Ryon Allyrion and Lady Delonne from House Allyrion,” Oberyn was saying.

“It is a pleasure to finally meet you, Your Grace,” the stocky man in a pink mask –which he took off quickly in respect to reveal earnest black eyes. “We, of House Allyrion, pledge our allegiance to your cause.”

“Thank you, Lord Ryon,” Dany replied politely.

Small talk would be unnecessary as the next nobleman was already being shepherded up to her.

“Lord Anders Yronwood,” Oberyn introduced with a strained smile. It was clear there was no love lost between the two men, and Dany could see why. Anders was as tall and broad as Oberyn; his features handsome yet stern. He bowed to Dany and kissed the back of her hand before looking deep into her eyes as if hoping to unsettle her.

“House Yronwood pledges its allegiance to you, Your Grace. We are one of the noblest of houses in Dorne, and we will fight for you should you need us.”

“I thank you, Lord Anders,” Dany replied, wishing he would let go already. He finally did when he noticed Prince Doran – looking resplendent in purple velvet robes with a matching mask pushed to the top of his head – approach. Tyrion, also dressed in a rich maroon velvet jerkin and leather pants, bowed to Dany with a grin.

“Looks like a lovely party, Your Grace,” he enthused as more guests lined up to salute their potential future queen. “Are you enjoying yourself so far?”

“Hardly,” Dany whispered beneath her breath as Missandei slipped a handkerchief for her to wipe her hands. “I’m losing count of all the people I’ve met already, and my feet hurt in these fucking heels.”

“Language, my Queen,” Tyrion chuckled. She noticed his voice was slightly slurred; a clear sign her Hand had more than enjoyed himself already. “You don’t want them to think you’re uncouth, do you?”
“Fuck what they think,” Dany replied with a hint of a smile.

She cast a surreptitious glance over the head of some other Lord being introduced to her; violet eyes desperately searching for him again. Her disappointment at his absence was a gut wrenching sensation that she detested feeling.

*Urgh. Why do I even bother?*

“Lord Edric Dayne of House Dayne,” came the introduction which had Dany staring into similar shaded eyes gawking back at her with interest. Edric was younger than she was, fifteen to be exact, with quite striking features. He bowed and kissed her hand in greeting, before asking innocently, “Are we related, Your Grace?”

Dany could feel her cheeks flush with heat at that; and she felt the burning sting of unshed tears forming. She wasn’t sure if it was the simplicity of the question, or the dawning realization that despite being surrounded by so many people, who all wanted a piece of her, she was still so very much alone.

She swallowed the lump threatening to form in her throat and replied in as light a voice as she could manage. “I guess we must be. It would be nice to have you as a little brother.”

Edric blushed at this and bowed again. “Then may I have the first dance with you, Your Grace? It would be an honor.”

This seemed to delight the guests as many clapped and cheered them on.

Edric stepped back and held out a hand – like the perfect gentleman. Smiling in response, Dany accepted the offer, aching feet forgotten as the guests parted to make room in the middle of the dance floor.

“You are most beautiful, Your Grace,” Edric stated as he placed an arm around her waist and began to lead the way. He was good at dancing too. “You shimmer like the stars falling from the heavens.”

Dany’s smile was more genuine at the compliments. “You should be a poet, my Lord. Your words are bound to have many women falling at your feet.”

Edric giggled as they spun around the dance floor. “Hardly. I prefer the company of books and my horse, Silver.”

“You ride?”

“Yes…I plan to participate in the next grand equestrian games. Hopefully, I can take the trophy. My uncle Arthur has the record for most titles won.”

“Arthur?”

“Arthur Dayne,” Edric replied with a big smile. “He was quite famous and unfortunately lost his life during -”

“If I may, Your Grace,” Jorah’s voice suddenly cut in as he bowed in greeting. “Forgive me for being so forward, but may I have the next dance please?”

By now, the other guests were on the dance floor as well, so it wasn’t that awkward of a request, still with a light pout, Edric gave way to Jorah with a promise to Dany that he would leave his personal information if she ever needed to call or email him.
“He seems like a good lad,” Jorah was saying as led the way. “He’s got a bright future.”

“He was saying something about his Uncle Arthur,” Dany said with a light frown. “You didn’t know him, did you?”

“Arthur Dayne was a brave man…gave his life for the country.”

“Oh…he was in the military then.”

Jorah seemed to reconsider his answer before simply nodding. “Indeed, Your Grace. But may I say how beautiful you look tonight,” he added as if hoping to change the subject.

Dany gave a wan smile and accepted his diversion. “Thank you, Jorah, and who knew you were so good on your feet?”

He laughed at that, and not for the first time, Dany wondered why a good-looking man like him wouldn’t set his sights on many of the other women currently ogling him from across the room.

Almost an hour later, Dany had danced with three other lords – whose names she could barely remember – and she was beginning to nurse a headache. The mask hurt her eyes and bridge of her nose, and she desperately wished she could go outside to get some fresh air.

And I’ve still not seen him, she thought morosely as Ellaria – probably half-drunk and singing off key –danced toward her with Tyrion in tow. What did they want now?

“It’s time to give a speech, Your Grace,” Ellaria announced in a sing-song voice.

“A speech?” Dany was mortified. “Why?”

“It’s a great way to thank everyone for showing up,” Tyrion replied with a nod. “This was a great welcome party to Westeros, and it’s clear we’ve got most of Dorne in our corner. So what better way to show our gratitude but to give some rambling speech about being in their debt etcetera, etcetera.”

“I don’t really have any speech prepared,” Dany stuttered, but Ellaria was already tugging her toward the makeshift stage where a popular band was still playing.

“Who cares? This should come from the heart, shouldn’t it?”

She grabbed the microphone from the lead singer without apologies and coughed into it. “Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen. If I may have your attention please.”

Everyone stopped and turned toward her. Dany, who was now wishing she could melt into the equipment, struggled to maintain her smile. Her jaw was already beginning to ache, and just as she lifted her mask to get some air, she finally caught sight of him weaving his way through the crowd… Tyene was nowhere in sight.

Oh.

“…present to you, our future Queen of Westeros…Queen Daenerys Targaryen!”

The applause was thunderous (hoots and whistles included), yet Dany could hear nothing. Jon was nursing a flute of champagne and giving polite applause as well, and she wasn’t sure but was he giving her a small smile and nod of encouragement? That was weird. Why would he? Wasn’t he the one who said she wouldn’t be good at ruling? What right did she have to stand before all these people to proclaim that she’d be the change they desperately needed?
Still, her feet moved – or rather Tyrion’s gentle shove forward – had her almost colliding with the microphone. She wrapped her trembling hands around the stand and closed her eyes.

“You can do it,” Tyrion urged in a harsh whisper. “This is your chance to shine, Dany. Make it count.”

Right.

She lifted her lashes and raised her hands to silence the guests, which they did almost immediately.

“Thank you all,” she began; her voice surprisingly steady despite the fluttering in her stomach. “Thank you so very much for your warm welcome.”

“Go back to Essos, you bitch!” came the sudden yell from someone at the back of the room. As expected, heads began turning; murmurings rising as they tried to make out who was responsible for the heckling.

Dany faltered, but Tyrion nodded firmly; his eyes urging her to continue.

“It…It’s been an honor to be in your presence this evening,” she forced herself to speak; calling up every reserve of restraint she could muster. It was embarrassing to be called out like that, but she told herself she didn’t care. She would not let them get to her. She’s dealt with worse shit in Meereen.

I am the dragon queen. Don’t ever forget that.

“I sincerely hope that we can all work together-”

“We don’t want you, you foreign slut!” This time the voice seemed to come from the opposite end of the room.

The murmurs grew louder and now the faces before her seemed to change expressions from respect to doubt, but mostly embarrassment for her. She could see several guards already slipping into the room in their quest to find the troublemakers, and as Dany struggled to find a kind face amongst the crowd, they fell on Jon again; whose expression was enough to make her want to leap through the throng to grab him in a fierce hug.

He looked absolutely livid.

“Don’t let them deter you,” Prince Doran was saying from the side of the stage, with a rare smile of encouragement. “Finish up your speech, my Queen.”

Dany took a deep breath and nodded before making the decision to rush through whatever she had to say next. The sooner she got off this damn stage, the better.

“Westeros needs change,” she stated firmly. “And together, we can work to bring that change. Thanks so very much again for your…aaah!”

It had come so fast and so sudden, no one on stage moved for almost a full minute in complete shock.

Dany felt the chill before looking down at herself to see the ugly blossoming red stain seeping through her gown. Her first alarming thought was that she had been stabbed or shot at, but when the sweet aroma of the wine filtered into her numbed senses, she realized someone had doused her with it. That someone was a woman dressed in black, waving a banner which said ‘FOREIGN WHORE’ while being dragged to the exits by two burly security guards, while screaming “Get out of
Westeros! You murderer!"

“Good grief,” Ellaria gasped as she dashed over to dab the stain with a handkerchief; a fruitless gesture. The dress was effectively ruined. “Those crazy protesters. How did they get in here? I’m so sorry, Your Grace. This shouldn’t have happened.”

“Take her upstairs,” someone else was saying as many arms, hands, and everything in-between seemed to drag her away from the stage amidst the rumbling from the guests who were marveling at the sudden change in events.

Dany would allow herself to be led upstairs, and it was only when she was in the safety of her private quarters, did she finally force her mind to function again. This time, she held her ground.

“I’m fine,” she stated calmly.

Missandei, Jorah, Tyrion, Ellaria, and Oberyn stared at her in concern.

“Your Grace,” Jorah began, but Dany pushed him away and took a step back.

“I’m fine,” she repeated as she met each worried look with a small smile. “I need some time alone please, but I’m okay. I’m used to this, remember?”

Not waiting to see their reaction, she spun on her heels and left the room again, this time she took a private path which led directly to the shores of the Summer Sea. It seemed to understand her plight for she was serenaded with its gentle waves as she approached.

She took off her shoes and placed them on a pile of rocks, then tossed away the mask which had been stuck on her head all this time. She stole a quick glance at the palace, the bright lights and music still drifting down to her location. Along the shore, wooden torches had been lit; their flames crackling in silent admonishment as she sank her toes into the sand and began to walk in the opposite direction. Every now and then, she’d rub at the stain on her dress, wondering why her vision was so damn blurry, and why this stubborn stain wouldn’t go away.

It was a stupid dress anyway. And it had been a stupid party. And it had been a stupid idea to introduce herself to the public like this, and it was going to make headlines all over Westeros, and her humiliation was going to be complete for everyone would see her as the sham of a Queen she really was.

Maybe Jon was right after all.

Maybe she really should just pack it up and go back to Meereen.

“Fuck my life,” she whispered with a sniffle as the tears rolled down her cheeks and down her nose. She scrubbed at the blasted stain angrily. It still wouldn’t go away. “Fuck!”

“Geez, you sure do walk pretty fast for someone who just left the party,” came the dry comment which had her spinning around so fast, she nearly fell in her haste.

Jo...Jon?

He was strolling casually toward her; hands in the pockets of his pants, which were rolled up to his shin as he too was barefoot. He had long discarded his mask, and the once constricting tuxedo tie was askew around his neck allowing the top two buttons of his white dress-shirt to reveal his chest.

His hair had been held in a bun to probably keep the mask in place, and she had to admit it made him
look older, but no less handsome – still this was no time to stand around admiring him. She was in no mood for him…or anyone else for that matter.

“Go back,” she replied wearily and turned away to continue walking; though her steps were slower. “I want to be left alone.”

“Ditto,” he replied as he followed but at a respectable distance. “I want to be left alone as well.”

“Then why the fuck are you following me? Gods, you are infuriating.”

“Look who’s talking.”

“Did you come to gloat? Is that it?”

“No.”

“Oh give me a break,” she sneered. “You must have been licking your chops in there saying how great it is that I was humiliated like that. I was getting a taste of the sort of things I’ll deal with as Queen, right? I don’t deserve to be in charge of the Syndicate, right?”

“Dany-”

“Well fuck you and stay the hell away from me!”

“Dany -”

“I am not in the mood, Jon Snow!”

“Well, neither am I.”

“I’m serious, goddamnit! Leave me alone!” She whirled on him then, only her attempt to be furious was ruined with the breaking of her voice and the harsh sob to escape her lips. She didn’t want him to see her like this. This was not ‘queenly’ at all. This was only going to prove his theories right. She couldn’t show her weakness…this vulnerability to him. She had to be strong. She had to be –

(I’m sorryI’msorryI’msosorry)

“Please,” she begged in a whisper, as she slapped trembling hands over her mouth and pleaded desperately with amethyst eyes wet with tears. “Just go away. Please…I…I can’t…”

He would not give her a chance to complete her words, for the next thing she knew, her face was buried against the warmth of his chest; his strong arms enveloping her in a hug so earnest, Dany felt every resolve and wall she had built around herself slowly crumble to pieces.

Perhaps it was finally time to give up the fight.
Smutiness ahead.
The song used in this – or rather what inspired this chapter - was the song Firestone by Kygo. Great song and highly recommended you listen while reading a particular section of the story.
Enjoy!

I'm a flame
You're a fire
I'm the dark in need of light
When we touch
You inspire

Loud. Too fucking loud.
It was all Jon could think of as Tyene dragged him from one hall to the next. She looked good in a
flapper-inspired dress of glittering gold and green sequins; her matching mask a permanent fixture on her face. She caught up with old friends and tried to introduce Jon to them, but they might have been nothing more than names on a list for his attention was focused on something else entirely.

She’s not here.

He was losing track of how many flutes of champagne he’d guzzled in the past hour, and the mask was beginning to irritate the bridge of his nose. When Tyene finally let him breathe for a second – an old flame had garnered her attention – Jon slipped out to the balcony; where a few couples seemed to have the same idea of seeking solitude from the frenzied festivities.

He rest his elbows upon the stone railing and absently watched Prince Oberyn try to woo two beautiful ladies in the gardens below. The prince had been a gracious host so far, for he too had tried to get Jon interested in many of the single women sashaying through their great doors. However, he had to give up when Tyene took over ‘chaperone’ duties. His other daughters, except for the two youngest, were a little less reserved tonight. Jon was sure he had never seen them laugh as loud amongst familiar faces, especially the usually stoic Nymeria.

His gaze caught penetrating blue ones watching him from across the balcony. Faintly amused by the unsmiling visage, Jon raised his glass in silent toast to Jorah, who repeated the gesture before heading back to the ballroom. Jon knew he was still on shaky ground with the older man, but at least he had tried to engage in conversation with him the other day. His last name – Mormont – finally clicked when Jon recalled the one time his family had visited their great House on Bear Island; a small chunk of land just off the coast in the North. He didn’t recall seeing Jorah during that meeting, and Jon would come to learn he had left home years ago due to some spat with his father, Jeor. It was a spat Jorah had not wished to elaborate on.

Sudden cackling laughter had Jon turning around to notice Tyrion – looking quite dapper in his leather and velvet – with two scantily clad women draped on each arm; no small feat for one his size. Twinkling green eyes noticed Jon and he raised his goblet of wine in salute.

“Enjoying yourself, Snow?” he asked with a slight slur. His features were flushed with enjoyment, and Jon couldn’t help smirking in amusement. “Who says the Dornish can’t throw a shindig, eh?”

“It’s a party, all right,” Jon agreed, but Tyrion was already leading his ladies away with the promise to show them just how the Lannisters did things in the bedroom.

Jon watched them walk away; the dwarf’s words, from the other day, coming back to haunt him as his brows drew together in thought.

(Get to know more about this Queen you can’t seem to understand as well as you’d like. You’d be surprised by what you find.)

Jon had taken that to heart; figuring the best way to get started was to see exactly what had happened in Meereen and why she was such a threat to the Sons of the Harpy. He had spent the better part of the night wandering through the abyss of the internet, and to say he was shocked at what he discovered would have been an understatement.

There was the initial embarrassment of realizing that there was indeed a world outside of Westeros, hell, a world outside of Winterfell. Unlike his siblings, especially Arya who was fascinated with traveling, Jon had never really shown much interest in politics or anything related to it. The North was all he knew (and loved), and aside from a few trips around that region, the furthest he had gone was King’s Landing.
God, he had a lot to learn.

His search for ‘Meereen’ pulled up articles and videos showing the civil unrest in Slaver’s Bay. Along with Yunkai and Astapor, these cities were considerably wealthy and quite beautiful. Unfortunately, they were known more for their dealings in human trafficking or slavery; with most of their revenue coming from underage children. Jon scrolled through disturbing images of chained men, women, and children – some as young as three – paraded around like objects for greasy men in silk robes and gold teeth. His disgust grew tenfold with the photos of bloodied or castrated bodies lying on the street; alleged ‘punishments’ for those who dared to protest or speak up for their rights.

**So how in seven hells had Dany taken over such a place?**

It took some deep searching, for there were many conspiracy theory pages and anti-Daenerys sites with far-fetched stories that didn’t make sense or simply set out to sully her name. She was clearly a polarizing figure, and though there were many who saw her as a revolutionary, there were others - mostly politicians - who saw her as a threat to their lavish lifestyles.

Jon’s admiration grew as he finally found a website with factual information. She, apparently, arrived at Astapor three years ago with nothing to her name but a core group of supporters including Tyrion, Jorah, and someone named Barristan Selmy. She began forming underground networks to counter the Great Masters and within a year, her small army had increased to over a hundred thousand loyal supporters. Tough negotiations with some of the masters, eventually earned her the Unsullied – a group of skilled mercenaries whose allegiance to their liberator was absolute. Many were sure that Dany’s success came with her association with the Dothraki, and of course her lineage, but it failed to adequately express how a mere eighteen-year-old had managed to do something others – twice her age – couldn’t achieve.

There was no doubt she took a lot of abuse from her detractors and many never took her seriously, but with the few videos of her speaking engagements at rallies, the Dany on the screen had sent chills down Jon’s spine. That Dany was a beast of a different kind; a fearless, amazing woman who didn’t mind standing on a set of boxes just to tower above her riveted audience. She was never in expensive gowns or clothing as required by a ‘queen’, but was one with the people. She was almost always clad in worn jeans and simple shirts; her long hair held back in a braid or shoved beneath face caps as she spoke into megaphones, microphones or simply yelled when those other options weren’t available. She inspired hope in faces wrought with fear and suffering. She made them feel they were worth something, and it was that ‘something’ that finally made them rise against the establishment. They fought back – not without its share of casualties - and won; a victory that was a long time coming. The loving moniker ‘Mhysa’ (mother) – was given to her by the freed people once the declaration of independence was signed into law.

A fitting tribute in Jon’s humble opinion.

Was it any wonder the Great Masters weren’t happy? With such power, who knew how far reaching her reign could be? Especially now with her quest to control the Syndicate. Daenerys Targaryen could truly be a formidable force, and those currently in power were no doubt shaking in their boots.

So why sneak into Westeros? Jon mused once he was done with his research. What stopped her from simply blasting into King’s Landing and challenging the Lannisters head on?

_You must think like your enemies_, Ned’s voice filtered into his head. _Put yourselves in their shoes and imagine what they would do._

_Smart_, Jon mused as the sounds of the party drifted back to him. He was sure Tyrion had suggested she come in that way. After all, this was his family they were dealing with, and Tywin Lannister –
from all he had heard – was not exactly a cakewalk.

All the same, Jon knew he owed Dany a huge apology for doubting her, and he sincerely hoped she’d at least give him a chance to explain himself. As he drained the last of his champagne, there was a tangible change in the atmosphere. Even the guests outdoors must have sensed it for they began to drift into the palace. Jon followed; his curiosity piqued, and as he squeezed himself through the throng of people to see what the hoopla was about, he was rewarded with a sight he was sure would be imprinted in his mind until his dying day.

*Holy shit…Dany…*

It was all he could do not to let his jaw drop as some of the other men around him. She looked absolutely breathtaking, and Jon could feel his chest tighten with that damn emotion he was really finding more difficult to comprehend. He wanted to shove everyone else aside and sweep her off her feet, but realized how cheesy and stupid that sounded even in his head. She was a vision in white and it didn’t help that the complete ensemble left little to the imagination…at least for the most perverted amongst them. His breath caught when he was sure those familiar violet eyes were trained on him, but it was ruined when a warm whisper filled his ear.

“Gods, I wish I had a camera,” Tyene complained. “None of that allowed in here. It would have been a great opportunity to get some pictures. Isn’t she just stunning?”

Jon might have nodded, he wasn’t sure, but when he turned back to Dany, she was already being carted away by Prince Oberyn and being introduced to the forming line of nobility eager to get a piece of the last Targaryen.

He bit his lower lip at the sight; a small part of him realizing just how different they really were. If, and when she became the leader of the Syndicate, this is what her daily life would be; a constant flow of more important men and women seeking her attention. Where was room for someone like him? A goddamn bastard with hardly anything to his name, for he was sure Catelyn would do all she could to erase him from the Stark history books if she could manage it.

With a mumbled excuse, he stepped outside again to gather himself. He knew he was about to sink into one of his melancholic moods, and reaching for a passing glass of wine, he figured he might as well try to drink it away and hopefully pass out before the night was over. Still, he found himself gravitating toward the ballroom, where she was now dancing with a kid who might have been a long-lost brother considering their similar features. Jon felt a wistful longing at the beautiful smile on her face, which broke into light laughter as she danced like the true nobility she was.

He tried to imagine himself in that position and failed miserably. For one thing, he sucked at dancing, and two, she was still pissed at him, so there was no point in imagining such a scenario would happen.

Despite his attempt to hide away from everyone, Tyene – like a goddamn sleuth – was able to find him.

“Don’t you want to dance with me?” she asked with a pout. “You don’t seem to be having any fun.”

“I’m good,” Jon replied with a weak smile. His head was beginning to buzz slightly. There was hope yet to get completely wasted. “You…you go on and have fun. I’ll be okay.”

“Is everything all right?” She asked with genuine concern. “You’re not feeling ill, are you?”

*Yeah, I am,* he wanted to say. *I’m sick of all the fake smiles and constant bullshit surrounding me*
and especially her. Can’t she see that most of them are just trying to kiss her ass? It’s the same cycle about to be repeated. They get in her good graces, and when she gets to that seat, they’ll want their hands greased in return. Politics is bullshit.

“I’m fine,” was all he said with a smile. “Don’t worry…”

His words faltered when the music suddenly stopped and they could hear Ellaria on the microphone asking for their attention.

“Wonder what she’s doing now,” Tyene mused. “Mom always did know how to make a scene.”

Ignoring Tyene, Jon made his way into the ballroom. He noticed Dany was on the stage as well as Tyrion and Prince Doran. To his surprise, she was acting a bit shy; not wanting to take the limelight as she was introduced. There was something rather endearing about it, considering the vast difference to the defiant Dany he had seen in the videos. He couldn’t help smiling in encouragement and applauding for her as well; a part of him wanting to whistle and bellow out ‘you tell ‘em, Dany!’ or something that insane to motivate her.

You’ve inspired so many others, he thought as if hoping his silent words would reach her in some way. You can do it again, and this time…if you’ll let me, I want to be at your side. No matter how small my role may be.

“Thank you so very much for your warm welcome,” she was saying before the rude interruption of “Go back to Essos, you bitch!” jarred through the silence like a dagger.

At first Jon wasn’t sure if that was simply an auditory hallucination, but when others began turning their heads and whispering amongst themselves, it proved he wasn’t the only one hearing things.

Dany continued, but when the second heckle rang out loud and clear; Jon could feel the first flicker of rage in the pit of his stomach. However, it was nothing compared to the horror of witnessing wine being flung in Dany’s direction effectively ruining her dress and embarrassing her in front of hundreds of people.

Son-of-bitch!

Not thinking, Jon began shoving his way through the now panicked crowd. He had seen the person responsible for it and had every intention of giving her a piece of his mind. However, he was spared that chore by the appearance of the guards. They were already escorting the screeching woman out; her insulting banner still being unfurled though quickly taken down by another security personnel. From his peripheral vision, he could see Dany being led away by Prince Oberyn and the others, and Jon’s first instinct was to go after them. However, someone had the audacity to murmur, “…she sort of deserved it. She does seem presumptuous coming to Westeros to take over. Who does she think she is?”

Jon whirled around; his jaw and fists clenched as he took note of the short heavyset man wearing a mask of blue and gold while sipping daintily on his wine; his thick fingers covered with so many expensive rings, it was blinding. He must have noticed he was being glared at for he looked up with a slight gasp. Whatever expression he noticed on Jon’s face had him taking a frightened step back, but Jon wasn’t about to let him off the hook that easy.

“Who does she think she is?” he repeated slowly as if speaking to a child. “A million times better than you, you sack of shit. She’s Daenerys Targaryen, the next Queen of Westeros. Your queen, asshole. So you might as well start getting used to that title.”
Jon made sure to bump hard into the man as he walked past; hardly looking back when he gave a small cry of indignation and fell on his generous bottom.

He would find Missandei at the top of the stairs, and with one look at Jon, she seemed to understand what he wanted to know.

“At the beach,” she said with a small nod; her features barely holding in her sadness and frustration.

“But please…do not-”

“I know,” Jon replied quietly. “I promise.”

Feel the change in me tonight
So take me up
Take me higher
There's a war not far from here
We can dance
In desire
Or we can burn in love tonight

_I promise_, he thought over and over as he closed his eyes and held her tighter still; her hard sobs soaking his shirt. He buried his face within her hair and closed his eyes; struggling to control the hard lump forming in his throat. Gods, she felt so small and fragile in his arms; as if she was likely to break if he dared to let her go. Her body trembled with the force of her sorrow, and it was at this moment, where Jon was sure flowery words of comfort would be necessary – that he was painfully blank.

There weren’t enough words in his vocabulary to adequately convey how angry and sorry he was for what she was going through. She didn’t deserve all the hate and animosity; so yeah…maybe some of her actions might have been questionable, but seven hells! No one was perfect.

If I could fix the world for you, I would. I would do anything never to see you cry again, Daenerys. I promise.

He had no idea how long they stood there, but when her sobs finally quieted and she began to really shiver (it was much cooler tonight), Jon reluctantly released her slowly, but only to take off his jacket. She couldn’t seem to look at him as she remained silent while he placed it over her shoulders. Her head remained lowered; her hands clasped against her chest as if ready to be admonished for daring to show her vulnerability.

He finally had to place a hand beneath her chin to force her gaze upwards, and damn if he didn’t immediately want to claim her lips in a kiss. He fought against the temptation and smiled softly
instead. Making any kind of romantic gesture at this point was probably going to get him a really hard kick in the nuts.

“Feel a little better?” he asked.

Her eyes, now slightly red though stunning, seemed to regard him as if he were a foreign entity, before she gave a barely perceptible nod. She didn’t stop him from wiping her tears with his handkerchief. However, when he made a joking remark about her getting snot all over his expensive shirt, her lips twitched in a reluctant smile that made his heart skip a beat.

_Stupid_, he chided himself and took a deep breath.

She tugged the jacket around her, but figured it might fall off. He watched as she shoved her arms in the sleeves and it almost drowned her with her big it was. It was quite a contrast; an expensive wine-stained gown with his tux-

“Stop staring,” she finally croaked and walked away, but only to sit upon a boulder with a heavy sigh. “But…thank you, Jon. Really.”

He swallowed and sank his hands into the pockets of his pants; giving a light shrug of dismissal despite his cheeks burning at the genuine gesture of gratitude. “I didn’t do anything. It was either come out here…or go back in there and punch a few assholes in the face.”

She gave him an incredulous look, and when she saw he wasn’t joking, she gave a light snort and shook her head. “You are so weird, Jon Snow.”

“Good weird or scary weird?” he asked with a smile as he sat beside her; but not too close just in case she wasn’t welcoming of his company.

“A little bit of both?” she admitted after a pause as if to think it over. “…you are not like the others.”

“The others?”

She looked away from him; her gaze now trained on the dark waves and the faint flickering lights of ships in the distance. “The other men I’ve known and I’ve known quite a few.”

(Get to know more about this Queen you can’t seem to understand as well as you’d like. You’d be surprised by what you find.)

“Oh yeah?” he asked, though a part of him wasn’t sure he wanted to know about the ‘other men’ she might have slept with. However, if he planned to understand who she was then it was a part of her history he’d just have to deal with. “Guess I’ve made that much of an impression, huh?”

Dany tossed him a wan smile. “You are one of a kind all right. You just don’t know when to quit.”

“Not when I’ve found something worth fighting for,” he blurted out before he could control himself. This time, he was the one looking away; thankful for the shadows around so she couldn’t see how embarrassed he was by his admission. Seven hells, he really needed to filter his thoughts sometimes.

There was a tense silence before she stated quietly. “Am I really worth fighting for, Jon? After what you’ve seen in there? After what you told me regarding my abilities to rule?”

“About that-” Jon began, but she didn’t let him finish.

“Don’t think for one second I haven’t thought about that a million times even before you articulated
“It.” She tugged the lapels of the jacket and dug her toes into the sand. Without looking up, she continued speaking. “I can’t tell you how many nights I’ve had conversations with myself, wondering if everything I was doing was simply because I wanted to or because I had to. There is a difference, Jon.” She pursed her lips and drew a circle in the sand with her big toe. “There is the weight of coming from a family that once ruled most of the Western world, and the expectation that falls upon my shoulders to continue that tradition. I am the last of my kind after all.” She gave a sound that was between exasperation and derision. “And then there’s another part of me that simply hates the way the world works. I’ve seen enough suffering, death, needless poverty, and injustice happen to people who do not deserve it. Maybe I’m being too sanctimonious, but I couldn’t just sit by and let it happen. I had to be a voice for those who couldn’t speak up, so I pushed on. I’ve been on the verge of death many times, Jon, from those I loved and strangers alike, but…here I am. I’m still standing.”

She gave him a shy smile, and that damn powerful urge to take her in his arms had Jon cursing beneath his breath and looking away with an effort.

“I saw what you did in Slaver’s Bay,” he finally grated roughly. “Read and looked it up online…you…what you did-”

“Pure luck,” she interrupted.

“Bullshit,” Jon retorted with a frown. “Luck doesn’t get you followers finally seeing the light and deciding to take a stand for their freedom. Luck doesn’t get you the Unsullied for fuck’s sake. You inspired those people. They looked up to you and you changed their lives for the better.”

“Really? Haven’t you heard of the civil unrests still going on?”

“Yeah, but that’s to be expected,” Jon replied with a shrug. “Democracy doesn’t just happen overnight. There’s always going to be those who want things to return to the way it used to be, but you’ve planted those seeds of hope and that’s what the majority will keep fighting for. It’s what Westeros now needs, and even though it’s going to be difficult…I think you can do it.”

“Because you watched a few videos and read some things about me?”

Jon knew he was being reminded of his previous comments and he welcomed the admonishment, but he wasn’t backing down. He met her skeptical gaze and spoke firmly. “Because those who love you believe and trust in you. They’ve told me their stories, and I’ve seen your sense of justice. What I said, I said only because I didn’t want you falling into familiar traps set by those in power. If you can get through that, with the crew you have…you can do anything.”

“My crew,” Dany repeated as if testing the word on her tongue. She studied Jon for a moment longer, before rising to her feet. She took a few steps toward the sea and stopped to square her shoulders.

“Did I tell you how I ended up in Essos in the first place?”

“Don’t think we ever got around to that conversation,” Jon replied with a hint of sarcasm. He was rewarded with her middle finger raised in his direction. He chuckled and leaned back to listen.

“I’m not some foreign whore,” Dany stated with a shrug. “I wasn’t born in Essos. I was actually born in Dragonstone. I was just unfortunate not be raised here. That’s all.”

She told him of how she and Viserys had been shipped off to Braavos with one of their father’s friends, Willem Darry, after the death of her mother at childbirth.
“I think Viserys always blamed me for that,” Dany confessed; her voice trembling at the memories. “He made sure I never forgot it. I was a hindrance most of the time, and he would vent his frustrations under the guise of training me to become a warrior.” She raised her hands and studied them. “He would beat me to unconsciousness sometimes, and I must have kissed the hands of Death one too many times. Lucky for me, Jorah was there to bring me back to life.” She lowered her hands and buried them into the pockets of the jacket. “Eventually, I grew stronger, and I finally won a match against him.” She sounded smug. “It was the day before we were taken to see Khal Drogo. Apparently, I was going to marry him as part of a deal. Pity no one gave me the memo before we ended up in Dothraki territory. I was fourteen at the time.”

Jon couldn’t believe what he was hearing, but he kept silent as she continued.

“You see, if Viserys had lived, he would have been in this position. He, desperately, wanted to gain control of the Syndicate, but to do that, he had to have an army behind him. What better way to do that, but to have one of the strongest cartels in Essos at his side. If he could gain favor with the infamous Khal Drogo…Westeros was his for the taking.”

“And he sold you to him? Just like that?” Jon asked incredulously.

“Just like that,” Dany replied with a bitter smile. “Needless to say, it wasn’t a very happy time for me, and I let him know that. Got slapped around for speaking my mind, but I didn’t care. I wasn’t going to be taken to fucking Vaes Dothrak just to make him happy. I wanted to remain in Braavos.”

Dany shivered, but it wasn’t from the chill of the night air. The memories of that day came flooding back with a vengeance. It was the first time Viserys had purchased any sort of dress for her, and the silk flimsy thing had only been to impress the drug lord. It was no wonder he had gone easy on her with the beatings the past few weeks. It was to increase her worth; after all showing up with bruises and a black eye wasn’t going to be particularly appealing to Drogo and his bloodriders.

“We were married in Dothraki fashion,” Dany said; her voice barely audible as she seemed to shrink into herself. “Lots of drinking, fighting, orgies right there in the middle of the reception and of course a shit ton of drugs for the taking. None of the cheap stuff for those guys. He wasn’t considered the greatest Khal for no reason. Drogo was astute and a brilliant entrepreneur…though one of the deadliest. Bottom line, no one fucked with him, especially not his new bride. I was off limits to his lustful riders.”

She chuckled at that. “At least, I guess I ought to be grateful he waited until my sixteenth birthday to finally claim me.”

She bit her lower lip hard, not wanting to mention how horrific that night had been. Not just because Drogo’s impatience had finally worn thin, and he all but threw her on the bed - on her name day - to fuck her raw. If she closed her eyes, she could still hear his ragged breathing as he took her from behind; his skin hot and sweaty as he rubbed against her back over and over and over again, until her screams of agony were muffled in the pillows. She could still feel the blood dripping down her thighs, and not once had he apologized for taking her that roughly. That night and many other nights to come.

Perhaps she didn’t need to say anything, for Jon could see the clenching of her fists before she withdrew them from the pockets to hug herself tightly. He gritted his teeth and forced himself not to get angry over something that happened a long time ago.

“Still…I learned a lot from them,” Dany admitted. “You have to when you spend at least four years in their company. You learn to speak like a Dothraki, live like a Dothraki, think like a Dothraki…and kill like a Dothraki. You don’t become a khal by sitting on your ass and doing nothing, and being his
khaleesi, that wasn’t an option either. I had to be just as brave and strong, so he taught me all he knew…or rather I made him teach me all he knew. I guess giving great blowjobs and learning how to fuck his brains out finally paid off.”

She looked over her shoulder at Jon. “This isn’t freaking you out, is it?”

Jon raised a brow. “Why should it?”

“Aren’t you northerners all proper and shit?”

Jon smirked. “You haven’t met a lot of northerners, have you? The South considers us barbarians, remember?”

Her lips quirked upward, and a familiar gleam filled her eyes as she studied him from head to foot, as if trying to decide if he was something edible or not. Jon matched her expression; his amusement growing when she seemed satisfied with her survey. It wasn’t until she turned away, did he realize he had been holding his breath in anticipation.

Seven hells, I want her to fuck my brains out too, he mused with a subconscious lick of his lips. If she could please the great Khal Drogo, what kind of a monster is she in bed?

“Do you want to know how I left Drogo?” she asked to break into his heated thoughts. “It is said no one ever leaves the khalasar, but I managed it.”

“How?”

She smiled; a wistful expression that sent a pang of jealousy right through Jon’s heart. That was a smile that could only mean one thing, and he wasn’t sure he wanted to hear it.

“He loved me,” she said aloud. “That big brute, who can scare the pants off anyone by just stepping into a room, was nothing more than putty in my hands. He knew it, and could do nothing when I made the decision to leave him. I had learned just about all I could from him. I had nothing more to give.”

“And Viserys? What did he think of that?”

“…he was dead by then,” came the flat reply. “Drogo killed him on my behalf. He stepped out of line and threatened my…our child.”

Jon blinked at that revelation. Gods, she was even pregnant for him?

“I lost the baby,” she added quickly as if to answer his unspoken question. “Miscarriage. Anyway…I was not pursued by his bloodriders when I snuck out of Vaes Dothrak that night. There was every opportunity for him to do so, but he did nothing. Jorah, Barristan Selmy, and I left with a few horses and only the stigma of being a khaleesi to my name. It was one of the reasons I was able to make such an impact in Slaver’s Bay. After all, word of Khal Drogo’s wife coming to their shores was enough to make them sit up and take notice.”

“…so you’re not properly divorced?”

“The Dothraki don’t sign legal papers when it comes to marriages,” Dany replied as if speaking to a child. “The only way you get out of one is if your husband dies and you get chucked into the dosh khaleen or if you kill yourself. Either option isn’t particularly appealing.”

“So when you say ‘luck’…you mean it was all because they were afraid of Drogo?”
Dany shrugged. “A part of me believes he still looks out for me despite his ‘anger’ at my betrayal.”

“But he’s working with Robert Baratheon to take you out,” Jon said incredulously. “Didn’t Tyrion tell you that?”

“I know Drogo’s after me,” Dany replied in a voice so calm, Jon felt the urge to shake her. “A khal’s pride is paramount in the presence of his bloodriders and khalasar. Perhaps he’s only doing this to save face.”

Jon scoffed. “You really believe that?”

“Drogo knows of my desire to control the Syndicate and he was all for it. So if Robert was able to convince him to switch sides…there’s nothing more I can do but to fight him head on the only way I know how.”

“With the Unsullied?”

Dany took a deep breath. “Perhaps.”

She spun around then; her expression weary but less distraught from earlier. “Can we not talk about him anymore? I think I want to call it a night. It’s been a rather interesting…evening.” She looked down at her dress as if forcing herself to remember just why she had come out here in the first place.

Jon watched her slumped shoulders for a moment and frowned.

“That’s right.

He arched his neck to look behind him. He could still hear the party goers and music playing in the background. So the festivities were still going on without them.

“That’s right…she was forced out of a night meant for celebration by a bunch of whining assholes.

“…probably wake up tomorrow,” Dany was muttering to herself as she rubbed at the stain absently.

“Let’s go back to the party,” Jon blurted out firmly.

Her head shot up, and her incredulous look was everything. She looked mortified yet incredulous at the same time; her eyes wide as saucers.

“What?” she finally squeaked out.

Jon rose to his feet and stretched his hands above his head. He grinned at her expression. “Let’s get back to the party,” he repeated. “This is supposed to be our night of celebration, and I’ll be damned if a bunch of whining pussies try to ruin it for us. We can’t let them win.”

He began to unroll his pants. He had left his shoes somewhere back there, but he could care less about them.

“Are you crazy?” she hissed as she stormed up to him. “Look at me! I’m covered in fucking wine and I smell like it too…damn it, it’s even sticking to my body…and my face! I’ve been crying and I’m probably all puffed up and looking like a raccoon and—”

“And you look absolutely beautiful,” came the quiet words that left her breathless. The warm expression in his eyes weren’t helping either.

His finger tipped her chin, and his smile this time had her heart beating so fast she was sure she
would have a heart attack, or pass out, whichever came first. He was making her dizzy.

“Let’s go back in there and show them what having a good time is all about,” Jon invited tenderly; his northern drawl more prominent. His eyes were twin pools of chocolate she could melt in, and when she tried shaking her head to refuse his ridiculous offer, she was rendered speechless when he gripped her right hand in his and began to lead them back to the palace.

No, no, no, no, her mind screamed as her bare feet scraped against the sand and rocks and then the smooth stone steps. I can’t do this. I can’t face them again. I can’t…

But as she looked up at Jon – at that broad back enclosed in a simple white dress shirt (and she could make out his bandages beneath the cloth), she felt a surge of daring she had almost forgotten she possessed. Had she been so beaten down by her recent failures that she had forgotten just who she really was? Why did it have to take this man to stir those feelings all over again? Her fingers tightened around his as they began to pass a few of the guests, who were now looking at the couple in disbelief.

Talk about making another entrance, Dany thought with faint amusement as more stares and gawks came their way. Jon did not even falter in his quest to get to the ballroom. He ignored every one as they made their way through the crowd, which parted to give them room as they got closer to their destination.

Dany, who once had her head lowered as she walked, now found herself looking up to meet their gazes in defiance. So what if she looked like a drowned rat and her shoes were missing and her haute couture dress was ruined and she was wearing a man’s tux? They could all kiss her ass for all she cared.

She even dared to smile smugly at Lord Yronwood, who looked positively gob smacked, but none more so than her crew; Missandei, Jorah, Tyrion, Ellaria, and Prince Oberyn, who all stared - in various stages of shock - at what was happening.

Jon – still holding onto her hand – walked up to the DJ on stage (the live band had packed up the for the night apparently), and placed a request for a song, which he was glad to oblige. Jon tugged Dany back to the middle of the dance floor, and with a sheepish grin as the opening beats of the popular club song began to play, he bowed politely.

“My apologies, Your Grace, if I end up stepping on your toes, but did I forget to mention I’m a terrible dancer?”

Dany couldn’t help it. The first stirrings of laughter seemed to flow from the depths of her stomach, working its way through her heart until it filtered past her lips in a breathless giggle. He really was hopeless.

“Good thing it’s not really a slow song then, huh?” she said as she shrugged out of the jacket and tossed it to the side of the room. She spun around to press her back against him; smiling at his sharp inhalation of surprise at the sudden seductive move. She loved the song he had chosen and as she closed her eyes and allowed the rhythm of the beat to soothe away her ache -

My heart's alive

Firestones

When they strike
We feel the love
Sparks will fly
They ignite our bones
When they strike
We light up the world!

…she shed the cloak of royalty and welcomed his strong hands encircling her waist as they began to move as one.

Let the world talk.

She wasn’t going to give a shit anymore.

“Well, well, well,” Prince Oberyn said with a shake of his head; his lips tugging into a smirk as he and the rest of the party watched the couple on the dance floor. “What do we have here?”

Ellaria, who had been sobbing at how much of a disaster her party had been – for several guests had filed out after the debacle with the heckler, and there was sure to be talk about it in the news tomorrow – was now grinning from ear to ear; tears still in her eyes.

“I don’t believe it,” Tyrion was whispering in astonishment. If he was on the verge of getting drunk earlier, this was doing a fine job clearing his fuzzy mind. “What is she doing?”

“Switching the narrative,” Missandei replied with a smile, while trying hard not to cry at how – and for the first time in a long time – her friend looked relaxed and less burdened with the pressures of her role. “See? Some of the press and guests are coming back.”

And indeed they were, for word had gotten out that the ‘disgraced’ Queen was back amongst the people. Instead of the once expressions of embarrassment on their faces, many could now only look in awe at the show the young queen, and her mysterious dark-haired prince, were displaying.

Fevered whispers of ‘who is he?’ filtered around the room; no one able to put a name to the handsome face whose attention was solely fixed on the woman he was with.

“Has our Queen finally found her King?” Oberyn asked as he held out his hand to his wife. “Perhaps we should join them, my darling. Looks like your party will turn out to be the talk of the town after all.”

Ellaria laughed and accepted his offer, both sweeping through the crowd to join Jon and Dany. Soon other couples enveloped them, and an atmosphere that was once grim and almost somber was switched back to its spontaneous gaiety. The DJ obliged by playing hit after hit; bodies writhing and grinding against each other until time lost all meaning.
Dany’s arms were around his neck; a light sheen of sweat on her flushed features as she studied his face in silent awe. For someone who had claimed he wasn’t a dancer, she could barely keep up with his movements. He had a natural rhythm he wasn’t aware of, and though he had to be careful – because of his wounds - it didn’t stop him from giving it his all. His eyes were literally aglow with a fire she had never seen before, his lovely curly hair now stuck to his forehead and cheeks, with sweat, as they had long been loosened from its bun. Bodies crushed against them; the partygoers still enjoying themselves and no longer concerned with the bedraggled Queen and her partner.

You are amazing, Jon Snow, she thought with a dawning realization she wasn’t planning on questioning anytime soon. You really are.

“What are you thinking about now?” he asked; having to almost yell into her ear since the music was so damn loud.

His arms were still around her waist; his hands almost – and not for the first time – brushing against her ass. She sighed and pressed against him; her body now thrumming with not just the exhilaration of dancing, but of being aware of every sinewy inch of his body.

She wanted him.

Fuck.

“Dany?” he seemed to growl in her ears, and that was enough for her. How anyone could make her name sound so sexy was beyond comprehension.

This time she was the one to tug on his hand, shoving rudely through people as she dragged him away from the party. She didn’t stop even when they were in the relatively less crowded grand lobby, only this time she quickened her pace until they were literally running down the hallways, further and further away from the hive of activity.

“Where the hell are we going?” Jon asked with a laugh.

“To the ends of the earth,” Dany replied; her voice light with anticipation and delight.

Both laughing at how childish they were being, she found her destination. It was a private library she had fallen in love with when they arrived here, and she had spent quite a few precious hours buried in the many books kept in their impressive collection. It was suitably cozy with a familiar musty smell of aged paper and leather, and as she slammed the door shut behind them, she pushed Jon against the wall to crush her lips against his in a kiss that took their breaths away.

He did not bother questioning her decision to bring them here, or why she was doing this, for his hands were already working hard on finding the damn buttons or zipper to the dress. When he could find nothing, the loud rip of clothing had them pulling apart – just barely – to see what had happened.
“…it was haute couture, you jerk,” she breathed with a smirk as she met his darkening gaze.

“Really?” he taunted with a grin. “Sorry…not.”

He swooped in to capture her swollen lips in another hard kiss, his hands making quick work of the gown; only ripping it as far enough to have it cascade down her body in a whisper to the floor.

She sank her fingers into his hair and held on tight; moaning as he thrust a leg between hers; his hands cupping her ass to pull her flush against him. If she hadn’t realized he was already aroused for her, the obvious nudge of his erection against her abdomen was enough to verify just how much she was affecting him. Their tongues danced in wild abandon; their breathing shallow and uneven until he pulled away suddenly to leave her gasping in dismay.

“Wha…Jon…?” she almost whined in protest, but he was only switching positions; now turning her around so she was pressed against the wall.

This time, when he claimed her lips again, she felt the surge of heat well from the sole of her feet like a raging inferno. Her legs trembled as his tongue savored her with a thoroughness that was borderline sinful. When he dragged his teeth against her lower lip before sucking on it, she whimpered and threw her head back, allowing his mouth to continue their exploration of her heated flesh.

She buried her fingers in his hair as he moved lower; lips and teeth grazing her breasts before teasing already hardened nipples into submission. She cried out; her neck arching in helpless desire as a steady hand moved between her thighs to pull them apart. When his fingers brushed against her panties, she blushed at how wet the flimsy piece of clothing had become. He made quick work of it; ripping it away like he had done with her gown. Her musk permeated the air like a cloak; and as his lips moved even lower; past the clenching muscles of her abdomen until it tickled the top of her womanhood, she lowered her head to meet his hooded gaze.

The knowing expression in those brown eyes was almost her undoing. She did not stop him as he raised her right leg to place it over his shoulder; positioning her in such a way she was less likely to fall from the oncoming onslaught.

She shivered in anticipation; trying to recall the last time any man had dared to go down on her like this. Having Missandei do it was one thing, but –

“Ooooh fuuuuuuck,” came the guttural growl of shocked delight as his lips finally found what they were looking for.

Describing what happened next was purely left for the gods to put into words, for Dany was sure this might just be the equivalent of reaching nirvana. Her legs quaked as Jon’s lips and tongue worshipped every inch of her core as if he was born to simply pleasure her in that way.

“Sīr sỳţ,” she panted breathlessly. The waves of ecstasy threatened to have her drowning as they wracked through her. “Sīr sỳţ! Fuck!”

She bit hard on her lower lip, her eyes squeezing shut as she wrapped her leg tight around his shoulders to hold on for dear life. She stiffened as she came; the flames within her scorching in their intensity until tears threatened to escape. She wasn’t sure if it was the added sensation of his beard against her already throbbing folds, but whatever it was, she had never felt this satisfied before. She could feel her bones melting in satiation, heightened as he continued placing tender kisses along her inner thighs until he wound his way back to her lips where he drank greedily from her parted offering.
She tasted herself on him; his beard wet with her juices as she savored him with a greed that was almost frightening.

“Go easy,” he groaned when she began to tug on his pants impatiently. “I’ve still got-”

“I know,” she silenced him with another hard kiss; her fingers dipping into his underwear to find the engorged flesh just begging for release. It was a damn miracle he hadn’t ripped a hole through the cloth, and as much as she would have loved to finish him off with her mouth, something else needed more attention.

“Nyke jāhor sagon s yŷz naejot ao,” she whispered into his ear as she wrapped an arm around his neck and eased his cock into her wet and ready center.

He hissed and seemed to growl at the same time; his breath harsh as he sank into her welcome warmth. Their foreheads met; chocolate clashing with amethyst until all they could see, feel, and hear were each other’s bodies becoming one. He waited until she had adjusted to his girth before moving his hips to set the pace. She matched him in due time; being careful not to move too fast lest it aggravate his wounds.

Sweet gods, Jon thought as much as his mind could manage to think in this moment. He had thought nothing would feel as good as feeling her come against his mouth just minutes earlier, but this…this was something else entirely. It was a pity he couldn’t go as fast as he’d like, but she was making up for it by the subtle rotation of her hips which was driving him insane. His hands tightened around her hips; thrusting as hard and as fast as he could manage it. Her muttered words in Valyrian were an added turn-on, and at this point, Jon could feel the surge of heat shoot through him until every nerve-ending was focused on their fused bodies.

Fuck!

He tore his lips away from hers, but only to bury it against her neck; sucking hard on the flesh as the crescendo of his orgasm threatened to have him screaming in satisfaction. When she lifted herself a little to wrap her leg tighter against his waist, it forced him to sink deeper still until she was all he could feel, taste, and smell.

Fuckfuckfuckfuckofuck!

He came with a low grunt; shivering as her inner muscles tightened around his cock to hold it prisoner until they too quivered with her release. Neither felt like moving; bodies simply clinging to each other as if afraid of letting go. They struggled to control their rapid breathing, and eventually, she lowered her leg…nearly falling if Jon hadn’t tightened his hold on her waist again.

“Dear gods,” she breathed against his temple. “What’s going to happen when you’re fully functional?”

Jon gave a low rumble of laughter against her neck before pulling away to steal her smile with a languid kiss. Gods, she tasted so good.

“Does this mean we’re going to do it again…when I’m fully functional?” he asked when they finally broke apart; his pounding heart, which he had somehow managed to settle down, now picking up the pace again. He hated to sound so hopeful, but hell…if she planned on making this a one-night stand…

She caressed his jaw and traced his full lips; her gaze filled with an expression that made his heart leap.
“Well,” she drawled playfully. “I don’t plan on sleeping alone tonight, sooo…”

“…my bed is pretty comfortable,” Jon invited.

“I’m sure it is.”

“I don’t snore either.”

“…I didn’t ask.”

“And I’ll try not to steal the covers.”

“You better not.”

He grinned and pulled away with great reluctance, but only to study her body as if witnessing a work of art for the first time. “Wow,” he marveled beneath his breath. He could see his seed dripping between her thighs, and nothing had ever looked sexier to him.

“Stop staring, Jon Snow,” she chided, though the pretty blush on her cheeks more than made up for her scolding. She reached for her gown and eyed the remnants of it. There was no way she could wear this now. It was definitely ruined.

“Here,” Jon offered as he unbuttoned his shirt and gave it to her. “Sorry about the dress.”

“Sure you are.” She smirked and shrugged into it; inhaling his scent and the warmth of it as she picked up her torn panties and stuck it into the pocket of his pants; an act that brought the color to his cheeks as well. She caressed the bandage around his torso; glad to see there was no sign of bleeding from their activity.

She looked up to see him watching her with an unreadable expression in his eyes. She blushed again and reached for his hand, wondering just what he was thinking now. it was sometimes hard to read him, but what she did know…and was more than grateful for was his belief in her. He had pulled her out of the depths of her despair and had shown that she was still capable of being strong and confident.

Thank you, Jon.

She placed her hand on the doorknob and took a deep breath. Deep down, she knew this might be the start of something long lasting or it could be the cusp of a major disaster. After all, her track record when it came to relationships wasn’t exactly great. It was nice to dream that life could be this simple or wonderful, where they could be a normal couple with no cares in the world. However, there was a cruel reality out there, and she had come to learn that happiness was nothing more than a fleeting shadow in her tumultuous world.

For tonight at last, it felt good to play pretend and live in this fantasy. He had given her a taste of freedom, and it was easy to get intoxicated by its promise.

She opened the door and looked back with a smile as he squeezed her hand in silent reassurance.

Yes, the world awaited them with its cold claws of despair, but for tonight…they could push that all away and try their damnest best to just be ordinary.
Translations:

*Nyke jāhor sagon s ūz naejot ao*

(I will be good to you)

*Sīr s ūz*

(so good)
The biting wind howled as he trudged through the snow; his features almost as pale and frozen as the accumulation despite the thick layers of clothing to keep him warm.

The measly yellow beam, from the high-powered flashlight in his grip, could barely make in dent in the curtain of flurried snowflakes now falling faster. He blinked rapidly; a thick cloud of mist escaping trembling lips with every ragged breath. It was a struggle to lift one boot-clad foot after the other, for the snow was nearly shin-high now. If he didn’t make it back to the truck soon, Jon knew he’d have to set up camp to get through the night. It was a miserable prospect he did not look forward to.

Somewhere ahead, his direwolf – Ghost – pranced around as if the weather was nothing. It was
becoming more difficult to make out his location, for his fur was just as white as most of his surroundings.

“Seven hells, Ghost,” he grumbled through chattering teeth. He came to a stop to catch his breath. “Don’t go too far where I can’t find you, goddamnit.”

Ghost must have heard his master’s complaint, for it came trotting back with its familiar blood-red eyes glowing with what could pass as contrition. There was a dead squirrel caught between his sharp teeth, and he lowered it to the ground in offering before sitting back on his haunches as if waiting for approval.

Jon sighed in resignation and did just that; his hand sinking into the warmth of his closest companion’s fur. It was impossible to resist that look anyway. Jon scratched between his ears, realizing just how big his ‘pet’ was becoming. Despite finding the pup (and his siblings) less than two years ago, Ghost was almost waist high now. In no time, the creature was likely to tower over him, and if the legends were true about direwolves, it was almost a scary thought.

“Don’t think we can go back home tonight, boy,” Jon mumbled as he looked up and into the bleak gray sky. “We’re too far away, aren’t we?”

Ghost said nothing; though its knowing eyes seemed to be studying something beyond his master’s line of vision. It suddenly gave a low growl and released himself; his sure steps leading the way toward something Jon was yet to see.

“Where are you going now?” Jon asked with a low groan. He forced himself to move again; doing his best to catch up to his companion.

As they burst out of the thick skeletal trees of the Wolfswood, it was now easier to make out the daunting yet impressive piece of architecture ever created. Though a considerable distance away, The Wall loomed like a judgmental sentry over the North; the 700 feet high ice structure a marvel of man’s ingenuity. History had it that one of his ancestors – Brandon the Builder – was responsible for its construction. And for over eight thousand years, it had stood to protect the realms of men. Jon had no doubt it would last for eight thousand more.

However, as monstrously beautiful as it was, The Wall served as a cruel reminder of the fates of those who were not considered worthy by society. It boasted of several holdfasts, one of which was the home of the infamous Night’s Watch – a group of highly skilled soldiers of which his Uncle Benjen had been a part of. Castle Black was the name of the barracks, and Jon had only seen pictures of the place via Uncle Benjen’s visits to Winterfell. However, several other old or abandoned castles had been transformed into prisons, for they housed some of the most ruthless criminals in all of Westeros. Rapists, murderers, and everything in-between, were shipped off here and forgotten by the rest of humanity. It was generally agreed that there was no greater punishment – short of getting the death penalty – than being sent to The Wall. Living in such bone-chilling, and sometimes unbearable conditions, was enough for anyone to wish for a quick death.

But here’s the million dragon coins question, Jon Snow. How the fuck did you get this far North? Jon thought, in growing bewilderment, as he continued his weary trudge after Ghost. Every bone in his body ached, and he was now so cold, he could barely feel his extremities. I shouldn’t be this far away from home. I only went out hunting with Robb and the others around Crofter’s Village…and now…I can almost touch the fucking Wall.

“Ghost,” he began through lips that felt like chips of ice. “Where are…?”

He would hear the familiar crackles and spits of a campfire, causing him to gasp in surprise at the
unexpected sight. Its orange and red sparks floated into the heavens as the delicious smells of roasting meat filled his nostrils. His stomach growled in appreciation, and it was a reminder he had not eaten in what seemed like forever. He only had a water bottle and a pack of dried jerk beef, and with only his shotgun slung over his shoulder; he hadn’t exactly prepared for an overnight stay. Praying he was going to meet a friendly face and would be able to share the fire, Jon walked closer until he could make out the two silent figures sitting across each other; each sipping something warm from tin cups.

He couldn’t really make out who they were, for they were clad in similar hunting garb and had their heads and most of their face protected with hoodies and extra scarves to keep out the cold. Still, it was surprising to see Ghost walk up to them without giving a howl or whine of caution. If anything, the wolf trotted up to the one sitting on a log and nudged its muzzle against his lap. The man laughed softly and said something to his companion while ruffling Ghost’s head in a familiar pattern that only one other person used to do.

*Wait a minute…*

Jon was now finding it extremely difficult to breathe, and it had absolutely nothing to do with the weather.

*Wait just one damn minute…*

The other man dug into his jacket and whipped out what looked like a piece of meat. He wagged it playfully at Ghost, and the wolf was more than happy to oblige as he reached out to chomp on it.

Jon could feel the sting of tears forming; a hard lump lodging somewhere in his throat until he felt he would scream at the horror yet wonder of it all.

*It can’t be. It…it shouldn’t be.*

“Why are you standing there, Jon?” came the oh-so-familiar deep northern drawl which sent Jon regressing back to his childhood in an instant.

Even before the man finally raised his head, Jon knew who it was.

Lord Eddard Stark of Winterfell.

His late father.

*It…it can’t be.*

Ned Stark’s grey eyes were still filled with that warmth always reserved for his son, and as he lowered his scarf, his lips curved into a smile Jon had once thought he would never see again. It was the final straw; for it broke Jon’s resolve to remain strong and forced the tears out of his eyes.

“Good to see you again, my boy,” Ned said with a nod in greeting. “Although we weren’t really expecting you so soon.”

*We…?*

Ned’s companion lowered his scarf as well, and even before he completely turned, Jon’s instincts proved him right. His breath hitched and the tears fell faster.

*Uncle Benjen!*
“He never did know how to follow instructions,” Benjen said with a flash of his teeth as he chuckled. “You raised a stubborn brat, Ned.”

“And you were supposed to tame him,” Ned replied with a smirk. “Still doesn’t explain why he’s here, does it?”

They all studied him; Ghost included, and it was then that it hit Jon like an avalanche. This wasn’t reality. This was a dream; a horrible tragic dream in which the three most precious things in his life had been lost.

Who’s fucking cruel joke was this?

He sucked in a harsh sob and fell to his knees; the snow almost swallowing him in a greedy gulp.

“No need to cry over something you couldn’t control, Jon,” Ned admonished with a hint of impatience. “The wheels of change were already spinning before you came into the picture.”

Jon scrubbed at his face and tried to speak, but he couldn’t find the words. However, his uncle and father didn’t seem to mind for they shared a look before Benjen turned back to him.

“I’m sorry, Jon,” he said quietly; regret etched in his voice. “I did try to warn you, but they got me before I could. I shouldn’t have left in such a way, and I truly am sorry for what happened.”

“You were chopped into pieces!” Jon cried out when he could trust himself to speak again. “They… those bastards killed you for no reason!”

“There is always a reason,” came the cryptic statement from Ned as he stared into the fire; his features pensive. “Sometimes when we think we are doing the right thing, it turns out we are merely digging ourselves into deeper pits of a quagmire we can never get out of.”

“What are you talking about?” Jon nearly screamed in frustration. “Is it why you were killed? Was it made to look like an accident? Tyrion says-”

“Lannisters have always been known to pay their debts,” Ned interrupted with a bitter smile. “I would pay much attention to the dwarf if I were you. He knows quite a few things.”

“Does this have something to do with why you were both killed?” Jon asked desperately. He struggled to rise to his feet, but the snow now appeared to be enclosing around him like quicksand. He gritted his teeth and clawed through the icy clumps; refusing to let things end like this. “What happened?! Why isn’t anyone telling me the truth?!?”

“You will learn in due time,” came the whispered words as Ned, Benjen, and even Ghost’s figures began to waver before him. “I only hope you can come to forgive us, Jon. We merely thought we were doing what was best.”

“But we failed,” Benjen finished with a sad smile.

“No…no…no!” Jon bellowed; his voice a raw sound torn from the depths of his throat. “Don’t leave me! Don’t leave me alone! Please!”

I miss you so fucking much, he sobbed into the snow while slowly sinking deeper and deeper into it; the warmth of the fire no longer able to reach him. His lashes grew heavier, and a part of him welcomed the heavy blanket of sleep to suddenly descend upon him. It was better this way. He could remain here…in the North…away from whatever cruel reality awaited him in the future. It was safer here. Cold as it might be. He was the North, and he belonged here.
Jon.

(please don’t wake me)

Jon, came the breathless whisper laced with something new. It was a different kind of warmth that seemed to begin from the tips of his toes. It crept slowly up his body leaving behind a wonderful sensation of peace and belonging.

Jon, this voice called out again; a familiar sound that forced his lashes open slowly as if dragged from the deepest of dreams.

Concerned violet eyes were studying him; full pouty lips parted with her breathing before the lower one was caught between her teeth. Her soft flowing hair was a curtain of silver around her face, and as he gingerly lifted a hand to her cheek – perhaps to make sure she wasn’t just another figment of his overactive imagination – she closed her eyes to lean into his caress.

She is real.

“Da…Dany?” he croaked as if to be absolutely sure she was with him.

“One and the same,” she replied and lifted her lashes. Her lips quirked into a small smile before down turning in a frown. Her brows creased in worry. “You were muttering in your sleep. Something about a ghost and…” Her eyes were downcast. “Your uncle…Benjen…”

She reached out to touch his cheek, only to pull it away to show the tear drop lingering on her fingertip.

“I…” He began in a hoarse whisper, not really sure of what exactly he could say; for his mind was a jumbled mass of images where reality and his horrible dream clashed relentlessly.

However, when her lips pressed against his cheeks and the warm wet sensation of her tongue was felt upon his flesh, he realized – with amazement – that she was kissing his tears away.

He didn’t trust himself to move, and he held his breath as she seemed to lick him clean. When her lips finally hovered over his in silent request, he all but moaned in approval and leaned in to claim them with a hunger that was almost frightening. He could taste the salt upon her tongue as he wove his around hers. He captured her breathless gasp as he strained against her; only to wince when his abdominal muscles protested the movement. It just about felt like his wound would rip open in a second.

“Sor…sorry,” she panted when they reluctantly pulled apart. She tried to get off him; for she had been lying half-way across his body, but he kept her prisoner, his arm tightening around her slender waist.

“I’m okay,” he whispered. “I won’t break.”

“I know,” she replied with a weak smile. “You held up the second time around.”

He tried not to blush at the memory of their coupling - where she had all but taken control by straddling his waist and showing him exactly why Drogo had probably become a wimp in her hands. He could feel his nether regions already rising to the occasion when his abdominal muscles protested the movement. It just about felt like his wound would rip open in a second.

“You were most considerate,” Jon said with a chuckle. He reached up to sink his hand into her hair, his fingers brushing through the silky tendrils until they almost covered his chest like a second blanket. God, she smelled like heaven…and tasted like it too.
“…and this isn’t a dream, is it?” came the almost fearful whisper as he stopped his massaging to study her features with an intensity that sent a flood of color to her cheeks.

“I hope not,” she replied and pinched his nipple hard enough to have him wincing again. “That real enough for you?”

“Point taken,” came the whimper as she snuggled against him and ran her fingers across his chest; fingertips dancing over his old scars before tracing the outline of the bandages.

“I’ll change them later,” she said quietly, “but first…you have to tell me why you were crying, Jon. I’m sure it’s got something to do with your uncle and…” She lifted her gaze to him; her eyes dark with sorrow. “I really am sorry you lost him in such a way.”

Jon’s fingers traced random circles along her back, a part of him relishing in the tremble this elicited as she pressed closer to him. Her leg slid seductively against his at the same time, and forcing himself to concentrate, he struggled within himself to tell her everything. Would she truly understand or would she be like Ros, who only listened to his nightmares and recommended he see a shrink to get his head fixed?

This is Daenerys, a voice chided forcefully. Don’t you dare try to compare the two.

He sighed and placed a hard kiss to the top of her head, before turning to look out the opened glass doors leading to the veranda. He had no idea what time it was, but with the soft rays of sun peeking through the curtains, it was clearly morning or midday.

Time flies when you’re having so much fun, eh?

“Did I ever tell you I used to have a direwolf,” he began quietly. The old ache threatened to return and he had to swallow to gather himself. He could feel Dany’s head shake against his chest, and he took a deep breath. “We all did – me and my siblings I mean. I found him and his brothers along a creek several miles from home…his mother was dead at the time. He was the smallest of them all, but I related to him for some reason. I named him Ghost…and he was the best friend I ever had. He made those lonely days in Winterfell bearable in more ways than one.”

An understatement to be sure, for there had been no one more loyal than his direwolf, and Jon knew that was something he could never gain again.

“What happened to him?” Dany urged when he remained silent for a while.

The pain was almost too fresh, and Jon thought he had done a good job repressing those memories. However, Fate had proven time and again to be a cruel mistress, so it was no wonder the dream had happened last night.

“We went hunting,” Jon began as his free hand formed a subconscious fist. “Robb, me, and a couple of buddies. He had Grey Wind, his direwolf, and I had Ghost. They make it easier to find game by the way…and besides, they enjoy running around the forest and such. Good luck finding him though…”

“Ghost?”

“Right.”

“Because he was as white as snow?”

“Did you figure that out all by yourself, genius?”
He received a light blow to the chest for his sarcastic teasing.

Rubbing the ‘injured’ area and trying not to chuckle at her pout, he continued his story. “Well, it was turning out to be an okay day; not much game though because a snowstorm was coming and we had to get back to the truck before it really came down. Believe me, you do not want to be caught in a snowstorm up North. You might as well just hunker down and prepare to spend the night in the forest. Not fun at all.”

He could almost feel his teeth chattering at the memory, and if he closed his eyes, Jon was sure he’d be transported back to the cluttered woods of Crofter’s Village.

“Robb and the others went ahead, and I was bringing up the rear because I had some gear to pack up. Unfortunately, I was being slow, so I lost them for a bit. Ghost…well he knows the way, and he was walking way too fast for me to catch up. If it wasn’t for his eyes, I wouldn’t know where he was. They’re blood red.”

“He sounds beautiful,” Dany whispered.

“He was,” Jon agreed as his eyes stung. “You would have loved him…and I guess he would have loved you too.” He took a deep breath to control himself. “Want to see a picture of him?”

“Sure!” Dany sat up with almost childish anticipation; not caring that she was completely nude. Not that Jon was complaining.

However, her eagerness made him feel good, and he sat up gingerly; trying not to wince as aching muscles protested. “Seven hells, Dany. You’ve turned me into an old man.”

“Shut the fuck up and get your damn phone,” she admonished with a laugh as she swatted his ass gently when he rose to his feet to find his device. He mock whined at being harassed, but did not fail to give her a show while bending to pick up his pants. Her low purr of approval caused him to laugh despite himself.

He returned to bed; only this time they both sat up amongst the pillows. If he noticed the barrage of missed calls and messages waiting for him, he ignored them and scrolled to his gallery.

“Here he is,” Jon bragged shyly as he pulled up several pictures of him and his white wolf in various poses. From the precocious adorable puppy it had once been, to the huge – almost waist high – direwolf it became, Dany marveled at how gorgeous it was. She could understand why losing such a loyal companion would be crushing to Jon, and she was now more curious than ever as to how he passed away.

“So what happened to him?” she asked as she studied the last picture of Ghost. It must have been the last time they were together, for it was of he and Jon – in hunting gear – kneeling along with a group of similar dressed men in front of a truck. The date was almost three years ago.

“He was shot,” came the flat answer that sent a piercing jolt through Dany’s heart. Jon took back the phone from her to study the image; his features unreadable. “A bunch of assholes, who claimed they were ‘tourists’ but led by one of our neighboring Houses – the Karstarks – thought Ghost was game and riddled him with bullets.” Jon’s jaw clenched. “At first, I thought it was a firecracker going off, and couldn’t understand what I was seeing. Ghost is usually fast, but then again, no one’s really tried shooting at him before, so why the fuck would I understand why my direwolf was suddenly limping toward me with blood trailing down his hind legs? He was trying to get to me, and there I was… frozen…my mind not able to comprehend what it was seeing until I heard two more shots…bang! Bang! Just like that…”
Jon’s voice trailed off and an expression so dark filtered across his features, Dany shivered at the sight.

“They came running out whooping and hollering in celebration. They had caught the biggest game. They thought Ghost was a wild wolf, but that fucking asshole Eddard Karstark knew who Ghost was and still let his friends shoot at him! He knew! And I wasn’t going to let them get away with it.”

Jon took a deep breath and what he said next was stated so matter-of-factly, Dany did not doubt it for a second.

“I ended up killing him and two of his friends.”

Jon studied his fists; his gaze distant as if recalling the memory of that night all over again. It had taken him almost a week to plan, for simply walking up the gates of the Karstark Estate was next to impossible. They definitely hadn’t expected to see Jon ambush their truck, but then again, it was he against four formidable opponents, and as Robb once pointed out, it was a damn miracle he survived.

“I almost died as well, but it was worth it. It’s why I ended up in the hospital for a month or so…got these scars as memoirs of that day.” He pointed to the ones around his sternum. “It caused a pretty sticky situation between our families, and according to Robb – since I was in a coma at the time – my father had to do a lot of negotiating so they didn’t come waging war at the Starks. Bullshit if you ask me. They killed Ghost. I wasn’t going to let it go. They deserved every fucking thing that happened to them.”

He stopped talking; his lips curving into a cynical smile.

“Sorry. I bet you didn’t think I was capable of such a thing, huh?”

“…you killed a Harpy,” Dany declared; trying hard not to allow the wetness forming between her legs to show just how affected she was by this side of him. Hadn’t he once said that Northerners were considered barbaric and ruthless? They were almost like the Dothraki in that way, and a depraved part of her loved it.

“Self-preservation…or is that self-defense?” Jon replied with a shrug. “I try not to lose my temper often, and most folks think I’m chill and easy-going, but…when I get really upset…I sometimes forget who I am and just see…red. Know what I mean?”

“I do,” she whispered as she pressed her lips against his shoulder in a lingering kiss. “Trust me, I do.”

“You get into rages as well?”

Dany chuckled and grazed her teeth against his skin. She lifted her gaze to his, and it took all of Jon’s willpower not to push her onto her back – wound be damned – and fuck her into the mattress until she screamed loud enough for the rest of the palace to hear.

“Dragons have been known to be quite feisty,” she replied with a smirk. “Be careful now…I might begin to think you have some dragon blood in you.”

Jon chuckled as she rose to her feet to stretch and damn if every fiber of his being didn’t respond to the delectable sight she made. He cursed his sore muscles and bit his lip; adjusting himself as she shrugged into his shirt without bothering to button it up.

“Don’t worry about me having dragon blood,” he said with a shake of his head. “I’m all Stark…”
“But you don’t know your mother, right?” Dany prodded quietly. “Haven’t you ever wanted to know about her?”

He shrugged. “It’s not important.”

“Liar.”

“Hey!” he protested weakly, but she was already making her way into the bathroom to rummage for a first aid kit. “I’ll have you know that my life does not revolve around some Mom who probably didn’t want me.”

“How do you know that for sure? Did you ask your father?”

“…I…” Jon faltered. Yes, he had dared to ask Ned about his mother, but all he had received was the cryptic ‘she was a wonderful woman, and when I come back from my trip, I’ll tell you all about her.’ Unfortunately, the events around Ghost had taken place during that trip, and by the time Ned returned, he was stuck in a coma struggling for his life.

So what did he mean in that dream? What was I supposed to forgive him for?

“Guess this will have to do,” Dany was muttering as she returned with a basin of warm water and the kit. She motioned for Jon to lift his arms as far as they could go, which he did obediently; giving her access to his dressings.

“You should do a genealogy test,” she was saying as she snipped and unrolled the bandages with a tenderness and expertise that pleasantly surprised him. “It’s cheap these days.”

Jon was embarrassed to admit he had thought of doing that a million times in the past, but he always chickened out at the last minute. Perhaps a part of him was always going to feel ashamed of knowing his mother was probably just some whore, and it would be a reminder of his father’s infidelity and the shame it had brought upon the Stark household. He was that shame and digging into his past was only going to be a painful reminder of it.

“Maybe,” was all he could mumble. “I’d rather not think about it now, okay?”

She shrugged in understanding. “That’s fine. But just be sure to tell me the results when you do find out.”

“Dany…” he whined.

“I’m kidding, kidding,” she appeased him with a chuckle; dodging as he tried to tickle her in retaliation. “Stay still, Mister. I need to get this fixed right.”

“Yes, Nurse Daenerys.”

She stopped as she noticed the expression in his eyes. “Oh gods, let me guess. You just pictured me wearing a naughty nurse’s outfit, didn’t you?”

“Well only if you’re into roleplaying-”

“Shut the fuck up, Jon Snow,” she admonished with an attempt to scowl; though her features were flushed with delight as he pulled her close to place a hard kiss against her stomach.

I could get used to this, she thought with her heart soaring with delight at his undivided attention.
She was glad to see him in a better mood, for a part of her worried he might have awakened with feelings of regret. How they had managed to sneak into his bedroom last night was a miracle, but since most of the guests were so busy partying or drunk out of their minds, seeing two half-naked people must have been just another random expected sighting of debauchery.

Once in the safety of his bedroom, they were barely able to keep their hands and lips off each other. The rest of their clothing flew in different directions before the large (and yes, very comfortable bed) welcomed their naked bodies for the rest of the night/morning. Somewhere in the middle of their frenzied lovemaking, Jon had profusely apologized for not wearing protection. He was usually more careful and all that. How adorable had he looked being all flustered in embarrassment? However, she had reassured him that she was unlikely to get pregnant anytime soon, and silenced his unspoken query with a kiss to distract him. It was something she would rather not talk about.

She had watched him sleep; recalling the first time she saw him in such a state back in his apartment. That seemed a lifetime ago; only this time she had finally been given the permission to explore every inch of his amazing body. He didn’t seem to mind her taking the lead (this time), and it was almost orgasmic to watch him experience his release. She hated to compare notes with her previous lovers, but so far…this intriguing northerner was making her rethink a few things when it came to her bedroom skills.

“We should go do something today,” Jon was saying as he slipped into a fresh pair of pants once she was done with him. “Ooh, I know. I think you’re going to like going to the zoo with me. There’s this awesome exhibition of Komodo dragons Tyene and I saw the other day. You’ll get a kick out of them.”

“Ah, you’ve met them too?”

Jon stopped in mid zip of his pants and blinked in surprise at Dany. “What do you mean ‘met them too’?”

“Missandei and I visited the zoo when we first got here,” she explained with a grin. “We got to see the dragons and I gave them names. Aren’t they just gorgeous?”

Gorgeous wasn’t exactly the term Jon would have used to describe those cumbersome creatures, but he was more bemused at her decision to actually name them.

“You gave them names?”

“Viserion, Rhaegal, and Drogon,” she announced with a flourish. “Viserion and Rhaegal are named after my older brothers, and Drogon-”

“After Drogo,” Jon finished unable to hide his jealousy at that. “Geez, I thought you didn’t like that guy. And which one is Drogo? Let me guess…the biggest one? The one that’s black and red?”

Dany laughed softly. “There’s no need to pout over a couple of dragons. And yes, he was named after Drogo…because.”

“Maybe I don’t want to know,” Jon cut in as he reached for his phone. He winced at the messages piling up; his brows creasing as he noticed most of them were from Davos. What the fuck was going on?

“You will have to tell me more about these brothers of yours,” he added with a small smile. “Well aside from your dick brother, Viserys, I hope Rhaegal was -”

“Rhaegar. His name was Rhaegar,” Dany corrected with a tilt of her head. “Unfortunately, I didn’t
really know him. He died before I was born, so all I know is what I’ve heard from others.” Her gaze was distant as she pursed her lips. “He did sound like he was a great guy. Hell, even Viserys wanted to be like him.”

Jon nodded slowly, and then remembered something about the Targaryen dynasty. His lips quirked in amusement. “So if he was alive, would you have married him or something? Don’t you Targaryens practice incest?”

Dany rolled her eyes at his mock attempts to gag. She rose to her feet and reached for the bell to summon a handmaiden. She was starving.

“Laugh all you want, Mr. Northerner. I’m not ashamed of my family’s history and yes, I would have married Viserys at the least.”

Jon genuinely appeared intrigued at this. “It doesn’t bother you?”

“Why should it? Love is no respecter of person, age, creed and all that bullshit. As long as it’s not between father-daughter, mother-son, everything else is fair game.” She flopped onto her stomach on the bed and curled her arms around a pillow with a sigh. “We are Targaryens and we love indiscriminately.”

She smirked and studied him through the gossamer shield of silver hair; brilliant violet eyes almost daring him to refute her argument.

He matched her expression and raised his phone to turn on its recording feature; not sure why he was even doing this, but feeling that capturing this very moment - when she looked like a sexy fallen angel or something equally as cheesy – was something he desperately needed.

_Gods, you are beautiful, Daenerys Targaryen._

He ignored her playful pouts and savored every inch of her until his attention focused on the tantalizing view of her lower back where the three-headed dragon tattoo seemed to beckon him. She wasn’t helping matters by kicking her legs back and forth slowly, and he was powerless to control himself as he raised a knee upon the bed to touch the sigil with unfeigned reverence.

_The Targaryens love indiscriminately, huh?_

He turned off the phone and tossed it aside to move closer. He traced the outline of the magnificent creatures with his fingertips; smiling as her body responded with visible tremors accentuated by her sharp intake of breath. He groaned in helpless desire; lashes drifting closed as his tongue finally tasted the pale skin tinged with red and black ink. The tangy salt of her skin was an aphrodisiac to his senses, and he couldn’t get enough. She sighed and arched into his warm kisses; whimpering as his fingers roamed lower to caress the delectable curves of her ass before squeezing the plump cheeks with possessive intent.

Her breathless gasp of his name dared him to take it further.

When he smacked her cheeks gently, she yelped and shivered in response; the combined sensation of pain and pleasure sending delicious tingles down her spine. He smacked them a little harder, and this time she buried her face into the pillow; her lusty growl almost his undoing.

Lifting his lashes and noticing the unmistakable glistening dew between her secret folds, Jon licked his lips in hungry anticipation.

_Fuck it_, he thought as he stared at the clock. It was almost two in the afternoon, but there was no rule
“Your Grace?” came the sudden interruption which had them sitting up so quickly, Dany nearly rolled off the bed in her haste.

“My apologies!” the handmaiden gushed profusely as she lowered her head and bowed over and over again. “I did knock and no one answered and I heard the bell and -”

“It’s okay,” Dany interrupted before the younger girl could burst into tears. “We…if you don’t mind sending up some lunch for us, we’d really appreciate it.”

“Yes, Your Grace,” she replied with an exhale of relief and excused herself. No doubt she’d have some juicy gossip for her fellow handmaidens; the Queen and her new boy toy misbehaving.

Jon and Dany looked at each other for a moment before bursting into helpless laughter. She would have reached out for him again, when another knock had Jon cursing loudly in frustration. Dany rolled her eyes in resignation.

“The real world calls,” she complained as this time, it was Missandei sticking her head in with a sheepish smile.

“Sorry to interrupt you lovebirds,” she said with a polite bow. The smile faltered as she squared her shoulders and took a deep breath. “But I think you both need to come down to the Great Hall. Tyrion is about to lose his mind, and he was this close to coming up here to get you himself.”

Jon stiffened. “What’s wrong?” Recalling all the missed messages and phone calls sent alarm bells going off in his head.

Missandei would only shrug. “I think it’s best you come downstairs and see for yourselves.”

Thirty minutes later, they were staring at headlines from various newspapers across Westeros including an opened laptop with more viral discussions related to the ‘Dragon Queen’ and her ‘Mystery Man’ – though one clever journalist had actually done some digging and was able to disclose Jon’s true identity.

Well fuck.

“Most are good headlines,” Ellaria tried to diffuse the tense situation for Tyrion was currently staring, with a stony expression, out the window with his hands clasped tightly behind his back. “They seem positive…?”

And she was right, for the most part. Some were kind – mostly the gossip rags and frivolous magazines geared toward the youth – for they seemed to focus more on her ‘comeback’ after being heckled by protesters. However, the majority (mainstream publications) seemed determined to focus on her humiliation; some even going as far as printing the photo of the drink being spilled on her. They weren’t the most flattering of images, and it painted Daenerys Targaryen as nothing more than a sham of a wannabe ruler.

“And I could have sworn we had a no camera policy for the party,” Oberyn muttered in frustration. “I have no idea how-”
“There’s no way you can keep out anyone who wishes to sneak that in,” Jorah interrupted with a pained smile. He was studying Dany’s expressionless features; though his glance would slide every now and then to her equally silent companion, whose handsome visage was still trained on the computer screen.

He wasn’t naïve enough to think those two hadn’t spent the night together, and after watching Dany make several mistakes with some of her male partners over the years, he wondered if this Jon Snow would be another name added to that list soon. If this negative news coverage didn’t make him want to turn tail and leave her, then he was a better man than Jorah gave him credit for.

“When I agreed to this party,” Tyrion suddenly said; his voice tight with barely restrained fury. “It was with the intention to garner more support from the great Houses in Dorne. That plan did go swimmingly, and I’m glad we were able to get some alliances formed. However, with this…this disaster!”

He flung another newspaper in their direction; this time the headlines blared the words:

**WANTON DISPLAY BY FUTURE QUEEN OF WESTEROS?**

**WE THINK NOT.**

It was compounded by the image of Dany and Jon in a rather seductive pose on the dance floor.

“This is not what we planned for our grand entry into Westeros,” Tyrion raged. “My father is probably laughing his ass off at our folly and now regards this all as nothing more than child’s play for him. He’s got us right where he wants, and all we can do now is wait for him to strike the final hammer and destroy everything we’ve worked for! What was the whole point of coming here if we allow such blunders to keep occurring?! This is unacceptable!”

A strained silence fell around the large table, and perhaps they were grateful Doran wasn’t around for he had returned to Sunspear to be with his wife and family. He might have been just as furious. All the same, Jon could feel his ire rising at Tyrion’s unjust accusations. It wasn’t as if they planned any of that stuff to happen, and he was making it seem as if Dany was solely responsible.

“We have to come up with another plan,” Tyrion was saying as he paced to the window again. “I suggest we remain here for some time—”

“Keep hiding you mean?” Jon sneered before he could control himself. “How long do you intend to keep doing that, huh?”

There must have been something in his tone because everyone stared at him with surprise, none more so than Tyrion who looked apoplectic.

“I’m not sure I asked for your opinion, bastard of Winterfell,” he finally grated coldly. “Now if you don’t mind—”

“He will speak,” Dany commanded with a quick warning look at Tyrion before nodding to Jon. “What did you want to say? Please. Speak freely.”

Jon took a deep breath; his heart now beating a little too fast as the thoughts raced through his mind. This could be a foolhardy plan, but it was worth a try. He might not be as social media savvy as his
older brother, but he knew enough to realize this was a golden opportunity that could not be missed.

“We take advantage of this,” he said aloud as he met each gaze without flinching. “Tywin Lannister and his cohorts rely on the old school way of doing things; using the newspapers and buying them up to write whatever he chooses, right? Well we do the opposite. We make use of this.” He tapped the laptop gently. “I have a friend who’s a wiz at setting up websites and shit like that. If I can talk to him, he’ll be able to set up a network online that focuses on all the positives. We infiltrate Illustrogram, MaesterBook, and Raven…all of it. We build an online, social media army; those who support everything Dany stands for and we go from there. We’ve seen what she did in Slaver’s Bay, right? We take testimonials of all that, and we create a new movement here in Westeros. No more hiding bullshit. She goes out there and speaks directly to the people and lets them know what she’s all about.”

This time his gaze fell on the wide violet eyes staring back at him. His tone was softer now as if hoping to appease to her better judgement.

“I know it’s going to be daunting, but if you were able to change an entire nation in Essos, you can do the same here. You just have to find that same girl who wasn’t afraid to get dirty and gritty. You’ve got to stop hiding in the shadows and stake your claim. As for me, I know you want the North to be on your side, and I’ll do my best to bring it to you. My stepmother might want to put up a fight, but Robb’s the one who makes the final decisions, and I’ll do whatever I can to get him and the other Houses on board.”

When he was through with his speech, the silence was almost deafening. However, if he expected Dany to be furious with him, he was rewarded with a softening of her gaze in silent gratitude. He tried to ignore the roaring flutter of butterflies to fill his stomach at the sight and tore his gaze away to focus on Tyrion’s rigid expression. The dwarf looked as if he wanted to say something, but he was interrupted by the taller man at his side.

“She’ll become a sitting duck for her enemies,” Jorah protested with a shake of his head. “I know we’re taking care of the Harpies, but there’s Drogo and his army to worry about. And let’s not forget Robert Baratheon’s quest to eliminate you with their help. I cannot allow you to—”

“Thank you, Jorah,” Dany interrupted with a deep breath as she clasped her hands on her lap. “I know we’re taking care of the Harpies, but there’s Drogo and his army to worry about. And let’s not forget Robert Baratheon’s quest to eliminate you with their help. I cannot allow you to—”

“Thank you, Jorah,” Dany interrupted with a deep breath as she clasped her hands on her lap. “I appreciate your concern…and yours as well, my Lord Tyrion. You have both been invaluable help to me, and without you, I doubt I would have gotten this far.” She looked to Ellaria and Oberyn. “To you both, my dear friends, I owe you so much as well. I am forever in your debt for accepting me into your home.”

She rose to her feet. The simple white Grecian gown swept against her curves as she walked slowly toward the window, painting an almost ethereal picture of her. Her long hair was back in a single braid that fell over her right shoulder, and Jon found himself missing its loose form from earlier in the day. However, it was nice to see her being more feminine. It was a sight he could get used to.

“I’d like you to set up that meeting with the Great Masters as soon as possible, my Lord,” Dany directed toward Tyrion. “From Grey Worm’s last correspondence, they have managed to eliminate four of the bases, and now the Masters wish to renegotiate terms. Once and for all, we will settle whatever grievances they may have with me. As for your plan, Jon…”

She turned back to him. “I thank you for your promise of allegiance to me as well as your suggestions to further my cause for reclaiming the Syndicate. However, we do have certain plans in motion. The first is to reclaim Dragonstone as a home base instead of infringing on our dear host and hostess in Dorne. As wonderful a country as you have, my Prince and Princess, I’m afraid I cannot live here forever. It seems almost ridiculous having to fight to even get back my ancestral home, but
there is a lot of legal procedures to go through, and I believe we’re finally making some headway. Yes?”

This she posed to Tyrion, who could only nod albeit reluctantly.

“My father’s claws sink even deeper into territories once occupied by usurpers, and Dragonstone was once overtaken by Robert Baratheon’s late brother, Stannis. He passed away over five years ago ravaged by the pox.”

“Who lives there now?” Jon asked in bemusement.

“Cockroaches, rats, and the occasional hobo or two,” Tyrion replied dryly. “Once Prince Doran Martell signs the papers, Dragonstone is ours again. It’s part of the reason we were here; not just to lay around getting a suntan. We had to convince him to our side, and he made it possible. We owe him a great debt of gratitude.”

“Once situated, I’ll meet with the Great Masters and then follow through with Jon’s plans,” Dany said with a small smile. “He’s right. I cannot continue hiding forever, and if it means walking the streets of King’s Landing to get the message directly to the people, then so be it.”

“You could be arrested,” Tyrion whispered with barely concealed panic. “This is King’s Landing we’re talking about; not the Free Cities.”

“Then so be it. What’s a revolution without sacrifice?” Dany replied with a shrug. “I did not come to conquer Westeros or preside over them like a tyrant. They need to know what I stand for and not what lies and propaganda your father feeds them. As for Robert Baratheon and his quest to kill me… let him try.

“My army, and I, will be ready for him.”

By dinner time, however, she was a mass of worry.

She could barely taste the chicken on her plate, her furtive glance darting toward the empty seat where Jon should have been sitting. Around her, everyone else seemed unconcerned at his absence. At one end of the table, Prince Oberyn and Ellaria chuckled between themselves like infatuated lovers. At the other end, Tyrion and Jorah were engaged in conversation and she was glad to see her Hand was less uptight. Dany figured guzzling down an entire bottle of Dornish wine had something to do with that. Missandei also seemed lost in her meal, and it was a reminder that her best friend was probably missing Grey Worm. She hoped her captain had at least tried to keep in contact, for the last thing she needed to see was Missandei feeling miserable.

When brown eyes suddenly looked up to notice Dany’s gaze, she raised her brow in query.

“Is everything all right, my Queen?”

Dany tried to smile. “It’s…it’s nothing.”

She looked down and poked at her chicken again, but Missandei was already well-versed with her friend’s body language.
“Are you worried about Jon?” she prodded, and that released the pent up concerns she had.

“Where is he?” Dany leaned in to whisper in a rush. “I’ve not seen him since the meeting earlier today. He excused himself to catch up on some phone calls, and he’s not been back since.”

“Maybe he fell asleep somewhere…?”

“I’m going to find him.”

“Your Grace?” Missandei asked as she rose to her feet in reflex when Dany suddenly pushed back her chair to do the same. The others at the table noticed and stood as well in respect, but Dany did not wait to tell them the reason for her sudden departure.

She had no idea where to begin looking, but making a quick pit stop in her bedroom, she shrugged into his sweatshirt and covered her hair within the hoodie so as not to draw any extra attention to herself. Besides, the nights were getting cooler around here.

As she made her way down to the beach, she thought of all she had learned about him today. One; he was fiercely loyal to those he loved, even if it was to a furry companion whose loss had almost driven him to the point of madness.

Two; his promise to ‘bring the North to her’ was more than she could possibly wish for, but she was aware that it was going to be a difficult proposition. If he wasn’t able to convince his brother of her intentions, then the road to the Syndicate was going to be just a little bit harder to achieve. However, she was still pleased at his quick thinking at the meeting earlier today; for it showed a side of him that was most impressive. He could be a leader if he chose to be. However, she was sure a part of him was unwilling to take that position. Everyone had looked at him with respect, even Tyrion despite his better judgement. He had later confessed to Dany that Jon’s plan was actually quite feasible. They only had to turn the tide in their favor and set the wheels in motion. It would completely blindside Tywin if she took control of social media.

The palace was now a mere speck behind her, when she finally spied the glow of his cigarette and his solemn silhouette perched on a cluster of rocks. Her initial instinct to call out his name, in delight, faded at his body language. It was in the slumped shoulders and the almost resigned tilt of his head as he looked to the heavens and let out a cloud of smoke.

If he noticed her approach, he made no attempt to acknowledge it…until he drawled out lazily.

“So that’s where my goddamn sweatshirt’s been all this time. I still want it back, you know.”

She had the grace to blush at his teasing, before sitting beside him. There was so much she wanted to say and ask –

Do you have second thoughts? Do you wish you had never met me? Are you really sure this will work? What if we fail? What if we’re only kidding ourselves and we end up making a mess of things? What then?

She bit her lower lip and was content to let the companionable silence stew between them for a while. Dany figured he’d speak when he was good and ready to.

After what seemed like an eternity, he crushed out the cigarette and exhaled sharply. When he spoke, his voice was low and almost broken. “I have to return to King’s Landing, Dany.”

Dany did not really believe in premonitions, but a part of her knew it had to be something like this. She might have convinced herself that it was an inevitability; after all they couldn’t live out the rest of
their lives in scenic Dorne. Still, the sharp ache to fill her heart at the knowledge that they were going
to be separated again was too much to bear. It was almost embarrassing to feel this strongly for
someone so soon.

“Why?” she asked as she raised her knees to her chest and kept her eyes focused on her toes.

“…I fucked up.”

She looked up then; eyes widening in confusion. “What?”

Jon closed his eyes; a pained expression on his features. “Did I ever tell you about my encounter
with the Dothraki at Robert Baratheon’s store?”

“I don’t think so,” she replied carefully.

He took a deep breath and recounted the terrifying encounter, where he had almost lost his life to one
of Drogo’s men. Dany listened with her heart in her throat; the realization of how close he had come
to death now weighing on her mind. Somehow this was beginning to hit home again, and if her
initial concern for his safety was a flame, it had now magnified into a raging inferno.

“I hid the weapon beneath my car seat that night,” Jon was saying, “and I forgot all about it…until
now.” He lifted his lashes to look at her. “The City Watch has been looking through my things…
everything in their quest to find my uncle’s killer, and apparently they dug around the Camaro too.
They found the weapon and now they want me to turn myself in.”

“But you had nothing to do with it!” Dany cried out in dismay. “I don’t under-!”

“I know,” Jon replied with a weary smile. “It’s why Davos has been calling me like crazy. They
have an arrest warrant, and if I don’t show up by tomorrow morning…they’re going to shut down
the complexes and force the tenants to move out.”

“They can’t do that!”

“This is King’s Landing,” Jon said with a bitter smile. “You’ve lived in the Free Cities for too long,
Dany. In Westeros, they don’t follow the same rules.”

She rose to her feet; her agitation evident in the restless pacing and the wringing of her hands. She
eventually came to a stop before him; her eyes blazing with determination. “I’ll send the bail money.
We’ll get you out of there immediately. You won’t have to spend a single night in their disgusting
cells and…oh.”

He had reached out to tug on the sleeve of the sweatshirt, pulling her close to him to bury his face
against her neck as he hugged her tight.

“Don’t worry about me. I’ll be fine,” he murmured thickly against her flesh. “I didn’t do anything,
and they know it. They just want a scapegoat and besides, I think this tells me exactly what
happened.”

“What do you mean?” Dany whispered into his hair.

I won’t cry. I won’t cry. I won’t fucking cry.

“It was the Dothraki who killed my uncle. According to the autopsy, the ridges of the blade match
the severed parts of my uncle’s body. Robert Baratheon had something to do with all this. He works
with them now, right?”
Jon pulled back, but just far enough to stare into the shimmering amethyst eyes he would dream of for many more nights to come. “I don’t know how or why, but I’ll get to the bottom of it, and if it eventually means me taking him out myself, then please…give me the pleasure of doing it, Dany. I want this.”

She swallowed the hard lump forming in her throat; the tears threatening to escape as she clutched his shoulders tightly and rest her forehead against his.

_I won’t cry. I won’t cry. I won’t fucking cry._

“Okay, okay…” she breathed as she studied every golden fleck within his beautiful brown eyes. She roamed over his beautiful scarred features; the cut above his right eye almost healed yet giving him a more rugged appearance she could appreciate. She memorized every curl of his thick head of hair to the rich fullness of his beard. She wanted to remember him this way.

“As you wish…but I swear, if he harms a hair on your head, Jon Snow-”

“Right,” he chuckled against her lips. “You have my permission to kick his ass as well.”

She kissed him then; a hard meeting of parted lips and feverish tongues that sought to outduel each other. They drank of each other with a greed that made them weak yet strong in their realization of what could be happening between them. When they finally broke apart for air, it was only to cling even tighter to each other as if aware that time was fleeting and they needed to hold on to these precious moments for as long as they could.

She wanted to ask him to call or text her every day, and he wished he could ask her to facetime or text him every fucking minute if possible. She hoped he could guess that she would miss him to pieces and would monitor his whereabouts with the sending of her Unsullied to protect him, while he hoped she would guess he’d be thinking of her every goddamn fucking minute until he went mad with the desire to be with her again.

But the words they longed to say, would remain lodged stubbornly in their throats; their only means of communicating the depths of their feelings being the tightening of their clasped hands and the steady beating of their hearts.

Come morning, they would say their farewells, for Life was nothing more than a cruel bitch with no plans to give them a breather.
Dawn was yet to break the shadowed horizon as the sedan cruised onto the tarmac where a sleek private jet sat in silent vigil for its occupants.

I do hope you know what you’re doing, Snow, the dwarf warned. His features were pinched despite his attempt to appear blasé. This could very well be a trap, and I’d hate for the news to reach us about your untimely demise. You’ve already made quite an impression with our Queen, so it’s best you remember not to betray her trust when faced with potential dilemmas, and believe me…there will be plenty abound. Just promise you’ll make the right choice when the time comes. These are not your normal adversaries on a children’s playground. You are now dealing with adults who aren’t afraid to get their hands dirty or bloody until victory is achieved. Tread lightly, bastard. That is all.
When the sedan came to a stop, an Unsullied was quick to open the door before Jon could do so. Embarrassed at the extra attention, he stepped out and tried to smile at the stern features before him. It was not reciprocated. These guys really took their jobs seriously, didn’t they? If they were going to become ‘companions’ - for goodness knows how long - it was best to establish some sort of rapport, yes? Pity his Valyrian was abysmal.

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*I really wish we got to know each other for a little bit longer,* Tyene complained in good-natured teasing. *But yes, I will deliver the message to your brother when I see him at the college. I hope you’ll come visit as well, Jon. It’s been a pleasure getting to know you. You take care of yourself, all right? And don’t mind what those gossip rags say. You remain true to who you are. Promise me that.*

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“Any other luggage, sir?” the sweet-faced flight attendant asked with a charming smile.

Jon matched her expression and shook his head as he pointed to the backpack over his shoulder. “Nope. Just this. Sorry. Light traveler.”

She bowed and stepped aside to let him in. “Welcome aboard, sir.”

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*You must return to our lovely country again, Jon,* Oberyn enthused despite the unreadable expression in his dark eyes. *And when you do, we must battle. I look forward to teaching you the way of the spear. Besides, it’s going to be an added plus in your attempts to woo our future Queen, eh?*

*Don’t embarrass him,* Ellaria chimed in. *But what he says is true. I do hope you return to us again, Jon. You’ve been a delightful guest – a bit morose most of the time – but we can change all that around here. Take care of yourself, my darling.*

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He sank into one of the posh leather seats; the House Martell color scheme of orange, red, and cream prominent in the décor. Three of his new ‘companions’ - also known as bodyguards - sat across the aisle, led by the solemn Stalwart Shield. He gave a polite nod when he noticed his new master studying him, before turning his attention to his fellow soldiers.
“Can I get you anything, sir?”

It was another flight attendant, only she was a little older than the first, but no less pretty. It must be a requirement for all Dornish women to look this good, Jon thought with faint amusement.

“No, thanks,” he replied politely. “I’m fine.”

“Very good, sir.” And with a courteous bow, she sashayed across the aisle to charm the stoic eunuchs as best she could.

_I hope we do meet again, Jon_, Missandei said with a warm smile. _It’s been a pleasure getting to know you – although one feels there’s more to the sullen Northerner than meets the eye. Still, I thank you for revealing a little more of the real Daenerys beneath the veneer. I don’t think I’ve seen her this…at peace? Seems almost strange to put it that way considering the chaos that surrounds her constantly, but you are responsible for it, and I thank you from the depths of my heart. However, if there comes a time when you feel you can no longer be with her, please break her heart from a million miles away where we can never reach you. Nykeā zaldrīzes’s vēdros daor sagon lyka (a dragon’s fury cannot be silent)._  

He slipped the headphones over his ears and almost sighed in pleasure as – with the push of a button - the seat slowly reclined into a more comfortable position.

The lights of the cabin dimmed, and the barely audible rumble of the jet taxiing down the runway, blended effortlessly with the opening strums of his favorite guitar solo. He stared out the window with a pang of longing he had hoped would fade by now.

_Farewell, oh sweet summer refuge._

He couldn’t remember the journey to this fascinating country, but leaving it felt like a piece of him was missing. In the week he had spent here with its colorful people, Jon had come to appreciate their fierce loyalty and free spirit. They didn’t seem shackled with the boundaries set by the occupants in the Red Keep, for they simply chose to do things their way. They might have been a part of Westeros, but the Dornish followed their own rules and were more than content to protect those freedoms should it ever come under attack. They were a proud people and weren’t the slightest bit ashamed to let everyone know it.

Jon would miss this place. He would miss the open and unpretentious geniality of the small folk with their delightful accents. He would miss the savory goodness of a well-cooked traditional Dornish meal, for their spices and herbs were out of this world. He would miss the rich flavor of their wines; an intoxicating aphrodisiac one could never find in King’s Landing (or Winterfell come to think of it). He would miss the sight of cloudless azure skies, swaying palm trees outside his window and the sounds of happy families frolicking in the palace’s magical pools. He wondered if he’d ever get to see those distant red mountains again, or get to sail the Summer Sea in one of Prince Oberyn’s
ostentatious yachts or ever get to walk along its picturesque beaches with a certain young woman at
his side.

I miss her already.

He closed his eyes and fought down the rising lump to his throat; cursing at how pathetic he was
becoming when it came to his affections for her. He was almost fearful of how quick he was to feel
this way, and a part of him worried that it might end up being a one-sided affair. So yes, she had not
given him any reason to assume otherwise, but one never knew when it came to such things.

He was no expert in love or being able to deduce body languages when it came to that particular
emotion. After all, Robb had teased him mercilessly about his cluelessness when it came to women.

However, if their decision to spend the rest of the night talking for hours on end…or sometimes not
saying anything but simply holding onto each other with stolen soft kisses – was any indication, then
there had to be some hope for him, right? She had not specifically said she liked him like that, and
though he had been tempted on more than one occasion to blurt out the ‘I’ word in a fit of passion, he
restrained himself. The last thing he wanted was to alienate her with his ardor, so he vowed to be
content with this blossoming stage of their relationship.

Besides, there was no guarantee he was going to return.

I might be walking right into a trap, just like Tyrion said.

His lips quirked into a cynical smile at that thought, and not for the first time, he wondered what his
final moments on earth would be like.

For all he knew, the City Watch might gun him down the moment he stepped onto the tarmac, and if
they didn’t, then the Dothraki might be lying in wait to eliminate him via Robert Baratheon’s
orders… probably. If Grey Worm was to be believed, he and his soldiers had just about taken care of
most of the Harpies hiding in King’s Landing, but there was really no guarantee they weren’t rogues
still roaming about. If there was a hit out for him, then Jon knew he was going to be a walking target
until Dany was able to convince those Masters to call off their dogs.

Gods he hoped their move to Dragonstone would happen quickly so she could begin those
negotiations.

Still, he realized concerning himself with what was to happen wasn’t really conducive. Why worry
over events he could not really control? He might as well try to get some sleep despite the short
flight. The gods knew he needed it. However, as he was about to settle in, the familiar vibration of
his cell phone had him lifting his lashes quickly.

Assuming it was Davos, he couldn’t help the smile to tug at his lips as another familiar name glowed
on the screen. He unlocked the device and chuckled at the message complete with some rather
colorful emoji to emphasize her point.

Can’t believe u left me out there, u ass!!!!! (middle finger raised-angry face-more middle
fingers)

He typed back; the smile now seemingly fixed on his face. She could be so damn dramatic…even
with a text.

U looked so beautiful sleeping. Didn’t have the (heart emoji) to wake u. Forgive me? (sad face)

There was an eternity of swimming dots, and Jon could almost picture her blushing visage or her
confounded features as she bit her lower lip in thought before she finally responded with a –

U could have still woken me – that sand gets everywhere (sticking-out-tongue)

(laugh emoji) But you said u hate long goodbyes, he responded. Thought it best I leave without a fuss.

More swimming dots and then –

U forgot your sweatshirt.

U were sleeping in it (smile emoji)

I’m never giving it back…or rather, u have to come get it back and that’s an order from ur Queen. (crown emoji)

He felt the sting of tears prickle in his eyes and he swallowed tightly at the hidden plea in her ‘curt’ message. He took a deep breath to get his act together and typed as fast as his trembling fingers could.

Yes, my Queen. I promise.

His fingers hovered over the damn ‘l-word’ emoji and it took all of his effort not to say ‘fuck it’ and send it anyway, but he was spared the torturous decision when she sent back a simple -

Have a safe trip, Jon (snowflake emoji).

Anyone could sense that it was the official end of the conversation, and as he shut off the phone and closed his eyes again, Jon allowed the flow of their unspoken words to ease the tension brewing within.

A rough shake on his shoulder had him jerking out of a dreamless nap.

“We here,” Stalwart Shield said in his brusque tone as he towered over Jon. His knowledge of the Common Tongue was not as good as Grey Worm’s but Missandei had been doing her best to teach them over the years. It was slow-going, but as long as they could communicate the basics, Jon felt they could manage somehow.

“Thanks,” he groaned as he sat up and rubbed the back of his neck. A quick look out the window was enough to tell him the story. There was no mistaking the familiar King’s Landing skyline with its towering skyscrapers and of course, the monstrous Red Keep in the distance. It was a little lighter now, but still early enough that there was a bleak grayness to the dawn.

Home sweet home, Jon thought with a sardonic smile as he rose to his feet and reached for his backpack.

He thanked the pilot and flight attendants for their courtesy before stepping out of the plane and into the polluted stench of the city he was now all too accustomed to.

However, it was the sight of his friends that brought a genuine smile to his face, for waiting on the
tarmac was Davos, Sam, and Gendry. The most unlikely of trios.

Gods, he had missed them.

In other news, there was no sign of the City Watch…yet.

“Jon!” Sam cried out in delight as he all but waddled toward his best friend and engulfed him in the biggest bear hug possible. He just about lifted Jon off the ground. “I’ve missed you!”

“Seven hells, Sam,” Jon replied with a laugh. “I’ve just been gone for a few days.”

“It’s been a miserable few days,” Sam pouted and wiped the tear from his eye; his face flushed with delight yet failed to mask the hints of concern. “Last time I saw you, you were face down drunk on the roof.” He studied the healing wound above his right eye. “You fell and cut yourself, yeah?”

“I guess,” Jon replied and hugged Sam again. “Thank you,” he whispered into his ear. “For everything.”

He pulled away before Sam could burst into the waterworks again, and reached for Davos to give a firm handshake. Something about seeing the older man and his wizened features made Jon choke up. Perhaps it was the realization that this man had somehow become a father-figure in his life and was replacing the role his Uncle Benjen once had. Still, he didn’t expect to be yanked in for a warm hug as well, and as Davos patted his back, Jon had to squeeze his eyes shut to hold back his tears.

“I’m glad to see you, son,” Davos whispered fiercely. “It’s been hell, but it’s good to see you again.”

He released Jon with a firm squeeze of his shoulder, before allowing Gendry to take over.

Though a part of him was still wary about his friend’s association with an ‘enemy’, Jon was still big enough to hope that it wouldn’t tarnish a relationship he had come to cherish. He accepted the hug; almost taken aback at the shimmering tears in Gendry’s eyes when they finally pulled apart.

“It’s good to see you, man,” Gendry said; his voice rough with his emotions. “We thought…I don’t know…everything that happened that night…I thought I had lost you.”

“You did what you could,” Jon replied with a firm grip on his friend’s shoulder. “No one could have predicted what happened, and I heard you put up a fight.”

“Not good enough,” Gendry all but growled in frustration. “Would have taken out those assholes if those two hadn’t shown up.” His brows drew into a frown. “Still have no idea who the fuck they were, but they saved my life…and yours I guess. I woke up and you were gone.”

Curious blue eyes studied Jon for a long minute before he asked warily. “Who were they, Jon?”

*I wish I could tell you, buddy,* Jon thought, *but I can’t really trust where your loyalties lie at this time.*

Jon was spared an answer when Davos interrupted curtly. “We came as fast as we could because them bastards are on their way as we speak.”

“Right,” Jon replied as he shouldered off the backpack. He nodded toward the silent men watching the reunion from afar. “Those three are the Unsullied sent to protect me. They won’t start up a fight with the City Watch, so don’t worry, but they will be around as bodyguards…so-

“What do you need bodyguards for?” Gendry asked with a raised brow. “Is it because of those guys
“Pretty much,” Jon stated with a bitter smile. He handed the backpack to Davos. “All my stuff’s in there. Not much, but keep it safe.”

Davos nodded and stepped aside. They could now make out the flashing lights from several City Watch vehicles coming down the tarmac.

“Sam?” Jon motioned for his friend. He would have to do this quickly. “Can I talk to you for a minute?”

“Sure, Jon. What’s up?”

Jon wrapped an arm around Sam’s shoulder and led him further away from the others. Once he was out of earshot of Davos and Gendry, he dug into his pocket to pull out the private cellphone reserved for communication amongst Dany and her team.

“This is a very special phone,” Jon explained as he shoved it into Sam’s hand. “It’s got some very important people in there, and I want you to specifically concentrate on the person named D.T. She’ll call you at some point, and whatever she asks of you, please do it. I know you’ll be able to do a great job with her requests.”

“Who…?”

“No time for that now, Sam,” Jon cut in with a frown. The City Watch cars were now surrounding them – four in all – and as doors began opening and slamming shut, Jon could feel the weight of the situation settling upon his shoulders.

This was it.

“Just do whatever she tells you. When I get out, I’ll explain everything. I promise.”

“Okay. Got it,” Sam whispered as he hid the phone inside his jacket and studied his friend’s tense yet weary features with growing fear. “Will you be okay, Jon?”

“What’s the worst they can do to me?” came the flippant reply despite the strained smile. “I’m innocent and they know it.” He hugged Sam one last time before stepping back with a deep breath.

“It’s show time.”

Jacelyn Bywater looked positively chuffed at the sight of his latest victim, and if he could strut any more than he already was, he would try to manage it.

Jon was not impressed.

“Good morning to you, Jon Snow,” the officer greeted jovially as he approached with arms outstretched. His teeth flashed in a shit-eating grin. “Welcome back to King’s Landing, eh? How was your little vacation in good ol’ Dorne?”

“Wonderful, thanks,” Jon replied with a matching grin. “You should try it sometime. I hear it does wonders for washed-up lieutenants.”
That jab was enough to wipe the grin from Bywater’s face. His lips tightened and his eyes flashed with malicious intent. “Keep it up, Snow. There’s no getting away from us this time, and you know it.”

“Figures,” Jon said with a nod toward the rest of the officers. “All this pomp and display for little old me? I’m honored. I did say I’d come willingly. No need for the extra show of authority.”

Bywater sneered and barked at one of his officers. “Cuff the son-of-a-bitch.”

“Why is he being cuffed?” Davos asked as he took a step toward Bywater. “He’s already agreed to come with you-”

“Protocol, Seaworth,” Bywater snapped impatiently. “And it’s best you stay the fuck out of this, good sir, or you’ll be looking at some jail time as well.”

Jon struggled not to wince as his arms were yanked rudely behind him and the cold steel of the handcuffs tightened around his wrists. It was as if they had deliberately chosen the smallest size for his circulation was already being cut off.

“Come along now,” the officer ordered as he shoved Jon roughly forward. He nearly stumbled to the ground, but managed to steady himself; heated curses flowing through his mind.

“Come on, now. Take it easy,” Sam complained. He made as if to step forward, but Davos held him back with a slight shake of his head.

Jon was led toward one of the cars and as he was eased into the cramped back seat, he would take one last look at his companions with a vague feeling of finality. It was as if a part of him was resigned to the knowledge that he might never see them again, and it hurt to think that the last expressions he’d see would be sadness (Sam), open defiance (Davos) and thunderous anger (Gendry) on their faces.

Or even worse, the peaceful and most beautiful visage of a silver-haired woman sleeping by his side on the warm beaches of Dorne.

His breath hitched as he closed his eyes.

May the gods help him through this.

He wasn’t afraid of dark places. In fact, it could be said that he found some sort of strange solace in such environs.

Once upon a time, he had hidden in the deepest bowels of the crypt in Winterfell; content to remain amidst the looming stone figures of dead Starks who watched (or judged) silently from beyond the grave. It had taken an entire day for his father’s servants to find him, and when they did, Jon could still remember the terrible scolding he had received from Ned about his antics.

What on earth were you doing down there? Ned had bellowed while Catelyn looked smug in the background. Any opportunity to see him cry seemed to give her great joy. Well? Speak, Jon! Why were you down there?
Shy, embarrassed, and now horribly aware of how stupid he would sound, his seven-year-old self had whispered, *I was talking to them...especially to Aunt Lyanna. She’s the nicest.*

He would fail to notice the pallor on his father’s features as he said this, but then again, he had been sent to bed with no supper as punishment and that was the end of that…until the next time he and his siblings went running around there to play again.

So being in the dark did not bother him in the slightest. However, Jon had to admit that the dungeons of the Red Keep made for one hell of a prison. His cell was barely big enough for him to stretch out his legs when sitting. There was no bed, and there were no windows to let in fresh air. The door was of heavy weathered wood with iron bolts that grated loudly when opened or closed. During his booking, he overheard Bywater and his cohorts say they were sending him to the third level cells, supposedly reserved for the most vile and dangerous criminals. Jon would have scoffed at the irony of it all if he hadn’t suddenly been struck at the back of his head with a baton by an overzealous officer.

When he finally came to, it was to a numbing headache and a pervasive darkness. As if that wasn’t bad enough, there was the overpowering stench of feces and urine – not his own – but of previous occupants. His head still throbbed from where it had been struck, and a tentative touch revealed a small swelling mass with caked blood at the nape of his neck. He wiped the blood on his gray prison jumpsuit, and almost childishly swore vengeance on every goddamn City Watch officer he would come across.

He had no idea how long he had been kept in here, but at least they had taken off the handcuffs. A rub of his wrists showed that the area was still tender from the friction of the steel against his flesh. Beneath him, the stone floor was damp with water (or urine) - it was hard to tell - and as he struggled to his feet; the rough stone walls scraped against his hands. Some felt slightly loose, but most were slimy to the touch. He strained his ears to listen, and sure enough there were moans and wails coming from other prisoners. They were dreadful noises of suffering which had him breaking into goosebumps. He had heard there were torture chambers right beneath this level, and he wondered if some of the screams were coming from those who were unfortunate to be sent there.

*I’m one fucking level away from them,* he thought as he held his breath and tried to get used to the revolting smell and wails of despair. *Far cry from the fancy settings of the Water Palace that’s for damn sure.*

Something soft and furry suddenly scurried across his left foot, and it took all of his self-control not to scream out in shock at the sensation. His first instinct was to stomp on the rat, and as Jon squinted to get his vision adjusted to the gloom, he was sure the creature’s blood-red eyes were examining him, with malice, as well. Jon shook out his foot in warning, and it finally squeaked away; disappearing into an unseen hole in the corner of the cell.

*Dear gods, give me strength.*

He leaned against the wall and forced himself to concentrate on the next steps to take…if there was going to be a next step that is. Unfortunately for criminals in Westeros, most were arrested without fair trials, so it was likely he would be kept here until Davos reached his brother and told him about his incarceration. There was no doubt Robb would be on the next plane to King’s Landing to bail him out or at least demand a trial. The Starks had a plethora of good lawyers waiting in the wings, and Jon was sure one or two would be willing to take his case. If that happened, it would mean having to probably see the ‘great’ Tywin Lannister up close and personal. He had only seen images of the stern ruler in publications and on T.V., and Jon hated to admit that Tywin did give off an air of superiority that was intimidating. However, if Ned Stark had been able to stand up to him for so
many years, what stopped Jon from doing the same?

*These are not your normal adversaries on a children’s playground. You are now dealing with adults who aren’t afraid to get their hands dirty or bloody until victory is achieved. Tread lightly, bastard. That is all.*

Tyrion’s warning came back to him like a lover’s whisper, and Jon was sure he could feel the older man’s presence in the cell. He missed the wise cracks and sometimes sarcastic manner of speaking, and despite his moments of self-importance, Tyrion did have some words of wisdom that were insightful.

Come to think of it, hadn’t Ned told him, in that dream, to pay attention to whatever Tyrion had to say? That the dwarf knew a lot more than he let on? If that was the case, just how involved was Tyrion with his family? Was he really on Dany’s side despite his firm assertions that he would never betray the future Queen? The doubts still lingered in Jon’s mind, but he knew he ought to push those thoughts away and focus on the positives. She had a trusted team around her and she would prevail…with or without him.

*Though I would give anything to be there for your coronation,* he wished with a sad smile. However, he shook his head and frowned at his fatalist way of thinking. *I can’t die in this godforsaken place. Not yet anyway.*

There was still a shit ton of things he had to do.

As if hearing his unspoken plea, heavy footsteps came to a sudden stop outside his cell. Jon heard the rattle of keys and he took a step back and away from the door; subconsciously forming fists in readiness for any potential attack. There were stories of wardens who took pleasure in using some of their prisoners as punching bags, and may the gods pity the asshole who dared to pick a fight with him right now. The iron bolts were slid open with that annoying grinding sound until a flood of yellow light from the oil lamps, in the corridor, had Jon blinking at the sudden intrusion.

“You’re up, Snow,” came the growl from the burly officer whose face was riddled with angry sores and pus-filled pimples. “The boss wants ya.”

He stepped aside to let Jon pass, but not before licking his thick lips in a decidedly lecherous way. “They wasn’t kidding,” the officer crooned with a crooked grin. “They says you was pretty, and I see why they want to keep ya around. Some of them boys already have bets on who’s tearing that ass apart first.”

He guffawed at his joke before slapping the cuffs on Jon’s wrists. If he noticed the furious expression on his ward’s features, he ignored them as he tugged on Jon’s arm to lead him back to civilization.

The winding stone steps seemed to take forever, but eventually, they arrived on the main floor; where smoky oil lamps gave way to bulbs and fluorescent lighting. There was more activity here as well, and as he was led past other ‘criminals’; many of them small folk (your prostitutes, destitute, and drunken bums) from probably Flea Bottom, Jon was again made aware of the vast difference in the way things were done in the South compared to his hometown.

At least in Winterfell, their police station wasn’t this crowded or claustrophobic.

“In ya go,” Officer Pus announced once he led Jon down a quieter corridor of plain-looking doors before shoving him into one of the rooms. “Have a seat, Pretty Boy.”

He unlocked the cuffs and with another leery grin, left with a loud slam of the door behind him.
“You fat, ugly, piece of shit,” Jon cursed as he sat on the uncomfortable wooden chair and leaned his arms on the narrow steel table before him. Aside from the empty chair across it, there was no other furniture in the tiny space. It’s bland gray walls were depressing as all hell. There were no windows and the only other décor was a large white clock which said it was a quarter past six. Morning or evening? Jon couldn’t tell. He didn’t exactly get a chance to look out the windows during their march up here.

Fifteen tedious minutes later, Jacelyn Bywater decided to make his grand appearance. By this time, Jon was slumped a little lower on the chair, legs outstretched and arms crossed on his chest with a sullen expression on his features. He was grumpy, tired, and with the low growl his stomach gave – which in turn brought a smirk to Bywater’s face – incredibly hungry.

“Looks like you’re in the mood for some chow, Snow,” Bywater stated amiably as he closed the door before tossing something onto the table.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t anything edible, and Jon could only stare at the weapon now sealed in a clear plastic bag with indifference. There was no mistaking that curved dagger.

“Look familiar?” Bywater asked as he settled into the opposite chair and leaned back with feigned casual interest. When Jon remained stubbornly silent, Bywater’s smile wavered. “No need to act like a spoiled brat, Snow. You might as well start talking or we’re going to be here for a while.”

“Talk about what?” Jon asked with a raised brow.

“Don’t bullshit me,” came the still amiable response though there was an edge of impatience creeping in. “How the fuck did you end up with such a weapon in your possession?”

Jon’s eyes narrowed. “Don’t I get a lawyer or something?”

This comment elicited a snort of derision. “Where the hell do you think you are? Winterfell? You might do things differently up north, but down here, you follow our rules. Now.” Bywater leaned forward; his eyes now flints of barely suppressed fury. “How did you get such a weapon, Jon Snow?”

Jon’s lips quirked into cold smirk. “I want a lawyer.”

He didn’t see Bywater move, but he did feel the sudden impact of a heavy fist across his left cheek almost sending him crashing to the floor. The world exploded in white hot pain, and Jon could feel the blood filling his mouth. He spat it out and ran his tongue over his teeth. One or two were slightly loose, but that was enough to –

“Urgh!”

Bywater was now grasping his jaw with such pressure, Jon’s eyes watered in the agony that nearly crippled his thought processes.

“You want to keep repeating that bull about getting a lawyer?” came the low warning as Bywater’s onion-riddled breath wafted over him. The officer was that close; his features flushed with the intensity of his rage. “Do you!!” he roared when Jon stared back with defiance.

Keep it cool, a small voice whispered in his head. This is no time to get all riled up. Cooperate and then get him to give you the answers you need as well. Keep it cool, Jon.

With an effort, he shook his head slowly and hoped that his eyes were now filled with feigned contrition. It seemed to satisfy the officer, for he released Jon with a patronizing tap of his swelling
cheek and returned to his seat with a huff of pleasure.

“Good. I’m glad we can come to an agreement. Now…tell me how you got the weapon, Snow.”

“I found it,” Jon replied carefully. It hurt to talk now, and he hated how raspy his voice sounded.

“Found it where?”

“. . .at a store.”

“A store?” Bywater’s eyes narrowed. “What store, in King’s Landing, sells such weapons?”

Jon shrugged. “It was one of those mobile stores…the ones that come from the Free Cities. Their vendors look funny…wear strange clothing and shit.”

“Uh huh.”

The officer’s expression told Jon nothing, and he wondered if his attempt at lying was making any impression. He had no idea why he was keeping the truth from Bywater, but Jon had a feeling that if he did reveal such a thing, he was going to be in even bigger trouble.

“So you purchased it from a passing vendor,” Bywater stated carefully. “And you hid it beneath your car seat. But then again…this same weapon matches the one used to butcher your uncle. Hell, if I was a prosecutor, this is an open and shut case.”

“Why the hell would I want to kill my uncle?” Jon exploded; his earlier warnings to control his temper eroding as his hands formed fists on his lap.

“You tell me,” Bywater sneered. “Didn’t you suddenly come into large amounts of money and property with his death, eh? You must have known he would leave everything to you and then you decided to-”

“Oh for fuck’s sake,” Jon snapped irritably with a roll of his eyes. “That’s bullshit and you know it.”

“Bullshit or not, this,” Bywater sneered as he lifted the plastic bag. “Is no ordinary dagger, Snow. This belongs to a rather dangerous tribe, cult, whatever the fuck you want to call them – the Dothraki – surely you’ve heard of those assholes, haven’t you?”

“Yeah? So?”

“So, if you’re going about buying their weapons for no goddamn reason, you’ve going to have a hard time convincing anyone that you had no intentions to use it. Second, the Dothraki don’t go about selling their fucking weapons,” Bywater hissed coldly. “They are pretty particular about it, and this one – this arakh – is known to be a part of the infamous khalasar of Khal goddamn Drogo. No goddamn way that son-of-bitch is going to let any of his bloodriders sell their weapons!”

Jon felt a chill go through him, and it was an effort to maintain his mask of indifference. Bywater looked smug at his revelation and he leaned forward again.

“So tell me again, Jon Snow, and be honest with me this time. Where did you get this weapon?”

Jon lowered his gaze and took a deep breath. He slumped his shoulders and closed his eyes, and just when he sensed that Bywater was getting too comfy with his impending confession, he lifted his lashes and met the piercing blue eyes with his uncompromising gaze.

“I purchased it from a passing vendor from the Free Cities,” came the quiet words enunciated for
Bywater’s benefit. ‘That’s all I know.’

This time, when the blow came, it would send him into merciful darkness.

In his sporadic moments of consciousness, solace came in the hazy visions of Dany whispering words of comfort to him.

*Just a little bit longer,* she would cajole with tears in her eyes. *Please hold on…just a little bit longer.*

Time lost all meaning for the next few hours? Days? Weeks? It was hard to tell; though he did his best to keep track with the appearance of the tin plate with his meals shoved through a narrow opening on the door. The menu wasn’t particularly appetizing for there were times when it felt he was eating nothing but cold pureed vegetables, thin tasteless soups, or stale bread with water that tasted like piss. Every now and then, he’d be taken back up for questioning, and the same routine would play out. Neither man was making any headway, and Jon could only wonder how long this would last until Bywater snapped completely.

His left eye was still slightly swollen and Jon was sure his face was a wonderful kaleidoscope of bruises and cuts from the officer’s angry bursts.

“Let’s try something different today, shall we?” Bywater began as he settled behind the desk and studied the quiet man before him. “Since you’ve refused to confess regarding the arakh, care to tell me why we found four dead Sons of Harpy in your apartment?”

Jon figured they’d eventually make their way around to this line of questioning, sooner or later, but he kept silent; choosing to only give a light shrug in response. He felt he could tolerate more punishment rather than betray Dany. It was only a matter of time before they began to question his association with her; for if they were aware of his stay in Dorne, they might have put two-and-two together to assume he was working for her.

All the same, he couldn’t help wondering why his brother or anyone else for that matter, hadn’t come asking about him yet. The deal with Davos was to make sure he contacted Robb if he wasn’t released within twenty-four hours. Jon was sure he had spent longer than that in this dump, and yet there was radio silence from his friends or family.

*Unless…*

“Still going to act dumb?” Bywater snarled. “You really don’t want to leave this place alive, do you, Snow?”

“Go ahead and beat me to death if you want,” Jon replied with a small smile. “If you think I’m going to tell you a goddamn thing, you’re wrong.”

“You little-“

“You’ve always had it out for me anyway,” Jon continued unrepentantly. “You’ve always hated Northerners, so this was your chance to get back at me for that night. Well you can go fuck yourself, sir. I’m innocent. You know it, and it pisses you off that you can’t pin shit on me, so you serve your own brand of justice. Just know this, First Lieutenant Bywater…the North remembers, and winter is coming for you.”
Jon was sure he had seen the full extent of Bywater’s rage, but if there had to be a living
personification of Death, it was in the red almost purple flush of his hard features. His lips – already
thin – almost disappeared with the barring of his teeth. His eyes darkened until they seemed to spit
fire and as he raised his arm to deliver what Jon felt would be the finishing blow, the door opened to
shatter the tension-filled atmosphere.

“Sorry to interrupt,” came the breathless announcement from a fresh-faced officer who stared at the
two men in brief bewilderment. If he wondered why his boss looked ready to commit homicide, he
kept that to himself. “But it seems like we’ve got bail for Mr. Snow.”

“What?” Bywater squeaked as if unable to comprehend the string of words tossed at him.

“Bail,” the younger man repeated. “Captain Slynt says he’s to be sent to the front office. The
paperwork is ready.”

Jon felt a wave of relief so great, it weakened his knees. He expelled the breath he was unaware of
holding and struggled not to give Bywater a smug smile of victory. He was sure the asshole would
want to leave him with a parting gift; maybe a punch to his still healing torso – which Jon was
grateful had not been tampered with so far. He wasn’t sure he could handle that pain.

Jacelyn cleared his throat and straightened his uniform. He held himself up as if trying to shrug off
the murderous cloak that had descended on him just moments earlier. In a stilted voice, he gave
instructions to the officer that he would bring Jon to the office as ordered. Soon enough, they were
left alone again.

“Don’t think you’ve won, Snow,” Bywater quipped as he tugged Jon’s cuffed hands and dragged
him to his feet to all but spit into his face. “I’m going to be on you like a shadow from now on.
Whatever you do…whatever you say, I’ll be ready. You can bet on it.”

And hardly giving Jon a chance to give a wiseass retort, he spun the younger man toward the door
and all but shoved him out with a frustrated curse.

An hour later, Jon could very well say the foul stench of King’s Landing had never smelled better to
him.

He closed his eyes and inhaled deeply; soaking in the fading rays of sunlight on his skin. He was
back in his normal clothes; the drab gray and scratchy prison garb – which he hoped would one day
be burned – no longer causing his skin to chafe. They had at least given him an opportunity to take a
much-needed shower, brush his teeth with toothpaste that tasted like chalk, and comb his hair and
beard – which really needed a trim – into some semblance of normalcy.

He dug into the plain brown paper sack which contained his wallet, wristwatch, a pack of cigarettes
and a lighter. Helping himself to a stick, he inhaled and exhaled with a sigh of pleasure; allowing the
flow of nicotine into his bloodstream, to ease his frayed nerves. He still hurt and ached in various
places, but as he made his way down the long flight of steps, he figured he’d have a discussion with
Davos on what had taken him so damn long to get his bail ready. Not that it had been cheap. The
assholes had set it at a ridiculous amount of 50,000 gold dragons.

As if taxing us wasn’t enough. They’ve got to get their extra cash somewhere.
A quick glance at his release papers showed he had spent a whopping five days in this hell hole, and as he looked back at the towering red turrets that made up the infamous center of government, Jon tried to envision the changes Dany would make when she sat within those halls as its ruler. He hoped the first thing she’d do is destroy every fucking dungeon and re-establish a whole new criminal justice system with emphasis on the word *justice*. What Westeros had right now was a joke to say the least.

Walking past tearful reunions or miserable farewells, Jon surveyed the line of cars parked along the bustling curb. He knew Davos drove a dark red SUV, but he could not make out the familiar vehicle amongst the others. On autopilot, he pat his pockets for his cellphone, but remembered he had left the device with Davos at the airport.

*Shit. Now what?*

*Someone* had bailed him out, so why the fuck wasn’t there anyone to pick him up? It wasn’t as if the papers had specified who was responsible for doing so, and Jon had simply assumed it was Davos. However, as the minutes ticked endlessly by, Jon found himself getting more pissed off.

*Guess I’ll take a cab then*, he thought with a muttered curse as he opened his wallet to see how much he had left. It wouldn’t surprise him if those officers had taken all his cash, but as he spied a lone gold dragon, he gave a small sigh of relief. It should be enough to take him home and then he could –

“There he is!” came the sudden loud and all too familiar booming voice that sent a chill right down Jon’s spine. “Hallo Jon, my boy!”

*Oh gods no…please no…*

“Sorry, I’m late, but I had to close the shop you know. Can’t trust that fucking kid of mine to do anything right. Hah!”

*Seven hells,* was the dreary thought as Jon looked up to see the very man of his nightmares approaching with a smile as bright as the sun on his flushed visage.

Breathing was now becoming a little difficult.

*Not this soon…not this soon…not this fucking soon!*

Unfortunately, Fate had other plans, for Jon Snow soon found himself engulfed in a bear hug that made him sick to his stomach. The urge to suddenly vomit all over the older man’s silk shirt was too overwhelming, as dawning realization of just what must have happened seeped into Jon’s panicked mind.

Robert goddamn Baratheon had bailed him from the depths of Hell.
This is a ‘heavy’ chapter; in that all information here has to be digested as it sets up or gives one an idea of why things have been happening so far.

Enjoy, and as always feedback is very much appreciated!

“Looks like we’ve got a little spy, Ned. Come over here, boy. Stop hiding behind that pillar and come talk to your Uncle Bobby.”

“It’s all right, Jon. You won’t get a scolding.”

“Hello…sir.”

“Speak up, boy. What’s your name now?”

“Jon.”

“Jon, eh? What were you doing behind that pillar?”

“…nothing.”

“Hmph. Well run along now and don’t hang around like a thief, Jon. If I catch you doing that again, you’ll get a good hiding on your backside.”
“Scrappy little rascal, isn’t he? He’s the bastard, yes?”

“…he is my son.”

“Still don’t understand why you keep him around, but then again, he’s more Stark than the rest of your brood. The gods bless Catelyn for putting up with your bullshit, and you still won’t tell me who his mother is.”

“…I’d rather not dwell on that, Robert.”

“I’d keep an eye on him all the same, Ned. He seems to be a special one. Noticed he beat all the bigger boys on the training grounds and almost gave your first born a run for his money. The bastard’s a fighter.”

“I think he’ll make a good soldier yes.”

“Hmph. What we need are good leaders in Westeros, Ned, not more mindless soldiers. We need level heads and keen minds, and since you’ve refused to accept my offer, let’s hope there’s someone else lurking around here willing to take the challenge.”

He was the quintessential larger-than-life character.

Every annual Realm Freedom Day celebration, his once towering, lithe, and powerful figure would grace publications and television screens. They revealed a warrior who wasn’t afraid of the establishment and was willing to do what was right for Westeros. He was considered a hero by many with public opinion in the high positives. That was the Robert Baratheon capable of becoming King and taking over the Syndicate; not the overweight, belligerent, often drunk plum-flushed caricature he had become. If there was anything he had retained from his hey days, it was his distinct voice and his gregarious personality, which was now being put to full effect as he charmed his way through the smattering group of admirers hoping he’d take a photo or shake their hands.

Jon, still reeling from his sudden appearance and impromptu hug, could only sit in the passenger seat of the sleek black Escalade (a custom-made machine adorned with the House Baratheon sigil on its leather seats as well as the crowned silver stag on its hood) and watch with growing impatience as Robert did his best to accommodate his adoring fans. It was irritating to be kept waiting, and Jon was this close to losing his temper.

I should just get the hell out of here while he’s preoccupied, he thought with a frown.

He surveyed the street. Robert was still a few feet away; his back turned as he shook hands with an old couple and their grandchildren. Traffic was somewhat heavy at this time of the day. If he was able to slip out and blend in with the rest of the pedestrians or dive into a waiting taxi, then his problems were solved.

Unfortunately, as his fingers hovered over the door handle; Common Sense aka nagging questions forced him to reconsider his decision. Why had Robert gone out of his way to bail him out? Why wasn’t Davos in the picture? Or Robb? Why would Robert shell out that much money just to get him out of prison? Was it done as some sort of appeasement for his involvement with Uncle Benjen’s death?
Nothing is as it seems, came the small voice within him. He wants something in return, Jon. No one does anything for free especially with something like this. So why don’t we hear him out? Let’s see what he has in mind. You can always take that information and share it with Dany. So stay put and follow his lead. Don’t you dare show your suspicions. Pour on the charm if you have to and give nothing away.

Taking a deep breath, he forced himself to relax. He took the time to admire the rest of the vehicle; not surprised to find it still had that new car smell. He wondered how many Robert had in his collection now, after all, the guy was rolling in money thanks to his successful weaponry business. This Escalade was decked out with the latest technology; a system that was tested when the interactive screen on the dashboard suddenly lit up with the approach of its driver.

Welcome back, Robert, the feminine automated voice greeted as the doors opened without any physical assistance and Robert – flushed and sweaty – squeezed himself into the driver’s seat.

“Sorry about that,” the older man huffed as he tossed a grin in Jon’s direction. “It’s why I never go out that much. Can’t get rid of the goddamn fans, eh?”

Jon raised his brows and gave a small smile in response, but that didn’t seem to faze his companion. Robert’s attention was on the dashboard as he punched in a few instructions and the surprisingly soothing sounds of jazz filtered through powerful speakers. Who knew the big guy had such good taste in music?

“Hope you don’t mind,” Robert enthused as he pulled out of the curb, “But I need this music to relax. It’s crazy being in my world; the mind’s all over the fucking place. One needs to find some inner fucking peace. Know what I mean?”

“I guess-”

“Fucked up place this world is,” he continued as if Jon hadn’t spoken. He took a moment to mop his face with a handkerchief, despite the cooling system doing its job. “It’s a goddamn shame is what it is.”

Jon realized it was no use trying to engage in conversation with Robert. The man would talk over and around you as if you didn’t even exist. Closing his eyes, he leaned his head against the window and, despite his intention to just block out Robert’s yakking, he was startled when a light shake on his shoulder had him sitting up with a gasp.

“Home sweet home,” Robert announced with a grin. “You fell asleep right off, son. You must be very tired. Go figure. That hellhole at the Red Keep’s no five-star accommodation, huh?”

“Yeah…” Jon croaked as he blinked away the cobwebs of weariness and surveyed his surroundings with growing confusion.

Home sweet home? This looked nothing like his apartment complex. He had expected to find himself in the familiar driveway leading to the building, but instead, he was sitting in a garage as massive as a public underground parking lot. Only all the cars sitting in this particular garage belonged to one man.

Holy shit, was all his befuddled mind could think of as he stepped out of the Escalade and marveled at the rows of cars; ranging from classic vintages to the latest models of the most popular brands.

“Impressed?” Robert smirked as he placed an arm around Jon’s shoulders and waved a hand toward the fleet. “Years of collecting them, son. They’re all my pride and joy, and who knows? One day
you might get them all.” He winked at this and guffawed despite the chill to run down Jon’s spine as he was led into an elevator he hadn’t even noticed.

**But Gendry’s your son…your fucking heir, a part of him cried out. Why would you say such a…?**

“Now then,” Robert began once they were cocooned in the rather elegant enclosed space. The wood paneling was of polished walnut with engravings of trees and nymphs weaving around them like crawling vines. Elegant wall sconces, with antique brass handles, emanated warm glows of light. The floor was made of dark marble and had the Baratheon sigil wrapped within a yellow and black circle. The roof was of thick plexiglass which gave the illusion of looking at the night sky without giving one a sense of vertigo.

“You are a guest in my home,” Robert declared when the doors slid noiselessly open to lead them into a magnificent lobby. Two middle-aged maids and a wizened butler, dressed in pristine white and black uniforms – were waiting their arrival; each holding onto something for their master. Without really acknowledging them, Robert snatched a towel from one, grabbed a cigar from another - stopping only to have it lit - and picked up a large mug of beer from the last.

He guzzled down the beverage without taking a breath, and once done, he gave a loud belch of satisfaction. “Ah, that hits the spot,” he growled with pleasure. “Now then, you will follow those fine ladies over there…”

He waved toward the impressive gilded spiral staircase, where two scantily-clad women with exotic features, posed seductively in waiting.

“…you’ll get a proper bath, shave, and wear something decent than the eyesore of a clothing you’ve got on. I have no idea why the youth of today don’t take their appearances more seriously! Once you’re done, you will meet me in the den before we have supper. You must be famished!” He pounded up the stairs, not without slapping the women’s asses in greeting. “Take good care of my guest, ladies! He’s a special one.” And with another playful wink, he disappeared into one of the many rooms scattered across the landing.

Jon would have protested being given any special treatment, but as the uniformed staff slipped away like ghosts, the giggling girls descended the stairs to grab his arms. They said something to each other in their native tongue - and Jon was sure it wasn’t Valyrian because he had heard enough of Dany and Missandei speak it to know the difference – but it had them giggling again before they tugged him gently upstairs.

“You come with us,” one of them finally said in the Common Tongue; her green eyes sparkling with mirth as if Jon was some sort of inside joke he would never understand.

“We take good care of you,” the other added. She appeared to be from Yi Ti; her almond shaped eyes glowing with a look Jon was more than familiar with. Ros would sometimes have that expression of feral hunger when she was about to go down on him.

Unfortunately, the last thing he was looking forward to was getting a blowjob from either of them. While thinking of suitable excuses to give - should they get the wrong idea - he tried to survey his surroundings.

Although the Baratheons held land in Storm’s End, Robert had invested in this once abandoned castle just past the Gate of the Gods. A five-year restoration process had transformed it into a home fit for a man of his stature. It was as if he had decided he’d compete with the Red Keep for most ostentatious home in all of King’s Landing, and so far, the verdict was still out on who was winning. Everything was just as overdone and exaggerated like its’ owner. Almost every furnishing was made
of gold. Every portrait that lined the walls – many with the distinct dark and regal features of the Baratheons – were almost seven feet high. Antique knight statues – some featuring the former colors of the Kingsguard stood in silent sentry; their helmets ranging from the simple to an impressive one with stag horns upon it. Jon had no doubt the weapons each clutched were authentic for nothing less would do for Robert Baratheon.

Once on the landing, Jon was able to look down at the lobby and wasn’t surprised to see what he had missed, for right in the middle of the marbled floor was a much bigger yellow circle with the crowned stag drawn in the middle. Just a friendly reminder to anyone regarding whose house they were in. Above them, giant chandeliers shimmered like golden crystals, and as the girls pushed open one of the many heavy oak doors, Jon felt he had stepped into the pages of every man’s wildest fantasy.

Whoa…

He had thought the furnishings of the Dornish castle were magnificent, but Robert had spared no expense designing a bedroom one would never want to leave anytime soon. From the king-sized bed with its maroon silk sheets and pillows, to a state-of-the-art entertainment system and stunning views of Blackwater Rush from the gothic-inspired windows, Jon was reluctantly impressed at the attention to detail. Pity the girls wouldn’t give him much of a chance to really study the rest of the room, for he was suddenly pushed unto the bed, where he collapsed with a soft ‘ooof’ of surprise.

“Ladies,” he pleaded as politely as he could, but they weren’t listening. Impatient hands were already peeling him out of his tee-shirt and unzipping his jeans. They made sad faces at his wounds and bruises; speaking to each other in their native tongue again before the green-eyed woman leaned down to begin trailing kisses along his torso.

“Whoa there!” Jon cried out as he shifted away from her touch and shook his head quickly. He held out his hands to keep them at bay, and at their bemused expressions, he took a deep breath and tried to smile. “Thanks…really, but I can take it from here. Just show me where the bathroom is and I’ll do the rest, okay? I really appreciate your…eh…services, but no…I’ve got a…a girlfriend.”

He could feel the heat creeping up his neck at the declaration; aware that he was making an assumption that was not set in stone. However, just imagining Dany’s disapproval at the current state of affairs was enough to have his semi-erection wilt to normalcy.

The girls must have noticed, for they made faces of dismay and rose to their feet; their flimsy transparent sheaths of clothing barely covering bodies that he might have once ogled at shamelessly. Despite their disappointment, they were kind enough to show him into the lavish bathroom complete with stag-inspired golden faucets, porcelain statues of naked women with water jars and a sunken bathtub fit for a King (or at least a man of Robert’s size). They drew a bath for him and left with blown kisses, and finally grateful for some time to himself, Jon stripped out of his clothes and sank into the scented waters with lather akin to fluffy clouds on a summer’s day.

He sighed and leaned back with relief; doing his best to ignore the pesky little voice that warned him not to get too used to such a pampered life.

*Remember all of this is for a reason,* it warned. *Stay aware, Jon.*

He would have fallen asleep again, but he forced himself awake with a firm shake of his head. After a quick rinse, he grabbed a cream-colored towel (again with the goddamn Baratheon sigil etched on it) and wrapped it around his waist. He walked up to one of the many mirrors and stared morosely at his reflection. The girls had gotten rid of his soiled bandages, and though the wound on his torso was not completely healed, it looked considerably better than before. There was no drainage, and a quick
search of cabinets revealed no first aid kit available to cover it up. He dried it as best he could and prayed it would hold up until he returned home. Luckily, there were shaving products available, so with a quick trim of his beard and holding back his hair in a ponytail, Jon studied himself with a cynical smirk.

“And the battle scars continue to mount, Jon Snow,” he teased his reflection. “Before you know it, this face will no longer be recognizable when you return to Winterfell.”

If he ever returned that is.

But you will have to anyway, came the quiet thought. You made a promise to Dany to unite the North to her cause.

He made his way to the bedroom, where a set of clothes was already laid out for him. Not sure how they had known his size, it was good to see that the tailored black pants fit him nicely, and the deceptively simple cobalt dress-shirt was just as comfortable. A pair of black leather shoes – and Jon had to whistle in awe at the label (their shit was expensive!) – beckoned his feet. Like his clothing, they fit like a glove and made him feel like he was walking on air. He almost missed the small black box hidden beneath the genuine leather belt, and as he opened it with caution, it was to see two silver direwolf cuff links sitting on a pillow of grey velvet.

...Fuck.

His jaw clenched. Suddenly, there was something horribly grotesque about the entire situation, and seeing the direwolf – his family sigil amid this Baratheon madness – seemed to be the icy dose of reality he needed. Just what the fuck was he doing in this man’s house? Why was he allowing himself to be ‘bought’ into whatever game Robert was playing? And why would he go as far as pampering Jon with shit he didn’t really need? With a muttered curse, he snapped the box shut and all but flung it across the room. He was tempted to rip off the clothing as well, but a polite knock at the door had him turning around quickly.

It was the old man butler, who bowed politely with no smile on his weathered visage.

“If the young master is ready,” he stated quietly. “Perhaps you are ready to be escorted to the living room.”

Jon nodded and tried to gather himself. Forcing a smile on his visage, he followed the soundless guide; faintly amused at how fast the butler walked despite his age. As they descended the spiral staircase, Jon couldn’t shake off the nagging sensation at the back of mind. It wasn’t as if he felt he was being watched, for there was really no one else loitering about the place. The illusion that he was the only one living in such an enormous castle was overwhelming, and it soon clicked. This was one lonely place.

For all its grandeur and splendor, there was no warmth here.

At Winterfell, one could sense the love of family within its walls. Even in a place as opulent as Dorne’s Water Palace, it wasn’t hard to feel the affection amongst its occupants. However, in this old castle; no matter how pretty Robert tried to make it, there was never going to be a feeling of companionship and love here. Was it any wonder Gendry chose to live in an apartment in the middle of the city? He must have had a room or two in here and hated it.

“Here we go, sir,” the butler said with another bow as he ushered Jon into a cozy living room done in solid oak and supple leather. A huge stone fireplace –with some rather interesting demonic-
looking carvings – had a roaring fire which created mysterious shadows around the intimate setting. Jon politely refused the glass of wine the butler offered, and when he saw his services were no longer needed, he slipped away without a sound.

Jon, with hands clasped behind his back, paced the room with curiosity. Bookshelves took up one side of the room and were filled with quite a collection of leather-bound classics with topics that ranged from Westerosi history to journals of medicine. There were many knickknacks from all over the globe, with carvings varying from false gods in salacious positions to cute little angels in repose. Among the many oil paintings, one in particular stood out. It was a massive framed image of a raging boar charging toward a warrior…which on closer inspection seemed to be a young Robert Baratheon in armor. This one was mounted right above the fireplace and was an intimidating display to say the least.

\textit{Hmmmm…weird choice to -}

“So, you are the one they call Jon Snow…the bastard of Winterfell,” came the unexpected seductive croon which had Jon spinning around so fast, he nearly lost his footing and almost gave himself whiplash.

Heart still pounding like a snare drum, Jon could barely make out the person responsible for speaking, until she stepped out of the shadows like an apparition.

\textit{Seven hells.}

The most striking thing was her hair of burnished copper, which fell to her waist in thick waves any man would love to run fingers through. Her features were heart-shaped and her skin pale and unblemished. Tall and slender, her full breasts were barely contained in the red halter dress which revealed her cleavage and showcased a stunning gold choker with a glowing ruby in its middle. Jon wasn’t sure if it was due to the dress or the shadows, but he could swear her eyes were in the same shade as her hair…giving it an almost reddish hue as she came closer still. Blood-red fingernails reached out to caress his chest; her matching colored lips curving into a small smile as she studied him with unfeigned interest.

Jon was so stunned at her presence; he could barely move or shove her away. She seemed to be weaving a spell of some kind on him, and when she moved closer to whisper into his ear –

“…you are all I expected and more, my prince.”

-Jon shivered with combined sensations of pleasure and repulsion.

Her accent was unusual, and while he struggled to make sense of where she came from (or why the fuck she had labeled him as ‘prince’), she pulled back and in the same breath, lowered her hand to his torso.

“You were hurt,” she stated. “Here more than the others.”

“…are you a doctor or something?” Jon asked; before kicking himself inwardly at how stupid the question sounded.

Her soft laughter didn’t help. “No. I am even better. I am a healer.”

“Huh?”

She chuckled and caressed his wound. Jon could feel the muscles clench tightly in response and he sucked in a harsh breath. He was vaguely aware she was flirting with him, and though every part of
his body screamed for him to get away, he couldn’t ignore the sudden rush of heat to flow right through the area where their skins touched.

*What is she doing to me…?*

“I am a servant of R’hllor – the Lord of Light – he who sees all and knows all.” Her ruby gaze was now intense. “And I have a sense of your true purpose Jon Snow. All of this is happening for a reason.”

“What are you-?”

“Stop harassing my fucking guest, Melisandre,” Robert barked as he barged into the room now dressed in a purple smoking jacket and black velvet pants. A cigar was clenched between his teeth, but his eyes blazed with something akin to irritation. “Why don’t you go practice your mumbo-jumbo magic someplace else, eh?”

“My Lord,” she replied with a polite bow; though a mysterious smile hovered on her lips. “My apologies for being so bold.”


If he noticed Jon wasn’t wearing the cuff links, he chose not to mention it.

“He looks dangerously handsome indeed,” the woman-in-red agreed with a slow lick of her lips.

Jon burned at the sight and was spared further embarrassment as Robert threw a meaty arm over his shoulder and led him out of the room.

“I hope you’ve got an appetite, Jon,” Robert enthused. “I could eat a fucking boar! A boar!” He laughed at this, though Jon failed to see the humor in it. This man seemed to have an unhealthy fascination with that animal.

Like the rest of the house, the formal dining room was designed to host at least forty people. (Un)fortunately, Jon was forced to sit on Robert’s right, while Melisandre sat on his left. With a loud clap of his hands, once unseen servants began parading out with bowls of lentil soup and garlic bread, roasted chickens garnished with olive oil dipped in thickened vegetable broth, along with fresh leafy salads with hints of bacon bits, white cheese, and sliced boiled eggs. Dessert was a floating slice of chocolate cheesecake in whipped cream and despite Jon’s request for only water; some of the finest wines were presented for his perusal.

Jon had thought he’d have no appetite; what with Robert slobbering all over his meal and talking at the same time to Melisandre who made polite conversation while shamelessly staring at Jon with come-hither eyes.

However, after spending five miserable days in the Red Keep dungeons, his stomach had other plans. Before he knew it, he had polished away two helpings of everything and was on his second (or third) glass of wine. He had a light buzz going, but felt he had to maintain his wits about him.

“Ah, now *that* was a meal!” Robert sighed in pleasure. “Care to join me in my den for coffee and some cigars, Jon? Boys only now, Mellie. You can go back to your chambers or catacombs or wherever it is the fuck you sleep these days.”

Ignoring the jab, Melisandre gave a small bow and excused herself but not before giving Jon one last
lingering look.

“Brr,” Robert said with a mock shiver. “She gives me the creeps, I tell you.”

“So who is she and why is she here?” Jon asked with bemusement as they stepped into Robert’s ‘office’ or what Jon would soon consider his war room. For taking up an entire part of the wall was the most detailed map of Westeros he had ever seen. Someone had actually taken the time to paint the damn thing which showcased every town, forest, river, road, and mountain. It must have been at least fifty feet wide and twenty or so feet high. There was even a step-ladder provided for anyone willing to climb; and it was clear Robert—or someone else – had been doing so as there were several locations with pins in the shapes of each House sigil stuck to them. Just looking at Winterfell with its many direwolf pins was enough to send chills down Jon’s spine.

_Just what is he planning to do? Conquer the North or all of Westeros?_

“Who is she?” Robert repeated as he walked to the mini-bar to mix up a few drinks. “Who knows? She claims she’s all the way from Asshai. What’s she doing here? She was my dead brother’s mistress, and once Stannis passed away; she came trudging up here one night all teary and miserable. Don’t ask me how they met – some religious cult shit he got himself into. I still think that bitch killed him, but don’t quote me on it. Besides, she’s a good fuck when she’s not busy trying to practice her witchy magic on me.”

Jon subconsciously touched his torso. He could still feel the scar, and maybe it was his imagination, but the throbbing pain he had once felt – not just there, but around his face – were no longer bothering him as much. Maybe there was something to this witchy-magic stuff after all.

“Here you go,” Robert stated as he offered Jon a glass of clear liquid with a slice of lemon. “A watered down gin and tonic, my boy. As much as I’d love to get you wasted, we really do need to talk, and I need all your faculties functioning. Cigar?”

“No, thank you.”

“Cigarettes then,” Robert insisted as he put away the gold case of cigars to reach for a silver one. He tapped it open and revealed the expensive brand. “I bet you’ll enjoy these ones and not that garbage you keep putting into your body.”

Jon struggled not to roll his eyes, but accepted the offer of a light before inhaling deeply. Robert wasn’t kidding about the rush, and Jon wouldn’t be surprised if this had hallucinogenic contents wrapped within. Either way, it helped to ease a bit of the tension stored within him.

“Make yourself at home,” Robert invited as he plopped into a large leather recliner before the fireplace. Jon sat across him slowly; though he stiffened with discomfort when the older man studied him in pensive silence for what seemed like an eternity. Clearing his throat, Jon took a quick sip of his drink and tried to get distracted with the sparse group of photographs along the-
“He’s your friend, right?” Robert asked with a raised brow.

“Yes, sir,” Jon replied.

“Yes, he speaks so highly of you. Imagine my surprise when he told me you were locked away in the Red Keep! And I asked…what for? And he says because they think you were the one who killed your uncle Benjen! What nonsense! I swear that City Watch is so incompetent, it’s a crying shame!”

At this, Jon’s fingers tightened around the glass and he struggled not to give anything away. Inside, his mind screamed at what a great actor Robert was to show such outrage over something he must have orchestrated. He settled for taking another sip of his drink and glancing toward the map.

“Is that why you bailed me out?” he finally asked as his pulse quickened. “Because Gendry told you?”

“Of course! Any friend of Gendry’s is a friend of mine, and also, you’re Ned’s son – bastard or not! I couldn’t let you rot in that hellhole – but then again…” He suddenly leaned forward; his whole body heaving like dough as his eyes darkened with intent. “…it appears they tried to get you to confess to having a weapon of some sort, and I heard you gave nothing away. Good on you, Jon.”

*Here it is,* Jon thought with a grim smile. *You fucking liar.*

“I had nothing to tell them.”

“Exactly!” Robert bellowed with a slap of his thigh. “There is nothing to tell especially if you had tried saying anything stupid, I just might have given them the video tape of you sneaking around in my store that day.” He grinned. “Oh yes, I did watch it and saw what happened when I had my special visitors in town.”

Jon’s jaw worked silently, but he said nothing.

“So? Tell me, Jon…just how much of our conversation did you hear? And don’t lie to me, son. I despise liars.”

His voice might have been amiable, but there was no mistaking the underlying threat laced within those words. Jon felt a chill seep into his bones, and as he met those beady dark eyes again, he forced himself to speak.

“I didn’t really understand much of the conversation,” he began carefully. “But I did hear you say something about providing weapons to Drogo’s army and…and…your quest to get rid of a certain Targaryen…and wanting to take over the Syndicate…” He stopped and shrugged. “That’s about it. Honest.”

Robert’s eyes narrowed. They scrutinized Jon’s impassive features for a long minute, and finally satisfied at what he saw, he gave a low grunt and rose to his feet; a move so quick it did not betray his generous girth. He walked toward the map and studied it with his hands clasped behind his back.

“Tell me, son…how cognizant are you with Targaryen history?”

The sudden image of Dany writhing seductively amongst the silk sheets of his bed in Dorne - those breathtaking violet eyes warm for him and only him - had Jon cursing inwardly and taking another gulp of his drink. Struggling to squash down the memory, he ground out a low. “Not much…sorry.”
“As it should be with the new generation,” Robert huffed. “They were a blemish to Westeros, and if I had my way, everything about their dynasty would be forbidden.” His hands formed tight fists; his voice getting colder and harder as he spoke. “It still amazes me –that a rather insignificant family from the Valyrian Freehold showed up to Westeros, conquered it and assumed they could dictate their brand of government over us. They assumed too much, and though I will give them a pass for bringing some sort of peace to a once chaotic continent, they seemed to forget exactly why they created that godforsaken Syndicate in the first place. Corruption, greed, lawlessness, and the absolute worst…the madness…oh, the madness, Jon! It took over everything and destroyed Westeros from the inside out! And do you want to know why they were all insane?”

“….why?”

Robert spun around; fire blazing in his eyes. “They inbreed, Jon. Incest! Brothers fucking sisters, uncles with nieces, aunts with nephews, all marrying amongst themselves and having children! What kind of sickness is that? They claim it’s all for protecting the pureblood of the family – magic or some shit, but I think it’s just some dumb excuse some sick perverted Targaryen used when he was caught balls deep in his sister at some point!”

“So if he was alive, would you have married him or something? Don’t you Targaryens practice incest?”

“Laugh all you want, Mr. Northerner. I’m not ashamed of my family’s history and yes, I would have married Viserys at the least.”

“It doesn’t bother you?”

“Why should it? Love is no respecter of person, age, creed and all that bullshit. As long as it’s not between father-daughter, mother-son, everything else is fair game. We are Targaryens and we love indiscriminately.”

Dany’s words danced like flickering fireflies within his mind, and Jon caught his lower lip between his teeth. He could only imagine how incensed she would be at Robert’s way of thinking, but then again, a small part of him – that part which did ponder on the reasons why the Targaryens would practice such taboo relationships – threatened to rise to the surface.

“…inbred madness,” Robert was still ranting as he paced before the map. “And that’s exactly what happened with Aerys! The son-of-a-bitch finally snapped and was this close to sending us all straight to hell! Do you know that bastard had a fetish for burning people alive? Oh yes. If you didn’t agree with whatever insane thought he came up with, he’d sentence you to death. No trial! Not even a fucking petition! What kind of a ruler is that? And as for his fucking son…Rhaegar motherfucking Targaryen.”

Jon looked up then. The way Robert had said that name, if Rhaegar had been standing in the room, he might have melted into a puddle at the venom laced within the tone used. Robert’s fists were so clenched, Jon was sure he’d dig groves into his palms and start bleeding soon.

“But I heard he was a good man?” Jon asked warily, only to wince as Robert all but whirled on him with spittle coming out of his mouth.

“Good man?! Good man?! What’s so good about some pretty boy wannabe king who thinks he can do whatever the fuck he wants?! He dared to steal the most precious thing in my life and ruined her life and…!”

He seemed to realize what he was saying; for a haunted expression filled his eyes before he turned
away to pace to the mini-bar. Not bothering to reach for a glass, he grabbed another bottle of whiskey and drank straight from it; stopping only when it was almost completely empty before giving a loud belch.

“All Targaryens are scum and no good to Westeros,” Robert finally said in a low voice. Jon could barely make out the slur in his words now. “It’s why your father and I…and fucking Tywin Lannister made the decision to change Westeros. We would get rid of the goddamn Syndicate from its center of concentrated power and give each region the right to select representatives to form a Grand Council. You can thank me…us for that decision.” He laughed bitterly and took another swig of the bottle until it was empty. He smashed it against the counter and grabbed a bottle of rum.

“That was the deal,” Robert stated as he staggered back to his chair to collapse into it. With his watery gaze fixed on the flickering flames in the fireplace, he continued. “Your father would take control of the North, Tywin would deal with the Westerlands and the Crownlands, while I went back to ‘retirement’ in the Stormlands. The fucking Dornish—stubborn bastards—could do whatever the hell they wanted, and the others…the Iron Islands, The Reach, and the Riverlands would all pledge their allegiance to King’s Landing…the equal representation to the council bullshit we set up. That was the deal!”

Robert scowled and held up the bottle as if about to give a toast. “Tywin felt it best I marry his fucking daughter, Cersei—that crazyass bitch…and promote a sense of unity for all the regions. Okay, yeah…I’ll marry her, no problems, I thought. He could be the face of the government, while I was the figurehead, yeah? But then guess what? I come to learn that bitch and her brother! Her goddamn brother, Jon! Jaime fucking Lannister! Were fucking each other behind my back! I mean, I had to go looking through the history books to make sure they weren’t goddamn Targaryens in disguise!”

Jon winced and looked away. He had only heard of the marriage between Cersei and Robert—considering it had been a pretty big deal and it was all the media outlets could speak about for weeks apparently. Jon was still a kid at the time, so he couldn’t really remember much about it.

“Three kids those sick fucks had between them, and yay! Karma’s a bitch, isn’t it? They all fucking died too! Good riddance to incestuous little bastards!”

Robert guzzled down half of the rum and at this point, Jon was concerned Robert would pass out drunk before getting to his point. All this talk about his hate for the Targaryens was beginning to give him a headache. If he hated the idea of the current state of the government so much, why did he want to return to it?

“Change things,” Robert mumbled; startling Jon who wondered if he had spoken out loud. “I need to change things, Jon. Westeros needs good leaders, not a bunch of mindless soldiers, and that’s what Tywin’s doing. I see how he’s slowly becoming another Aerys and I wonder why I trusted him to take control. However, he’s not one to be fucked with; and he’s turning out to be much smarter than I give him credit for. He’s not going to make this easy for me, and I need outside help if I’m to get rid of his ass. But then…then! Guess who shows up out of the blue to ruin my plans?! That goddamn Targaryen whore from across the Narrow Sea! It’s like no matter how many of them you get rid of them, they just keep popping up like goddamn cockroaches! Fucking Targaryens!”

Jon resisted the urge to leap across the room to choke him out for calling Dany that slur, but he restrained himself with an effort. He didn’t want to give away that he knew Dany on a personal level. The hatred was back in Robert’s eyes, and it was palpable. Good grief.

“I was sure she was dead…sure that fucker Mormont had taken her out like your father and I had ordered him to, and yet she lives.”
Wait…what?!

Jon’s eyes widened, but Robert missed the stunned expression on Jon’s visage for he was brooding at the fire again.

“Conquering Slavers Bay…causing some kind of fucked up revolution…people thinking she’s the second coming…and now she’s back in Westeros…trying to repeat the same circle, and I can’t have that, Jon. I can’t! She must not be in power or Westeros will return to the abyss. It’s only a matter of time before she shows those same signs of madness and then what? Westeros becomes her playground for her sick and twisted rule of government! We cannot have that!”

Wait…slow down…slow fuck down! What was that about Jorah being a spy for Robert and his father?

Jon, no longer able to control himself, rose to his feet and made his way to the mini-bar. He would have paced, for he was that agitated, but busying himself with alcohol seemed the most feasible…that or shattering every goddamn bottle in the shelves.

Jorah was a spy? Jorah’s been working for Robert all this time?! How the fuck didn’t any of Dany’s team know about this? And why - oh why did Ned even agree to something like that? It didn’t seem like something his father would do, but if they were all afraid of another Targaryen restoration…was it really that difficult to believe his father was capable of wanting Dany and her brother killed? Did Uncle Benjen know about it too? Was that why he looked so terrified that night?

Oh gods…I think I’m going to be sick.

“The whore is a much bigger threat now,” Robert stated. “And she’s going to have to be the first thing we deal with. Once she’s out of the picture, then I can pour all my attention on Tywin and his fucking Council majority. He thinks he’s got the votes, but I need more people on my side, and that’s where you come in, Jon.”

“What?”

Robert rose to his feet; seemed to stagger a little, but righted himself with a grunt. “I need your help in capturing or better yet, taking out that Targaryen bitch. Rumor has it, you two have met, and it’s no use lying to me, son. I keep my ears and nose to the ground…so to speak. Drogo and his Dothraki horde were a necessary evil for this, since he’s still got a grudge for her betrayal or whatever, but he’s wasting my time by dragging his feet!”

He turned to Jon, and if he had been on the verge of being drunk before, his features now looked as sober as ever. Jon frowned despite the rapid thudding of his heartbeat. Had all of that been an act then?

“You went to Dorne…it’s where she is at the moment…trying to gather more people to believe in her fantasy about conquering Westeros. So she’s managed to get them under her spell, but good luck trying to get the rest of the continent on her side. Hah!”

He made his way toward the large oak desk, which was clean except for a computer and a crystalline statue of an eagle in flight. Sitting behind it, he leaned back on the leather swivel chair and studied the young man’s pallid features.

“She must have asked for your help in getting the Northern votes, yes?”

Jon gritted his teeth, but remained silent. If Robert thought for one goddamn second he was going to do anything to Dany-
“Of course I don’t expect you to jump at the opportunity to do this, so I might as well explain why you will choose to do it…in your best interests of course.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Jon asked tightly.

“What it means is that I don’t go about posting 50,000 dragons bail for nothing, young man. If you wish to live the rest of your life without the City Watch harassing you at every turn…or maybe one or two angry Dothraki showing up randomly at your doorstep, then I suggest you think really hard about what I’m about to say. It’s a simple task for your relative peace and stability. Sure the Targaryen whore is beautiful and probably a good fuck, but what’s that compared to everyone considering you the savior of Westeros, eh?”

Robert leaned forward; his eyes twin orbs of malicious intent. “Believe it or not, the City Watch is made up of a bunch of greedy fuckers who will do anything I ask for an extra dragon or two. It’s why they sent your dear Davos Seaworth away after that first night – refusing his bail due to some…technicality or another.”

Jon’s fists tightened around the glass. His ears roared with the fury rising within him. He knew! Robert had planned this the whole time!

“You assho-!”

“Now, now, Jon…careful,” Robert warned with a wag of his finger. “We don’t want to go about saying things we’re going to regret, do we? So yes, I asked that idiot, Bywater, to rough you up a little, but it was all for a good cause. It’s to drive the message home. You do not want to fuck with me or think lightly of the situation. This is a matter of life or death…literally, and as of right now, you are on the side of the enemy, Jon Snow. I could easily have you arrested for treason.”

“Says the man relying on the Dothraki to do his dirty work,” Jon sneered. “What? You’re afraid of a lone woman? That’s why you’ll go through these lengths just to prove a point? Do your worst, you piece of shit. If you want Daenerys Targaryen, you get her yourself. If you can get through me first!”

He moved before he could convince his mind to re-think his rash decision. Unfortunately, all he could see was Dany’s visage and the realization that someone she had considered close was actually a traitor, and even worse…this fucking fat slob had tortured him just to prove a point!

He smashed the bottle against the counter and leaped over it; his intention to drive it into the neck of the unmoving figure behind the desk. However, before his feet could land on the floor, he felt the hard blow driven into his side from an unseen figure which sent him crashing to the floor in a painful heap.

Fuck!

Jon would look up quickly; and roll to the side – just barely – as a heavy-booted foot just missed making contact with the side of his head. He scrambled into a sitting position; breathing hard and staring wide-eyed at the towering figure of a man who had come out of nowhere. His features were ghastly; the left side of his face badly scarred as if he had been dipped into something extremely hot and it had melted off the flesh. His one good eye almost looked disinterested; as if trying to kill some random guy was something he did on a regular basis. Jon hissed and kicked up a leg to slam it against the man’s shins; glad it made contact and startled his attacker.

However, the newcomer was able to right himself and reached for Jon again; missing when the younger man slipped between his legs with a speed that took him by surprise. Jon spied the broken bottleneck and made a grab for it, but when the heavy boot suddenly stepped on his hand, he could
barely fight back the scream of agony at the impact.

“Don’t crush it,” Robert warned as he stood up. He had watched the fight with interest. “I still need him in one piece.”

The newcomer grunted in displeasure and reluctantly took off his foot. However, he did drag Jon up by the scruff of his neck and held him up before Robert as if offering a prize. Jon tried to disengage from the rather painful embrace, but it was impossible to do so. This guy was much taller and stronger than him.

“Thank you, Hound,” Robert said with an amiable grin. He stopped before the panting Jon and blew a cloud of smoke into his flushed features. “I’ve got to give you credit for putting up a fight. Reminds me of the first time I saw you back in Winterfell. You might have been a runt, but you had a lot of firepower in you, and that’s the kind of firepower I’ll need to take over the North.”

“Fuck off,” Jon grunted, and then stifled a cry as the Hound tightened his grip beneath his arms. Geez! This guy was going to rip them off.

“That’s good…be angry,” Robert encouraged with a nod. “Because what I’m about to tell you isn’t going to make things any easier, my boy. I didn’t want to have to bring this up as some might consider it a low blow, but…honesty is my best policy and your father was more than guilty of always throwing his fucking ‘honor’ in my face whenever he could manage it. Now then…do you know what this is?”

Jon stared at the envelope Robert was waving before his face. He frowned in consternation. It was the envelope Robb had with him when they went to Robert’s store that day. It was supposedly a letter from Catelyn.

“Your stepmother and I keep in touch every once in a while,” Robert was saying as he opened the envelope and held the letter to his nose as if to inhale its flowery scent. “She’s quite old fashioned and sometimes doesn’t like using modern technology to communicate her concerns. You see, she’s still not over the loss of her dead husband, and I’ve done my best over the years to see that she’s comfortable especially in this most difficult time.” Robert paused and caught Jon’s angry glare. “The reality is this, Jon Snow, your stepmother has been declining in health, and it’s not all due to the cancer eating away at her lungs either. It’s something Ned would have rather not shared with all of you, and your dear older brother is now seeing the full effects of your father’s so-called ‘honor’. In simple terms, it appears that the power the Starks once had over the North is all but eroding.”

Jon felt something heavy drop in his stomach; the sudden image of Robb’s desperate visage – wishing for Jon to return home to help run the family business – now making more sense…or perhaps...

“Bullshit,” Jon snarled. “You’re bluffing. The Starks will never be betrayed by the Houses that have pledged allegiance to them.”

“Then you’re an even bigger fool than your brother,” Robert snapped impatiently. “Honor? Allegiance? This is the same North your father could barely hold together as everyone—the Karstaks, the Boltons, the Grovers, the Umbers…need I list them all? All those fickle sons of bitches were quick to turn face when Ned passed away! Do you think they follow your hapless brother who seems to think running such an intricate conglomerate is all fun and games? Your stocks are in the red, and he’s unable to stop the bleeding! Your family is a mockery of the North, Jon.”

“Stop…”
“Tywin Lannister offered to buy out the company, but your father -stubborn as he is - refused. That goddamn Stark pride! He insisted things would turn around, but no! Nothing has changed since then! The Manderlys, now the wealthiest, probably sup with the other houses and laugh at your folly!”

“Stop…”

“And you have siblings in college yes?” Robert continued mercilessly. “There’s the one in Oldtown – though he’s got a scholarship – the lucky bastard, but you’ve got the last born, whose name I forget, he’s going to be entering college soon, isn’t he? Where’s the money to fund that? And you’ve got that sister of yours going to The Prestige in Braavos, not exactly a cheap expenditure, is it? And then there’s Sansa, yes? She plans to attend one of the foremost fashion institutions in Westeros and yet, she won’t be able to afford it because of your father’s poor business-making decisions-”

“STOP IT!” Jon roared.

The tears had sprung to his eyes before he could control them; his entire body trembling with the force of his misery and dismay. He felt as if he was being choked by an invisible noose, and as Robert moved closer until they were just a kiss away, Jon tried not to spit into the feigned sad visage staring back at him.

“Your uncle Benjen died and left you with a considerable sum of money, and I’m sure you’re thinking you can help your family with it, but let’s be honest…do you really think you have enough to stop the Lannisters from buying out the Stark Corporation? They only need dangle a suitable sum in front of your pitiful brother, and he’ll jump at the opportunity. Oh, and let’s not forget that one little problem regarding your legitimacy. Ned might be your father, but according to the rules, you are technically not a Stark, and all documentation might not let you take control of the company without Catelyn’s final say-so. In other words…your money might be no good in the long run.

“However, I can change all that, Jon. Just say the word and all talk about being a ‘bastard’ will be erased. In fact, I dare say most of the Northern lords would much prefer to have you in control over your brother. Save your precious family, Jon. Make the Starks more respectable, and I will do all in my power to see that come to fruition. In turn, you need only do one simple thing for me. Just one thing. It’s really not too much to ask.”

He placed a hand on Jon’s shoulder and squeezed gently; dark eyes burning with hate and smug satisfaction. “Bring me Daenerys Targaryen alive or dead, Jon Snow, and every horrible thing that’s happened or has been happening in your life will disappear…just like that.” He snapped his fingers right next to Jon’s ear, causing him to jump at the sound.

“But, I realize this is all a lot to digest at this time,” Robert added with a laugh as he motioned to The Hound to release his prisoner. “So I’ll have my trusty assistant here take you home, you get some rest…and say…twenty-four hours? Or let’s make it forty-eight…should be long enough for you to think things through, eh? But choose wisely, son. It is literally going to be a life or death situation depending on your answer.”

With a loud yawn, he began shuffling out of the room as Jon was dumped to the floor. “You are more than welcome to read the letter from Catelyn if you don’t believe me. Hopefully, it will all become clearer as to just how dire things are back home. Oh! You can keep the clothes and the cuff links too. It’s on the house! Hah!”
Jon did not look up; his entire being seemingly frozen in a state of inertia as every threatening word repeated in an endless loop within his mind.

*I’ll kill him…*

He could vaguely hear the Hound mumble something about meeting him outside.

*I’ll kill him…*

Somewhere, in the distance, a door closed, but he couldn’t be sure.

*I’ll kill him…*

The crackle from the fire now seemed louder and louder until it threatened to consume him.

*I’ll…kill…him…!*

His hands formed fists of frustration for he knew thinking such a thing was one thing…actually pulling it off was another. Tyrion was right after all. Robert had played him like a fiddle; feeding off his naivety to concoct an elaborate plan just to get him to this position. How foolish had he been?! He thought of his beloved Winterfell; of the happier memories spent there with his father and siblings. Not a day had gone by when Ned gave off the impression that they were in any kind of financial debt, but then again, reading Ned Stark could sometimes be a chore in itself. He epitomized the typical stoic Stark reserve; never to show the fear within no matter the odds. Winter was always coming, and they had to prepare for any inevitability.

Trembling fingers reached for the letter Robert had flung to his face, and as he read through Catelyn’s scribbled words, Jon found his vision getting blurrier by the second.

It was true after all.

For all her bravado and hateful attitude towards him, this letter came across as genuine and heartfelt. It spoke of a woman who was aware she was in her final days and was ready to make her peace.

…or perhaps I am simply being punished for never opening my heart to a bastard boy, she wrote at the end of the letter. Whatever the case, I pray to the gods that they find a way to forgive my transgressions, for there were so many times I wished I could give just a dollop of affection to him, and yet I couldn’t. So here I am, Robert, suffering on my death bed; knowing that there are things I cannot change. Please take care of my children and treat them as yours. You always considered Ned a brother, no matter your differences, so please…do not forget his legacy when I’m gone. I thank you for all you’ve done for us over the years, and I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

Love,

Catelyn Stark.

He crumpled the letter and bowed his head in sorrow. He thought of his brave and kind brother Robb and how much he had suffered trying to take over his father’s role as head of the household. He thought of Sansa, whose cold beauty was a magnet for many bachelors around the North, though her sights were always set on loftier goals and impossible standards. He thought of the brilliant Bran, who had left home to pursue his dreams of becoming a bioengineer and scientist. He thought of little Rickon, who still had so much to look forward to with dreams yet to be fulfilled. And then there was Arya, his precious dearest sister, whose dream to become a soldier was finally coming to fruition.
with her acceptance into The Prestige. Just recalling her pure happiness, during that video conference call, had Jon stifling a choked sob. How could he risk seeing her disappointment if Robert was to squash her dreams...ALL their dreams?

"Bring me Daenerys Targaryen alive or dead, Jon Snow, and every horrible thing that’s happened or has been happening in your life will disappear...just like that."

Dany...Dany...Dany...oh dear gods. What do I do?

He moaned and squeezed his eyes shut as every single moment spent in her presence came flaring back to mind. Every look, every touch, every kiss, every whispered word, her tears, her defiance, and her inner strength...every goddamn part of her he had come to admire and cherish...how the fuck was he supposed to betray her now?

He had so little time to come up with his answer, and as he lifted his lashes and forced himself to move, his gaze would fall on a photograph that was almost hidden behind a series of carved figurines.

Posing in front of vintage automobile, four grinning young people – about his age – peered back at him from the dusty annals of history. It was easy to make out Robert and Ned, but it was the couple in the middle which had Jon doing a double take.

It was his beautiful Aunt Lyanna – his father’s sister - and a tall, handsome (almost pretty) silver-haired male with striking indigo eyes.

Rhaegar Targaryen?

It seemed impossible - considering how much Robert hated him -and yet...why did they all look so happy in the photograph? What really happened between them to create the monster Robert Baratheon had become? And could Ned have done anything to try to change the course of events?

What would you do if you were in my shoes, father? Would you choose family and duty over the love of a woman? I have only forty-eight hours to make my decision, Jon thought with a heavy heart. And I pray to the gods that I make the right one.
As beautiful as the show version of Dragonstone is, I chose to go with the book version. And again, my sincere thanks to those of you who take the time to leave feedback! *bows gratefully* You help make this story what it is.
Enjoy!

Dragonstone was a dump.

Perhaps that was too harsh a word to describe it, but considering her impatience to move in -despite Tyrion’s insistence that renovations were still being done - Daenerys could only stifle her complaints as she stepped over yet another pile of plywood and slithering electrical wires.

Clad in a pair of jeans and an old sweater; both covered in soot and paint stains, she was careful not to drop the bucket of dirty water she planned to discard. Her hair was protected with a scarf, though a few tendrils clung to her face thanks to the light sheen of sweat accumulated from her exertions. She had spent the better part of the morning scrubbing down the walls of what would become her main office, and she had to admit it looked so much better than its original appearance when they arrived two nights ago.

She still couldn’t get over the magnificent Painted Table – which was a massive map of Westeros some talented carpenter or sculptor had created. Over fifty-feet long and twenty-five feet wide, it was accented with a raised seat (or mini-throne) right next to Dragonstone’s location. It was a shame to see the pitiful state it was in, but as she washed away the layers of dust, Dany found her
determination to earn the loyalty of each region becoming more paramount. It was incomprehensible to think that her ancestors had used this same room for warring purposes, and she could swear she heard their ghosts whispering in (dis)approval as she paid attention to every nook and cranny in an attempt to return it to its former glory.

That was about as much of a homecoming as she had received.

She had, of course, seen photographs of Dragonstone – both castle and island, but it paled in comparison to being there in person. There was something rather imposing and unwelcoming about the land once conquered by her forebears. For starters, the only way to get to the island was by sea, and it had been a two-day trip with help from Prince Doran who was willing to offer some of his fastest vessels. The air over the island was usually so thick with smoke and the stench of sulfur and brimstone – a result of the volcanic mountains in the region – that planes had difficulty navigating their way there. Not that an attempt hadn’t been made to build an airport, or at least a landing strip, but it was eventually abandoned after years of neglect.

The once bustling port was just as pitiful. Apparently, after the passing of Stannis Baratheon, fewer visitors bothered to show up to its shores. Once a hive of activity for trading ships from as far as Tyr and Pentos, the main wharf was now a shadow of its former self; with a few derelict ships anchored with no place to go and small fishing boats bobbing listlessly on the quiet shores. The sleepy little village was made up of mostly fishermen and farmers; most of whom could only stare in silent bemusement as Daenerys and her entourage showed up at their doorsteps. There was no grand welcoming parade. There were no cheering crowds beaming with relief or pride, and Daenerys could only think of how upset Viserys would have been at such lukewarm reception.

Not exactly how a dragon king or queen should have been received, eh, dear brother?

Fortunately, Maester Pylos – who couldn’t be older than twenty-five – had anticipated their arrival and was more than eager to show them around their new lodgings. Polite and well-educated – and actually good-looking - he claimed to be the successor to the late Maester Cressen, who had served the previous lords of the castle. He not only took care of the castle as best he could, he was considered the village’s school master as well.

“We are not a big island,” Pylos had confessed abashedly at Dany’s line of questioning. “But we do our best. The children in the villages do look forward to the lessons I try to teach them.”

As great a guide as he was, Dany couldn’t help the chill to seep through her bones as she walked through each hall and room. She had no idea why her ancestors had felt the need to use some rather disturbing demonic statues for decorations; though she could appreciate most of the dragonesque sculptures. In fact, one could say that the entire castle had been designed to look like several dragons in flight – which was impressive if it wasn’t for how pitch black most of the stones were. According to legend, the castle was created with dragon fire and magic, and Dany could almost believe it. There was something otherworldly about this place, and she was not usually one to believe in superstitions.

Most of the staircases and archways were in the shape of dragon tails, and even the three curtain walls with their battlements were in the shape of gargoyles and wyrens. The Great Hall was also impressive for its entrance was shaped like an opened dragon’s mouth, and its overall shape was supposedly of a dragon lying on its stomach. The kitchens also resembled a curled up dragon; only smoke and heat would escape its nostrils. At least someone must have had a sense of humor in designing these rooms.

Forsaken. Forgotten. Desolate.

These were all the terms that sprang to her mind despite the few signs of modern improvement.
Many of the rooms still had traces of Stannis Baratheon’s presence, and her first orders were to have everything related to him removed from the castle and burned. Though she was pleased to know that most of the vermin issue had been taken care of, many of the rooms had leaking roofs, shattered windows, or cracks in the walls and floors. Some parts of the castle had no electricity, and to make things worse, there was no hot water readily available; something the hired plumber had apologized for profusely. He vowed he and his crew would get things fixed by the end of the week, so in the interim everyone would have to do things the old fashioned way.

“At least they set up the Wi-Fi,” Missandei mumbled, with exaggerated relief, while testing her cellphone capabilities. “If not, I would have gone mad.”

Dany had chuckled at that, but she was just as relieved. It would make living here a bit more bearable despite the amount of work they still had to do. Fortunately, attempts had been made to get her private quarters ready. Her bedroom was situated in the highest tower, the Stone Drum, which gave her a wonderful view of the sea and thankfully none of the intimidating mountains behind the castle. With four large windows and a pair of weathered oak doors leading out to a veranda, it almost gave one the illusion of standing on the edge of a cliff. It was incredibly windy out there, and Dany was sure if she hadn’t held on to the stone balustrades for dear life, she might have been blown right off.

The King-sized canopy bed was not covered in silks and jeweled fabrics like her room in Dorne, but the simple royal blue sheets, pillows, and matching comforter set did just fine. There was a grand fireplace – again with its dragon motif – and though she would have wished for the electric version, she would have to make do with inhaling the clouds of smoke to escape the logs tossed in there by some of her Unsullied helpers. There was a gaping hole above the fireplace, and it was clear a large portrait had once hung there, but someone (Stannis probably) must have taken it down.

“All the portraits were sent to the dungeons,” Maester Pylos revealed when she asked. “Lord Stannis’s orders. He declared that anything related to your family was to be removed, Your Grace.”

At least he hadn’t destroyed them, Dany thought with irritation. It was going to be a chore having to cart all those things back up, and she had no intention of creeping around the dungeons anytime soon. She would have to send her soldiers down there.

One of the more functioning sections of the castle was the sept, where some of the villagers came to worship with their devotion to the Faith of the Seven. It was a peaceful rotunda, where statues of each aspect of the Faith towered over its visitors in a circle. The septon Barre was almost blind in his old age, but was still welcoming to Dany. He hoped she’d come to visit often despite her insistence that she was no fan of the religion.

However, her most favorite part of the castle – aside from the great library which still had all its books intact – was Aegon’s Garden. It was located in the heart of the castle; a private little haven filled with towering dark trees, wild roses, and cranberries all surrounded by high thorny hedges. There was a pleasing pine scent in here, and despite the overgrown foliage, there was something wildly beautiful about this slice of paradise in the midst of the ‘darkness’. Dany could picture herself spending endless hours here; sitting on one of the stone benches beneath a tree and losing herself in a book or two.

Unfortunately, those fantasies would have to wait for some time. She had to get her hands dirty and help in the upkeep of her new home even if her sudden appearance in jeans and t-shirt had the smallfolk gawking in disbelief at a ‘royal’ willing to do such menial tasks.

To win the hearts of the people, you have to get down to their level, someone once told her. It was one of the reasons she had been successful in Slavers Bay. It was all well and good to proclaim you
wanted to lead a revolution, but what good was a leader if you didn’t set an example? It’s what Jon had suggested she do in Westeros, and by the gods, she was going to do the best she could.

“Good day, Your Grace!”

“Hello, Your Grace!”

“Great job, my Queen!”

She smiled brightly at the greetings she received from some of the workers around the grounds as she emptied her bucket into the crude drainage system that flowed toward the sea. She was glad to see the overgrown grass and weeds around the portcullis had been cut and new plants were now being cultivated. She wasn’t too sure how well lemon and orange trees would grow in this climate, but it was considerably better than nothing at all.

“Smells like rain,” came the dry commentary, which had her turning to see Tyrion approaching with a bottle of beer in hand. He looked slightly dishelved in the most casual clothing she had ever seen him don, and though he hadn’t exactly approved her order that everyone in her team was to chip in with ‘housework’, Tyrion did pull his weight. He actually came to enjoy spending time with some of the stonemasons; buff and gruff men who enjoyed the dwarf’s crude jokes and invited him to join them for lunch or after work drinks at a nearby inn.

“It does,” Dany agreed as they looked up at the same time. It was a bit hard to tell considering all the gray clouds emanating from the mountains, but the wind was picking up and the tangy scent of sea salt was much stronger. “Hopefully, it won’t affect some of the roof work.”

“They are already laying tarps just in case,” Tyrion replied. He finished his beer and gave a belch. “Good thing too. My back’s already killing me. I don’t think I signed up for this-”

“You need to stop bitching about things, my Lord,” Dany cut in with a sigh of exasperation. “Jorah’s been working with the plumbing crew. You don’t see him complaining.”

Tyrion might have muttered something about ‘Jorah being an ass kisser’, but Dany chose to ignore the insult. She led the way back into the castle; the tantalizing smells of fried fish and baked potatoes floating from the kitchens. They were lucky some of the villagers had offered their services in that department, for Dany hadn’t really considered bringing in any chefs from Dorne.

“So, I have set up the video conference call with the Great Masters first thing in the morning,” Tyrion stated as they walked past the whirring noises from drills and pounding hammers in the Great Hall.

“Good. I assume Hizdahr – that fucking creep – is going to be in attendance?”

“Considering that fucking creep was one of your lovers, then yes.”

“He used me.”

“As you did him, if I recall.”

Dany slid a narrowed gaze at her Hand. “Whose side are you on here?”

“I am on the side of Common Sense,” Tyrion replied pleasantly. “In fact, I encourage you to control your temper once you see his face, Your Grace. If you were a porcupine your needles would be most sharp at that moment.”
Dany scoffed and stepped into the Chamber of the Painted Table, where Missandei was still busy trying to set up the computers in the corner of the room. Dany had requested two desks be provided for her friend and Tyrion. They would share the same ‘office space’, while she was content to sit on the mini-throne with a laptop that was functioning just fine. Thank the gods for Missandei and her skills.

“How goes it, Missandei?” Dany asked as she sat on the chair with a soft sigh of relief. Her lower back was throbbing, but one glance around the room she had spent the better half of the day cleaning, made her feel better. The amazing dragon carvings on the wall now shone in the fading light; their black stones almost shimmering if you looked at it a certain way. As for the table, well… there was really nothing she could do about the chips and scratches – and she hated to tamper with something old, but it was cleaner and all the wooden house sigils were in their proper place.

“Almost done,” her friend replied with a smile. Like Dany, she was dressed in faded jeans and a sweater, but with a pair of reading glasses perched on her nose it gave her a nerdy/bookworm appearance. “Just need to reboot this computer, and we’re all set.”

“The cameras as well?” Tyrion inquired as he peered over her shoulder. “They must be able to see us.”

“It’s all working fine,” Missandei replied with barely controlled impatience. “You can test it for yourself if you like, my Lord.”

Dany tuned out their conversation and studied the map from her vantage point. The chair wasn’t exactly comfortable, and she made a mental note to get more cushioning for the seat.

To conquer Westeros…an impossible dream?

It was almost intimidating when one thought about it. Why just the North alone was large enough to be its own continent! She reached for a direwolf carving; absently caressing the snarling creature as she studied every town and village especially the location simply labeled ‘Winterfell’.

Jon’s home.

She was powerless to stop the blush that filled her cheeks; mentally kicking herself for always allowing her stomach to jump with nervous butterflies at just the thought of him. She was more than aware of how long it had been since they had spoken to each other, and though she knew he had turned himself in to the City Watch - and she had sworn she wouldn’t call him until his release (probably by now) – it still didn’t lessen the feelings of longing.

That night on the beach, she would never soon forget. He had talked a little more of his hometown, but mostly about the adventures he used to have with his precious Ghost. He also talked about his siblings, but seemed to focus more his sister called ‘Arya’, who was apparently going to be attending The Prestige in Braavos. No small feat since that school was known to take only those considered elite. Jon had shown her pictures to match the names. Robb, she already knew from her investigation of his social media websites, and she could tell Jon’s affections for him were almost adorable. Talk about ‘hero worship’. Then there was Sansa – a stunning redhead with features that could be considered cold when she wasn’t smiling. However, when Jon showed photos of some of Sansa’s fashion acumen, Dany couldn’t help being impressed. She wouldn’t mind getting one or two outfits designed by the talented young woman. Bran was as studious as Jon had described him. He was at the Citadel in Oldtown, and his narrow features accented with a pair of thick glasses, spoke of a serious-minded individual. Rickon was the youngest, and his open features told of a young man who had hopes for a bright future. He was almost considered a ‘star’ in his hometown for being in a winning basketball team.
“Two regional championships in a row,” Jon had bragged proudly.

Not surprising, Jon had quite a collection of images of he and Arya – a tomboyish petite girl who resembled Jon more than the rest of his siblings. It was clear to see why she was his favorite, for those two seemed glued at the hip. There were photos with the two playing in the snow, sticking out tongues at the camera, blowing out birthday candles, Jon taking her to school, teaching her how to drive, ride a horse, use a shotgun, or simply carrying her either in his arms or over his shoulders…but most importantly…laughing…smiling…all for and with Arya.

Dany knew it was silly to feel jealous since they were siblings, yet a tiny part of her did wish she was the one occupying most of Jon’s photo album. She wished she had taken more photos of him while at Dorne, but things had happened so fast, she was unable to take advantage of those private moments with him – oh and there was the fact that she had been too stubborn in her quest to keep him away from her issues.

So much for that.

Still, she wondered if they’d ever come a time she’d get to visit Winterfell. She still hadn’t seen snow firsthand, and she could remember how shocked Jon had been at that revelation.

“Then you’ll have to come North someday,” he offered in that thick northern accent she could never get tired of listening to.

“Is that an official invitation?” she had teased as he planted a firm kiss on her forehead and hugged her tighter to him.

“Yes, Dany. I’d love to show you around Winterfell someday.”

Someday…when?

With a firm shake of her head, she made the decision to call him tonight and catch up on how far he was handling the Robert Baratheon situation. Though Grey Worm and his team would be returning to Dragonstone sometime tomorrow, Stalwart Shield and his crew – who were supposed to protect Jon – were yet to be heard from. It wasn’t as if she had told them to keep her updated every single minute, but it was unusual not to hear anything so far.

Yes, it’s only been a couple of days, but still…I’m sure things are all right, Dany pep-talked herself as she took a deep breath and struggled to focus. She had to prepare for the meeting with the Grand Masters, so all thoughts of Jon and his need for vengeance would have to be put on the backburner for now.

She awoke to the rumbling sound of thunder and the brightest flash of lightning. A quick glance at the alarm clock showed it was a little past seven in the morning, and yet it was still dark outside. She shivered and sat up slowly; pulling the warm blanket up to her chest while sinking a trembling hand into her hair.

What a horrible dream…

She could barely remember what it was about. She did recall feeling claustrophobic – as if she was being kept in some place with no light or air – and she might have been screaming for help, but she
wasn’t sure.

The sudden glow from her cellphone had her looking at the device with confusion for a moment before it all came rushing back. She had tried calling Jon last night, but was surprised to hear someone else’s voice. It was the one called Davos Seaworth, who was supposedly a friend of his late Uncle Benjen and was helping to run things while Jon was away. Jon had spoken highly of him.

“I’m sorry, Your Grace,” the man had said in his thick Flea Bottom accent. “But they are keeping him for more questioning…I know…I’m just as confused, but they say it’s protocol of some sort…trust me, Your Grace, I did all I could, but they just about threatened to arrest me as well…the Unsullied? They are here, your Grace. I gave them the orders not to do anything stupid to get Jon in even more trouble, so we’re going to wait until he comes home…and don’t you worry, Your Grace. I’m sure they’ll release him soon.”

Don’t worry.

Easier said than done.

She forced herself out of bed and trudged into the bathroom; nearly tripping over the clothes she had discarded on the floor last night. She remembered she had no hot water, so it would require the maids getting her bath ready; a tedious process all around. Ringing the bell with a groan, she sat on the toilet seat and pondered on the meeting ahead. She was really not looking forward to seeing those greasy bastards from Meereen, but she had to scratch that unpleasant task from her never-ending to-do list.

In addition, she was expecting visitors from Driftmark – a slightly larger but prosperous island - half-a-day travel from Dragonstone. Representatives from House Velaryon would be expecting to see the new occupants of the castle; and if she played her cards right, she could garner their allegiance. They might be small, but every vote counted after all.

After a quick breakfast of buttered toast and omelette with much-needed coffee, her team assembled in the Chamber of the Painted Table where Missandei had already set up the main computers and phones for the conference call. Dany couldn’t help noticing her best friend looked exceptionally pretty today, and it had nothing to do with the form-fitting navy blue pantsuit she was wearing. It was in her overall demeanor, with a small smile she couldn’t hide even if there was nothing to smile about. More astute observers would realize it was all because of Grey Worm’s return, and Dany was sure she was not going to be seeing her friend for an entire day at least while they did a lot of ‘catching up’.

Squashing down her feeling of envy, Dany – dressed in similar fashion; only her pantsuit was black with a dark red shirt and a silver brooch of three dragons pinned to the lapel – sat before the main computer and studied the notes Tyrion had been kind enough to leave for her. Her Hand was dressed just as sharply; his pinstripe suit with a gold handkerchief in the breast pocket reminding one of just what family he came from. Jorah was also in attendance, and though he wasn’t too fond of being cooped in stuffy suits, Dany had to admit he looked quite good in the well-tailored black pants and lilac dress shirt.

“Are we all ready?” Dany asked as the screen came to life and the familiar handsome features of Hizdahr filled the screen. He didn’t help matters by breaking into a sheepish smile and daring to wave in greeting.

Recalling her Hand’s advice not to burst into a torrent of curse words, she shared a quick look with Tyrion and counted inwardly to ten to control herself.
Almost three wearisome hours later, the conference meeting ended with no heads rolling or Dany threatening to burn the entire city of Meereen to the ground in some shape or form. They had agreed to a peaceful armistice; where their Harpies would be called off as long as the Great Masters had a little more say in the running of their government. As much as they appreciated the efforts to become more democratic, the civil unrest still happening between different factions could be eased if more of their members were in the council. They would continue to stick with the rules not to continue their dealings with slavery, but even Dany was wise enough to know that such practices still occurred in the underground for old habits were hard to break.

Someday, Hizdahr had reassured her. *Give them time, Daenerys. With each new generation, things will change for the better. You’ve already laid the foundation…let the people take care of the rest.*

All the same, some very revealing information had also come out of this, and Dany was left pondering on all she had heard. At the moment, Jorah was on the phone with Varys – their spy at the Red Keep – and Missandei was looking up some information on the computer. Tyrion had paced to the windows; his features just as pensive if not perplexed.

“You had an idea, didn’t you?” Dany finally asked without looking at him. Her gaze was trained on the area labeled ‘Casterly Rock’ – the stronghold of the Lannisters. Several lion head figurines sat in their position. “Well, my Lord Tyrion?”

“It might have crossed my mind at some point,” Tyrion finally replied with what seemed like great reluctance. “But I had no idea he would go to those lengths—”

“You said yourself never to underestimate your father,” Dany interrupted curtly. “What surprises you about his decision to purchase the services of the Sons of the Harpy? He also sees me as a threat, so why not seek a way to eliminate me, by using those who already despise me?”

“Fair enough,” Tyrion agreed. He turned back to Dany; his eyes filled with an expression that could be considered defensive. “But we have managed to squash those goals with the peace agreement. Word must have reached him of our success with the dismantling of the Harpies in King’s Landing, and so he might have to rely on Robert Baratheon for help…and I don’t really see how that’s going to work considering they aren’t exactly on speaking terms.”

“Grownups and their childish games,” Dany said with a sneer. “They seem to think the lives of those beneath them are nothing more than chess pieces they can move about. They forget the smallfolk they have to rely on.”

“And we hope to change all that, yes?”

“Of course. I still intend to visit the streets of King’s Landing.”

“At the risk of getting arrested?”

“They wouldn’t dare…” She paused as one of Jon’s suggestions came rushing back. She groaned and slapped her forehead. “Good grief! In the chaos, I forgot all about contacting that friend of his.”
“Friend?” Tyrion asked with a raised brow.

“The one who is some sort of social media guru,” Dany replied as she reached for the private phone. “I have to begin forming my online army, Tyrion. He said to call the private phone, but I do hope I don’t get Seaworth again. Nice as he is -”

“And Jon? Where is he at the moment?” Tyrion queried, but that question was answered with Jorah returning to them; a light frown on his features.

“What’s wrong?” Dany asked; unaware of her fingers tightening around the phone.

Jorah gave a light bow before speaking. “Varys reports that Jon was last seen getting into a car with Robert Baratheon yesterday. He’s been at the Red Keep for the past week under the pretext of being questioned by the City Watch, although one can safely assume Robert had this all planned. The bail was set at a ridiculous sum of 50,000 dragons and though the paperwork claims Robert paid it off, no such thing happened. The only payment sent was the bribes given to the parties involved led by First Lieutenant Bywater and Captain Janos Slynt.”

It was a weird sensation; the roiling coil of fury bubbling within and yet a strange calmness coming over her at the same time. She could feel their gazes trained on her; holding their breaths for whatever decision she was going to make. Closing her eyes, she felt she could transport herself into those dungeons where they had kept Jon, and perhaps that was the reason for her dream. She could only imagine how miserable the conditions must have been, and that asshole, Baratheon, had done it all for what? To teach Jon a lesson? The arrogant fat bastard. And as for those officers?

*Bywater and Slynt, eh?*

May the gods help them.

“My Unsullied,” she finally said quietly. “Where are they?”

“They remain with Davos Seaworth,” Jorah replied. “They are under strict instructions not to interfere. It appears the former smuggler wishes things to remain as quiet as possible.”

“And you say Jon has not returned back to his home since he left with Robert?”

“Not at this time, no.”

Dany expelled a soft breath of air and lifted her lashes.

“I don’t know how or why, but I’ll get to the bottom of it, and if it eventually means me taking him out myself, then please…give me the pleasure of doing it, Dany. I want this.”

Jon had said those words to her, hadn’t he? His voice raw with emotion and the depth of his conviction. She had to swallow her fears and doubts and trust that he knew what he was doing. She would have to squash every fiber of her being that pleaded for her to get on the next ship to King’s Landing, barge into Robert’s castle and rescue him, but she realized that this was his battle to win or lose. If he really needed her help, he’d find a way to reach her and only then would she interfere.

“All right,” she said quietly as she began dialing his number. “Thanks for information, Jorah. We’ll all have lunch and then convene here again with, hopefully, the members of House Velaryon. They are on their way, yes?”

“They should be here within the hour, your Grace,” Jorah agreed with a nod.
When she got nothing but the automated voicemail, she gave a soft curse and settled for leaving a message. It was risky; considering someone else might pick up the device and know who she is, but she kept it brief without giving too much away.

She led the way to the Great Hall, where Maester Pylos and the Septon Barre could be seen telling some of her Unsullied and the village helpers how to decorate and arrange things for their coming guests. In just a few hours, they had managed to transform the once empty and desolate room into its former glory. The banners of House Targaryen—carefully washed and dried—now hung from the arched ceilings. Exquisite tapestries, featuring the conquests of her ancestors, draped the black walls which now gleamed dully wherever the light hit. The throne, which had an impressive towering seat of winding stone dragons with detailed scales and swords, looked uncomfortable at first sight, but the thick red cushion of its seat made things more bearable. Dany took a moment to praise the workers for a job well done, before walking up the short flight of steps to take her position on the throne.

It was tricky settling her hands on the armrests without slicing her skin on the scales and swords, but she managed it. Recalling to keep her regal wits about her, she took a deep breath and prepared to meet her guests.

She had braced herself for malicious faces and spiteful words, but was genuinely pleased to see the small group of representatives appear with nothing more than humble offerings of a continued alliance with House Targaryen.

Marching into the Great Hall with their House banner of a silver sea horse on a sea green background, Lord Monford Velaryon could have been pulled out the pages of the Targaryen history books. Dressed in a fine black and gold velvet Mandarin-style jacket and pants, he was handsome and tall with fair hair and violet eyes. It was such a shock to see him that Dany had at first assumed it was her brother, Rhaegar, back from the dead. It had been a struggle not to burst into tears at the ridiculous notion. However, as Monford approached, it was clear he was older and was slightly more slender than her brother. He introduced his son Monterys, who was only six and quite precocious for once the formalities were over, the little rascal was already off and running to explore the rest of the castle with two poor guards chasing after him.

Dinner with Monford and his small council was a pleasant affair, and he was more than willing to share most of the Targaryen history she was unaware of over plates of steaming dumplings and vegetables with sweet wine as an aperitif. Apparently, the two Houses had been quite close over the centuries and there was even a coat of arms designed by Rhaenyra Targaryen that incorporated both houses in it. The Velaryons were nice enough to present a beautiful handmade quilt with that design as a gift to Dany.

“We continue to be on the side of House Targaryen,” Monford explained, “and it was something Stannis could not understand. He did try to demand our allegiance, but we had a feeling this great house would return some day and here you are.”

He punctuated this by daring to place a gentle kiss on the back of her hand; his eyes smoldering with an intent that was not lost on Dany.

He was already more than interested, and his pursuit of her continued as they excused themselves from the rest of the guests to walk toward Aegon’s Garden. The gardeners had done a great job restoring it to its original state. The shrubberies of white and red roses were now more visible and the
trees provided an intimate protection from the still rather gloomy weather. The grass was still wet from the rains, and the droplets of water on the plants gave the illusion of glistening crystals in the twilight.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Monford observed as he walked beside her. “I remember coming here as a boy with my father. Back then it was your father – Aerys – who was lord of the castle. However, your mother loved this garden the most.” He pointed toward a section of the garden; an area Dany had mentally considered her private spot. “She would also sit there reading a book. She was so beautiful…quiet and mostly sickly; I’m sorry to say, but she was a wonderful woman. Never had a bad word to say about anyone, and did not mind rambunctious children running around the halls.”

Dany’s throat tightened and she struggled to hold back the tears. It was rare to hear stories about her mother. Viserys never liked talking about her much since he blamed Dany for her death. Jorah hadn’t really known her that intimately either. All he knew was what the papers or media would feed to the masses. The only other person who might have known her was Barristan Selmy, but he hadn’t many stories to tell of Rhaella either. He was more of a protector of her son, Prince Rhaegar.

“…and my brother?” Dany asked quietly. “You must have known him. You are almost his age.”

Monford chuckled. “Indeed. I was just a few years older, but we were friends. He might have been a good man, but he was not immune to making mistakes here and there…or being exceptionally stubborn. He did hate coming here though…and who could blame him? These surroundings weren’t exactly cheery and Aerys didn’t help matters by creating an even darker atmosphere. He and Rhaella preferred Summerhall…before it got burnt to the ground that is.”

Sitting on a stone bench, her curiosity to know more was tampered with the sudden buzz of the cellphone in the pocket of her pants. Torn between wanting to speak to Monford, who sat beside her with that open expression of admiration on his features, she apologized profusely and walked away to accept the call for the name on the screen had sent her pulse quickening in anticipation.

*It’s been too long.*

She had hoped it might be Jon, but at the sound of the tentative voice at the other end, Dany had to close her eyes to control the near-weakening sensation of disappointment to overwhelm her.

“He…hello? Someone called from this number? Are you D…eh…D.T?”

This person sounded nervous yet unpretentious, and gathering herself, Dany stole a quick glance at Monford, who was leaning back on the bench and staring at the heavens.

“Yes, I am,” she replied. She took a step further away from her visitor; keeping her voice low. She hid behind a pillar and leaned against it. “And you must be Samwell Tarly?”

“Oh yes, yes I am,” came the enthusiastic reply. “Jon told me to expect a call from you. Sorry I couldn’t pick up earlier. I was at work and I left the phone in my other jacket and I forgot…and I’m rambling. I’m so sorry. Please forgive me.”

She resisted the urge to laugh at his flustered apology. “It’s quite all right, Samwell—”

“You can call me Sam. Only my grandfather called me Samwell, and he’s long dead.”

“All right…Sam. Did Jon tell you about me?”

“Not much to be honest. He was kinda in a hurry when he gave me the information. So all he said was to expect a phone call from you and do whatever you ask…so…who are you though?”
“You don’t mind if I see your face first, do you, Sam?” she inquired with a small smile. “I’d like to know exactly who I’m dealing with.”

“Oh of course, of course! Give me a minute…got to look a little more presentable. I’m only in my underwear, no, no of course not, I’m only kidding.” His laughter had her chuckling, and she was already beginning to see why Jon would associate with a man like this. His sense of humor was infectious and something she wasn’t aware she needed.

When he returned, she was almost not surprised to see the chubby cheerful red-cheeked features now staring at her. “Here I am,” he announced with a flourish as he moved back a little to show more of himself. He was dressed in a black t-shirt with ‘The Crows’ written on it, and though his hair looked as if it had experienced the worst electric shock, he was definitely presentable. “So, now that you’ve taken a good look at this handsome devil, dare I ask who you are again?”

“Indeed,” Dany replied and turned on the feature to reveal herself.

The result was almost comical.

For a moment, Sam looked as if he was seeing a ghost and he even moved so close to the phone; his entire eye took up the screen. He pulled back again; a hand now going to his mouth and eyes widening to the size of saucers.

“You…you…you….” He stuttered and pointed at the phone. He looked around the room as if hoping no one else was there with him before leaning in again to whisper harshly into the phone. “You’re Daenerys fucking Targaryen! Holy fucking shit!”

Dany smiled and nodded. “Well, that’s one way of putting it, but yes…I’m Daenerys fucking Targaryen. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Sam Tarly. Jon says I can rely on you for what we plan to do, yes?”

Sam nodded fervently; eyes now blazing with an excitement that was palpable. “I think I have an idea of what you want, and trust me, if it’s what I think you want to do, we already have the groundwork ready.”

“What?”

“You’re already a legend in the underground!” Sam enthused with a wave of his arms. “There’s a popular forum where there’s a whole topic board dedicated to all your escapades in Slavers Bay. We’ve been waiting for your return to Westeros, and now that you’re here…it’s going to be nuts!”

Dany was flummoxed. “Oh really? I was under the impression most people hated me.”

Sam scoffed and reached for a pair of glasses she hadn’t even noticed. He seemed to be pulling a laptop closer to him and was quickly typing something into it. “Those people who hate you are those still stuck in the old ways. We – your fans – already know and understand what you really are, and we’re more than ready for the fucking Targaryen Restoration.” He spun the laptop toward her and Dany was able to see exactly what Sam was talking about.

It was an online forum with the innocuous title of “The Blind Alley” – but many of the topics ranged from current headlines, political affairs and of course, the gossip tabloids delving into the lives of celebrities. However, there was a section indeed devoted to her…or rather her family. The T.R Forum – was the sub header and beneath was “The Stormborn Chronicles” – all topics related to her with over 192,300 posts.

Holy fucking shit indeed.
“We have to be careful though,” Sam was saying. “We can’t just reveal ourselves or information that way, and we have strict membership screening because there might be spies lurking about the place. But trust me; with you now in Westeros, this is going to blow up even more.”

“So what do I need to do?”

“Already on it,” Sam replied. He began typing again. “Do you have an Illustrogram account?”

“No…”

“Set up one. A Raven account?”

“…no.”

“Set one up as well,” Sam instructed. “I can help with the Raven – make it more official and what not, but the Illustrogram we want to focus on as you can build up more followers that way. Because guess what? Once you’re out there and you’re in the public eye, those assholes won’t dare do anything to you because your army will be watching out for you at all times. If you don’t post in more than say…forty-eight hours, we’ll flood social media and pressure the powers that be that way. We did that for several political prisoners and those fucking Lannisters had to release them eventually.”

“Ah…”

“The thing is not to be too overexposed though,” Sam continued with a wag of his finger at the screen. “When you create your Illustrogram account, try to maintain an air of mystery. Don’t go posting random crap like the food you’re having for breakfast or what your hair looks like first thing in the morning. Be outgoing, but just leave enough for folks to want more. Get what I mean?”

“Right.”

“And then with the Raven and MaesterBook account, we can use that for your activist roles. You go out to the streets, hold rallies, make announcements about the rallies there, and invite the people to come join us; get the buzz going and all that. We post up videos and spread the word that way. Awesome…looks like we can get a Raven account under the name “The Stormborn”. What do you think?”

Dany’s head was swimming. Sam was going at a mile-a-minute, and she needed to sit down, besides she could hear Monford moving restlessly in the background.

“It’s…it’s all wonderful, Sam,” she finally said. “But could we continue this conversation later? I do have a guest, and I need to get back to him. But…there is indeed so much more to discuss, and I’m excited to get started with you.”

“All right, Your Grace,” he agreed and beamed. “Wow…I really can’t believe I’m talking to you. You are like…an inspiration, Miss Targaryen…I mean-”

“Dany.”

“Dany.” He blushed so hard; his features were almost plum-colored. “I really couldn’t believe it was you and Jon in those photographs…the two of you dancing in Dorne, and I even got into fights on the forum that they were photo shopped, but…you really do know Jon, don’t you?”

Know him in more ways than one, Dany thought with a bashful smile that was not lost on the astute Sam. He shook his head in disbelief.
“So that’s why he’s been acting all weird the past month or so. It’s because of you.”

“ Weird?”

“Oh…well I mean, Jon’s usually quiet anyway, but after some time he started acting even more mysterious. You couldn’t get him to say anything, and it got worse when his Uncle Benjen…you know.”

Dany nodded in understanding.

“But then…I saw that picture on the internet and the way he was smiling with you and I couldn’t believe it was the same guy. He looked so freaking…happy I guess. Well…I don’t know if you two are a couple or anything…” He failed to notice the flood of color to fill Dany’s features at this for his face was turned to the computer screen with a pensive expression. “But I do hope you get to see each other again. He’s not come home yet, and I’m worried.”

At this, Dany was again reminded of Davos’s words and her concerns welled to the surface again.

“You should trust Jon,” she said aloud; wondering if she was speaking to herself or to Sam. “I’m sure he’ll return.”

“Yeah…yeah!” Sam agreed with more enthusiasm. “He always does anyway. So…let me go set things up and tease the rest of my forum mates that the Queen is back in town, eh?”

Dany smiled warmly. “Yes, Sam. That is fine. I will contact you first thing in the morning and we can discuss more of our plans. Have a goodnight.”

She hung up and took a deep breath; capturing her lower lip between her teeth.

*Where was Jon? Still with Robert? And if so…why? Was he being kept prisoner there as well? Should she send her Unsullied there despite Davos’s suggestions? She was sure Robert would have guards around his home, but it wouldn’t be too difficult for only three of her soldiers to infiltrate the castle and res –

“You seem lost in thought, my Queen,” came the sudden low voice which had her spinning around in surprise.

She had almost forgotten Monford’s existence.

“My apologies,” she said quickly with a soft laugh. “I was…it’s been a long day.”

“Is everything all right?” he asked with a frown of concern. “We are more than aware of the problems awaiting you in King’s Landing, and I am ready to send some of my soldiers to assist you in any way.”

“It’s all right,” she insisted. “I’ll be fine, but it’s getting late, Lord Velaryon…perhaps you and your council will wish to spend the night here? I know most of the rooms are not prepared but…” mmmphff!”

He had moved in so suddenly, the sensation of his lips against hers was hard to comprehend at first. His hands had reached out to grab her upper arms, pulling her closer as he took advantage of her parted lips to stick his tongue through for the unwanted kiss.

*What the…fuck?!
Her right knee jerked in reflex and made solid contact with his unprotected nether regions. His loud cry of pain as he pulled away and clutched his now throbbing groin was more than enough for her. Furious, she wiped her lips with the back of her hand and glared at him.

“Just what the hell was that all about, my Lord?”

“My apologies, my Queen,” he gasped as he struggled to maintain some sort of dignity, “but I was under the impression that…well…you were interested-”

“No, I am not,” she replied through clenched teeth. “You might be sworn to House Targaryen, but it does not give you the permission to claim me like a prize, goddamnit.”

He bowed and nodded in contrition. “It was too forward of me. Please…I hope this does not sever our relationship. I merely assumed erroneously.”

She stared for a long minute at the lowered head before sighing in weariness. Gods, she was tired of all of this.

“The servants will show you to your quarters, and we shall speak no more of this.” She spun on her heels to walk away, when the next question from his lips had her pausing to think.

“You are going to be the subject of many lords willing to form even stronger alliances with you, Your Grace. You might have to make your decision eventually, and my hope is that you do find someone who will be able to give you the best chance to gain control of Westeros.”

**Someone.**

Someone with curly dark hair that could be untamed yet silky to the touch when she ran her fingers through it.

Someone with deep brown eyes that could smolder with wicked intent or light up with amusement when pleased.

Someone with full lips that could curve into a cynical smirk, downturn with anger, or curve into the most beautiful smile she had ever seen.

Someone who was fiercely loyal and devoted to those he loved, but could be stubborn and boneheaded when he chose to be.

Someone whose naivety could be endearing (or infuriating), but was willing to learn and speak his mind when necessary.

Someone who listened and did not seem to care about her past or the baggage that came with it.

**Someone.**

“I wouldn’t worry too much about that, my Lord Velaryon” Dany finally said aloud with a small smile as she led the way back into the castle beneath towering arches of snarling dragons. “This queen has already made her decision.”
Chapter Summary

Where Jon learns it's never easy being a leader...

Chapter Notes

A very happy and wonderful Thanksgiving to those of you who celebrate the holiday! I hope you enjoy the new chapter, and thanks as always for your continuous support/feedback! *bows gratefully*

He dreamt of her again.

His footsteps made lonesome echoes within hallowed halls guarded by towering dragons of stone and mortar, yet their knowledgeable eyes followed his every move in silent regard. His destination was clear despite the vagueness of his surroundings. He could not tell exactly where he was, but he was sure he had been here a thousand times before. He knew every groove and grate as if he had built them himself.
He approached the gaping mouth of the biggest dragon of all and stepped into the sanctorum of the Great Hall. Empty except for the faintly fluttering Targaryen banners hanging from the ceiling, there – at the forefront - was an awe-inspiring throne of dragon scales and swords where she sat adorned in a stunning robe of flames. They licked in crackling flickers of scarlet and amber as if shielding rather than scorching her porcelain flesh. On her head of silver sat an obsidian crown with brilliant rubies in the shape of dragon wings. In her right hand was a golden scepter adorned with a magnificent dragon in flight. In her left, instead of an orb, sat the polished black skull of a dragon so small, it could have been that of a baby or one deformed at birth.

His heart soared with joy at seeing her again, and her name hovered on his lips with a desperation that was almost overwhelming. He longed to hold her in his arms and to tell her that everything was going to be okay. However, the closer he got, the more he realized her violet gaze was not trained on him at all. She was looking right through him; her expression devoid of any real emotion, which sent tingles of concern down his spine.

**She knows**, came the slithering whisper to suddenly fill his ears as his feet now seemed rooted to the ground.

He gritted his teeth and tried to take another step, but was hindered by the tendrils of black smoke now trickling around his feet, up his legs, before enveloping him completely in a near-choking cloud.

**She knows you’re going to betray her**, this now familiar voice continued to croon in his ear. **She knows...they know...**

*They* being the gossamer ghostly figures of her ancestors now surrounding the throne. Generations of the regal Targaryens, all dressed in clothing depicting their eras of reign, and most with the unmistakable traits of silver hair and purple eyes, studied the ‘imposter’ with gazes of silent contempt. Did they consider him a threat of some kind? Did they think he’d bring harm to their last living descendant? He shivered and almost fell to his knees in supplication, hoping he’d be forgiven for what he was about to do.

**You must be strong, my prince**, this shadow encouraged as the black tendrils began to morph into waves of silky red hair. Blood-red fingernails dragged across his shoulders and down to his chest from behind him, and as Jon looked up again to the throne; it was to see the current Queen’s features darkening with a rage that could never be controlled.

*The madness!* Robert’s voice suddenly roared into the chambers. *Don’t forget the madness! It will happen to her too! She’ll burn us all to the ground! Only you can stop it! Only you can stop the insanity!*

**Stop it!** he screamed within as he held his aching head between his hands. **She is not insane!**

*Or maybe you’re the one going mad,* Robert taunted mercilessly. *Maybe you’re the one who inherited that trait, Snow. How ironic.*

**Pay him no mind. You must be strong, my prince,** the red woman interrupted only this time she licked at his cheek with a cold wet tongue that had him shivering in repulsion and disbelief at her daring.

**Stop,** Jon protested. He gazed at the throne again and wasn’t surprised to see that the flames were getting higher and becoming hotter. The ghosts of her ancestors had faded away, but it was now difficult to make out her silhouette. The entire throne was completely engulfed with a roaring inferno.
that left him chilled despite the beads of sweat forming on his brow. There was no helping it now. They would all be scorched, and he was going to be the reason for it.

*Only you can make it stop, my prince. You were destined to,* the red woman insisted.

*I don’t know how to do it alone. I need her with me,* he pleaded, but the red woman wasn’t listening. Her licks were becoming bolder; her tongue long and slightly abrasive on his flesh. She was panting loudly and her breath reminded him of old sausages. When his disgust grew tenfold, he reached out to push her away.

*Gods, woman! Give it up!*

When she gave a low bark and pitiful whine of protest, Jon blinked in confusion at the odd sounds before turning around to find himself staring into familiar brown eyes trapped within a face that was adorable all things considered.

*Woof!*

“…Apollo?”

*Woof, woof!*

Jon blinked himself fully back to consciousness; suffering the Golden Retriever’s morning kisses as he approached again to lavish more of his excited slobbering on Jon’s face.

“Okay, already,” Jon laughed as he reached out to scratch the dog’s ears in greeting. “Good morning to you too.”

Barking happily in response, Apollo wagged his bushy tail, which just about slapped Jon completely awake with its enthusiasm. Realizing he was no longer getting any sleep, Jon swung his legs off the narrow cot and winced at the ache in his lower back.

“Your master needs to do something about his mattress,” Jon complained as he staggered to his feet to shuffle into the tiny bathroom. Apollo was already worrying one of his shoes and was paying no attention. “Gods, you’re just like Ghost. Never listen to me when I need you to.”

Yet it wasn’t easy having to deal with a dog who constantly reminded you of a dead companion and friend. The wounds would have to heal eventually, but when? Fuck whoever coined that phrase ‘time heals all wounds’. What bullshit.

Finishing with his morning toilette, he struggled not to study his reflection in the mirror as he shaved and brushed his teeth. He found it a bit difficult to do that these days, and a segment of his dream slipped into mind as he shrugged into a tee-shirt and hopped into the pair of jeans.

*You will betray her,* Melisandre’s shadow had warned.

Jon winced and shook his head. *No…it’s all for a reason.*

The tantalizing smells of breakfast assailed his senses as he opened the door and made his way down the cluttered but narrow hallway. From the T.V in the living room, two over-smiling, surgically-enhanced morning talk show hosts were doing their best to guarantee everyone in Westeros that the day was going to be absolutely freakin’ marvelous. On his left, a bedroom door was slightly ajar, but from the loud grunts, pants, and yelps emanating from within, Jon could only roll his eyes; a smile tugging his lips when the accompanying ‘oh gods, I’m coming!’ was all too predictable.
“‘Morning,” he greeted as he stepped into the kitchen, where a dark-haired man with a mousy face was busy cleaning and reassembling what appeared to be several handguns on a greasy kitchen table. A lit cigarette dangled from the corner of his mouth as he concentrated on his work and despite the stained undershirt he was wearing, he was still damp with sweat.

“Morning yourself, beautiful,” came the gruff greeting accompanied with a toothy grin. “Hey ya, boy. Gone to wake up your favorite guy, eh?” Apollo had jogged after Jon. He sniffed at the man’s slippers before giving a bark of pleasure at his master. He was rewarded with several bacon bits scattered on the floor.

Jon helped himself to a cup of coffee and some sausages, and as he leaned against the counter - waiting for his waffles to get done - he studied his companion with a wry smile. “You do that every damn morning, Grenn. Don’t think it’s gonna get any cleaner than it was yesterday.”

“Man’s always gotta be prepared,” Grenn replied as he pulled the trigger of the Glock 17 he had assembled. He studied the weapon with a professional eye, before looking up. “Especially with this shit storm you’ve gotten yourself into. Who knew the dumb bastard from Winterfell was gonna end up wanting to take out the big guys in King’s Landing?”

Jon gave a noncommittal grunt. His waffles were ready, and as he pulled up a chair to sit beside his friend, he allowed his gaze to drift to the single window with its curtain of ugly flower patterns. Through the grime-streaked glass, he could make out the familiar skyline of King’s Landing, and if he squinted hard enough, he could see his apartment building. Gods, he missed his bed.

“How long have those two been at it?” Jon asked as he bit into the waffle; forsaking the maple syrup this time.

“Who knows? Seems they’ve been fucking each other’s brains out all damn night,” Grenn grumbled. He glared at the door as if hoping the couple in the bedroom would magically appear. “You want me to go get him out?”

Jon waved a hand in dismissal. “Nah let him enjoy himself for now. He’s been busy the past couple of days.”

Grenn grunted and attended to the next weapon; a sweet-looking pistol that must have cost quite a pretty sum. “So? You sure you just don’t want me to take him out? That would end this whole thing in a heartbeat.”

“And would have every City Watch official at your doorstep in a second,” Jon replied dryly. “Trust me, if it was that easy, I would have done it a long time ago. That fat asshole’s got his bases covered.”

Grenn muttered something beneath his breath and continued to work on his guns, leaving Jon to his thoughts.

He could still remember his split decision that night. He wasn’t sure if it had been his plea to his father for advice that had made him do so; but his thinking was simple enough. If he could plant the seeds of trust in Robert, then everything else would eventually fall into place. He would give the son-of-a-bitch what he wanted.
“But I will need time,” he had demanded. “She’s also just as careful as you are, and simply trying to eliminate her without a plan is foolhardy. This has to be a careful process.”

“…and you wouldn’t be bullshitting me now, would you, Jon? You know I can smell bullshit from a mile away, don’t you?”

“That’s up to you, sir. If you don’t think I can do this then go find someone else. Otherwise…let me do things my way.”

“Don’t forget the North and your family’s legacy,” Robert had warned. “As well as your freedom, Snow. If you screw me over in anyway…you’ll regret the day you ever stepped into King’s Landing.”

The Hound had taken him home in the wee hours of the morning. He hadn’t exactly been a great conversationalist, but then again, Jon’s mind had been whirring with so many thoughts, he had no time to engage in chit chat with one of Robert’s henchmen. He did, however, pause when the car finally came to a stop at their destination. He had studied the big man’s disfigured features for a long minute until the gruff, “What you looking at, cunt?” had Jon giving a cynical smile.

“Just wondering why a man like you would want to work for someone like Robert Baratheon? What? He’s got your family hostage too?”

The Hound had finally looked at him then. A brow rose as if wondering why the pipsqueak had dared speak to him in the first place. However, he replied with that same disgruntled tone of impatience. “I go where the money is. That’s all there is to it. I ain’t got time to be taking anyone’s side.”

“No loyalty to your master then?”

The Hound had sneered; leaning close enough so that Jon could see every throbbing vein and nerve in the puckered flesh. He bared his teeth and snarled, “Get out of the car, Bastard. Don’t make me go against his wishes and knock your fucking teeth out.”

“Nice knowing you too,” Jon retorted as he let himself out and watched the sedan all but speed out of the parking lot as if it was being chased by the devil himself.

“Master Snow,” came the quiet greeting which had Jon turning around quickly in surprise. It was Stalwart Shield, dressed in street clothes instead of the usual tailored suits the Unsullied were prone to wearing most of the time. His features were sullen, but there was no mistaking the glint of relief to fill his eyes. Jon doubted giving the man a hug was in order, so he settled for a small nod and smile in greeting.

“Good to see you, Stalwart. However…I can’t stay long.”

“Why is that?”

“Come with me to see Davos, and I will explain it all to you.”

If Davos was perturbed at being woken at three-fifteen in the morning, he did not make a big deal of it. After a gratifying hug with unabashed tears of affection in his eyes, Davos put on a pot for tea and
listened attentively to what Jon had to say. Several cups of the refreshing beverage later, he was watching Jon pack up a few of his personal items in a duffel bag with more instructions he’d have to carry out.

“I’m sorry it had to be this way,” Jon apologized again as he prepared to leave from the secret back door behind his uncle’s office. “But it’s best I stay away from this place until things have settled down. I’ll leave the two other Unsullied with you while Stalwart stays with me.”

“And this Grenn…he can really be trusted?”

“I’ve known him most of my life,” Jon said with a small smile as he covered his head with the hoodie. “Though we haven’t talked in years, it’ll be nice to shock him with my appearance again.”

Shock was putting it mildly. Grenn just about pissed his pants.

Grenn was one of his closest friends in high school and one of the coolest kids he knew. For starters, he didn’t take shit from anyone despite his height – and if Jon was average, then Grenn was about a foot or so shorter. Grenn was a true northerner and was so good at hunting, to go on expeditions with him was a sure guarantee to bring home game of some sort, no matter how terrible the weather got.

In exchange for his street smarts and wilderness skills, Jon had done his best to help him pass high school with a C – about the highest possible grade he could achieve when it came to academics. Left to Grenn, he wouldn’t have given a shit about such things, but to please his single mother, it was the least he could do. Imagine his surprise when Grenn had relayed the news on graduation night, that his family would be moving to King’s Landing.

“Mom got herself this new fella and he lives there…says it would be better for me and all that shit.”

It was a bittersweet farewell, and Grenn had left the address to where he would be staying…just in case. That was almost five years ago, and Jon had honestly completely forgotten about it until he was rummaging through his personal items to find the old address book he had written Grenn’s information in.

Luckily, the address had not changed, but after his mother and her new boyfriend passed away in a freak boat accident during a vacation get-away, Grenn had inherited the claustrophobic apartment as well as a few thousand dollars. However, instead of investing in something legal, he came to discover that dealing with the underground was much more lucrative. He made fast contacts with the best dealers who sold anything from heroin to machine guns, and he would eventually come to be respected in the industry. Grenn knew just about everyone who worked or dabbled in the darkness, and though Jon hadn’t really expected this information about his friend; it was the lucky break he needed.

One would assume with all the money he was making, he’d choose to show off his wealth, but Grenn had no time to be a showboat. He enjoyed his simple habitat, and his only ostentatious display was his 75-inch ultra-high definition television complete with surround sound and a video game console that could make a grown man cry.

However, all the stoic layers of being a top boss in the underground were shed the moment he saw the sheepish man standing at his doorstep. His ‘Holy shit, Jon Snow?!” was enough to bring tears to Jon’s eyes, and both men had spent the rest of the morning catching up after being so long apart.

Bottom line, Grenn was willing to do any damn thing for Jon, and after hearing the story of his current predicament, he wasn’t averse to shooting down the entire City Watch (and Robert) just for his friend.
“I have to call home,” Jon had implored when he finally woke up after almost an entire day of passing out in exhaustion.

“Got you covered, buddy,” Grenn replied as he showed Jon into a private room with enough bolts and chains to resemble a mini Iron Bank.

And one could see why. It was stacked with boxes of illegal contraband; many of which were prescription narcotics to be sold to clients as far as Winterfell and some banned substances delivered from places like Myr and Tyrosh. In the middle of the room was a round Formica-top table with several boxes of more drugs, bags of coins and dusty ledgers stacked on it. Stiff wooden chairs – about six in all – surrounded the table. Sitting in a corner was a pile of electronics – illegal probably – and Jon could only watch as Grenn untangled some wires before setting up the phone on the table.

“You can use this as your office if you like,” Grenn invited with a proud smile. “Sorry about the dust and…eh…kinda stinks in here, but…!” He made a move to the only window – which took a few slams on the edge to get it to open – and let in much-needed fresh air. “Use it for whatever you want. I’ll get the keys copied and get you one. You need anything, man, I’m here for you.”

“Thank you, Grenn,” Jon had said with sincere gratitude. Grenn, embarrassed at this, only waved his hand in dismissal.

“Anything for you, pal. You saved my hide back home many times before. It’s the least I can do.”

Once left to his devices, Jon – who had actually wanted to use his cellphone to make the call – decided to take Grenn’s advice. Hoping Robb wouldn’t ignore the call – since it was bound to show up as ‘unknown’ on his device, he was rewarded with the familiar warm – though guarded – greeting from a brother he was now missing more than he ever thought possible.

“Who is this?” Robb asked impatiently, while Jon struggled to control himself for he had to cover his mouth and blink hard to hold back the tears.

“Goddamn it,” Robb was muttering. “Prank calls again-”

“Don’t…don’t hang up, Robb,” Jon cut in quickly with a hitched breath. “It’s me…Jon.”

“Jon? Holy shit…Jon? Is it really you? Thank the gods! I’ve been trying to reach you and Davos kept telling me you weren’t back from Dorne. What the fuck is going on?”

Recalling Davos’s story about how the City Watch had thwarted his attempts for bail, and why he hadn’t bothered to call Robb to give him an update, Jon could feel the flickering flames of fury rising with him again at Robert’s power play. He formed a tight fist and gathered himself. Fuck Robert Baratheon and his fucking threats!

“It’s a long story, Robb, but I called you for something else.”

“What is it?”

“…how…how is Catelyn?”

There was a long silence at the other end, before the release of breath from Robb just about told the story. “It’s just a matter of days now,” he finally replied quietly; and Jon could hear the strain in his voice. “She’s barely speaking…not eating either. Septa Mordane’s been at her bedside constantly and…well you can tell. She’s beginning to…you know…smell in that way.”

The smell of death; only those who had experienced it could adequately express its unique scent.
“Sansa and Bran are coming home,” Robb continued. “Sansa should be arriving in the morning and Bran…maybe tomorrow night depending on which flight he catches. Arya’s been in the dumps, and she’s been hoping you’ll call. Rickon…he’s been a zombie too. Doesn’t smile or anything. Just sits gloomy and with an attitude that makes me want to kick his ass, but then I have to remember he’s grieving too. In fact, the whole damn place is like a living crypt. It’s depressing as fuck. Folks have been coming by to pay their last respects, and the town is filling up with well-wishers.”

“…other lords from other houses?” Jon asked with a light frown.

“Yeah, other houses…why? Shouldn’t they be here? Dad was also Warden of the North, remember?”

But Robert says our influence is fading, that you are considered weak by the other lords and they all want to take over the Stark Estate. Yet Jon could only bite his lower lip and hold back the words. The last thing he wanted to do was hurt his brother’s feelings, and blurring out Robert’s insults wasn’t what he needed at this time.

“So? Are you coming back home, Jon?” Robb asked. “Even if it’s just for a few days…it would mean a lot to all of us.”

I want to. I really do, Jon thought feverishly. His gaze fell on a jutting handgun from a pile of boxes and he swallowed tightly before closing his eyes. But I can’t…not until I’ve finished this.

“No yet,” he whispered aloud as his throat tightened. He could almost picture the disappointment on Robb’s face. “Not now…there’s…I have some things to do, and then I promise I’ll come home.”

“Fair enough,” Robb accepted with a resigned sigh. “But…you know the gates and doors are always open for you. So if you change your mind at any time…lemme know, okay?”

“Deal…and…uum…”

“What now?”

“How’s the business? The corporation I mean?”

Robb chuckled. “What’s this? You’re suddenly showing interest in something you ran far away from? Or did you plan to take over?”

“No, trust me, I don’t have the time for that,” Jon replied with a wan smile. “But…seriously, Robb…is everything going okay?”

“As okay as it can possibly be,” came the almost too flippant reply. It was enough to have Jon’s brows drawing into a frown.

“I won’t say it’s easy,” Robb continued in that same tone as if hoping to convince Jon otherwise. “But we do the best we can. Competition is tough out there after all.”

“I see…”

“Have you been hearing things?” came the sharp query.

“No, nothing. I was just…I just hoped everything was okay.”

“Ah…well I’m fine,” Robb insisted. “Things will get better, you’ll see. Look, I’ve gotta run. I’ve got to host a couple of representatives from House Umber tonight. It’s a never ending parade of them
“Be careful, all right?” Jon said quickly; failing to point out that Robb’s ‘things will get better’ was another dead giveaway. So much for everything being all right.

“Thanks, little brother. I love you.”

“Love you too.”

He remained sitting in numb silence for a long time after he hung up; torn between calling his other siblings and setting the clock into motion for his plans. He settled for calling Sam next – at least he owed his friend some sort of reassurance of his return. He definitely wasn’t prepared for the exuberant response he got especially when Sam all but accused him of holding out.

“Daenerys fucking Targaryen! You know her!”

“I hope to the gods you’re all alone, Sam,” Jon replied in a harsh whisper as if Sam was in the room with him. “Keep your voice down, man.”

“Sorry, sorry, it’s just…it’s just so exciting, and she’s so gorgeous Jon…and wonderful and brilliant and…and…a Targaryen!”

Jon chuckled; feeling his heart warm at the excitement in his friend’s voice. He was glad the two had gotten along, but it was also a painful reminder of how much he missed Dany.

“We’re supposed to record her first video tomorrow,” Sam chattered on. “Or rather she’ll record it with the help of Missandei and then we’ll upload it to her Raven and Maesterbook account. Have you seen them yet? I mean it’s not officially public yet, but I can send you the link. I’ve been working hard on it, and you should see the forums, Jon! They’re buzzing with excitement. They can’t wait for her first ‘official’ appearance, and I swear, we’re going to fight tooth and nail for her, Jon. You’ll see.”

Feeling the heat creep up his neck as he cleared his throat and shifted uncomfortably in his seat, Jon dared to ask as casually as he could. “So…eh…has she asked about me at all? Not that I care if she asks because she’s busy and—”

Sam snickered. “Yes, she has, Jon. She hopes you’re doing all right, and she might not have said it out loud, but I’m sure she’ll love to hear from you again.”

Jon was now so embarrassed, he wished he could die…or be swallowed by the ground, but then again, this was Sam and nothing got past the other man easily. “We aren’t really—”

“Dude, a photo speaks a thousand words and that shot of you two on the dance floor…hello! You don’t have to try to act all innocent! Though it pains me to think you have ended up in the bed with our future Queen of Westeros, as a fellow man…I would hi-five the living fuck out of you right now, my friend.”

Jon blushed and tried to hide his smile. On any other day, he might have relished in his ‘conquest’, but it only did more to make him miserable and alone. He would trade a million hi-fives for one more opportunity to have her by his side, and maybe this time he’d have the balls to blurt out his true feelings before it was too late. Even if it did end up being a one-sided affair, and she merely wanted things to remain in their current state, it wouldn’t change the way he felt.

Giving Sam some final instructions on what to do, including letting him know of his new address, Jon crossed his name off his to-do list and took another deep breath.
Next up…Tyrion Lannister.

Since Sam still had possession of the private cellphone, Jon took a chance calling with Grenn’s device. As expected, it went straight to voicemail, but leaving a brief message for the older man; he was rewarded with an immediate return call.

“So, the Bastard of Winterfell is still alive? Congratulations.”

“Save the sarcasm for another day,” Jon replied with a wry smile. “It’s good to hear from you again, Tyrion.”

“It’s only been a week and some days, give or take, my dear boy. I trust Robert Baratheon has given you a taste of how conniving he can be?”

“…what did you hear?”

“Enough to have our Queen furious – though she’s done a good job controlling her emotions so far. Dragonstone has done its best to temper her usual outbursts, that or she’s been kept busy with renovations and hosting visiting neighbors willing to offer their support to her cause.”

“Ah, I see…how did you learn of all this? Jorah maybe?” Jon asked with a sneer; recalling Robert’s bombshell revelation.

“Jorah?” Tyrion sounded confused. “Why would you think it was him?”

“Because he’s a fucking spy,” Jon hissed. “Robert said he and my father had sent him there to keep an eye on Daenerys and the gods know what information he’s been feeding Robert all this time. To think we trusted him!”

“And we still have good reason to,” Tyrion replied; with a hint of a smile in his voice. “Trust me, bastard, that base was covered years ago.”

“What?”

“You did not know him, but Barristan Selmy was once a member of the Kingsguard and quite devoted to his work until he was kicked out by father…well no thanks to my dear sister’s influence. Long story short, Selmy was aware of Jorah’s role in all this and did reveal it to Daenerys while in her service. Naturally, this did not sit too well with the Queen considering their past history. She banished him…twice, but like a goddamn bug, he kept returning with more and more ways to prove he was no longer associated with Robert or your father. You can say that it was thanks to Jorah she was finally able to leave the Dothraki and conquer Slavers Bay. He has paid his dues, Jon, so I doubt he’s the traitor you point him out to be.”

Jon closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. “You knew about this all this time and no one thought of telling me-”

“You never asked,” Tyrion replied dryly. “But now that it seems you’re indeed curious to know more about the Queen’s counsel, then I suggest you look a little closer to home.”

“What?”

“We do have a spy, but he works for us and is currently in King’s Landing…in the Red Keep to be exact. He knows all about you, and has kept his little birds watching your every move.”

Jon stiffened; his heart clenching with mixed emotions of dismay and fury. “You have a spy
“More like protecting you as best he can from the shadows,” Tyrion corrected with a smile in his voice. “In fact, he has made us aware of your decision to move to a friend’s house and your choice not to dwell at your apartment for fear of drawing the attention of the putrid City Watch. He will prove to be an invaluable ally, so I recommend you sit tight and await his visit quite soon. Whatever grand plans you have to deal with Robert will only be successful if you have him in your corner.”

“Does this magical being have a name?”

“He simply goes by Lord Varys, but knowing him, he’ll probably visit you in disguise. He will call first to let you know of his arrival. No worries. Although…”

“…what?” Jon prodded when Tyrion’s voice faded.

“We also hear Robert did host you for an evening, and I doubt you merely discussed the weather for over three hours. So…let me guess, bastard. He gave you an offer you couldn’t refuse, am I correct?”

Jon’s fists tightened. “I figured your spy would have told you every single thing we discussed. Why don’t you ask him?”

Tyrion laughed. “No need to get so defensive, Jon. I merely wanted to hear it from your lips. It’s one thing to hear it from another source, but getting it directly from the horse’s mouth is another matter altogether. Now then, bastard, what choice have you made? Or do I go with the assumption that you’re hoping to play both sides?”

Jon remained silent, but that did not deter Tyrion who laughed even louder. “The boy is slowly becoming a man,” the dwarf praised with a clap of his hands. “But remember my advice, bastard, this is no simple game. You must continuously remain one step ahead of your enemies.”

“And think like them as well,” Jon replied with a cold smile. “I’ve learned my lessons well so far.”

“Hmph. In the interim, we’ll do all we can to protect the Queen.” Jon would have been a fool not to notice the underlying threat in that statement. Getting Dany wasn’t going to be a cakewalk no matter where his loyalties lay. “But do make an effort to visit Dragonstone someday, Jon. The overall architecture might leave something to be desired, but it’s got a definite ambience you’ll appreciate. It’s been good to hear from you again. I bid you farewell.”

I’ve been to Dragonstone a thousand times before, a tiny voice whispered in his mind as Jon hung up and crossed Tyrion’s name off his list. He had no idea where this line of thinking was coming from, but he had no intention of dwelling too much on it.

He had other matters of importance to deal with first.

“Hey, fellas.”

Jon and Grenn looked up at the gruff greeting with expressions of exasperation (Grenn) and faint amusement (Jon), on their features as the tall well-built man, with various interesting tattoos etched all over his body, sauntered into the kitchen in nothing but a pair of boxer shorts. Scratching his balls
as he headed for the coffee machine, Halder or Stone Head to his friends, was one of Grenn’s henchmen and like his boss, was not afraid to get dirty or bloody to get the job done.

“Enjoy yourself, you sick fuck?” Grenn complained, “And for fuck’s sake wash your fucking hands, man!”

“Sorry,” came the definitely unapologetic response.

The distracting sight of a rather plain-looking petite brunette dressed in only a tee-shirt, broke the possible argument those two would have gotten into. She smiled at Jon and Grenn before being swept into a hard kiss that left her breathless and giggling. She swatted playfully at Halder’s chest and reached for some bacon strips to stuff into her mouth. Jon could already see the faint lines of white powder around her nose, and he shook his head lightly. It wasn’t even eight in the morning, and those two were already high as fuck. But then again, if they had been going at it like bunnies all night, goodness knows how much they had snorted prior and during.

“Any news from yesterday, Stone Head?” Jon asked as he glanced at his watch.

“Same ol’ same ol’.” Halder replied with a shrug. “No Dothraki sighting either. He only went to his work, then went to his warehouse to get more supplies and that’s it.”

“City Watch?”

“Yep. Two of the cars came around patrolling for no reason yesterday. No one came out today though. Maybe those bodyguards of yours gave them a scare after that shit they tried pulling the other day.”

That shit being two green City Watch officers harassing some of his tenants until Brave Heart and Wild Spirit intervened. There had been no fighting, but seeing the presence of those two unflinching men would have scared the pants off anyone anyway.

Jon grunted. “And the other one?”

“Littlefinger? Didn’t leave the apartment once.”

“You sure about that?”

Halder looked offended. “You think I spent almost twelve fucking hours dozing off? I tell you he didn’t leave the fucking apartment. Only person who came out was that ho, Olivia, and that’s it.”

Jon rose to his feet and pat Halder’s shoulder in reassurance. “Not doubting you, man, but this is a serious matter. You know that. Littlefinger is capable of sneaking away right under your nose if he chooses to. Don’t ask me how, but I don’t trust that asshole.”

“We all don’t,” Grenn chimed in. “We know how he deals in the underworld. He’s a snake for sure.”

“And we know how snakes behave, don’t we?”

With that cryptic warning, Jon left the men and made his way back to his room. From his duffle bag, he pulled out a notebook and a map of Westeros he had stolen from his uncle’s office. It wasn’t as detailed as Robert’s, but it was enough for him to outline the necessary locations. He had circled Dorne with an erasable marker, focusing on the seat of power in Sunspear and all the Houses already pledged to Dany – not a bad haul come to think of it. If they kept their word, they were already a formidable force.
He bit his lip as he studied his beloved north; the names of every town, river or mountain more than familiar to him. Fighting back the pang of nostalgia, he carefully marked out the locations of each important House and made notes on which ones were capable of betraying the Starks and those they could still rely on.

When finished, he was dismayed to find barely a handful could really be counted on; the others - led by the despicable Karstarks and Boltons – had him rubbing his temples to push away the impending headache. How the fuck was he going to be able to convince those fickle assholes to align themselves with Daenerys…or rather a Targaryen? History hadn’t exactly been kind to their relationships –

*(maybe that’s why they looked at me with such distrust in that dream…can’t say I blame them…)*

Yet, there was that photograph of his father and his aunt Lyanna hanging out with Rhaegar Targaryen. How does one explain that? If there was such a bitter relationship between their families, it clearly hadn’t been there from the beginning.

He flopped back on the narrow bed and stared morosely at the ceiling. What was the use of trying to decipher what must have happened to those four, yet Jon couldn’t shake off the feeling that his uncle and father had died because of something related to all of that.

*And Robert is the key…some way…some how…*

Cursing beneath his breath, and in a desperate attempt not to work himself into a rage, he decided to take Sam’s advice and see how far along his websites for Dany were coming along.

He wasn’t disappointed. Sam was, really, outdoing himself.

Her Raven account – titled ‘The Stormborn’ - had a simple but eye-catching header of the familiar Targaryen sigil in silver surrounded by flames on a black background. There was only one caw so far – an official welcoming message – however, there were already 15,013 followers, and the site hadn’t even become officially public yet. Her Maesterbook was the same. Its header was a candid photo of a dressed-down Dany, grinning from ear-to-ear and surrounded by happy children. It was a shot taken when she was in Meereen, and the simple title of ‘Mhysa’ said it all.

The page’s profile picture was the Targaryen sigil – akin to the Raven header – and though there was only a welcome message and a photo album filled with already established images of Dany from her activities in Slavers Bay, she already had 20,000 plus friends and as many ‘likes’. Wow.

“Our Queen Returns,” Jon read beneath his breath at Sam’s welcome entry. “Join us for a worldwide event at midnight – on the 21st - for a live video from the Queen herself. You won’t want to miss this.”

That was a day away, and Jon hoped he would be able to watch it all.

“You’ll end up belonging to Westeros,” he mused sadly, as the enormity of the situation hit him suddenly. He had felt that same vibe when he watched her greet the dignitaries at the Martells’ party, and that sentiment was returning with a vengeance.

Against his better judgement, he went searching through his video files to pull up the last video he had recorded.

*Fuck…why am I doing this again?*

Yet no matter how many times he chided weakened resolve, he couldn’t help himself. It was hardly a
professional recording, but it was enough to remind him of that wonderful morning after in Dorne. She really had looked like a fallen angel in white for she had been wearing only his dress shirt from the night before, and that mass of silver hair had framed her features giving her a look of adorable innocence that made his heart ache with longing and desire. When the camera trailed down her back and he could see his hand reaching out to caress the tattoo on her lower back, Jon felt himself get even harder and he cursed beneath his breath.

_Fuck not having the private phone. I’m calling her now…_

It was risky, but just as he was just about to dial the numbers he had memorized; the sudden knock on the door had him tossing the phone aside quickly. Hoping the guilt wasn’t etched on his features, Grenn poked his head in.

“The Fat One and the Old Man are here.”

“They have names, Grenn,” Jon groaned, but all he received was a smirk and the door closing in his face.

An hour later, they were still seated in his ‘office’, with Sam busy at his laptop, Davos going over the notes Jon had made, while Grenn kept watch. Halder and Stewart Shield were stationed outside in discreet locations; keeping an eye out for possible City Watch spies or anyone else likely to come snooping around.

Sam had finally returned the private cellphone to Jon, and it currently buzzed with a text from L.V.

**Arriving shortly. I will come dressed as a cable repair man.**

“Dany’s spy will be here soon,” Jon announced to his team. “He’s going to pretend to be a cable repair guy.”

Grenn nodded and sent a text to Halder as warning.

“Gendry’s been asking questions,” Davos muttered as he studied the map Jon had spread on the table.

“And?” Jon asked with a raised brow.

“And you’ve got to tell him sooner or later, Jon.”

“How can I trust him? I still think he wants his father’s favor so much he’s willing to betray me if he realizes what I’m up to.”

“I don’t think he will,” Sam chimed in with a sad smile. “Gendry’s always been on your side, Jon. You’re like a brother to him too, and he’d do anything for you. You should have seen him the night after you went missing when those Harpies attacked. He was so pissed and distraught, you couldn’t console him. He really thought he had lost you and blamed it on himself for not protecting you.”

Jon looked away with a frown. He knew he ought to believe it, but there was still that nagging voice within that told him otherwise. It was best to keep Gendry out of it until it was absolutely necessary to involve him.

“Looks like our cable guy is here,” Grenn announced as he rose to his feet. “Halder says he’s on his way. I’ll get the door.”

Jon clasped his hands tightly on the table; hoping his expression gave nothing away. He wasn’t sure
of what to expect when it came to this Varys character, as all he had heard so far seemed to paint a picture of a man who could be scrupulous and much smarter than they gave him credit for. What stopped this man from betraying them? Jon knew he’d have to be careful in his dealings with the new guest.

“Here he is, gentlemen,” Grenn announced as he ushered in the portly hunched man clad in a typical nondescript blue overall with a popular cable company badge tacked to his breast pocket. On his head was a blue hat which he took off to reveal the shock of black hair to match the mustache and crooked grin he was giving as he bowed in greeting.

“Forgive my late appearance, good sirs,” came the almost sing-song voice that did not match the persona. His voice was as sleek as his supposed character, and as he straightened himself to his full height, he carefully peeled off the moustache and took off the wig to reveal the true Varys. He was completely bald for starters.

“Traffic is horrible at this time of the day,” Varys added with an exaggerated display of suffering.

“Lord Varys?” Jon asked as he rose to his feet and held out his hand. “Jon Snow.”

“Ah of course,” Varys replied with a grip of the offered hand. Jon almost shivered at the softness of his flesh, and he was sure he could smell lavender and rosewater drifting off him. He couldn’t withdraw his hand fast enough, for he now felt as if Varys was ripping a hole right through him with his penetrating stare.

He sees all and knows all, a voice warned as Jon sat down. He watched Varys greet the others before settling into one of the chairs.

“So I assume we are to get straight to the point and be done with the pleasantries?”

“It’s up to you,” Jon said with a faint smile. “Though I’d like to know exactly who I’m working with.”

“I was under the impression Lord Tyrion might have told you about me,” Varys stated with a girlish giggle. “But I should properly introduce myself anyway.” He gave a polite bow. “I am simply known as The Spider, for obvious reasons. While others trade in consumer-related products and wish to dabble in inconsequential matters, I choose to trade in secrets, for they truly are the most vital part of any successful kingdom, don’t you agree? To know the truth behind the lies is of valuable importance, no matter the means necessary to achieve the final goal, and my goal, dear sirs, is to restore Westeros to its true glory.” He focused his attention on Jon; an unreadable glint in his eye. “Once I served the Mad King Aerys, and did my best to provide him with all necessary matters for his reign. Unfortunately, he failed to make use of my services for the most important thing of all—the people he served. He forgot his role on that throne and his weaknesses gave way to the coup d’état that took the lives of his family and wiped clean the Targaryen dynasty…until now.”

Jon did his best to hold Varys’s gaze though his pulse had quickened for some inexplicable reason.

“I have pledged to work for Tywin Lannister,” Varys continued in that sweet tone. “Yet, my true allegiance has and will always remain with those who wish to see peace and stability return to Westeros. In this case, my belief in Daenerys Targaryen will hopefully yield fruit.” He turned to Sam, who had been listening with almost rapturous attention. “I know you’re already working hard on your social media army, and that is quite admirable, but a tricky proposition as well. Although Lord Tywin fails to see the necessity of the internet and its powers, his daughter – Cersei Lannister – is quite capable of interfering in any way she can. She’s already setting in motion counter activities to Daenerys’s glorious return without her father’s approval of course. I have no doubt her desire to
eliminate the competition is only a foil to gain further attention from him. Jaimie, on the other hand, only tends to follow like a sheep; merely doing whatever is asked of him as long as it does not interfere with his taboo incestuous affair."

A slow smile curved along Varys’s lips as he looked back to Jon and seemed to give a small nod. “I am also aware of the threats Robert made to you and it pains me to hear it. You must be torn with indecision especially when it comes to protecting your family. However, I believe I’ve come up with several ways we can combat Robert Baratheon without shedding an ounce of blood…unless absolutely necessary.”

“What are you talking about?” Jon asked with his brows creased.

“The key to those in power is the belief of being supported by those they control,” Varys explained as he leaned closer; his features contorted into an expression one could label as conniving. “However, they fail to realize that humans are fickle creatures and anyone can be purchased for the right price. Take the Lannisters for example, for all their braggadocio, why do you think they haven’t done more to take out the rightful Queen?”

His question was met with silence, and Varys sighed as if disappointed.

“Tywin Lannister assumes he’s shrewd and would rather not waste his time running after some girl he does not see as a real threat. He only listened to Cersei’s suggestion to make use of the Sons of the Harpy, simply because they already had a grievance with the Queen. It would be killing two birds with one stone after all; with little to no cost on his end. However, let it be known that trying to control most of Westeros is no cheap task, and the Lannisters do have to continue remaining in the good graces of the Iron Bank of Braavos. More show of power guarantees their undying devotion, and it’s one of the reasons he wishes to dissolve the Great Council’s role and return to the old ways of the Syndicate; where there was a central head in control of everything.”

“It’s what Robert wants as well,” Jon muttered.

“Ironic, isn’t it?” Varys said with a sad smile. “They blamed the Targaryens for being too powerful and eliminated them, only to want to return to the very thing they had destroyed. See how the cycle continues to repeat itself? It’s pitiful.”

“But Dany wants the same thing,” Jon said with a frown. “She wants to control the Syndicate…what difference does it make?”

Varys’s eyes widened and he held a hand to his chest. “I am shocked at your line of thinking, Jon Snow. Here I thought you were in her corner.”

Jon flushed and pounded a fist on the table in frustration. “That’s not what I meant-”

“Ah, I only jest,” Varys interrupted with a smile. “I know exactly what you were trying to say, but if Daenerys is anything like her brother Rhaegar, I’m sure the Syndicate would return to its original premise. It was never meant to be a dictatorship, Jon Snow. It was only designed to be a backup should the independent kingdoms within Westeros ever came to blows again. That was a system that worked for hundreds of years and there was indeed peace and stability. Rhaegar knew this and wished for it, so much so, he foolishly shared his dreams with Robert and your father…who both betrayed him at the last minute.”

“What did you say?” Jon all but hissed at the notion that his father could be a traitor, but that damned photograph filled his mind again.
“Calm down, Jon,” Davos warned though he was scowling at the Spider as well. “Look, you said you had a plan to get rid of Robert, yes? What’s this grand plan of yours?”

“Indeed,” Varys replied with a wave of his hand. “It’s relatively easy on paper, but it will require everyone’s full cooperation.” He studied each face before him, before speaking succinctly. “We cripple him.”

“Break his legs?” Grenn asked with his brows raised in disbelief.

“No,” Varys sighed and rolled his eyes. “We figuratively cripple him. We slowly take away everything that’s meaningful until he’s nothing but a shell of his former self.”

“How do we do that?” Sam asked.

“We first eliminate his main source of information, and I’m sure he’s quite familiar to you, Jon Snow.” Varys dug into the pocket of his overalls and produced a black and white photograph which he placed on the table. Jon broke into a grim smile.

“Figured,” he said aloud as he shook his head. “I knew that fucker was behind most of this.”

“Indeed,” Varys agreed. “Littlefinger has been working for both sides…like me, you could say, but there can be room for only one trader of secrets, and he’s becoming a little too big for his britches.” He folded his arms across his chest. “You have the means to take him out, but we must gather more information from him first.”

“What other information?” Davos queried.

“Robert’s ties to the Iron Bank,” Varys replied as he raised a finger. “His funds come directly from them, and if we are able to gather information on all his other business contacts via Littlefinger, we are set to go. At the right price, the Iron Bank is willing to go against even their most biggest of customers.”

Davos scoffed. “And just how much are we talking about here? Do you think we’ve got a bloody garden growing in the backyard with money on its trees?”

Varys chuckled. “I wouldn’t worry too much about that right now. Trust me when I say all of that is being taken care of.”

Davos shared a skeptical look with Jon, who only shrugged and figured if Varys had his own resources, all the better. It was one less thing to worry about.

“I can get Littlefinger to talk…if we find him that is,” Grenn offered. “The guy’s been a little elusive these days.”

“Not so,” Varys rebuked with a light smirk. “He spends most of his time in his underground brothels catering to greedy government officials and importing more slave girls and boys to do his bidding. Business has been booming lately, so forgive him for not spending more time at his apartment.”

“So we deal with Littlefinger and the Iron Bank…what else?” Jon asked.

“You are friends with his son Gendry, yes?”

Sam and Jon exchanged a quick look. Jon turned back to Varys and gave a curt nod. “Yes. So?”

“So, you are to continue being his friend. Shutting him out now is only going to raise his suspicions
and he might go running to Daddy dearest. However, that is not the most important thing. You realize what he is to Robert, don’t you?”

“His son…?”

“His bastard son…like yourself.”

Jon struggled not to roll his eyes at the reminder of his birth. “And?”

“Do you think Gendry is the only bastard running around King’s Landing with his father’s genes festering within him? Our dear Robert has quite the reputation of being a ladies man, and despite his generous quest to make right with dear Gendry, it is so easy to go weeding through the slums of King’s Landing to reveal every other whore and child that belongs to him. I have no doubt the media would love to hear all the sordid details of his numerous sexual encounters including underage girls. Ah, lest we forget his bout of madness — when married to Cersei — to have over ten of these babies murdered in cold blood. Why some of our very own beloved City Watch officials were involved in the Bloody Raid of ’15 — a day that will forever live in infamy amongst the smallfolk. Bywater, Slynt, and Trant…just to name a few. Men who weren’t afraid to slice the necks of babies or bash their heads against walls to fulfill their boss’s orders.”

“Seven hells,” Davos cursed in shock. Sam looked sick, while Jon’s hands clenched into tight fists.

“Terrible news to relay, but that is the honest truth. All of this was kept hush by Tywin, of course, but those mothers are still alive and are ready to tell their stories to a willing ear. If we flood the airwaves and newspapers with such stories, there’s no doubt Robert’s reputation would be damaged.”

“Holy shit…” Sam whispered.

“Last but not least,” Varys said as he leaned in; this time his gaze was trained on Jon. “This might be a little tricky, but is most necessary. We must get Khal Drogo on our side.”

Grenn, who had taken a sip of his beer nearly, spit it out. Sam gave a low whimper of dismay. Davos looked incredibly pale, and Jon felt the very act of breathing difficult.

“What…what did you say?” he finally asked in a voice that sounded a million miles away.

“We get Khal Drogo…one of the feared leaders of the Dothraki on our side,” Varys repeated without flinching. “Right now, Robert is using that as leverage for he believes once they get across the Narrow Sea, it’s game over for Tywin. He’ll start a war and not only take out Daenerys — with or without your help — but overthrow the current Great Council and declare himself the new king. The Dothraki are a formidable force not even the Lannister army can defeat, and yes, even if Tywin was able to gather more kingdoms to his cause, they will be no match for a Dothraki horde. They truly are fearful fighters.”

“How in the world is Jon supposed to get THE Khal Drogo on our side?!” Sam all but screamed.

“You know exactly how, don’t you, Jon Snow?” came the simple statement from the Spider which had Jon closing his eyes.

His heart was a snare drum in his chest, for he knew what a dangerous and impossible position he was being placed in. Seven hells, how could he possibly dare to ask her to do something like this? Especially when she had come this far? How could he hope to convince her to return to Khal Drogo’s territory where he was probably waiting to either kill or reclaim her?
“She…” He swallowed tightly. “She won’t agree to it.”

Just recalling her story about her time spent with Drogo was enough to have him gritting his teeth. Aside from the asshole abusing her, or her claims that he still loved her, Jon couldn’t do it. He couldn’t let her go through all that again. This was a part of the plan they’d have to do without.

“I won’t do it,” he said firmly as he lifted his lashes to pin a cold look at Varys. “I can’t do it.”

“A shame,” Varys said with a shake of his head; his features contorted with disappointment. “We might only hope that our other activities make a dent, but if my birds are correct, and they almost always are…we have little to no time to sit around twiddling our thumbs. Drogo is finally on the move, and according to my sources, he’s already sending his first few ships of his army across the sea. It took a lot of convincing as the Dothraki are quite superstitious of the sea in general, so you can imagine how much Robert must have convinced them. We are looking at war in Westeros, Jon Snow, and if our Queen hopes to regain control again, she’s going to have to make that sacrifice and nip this impending danger in the bud. You are vital in convincing her to do it.”

“You don’t understand-”

“Would you rather see Westeros burn to the ground because of your stubbornness? Also, how do you know she won’t agree to it? I’m sure if the Queen is aware of how dangerous the situation is becoming, she’ll be willing to do what is necessary.”

“You have no idea what the fucker did to her,” Jon growled. “And if you think I’m going to send her back to him…!”

“Hold on, hold on,” Davos interrupted as he held out his hands as to keep the glaring men apart. He took a deep breath and faced Varys. “He needs some time to think about this. As you can well imagine, the past few days have been quite difficult.”

“He must think fast then,” Varys declared in deceptively serene voice. “If Robert is to assume you’re to follow on your promise of bringing Daenerys to him, then you might as well play your role to the fullest and speed up the process before he discovers your true intention. Every minute you waste contemplating the ‘right’ decision, you condemn so many more to eternal damnation. Now, if you’ll all excuse me, I do believe I have some meetings to attend. If you should need me for anything else, you know how to reach me.”

He donned his disguise again, and with one last bow of farewell, he let himself out of the apartment.

For several agonizing minutes, a heavy silence descended in the room, until Grenn belched and studied his friend’s lowered head.

“I hate to say this, but…the baldie’s right,” he finally said quietly. “Time isn’t on our side, Jon. You’ve got to talk to this Queen and get her to agree to the plan. In the meantime, Halder and I will go pick up our buddy Littlefinger. If Baldie’s to be believed, we know just where to find him.”

Jon nodded without looking up, and taking that as a greenlight, Grenn excused himself just as Apollo trotted in with a low whine; perhaps sensing the despondence in the room. He nuzzled at Jon’s knee before slumping at his feet; dark brown eyes studying the brooding human he had come to appreciate.

“What are you going to do, Jon?” Sam asked quietly. He hated to see his friend deal with such a heavy burden, and it literally seemed he could see Jon shoulders slumping with the weight of it all.

“I’m sure he’ll do what’s right,” Davos said with a firm nod. “Let’s just give him some time, eh?”
His kind features – though just as concerned for the young man – broke into a small smile. He gave Jon’s shoulder a light squeeze. “Sam and I will be in the living room in case you need us.”

Jon lifted his head long enough to watch his friends leave. He couldn’t even respond to the smile Sam tossed at him before the closing the door. Save for Apollo’s panting - and Jon was rather glad for the company – the silence was deafening. He closed his eyes and counted slowly to ten to control the turbulent swirl of conflicting emotions within him.

What could he do? Dear gods, was this what it meant to be a leader? Where so many decisions were thrust at you and anything he declared was likely to end with dire consequences? How could people like his brother or even Dany handle such enormous responsibility? He felt he was being crushed by a boulder, and a small part of him wished he could turn back the clock and return to the days when all he had been concerned about was where he could score tickets to the next Crows concert.

You chose this, remember? came the quiet voice that was unlike the others. This voice was more soothing and almost teasing. I warned you about getting involved with someone like me, Jon. It’s too late to back out now. You’ve got to finish it like you promised.

Even if it means hurting you? Jon asked as he opened his eyes and stared at the private phone; a hard lump forming in his throat. He would have to call her. He would have to convince her to do something she dreads and for what? Oh, just to prevent the total destruction of Westeros. No big deal, right?

Fuckfuckfuckfuck!

“Okay, Jon,” he whispered as he took a deep breath. “You can do this. Just…just act cool and be completely honest-”

The phone suddenly glowed into life, and for a second Jon could only stare dumbly at the device as the oh-so-familiar initials soon blared on the screen.

D.T.

His Queen wanted a word with him.
Note to self; do not listen to ‘Truth’ while writing a chapter or you’ll end up bawling at your own scenes. Yikes. But yeah, have that song playing in the background for this if you want and it will all make sense *lol* Enjoy!

Truth

(best soundtrack in the history of soundtracks ever!)

He would have turned six today; her Rhaego that is.
His name day was usually spent in solemn reflection, where she was content to remain locked in her room looking through the priceless memories of a child she had loved and lost. In a small box carved from the oldest weirwood tree in all of Westeros - according to Magister Illyrio who presented it to her on her thirteenth name day - Dany had kept a few of the many gifts given to her unborn son. It was a lovely yet painful reminder of what could and should have been.

*Her stallion meant to mount the world…*

There was a pair of soft leather booties her handmaiden Doreah had sewn. His tiny feet would have fit them so well. A belt made of solid gold medallions – a gift from Khal Ogo and his *khalasar* - would run through her fingers with every tender caress. It would have been too big for her baby, but he would eventually grow into it. His first gold ring – a present from his father – sat gleaming at the bottom of the box. Her stallion would have worn it in his hair after his first name day; the beginning of his reign as the son of the *khal*. Last was a finely carved rattle of ivory; or at least it was supposed to be a rattle though it had an odd shape – like a miniature *arakh* but not quite. One of the crones from the *dosh khaleen* had made it, and it was believed to have powers to keep her son from all harm.

*Lies, lies, and more lies,* she thought with the sharp tang of bitterness still heavy on her tongue.

Yet, hadn’t she once clung to those lies with the desperation of a young girl seeking to find her worth in a world foreign and frightening? She had sought love wherever she could find it; having received none from her last living relative and oblivious to the kind Jorah was willing to give. It was terrible to think being pregnant for a man like Drogo, had made her feel she was actually more useful than just being a ‘trophy bride’. It made her endless days of drudgery and resigned fear more palatable.

Unfortunately, her condition did nothing to decrease his insatiable sexual appetite, for he wasn’t averse to taking her whenever he felt like it. If anything, seeing her with child made her even more desirable, he admitted after another night of pumping her full of his sticky seed until it trickled down her thighs. She told herself she relished in the gleam of pride in his dark eyes and was pleased when he praised her for being so strong. Like a true *khaleesi*.

*Moon of my life,* he would whisper as he sucked hard on her full and tender breasts until they hurt.

*My sun and stars,* she’d reply with tears in her eyes as she stared blankly at the ceiling and tried not to think of her belly throbbing in agony or how heavy and sweaty he felt against her weary body.

After all, the blood of the dragon flowed through her, and she could withstand any suffering.

She should have guessed something would go terribly wrong when those throbbing pains became even more pronounced in the latter months of her pregnancy. Drogo wasn’t helping with his constant need to keep moving from one place to another; to keep track of his assets and influx of revenue he’d argue. It was the Dothraki custom, no matter how many times the doctor had warned for her not to travel so much.

*She can remain in Vaes Dothrak until you return,* he would advise. *She is already fragile as it is. Traveling such far distances does not help.*

Unfortunately for the poor doctor, no one dared argue with the *khal* especially when he was dead set on his unborn son being a stallion or warrior. He was not going to be weak, and his wife had better be on the next fucking plane to wherever the hell he was going next. Even Jorah, despite his high esteem in Drogo’s eyes, could not convince the *khal* otherwise.

*I am the dragon’s daughter,* she would tell herself with every agonizing step she tried to mask with a
strained smile. *The stallion who mounts the world is within me, and he will be as strong as his father.*

The bleeding started somewhere between the flight from Lhazarene to Qohor, and at first she had slept right through the familiar pangs of pain until Jhiqui’s shriek of terror awakened her. She can still remember staring dumbly at the lower half of her body; almost marveling at how thick and heavy the blood was. She was literally drenched in it, and even as her handmaidens ran around the tiny cabin trying to clean and stop the damage, Dany had felt the first stirrings of dissociation take a hold of her.

*I failed.*

She watched a version of herself still frozen in the bed; her body simply being pulled this way and that by the sobbing women she also considered friends. Her face was remarkably without emotion; not a single tear dripping down her cheek. Her violet gaze was distant and empty; as barren as the womb that once contained a life.

*No longer. No longer.*

She could see Drogo dashing inside with his features distraught; a sight she never thought she’d ever see on that handsome proud face. Dany watched as he hugged her shell, muttering words in Dothraki that sounded like he was sorry, oh-so-terribly sorry…as he should be.

*You killed him,* a tiny voice whispered with icy venom that was frightening. *You and your fucking selfish desires. You killed our baby, and I’m glad. I’m glad he’s dead, because you don’t deserve to be a father.*

She might have returned to her body eventually, but everything else after that was a blur. *Life* became a blur; a meaningless motion of activities that were of no real concern to her. Oh she would hear the whispers as she walked by; how the other women would give looks of pity or disdain. And though her *khas* still treated her with respect reserved for her position, there was an underlying simmer of resentment at her failure to fulfill her most important of duties. What use was she to anyone? What was her purpose?

Jorah – dear Jorah – did his best to keep her spirits up. He would read to her and keep her updated on what was going on in other parts of the world. Her handmaidens did the same; bringing her fine clothing and perfumes from the next town or city they stopped at. Drogo, for his part, became somewhat distant. Losing a son was not exactly considered a crowning moment for a *khal* of his stature, and rumors swirled that he was already looking for a replacement for his barren bride. He did come to visit her bedroom once in a while, but she could and would not speak more than a few words to him; polite responses to his almost robotic queries about her day.

*He no longer cares.*

The nights were the worst. It was the time she could finally be alone to think, and her thoughts were almost always a mixture of melancholic regrets or vicious vengeance on those responsible for her nightmares. How many times had she pictured driving an *arakh* into Drogo’s back whenever he came to take her? He didn’t seem to mind that she simply lay like a dead fish as he buried himself to the hilt as if hoping to impregnate her all over again.

His seed was strong. It *had* to be strong, he would grunt with each feverish thrust. He was the goddamn *khal* of one of the greatest *khalasars* ever. His pride had taken a tremendous blow with her failure, and he would not accept defeat that easily. He would fuck her into the ground if it meant she produce an heir for him.

Two more years of this, and she finally had enough.
He knew. She knew.

She had absolutely nothing left to give.

“Found it!” came the happy sound to rattle her gloomy thoughts.

Monterys Velaryon was running back to her with what appeared to be a large black and red striped toad in his hands. His lilac eyes glowed with victory and there was a smug smile of satisfaction on his somewhat effeminate features. Despite the raincoat she had made him wear, his fair hair was drenched with flecks of mud stuck on it. The rest of him was no better, and Dany could already picture the fight they were going to have over him taking a shower later.

Ah boys.

“It’s…nice,” she said with a smile as the ugly creature croaked in protest at being manhandled. The boy had been chasing it along the marshes for a while, and perhaps it finally got tired and allowed the human to have its way for now.

“I’m naming him Daemon!” Monterys announced with a flourish. He pet the toad’s head tenderly and grinned at Dany. “Can I keep him, Aunt Dany? Pretty please?”

Dany took a deep breath. The idea of having a toad running around the castle was not exactly appealing, but since she had agreed to let Lord Velaryon’s son spend the weekend…how could she say ‘no’ to that face? Like Dany, his mother had passed away at childbirth and though Lord Velaryon did his best to raise him, it was clear his young son craved the attention of a mother-figure in his life. Monterys knew he had Dany wrapped around his finger, and he could probably get away with murder at this rate.

“I’ll have Jorah find a suitable cage or something for him,” Dany finally replied, unable to help chuckling as Monterys hugged her leg in gratitude.

“You’re the best, Aunt Dany! I’m going to show Missandei!” he said in delight as he ran off to look for her best friend, who was probably still haggling over a lovely handmade bracelet she had noticed in the window of the only trinket shop around.

“Be careful!” Dany called out, though she might as well be talking to the wind for the kid was already halfway down the slope and heading toward the flickering lights of the village below.

If Rhaego was still alive…you two might have been the best of friends.

But then again, if Rhaego was still alive, she wouldn’t be here today, would she?

Shaking away that depressing thought, she dug her hands into the pockets of her raincoat and continued to walk along the muddy shore; her rubber boots nearly getting stuck in some places with how deep the muck was. The rains had now become a light drizzle, which gave the evening a heavy damp ambience that was ripe for warm cups of cocoa before a roaring fire. However, she had chosen to spend most of the day in the villages; getting to meet the people and properly introducing herself to the curious ones.

It was a humbling experience – almost akin to her trips around the slums of Meereen, Astapor, and Yunkai. There were no adequate words to describe the gratification one received from being in the presence of smallfolk. Many were unpretentious and kind; men, women, and children who simply wanted to live in peace with no concern for kings and queens. They were worried about where their next meal was coming from, or how well their crops would grow in the next harvest season, or how much fish they would be able to catch and sell to neighboring islands. They believed in fair
democracy, and many of the men would love to chat about just what they really thought of the Lannisters. The older ones didn’t exactly have favorable stories to tell of her father, Aerys, but many did believe her brother Rhaegar might have changed things for the better. There was universal praise for he and her mother, who like Dany, would sometimes come down to the village to sup with the smallfolk or play with the children.

Hearing such stories warmed Dany’s heart and made her feel a little closer to a family and home she once felt alienated from. The more tales she heard about Rhaella, the more she came to love and admire a mother she had never really known.

Maester Pylos had taken her on a tour of the only school in town. It was a rundown two-story building divided into sections. The first floor was for the pre-school to middle-school age children, while the top half was basically the high-school. With about a hundred children in all, there were only so many adults willing to offer their time as school teachers. Six to be exact.

“We have two student-teachers that come all the way from King’s Landing and teach Mathematics and History,” Pylos explained in his small and cluttered office. “Unfortunately, they have to return home every weekend. They receive no pay and do this voluntarily which is a blessing.”

Indeed it was. They weren’t nearly enough books for everyone, and some students had to share with others. There wasn’t enough equipment to adequately teach some subjects, especially the Sciences, and the only computer in the building belonged to the Maester, who had to also act as secretary and receptionist in addition to being the administrator.

Missandei – who had followed for this excursion - had kept notes of everything Dany wanted improved. By the end of the year, she expected the building to be renovated and every classroom to have enough books and equipment for their students. She had also spoken to Lord Velaryon about the abysmal situation, slightly offended that he would rather see a neighboring island struggle, while his flourished.

As long as you are now here, my Queen, he had promised sheepishly, Driftmark will do its best to provide whatever services you require.

In fact, first thing in the morning, he was sending some of his best architects and engineers to see to the renovations and possible construction of new buildings to expand the school. In addition, she had also implored the services of her alliances from Claw Isle, Cape Wrath, Sharp Point, and Sweetport Sound. They, too, were willing to send in whatever support she needed. It was safe to say that the once lonesome port of Dragonstone was now seeing an increase in traffic since the return of the Targaryen heiress.

Word was spreading.

And favors expected along with it, Dany thought with a rueful smile as she studied the looming volcanic mountains of Dragonmont. They were so high, they seemed lost in the clouds; not that the thick curtain of smoke was helping matters. It was no wonder it rained so much around here. It was making the castle’s roof repairs a slow process, but at least most of the electricity had returned and there was hot water. Two basic necessities covered.

From here, the castle seemed to have been carved from the mountains itself. Tucked between two towering peaks, it was probably designed that way so enemies would find it difficult to attack from all sides. Dragonstone was created to meet possible threats from the sea, and no army was foolish enough to try traversing the jagged slopes of mountains capable of erupting at any moment. For a land that was supposedly unstable, there had been no reports of activity in centuries, and Dragonstone and its people have survived this long with no major incidents.
May it remain that way for a long time to come...whaaa?

There was a sudden flash of light to her right, and she turned to see Missandei beaming at her. She had taken a photo with her cellphone.

“For your Illustrogram page,” she said with a grin. “You looked so good staring at the mountains like that. You had a regal expression on your face. Your followers are going to love it.”

“What the fuck does that even mean?” Dany asked with a laugh. “I don’t go about trying to look regal.”

“You don’t have to,” her friend replied as she placed a kiss on Dany’s lips before engulfing her in a warm hug. “You’re a natural queen.”

Dany blushed and hugged back; while fighting the sting of tears threatening to fall. How she loved and appreciated this woman.

“A queen needs her king though, for the nights can get loooonely,” came the mischievous words which had Dany almost as red as a tomato at Missandei’s implication. She had done her best not to think about a certain someone all day, and now…

“Stooop,” Dany whined and pulled away with a pout and roll of her eyes. The gods damn her.

Monterys was back, though he appeared to be poking at something in the grass with a stick. She wondered what weird creature he was hunting for now. Besides, it was time to head back to the castle. His septa – though glad for a moment to put her feet up – would probably be worried sick about the young master.

“Come on Monterys,” she called out; glad for the distraction and an opportunity to avoid speaking about Jon. “Let’s go home. Almost dinner time.”

“Yay! Are we having chicken nuggets tonight?”

“No,” Dany replied with a frown. “You’re going to have a proper meal, young man. No more of that frozen stuff.”

“Aww,” Monterys protested and stomped his foot; sending more mud flying into his hair in the process. Daemon, the toad, croaked within the pocket of his raincoat, and the boy did his best to appease his new pet. “I wonder if Daemon likes nuggets.”

Missandei rubbed her chin in mock thought. “I guess we could find out.”

Dany was shaking her head. “Don’t encourage him!”

“Well how about this,” Missandei appeased. “You eat your veggies and you can have two chicken nuggets...plus one for Daemon.”

“Or, you can go study up on what frogs like to eat,” Dany added with an arms folded across her chest. “If you’re going to keep a pet like that you have to learn more about him, right?”

Monterys nodded. “Right.”

“So what are we going to do?”

“Go to the library and find books about frogs.”
“And if you can tell me at least two fascinating things about them,” Dany added with a smile. “You can have nuggets for breakfast too.”

She couldn’t have promised him anything better, for with a yelp of delight, the boy was off and running toward the castle.

“One of these days, he’s going to fall and break his neck and then I’ll have a civil war on my hands,” Dany said with a groan. “Maybe then I’ll really have to marry Lord Velaryon to make peace.”

Missandei laughed and slipped her arm through Dany’s as they walked back to the castle together. “He’s actually easy on the eyes. Only in his early forties, right?”

“That’s not the point,” Dany replied with a chuckle.

“Oh, that’s right. I forgot. You’re holding out for a certain northerner who keeps getting himself in trouble.”

Dany shook her head and looked away. “It’s not like that at all. We’re…friends.”

“Suuuuure,” Missandei replied with a smirk. “So…when are you going to call your friend again? It’s been a while, hasn’t it? He should be home by now…at least according to Lord Varys.”

“He’ll call me when he’s ready. Sam still has his private cellphone, remember? I doubt he’ll want to use his personal phone at this time. Too risky.”

Yet later that evening, she was propped up in bed in her favorite pjs (and his sweatshirt); staring impatiently at her phone with a lower lip caught between her teeth.


Open, on the laptop before her, was the page to her Illustrogram account, which already had an astonishing 128k followers considering it was opened about a day ago. Missandei had helped set things up, and Dany had tried to keep things simple as Sam suggested.

**daenerys_targaryen**

3 posts  128k followers  3 following

Taking back what’s ours with fire and blood – [https://maesterbook.com/stormborn](https://maesterbook.com/stormborn)

The very first image posted was of Dragonstone today, with the tag “Coming back home” - #homeiswheretheheartistheysay #stillneedasalotofworkbutthingsarecomingalongnicely #cantwaittoseemoreofmybirthplace. That had about 100k likes and over a thousand comments; most of which were positive. She had done her best to ignore some of the rather nasty and insulting ones – most telling her the usual of returning back to Essos or being a slut or bitch you name it.

*Been there, done that,* she scoffed.
The second was a picture of her in her jeans and sweatshirt with bucket and scrubbing brush in hand. Caption said “cleaning up is hard work, fam” #ittakesavillagelikeliterally #wearedoingourbesttogetthingsready #targaryenrestorationbeginstoday. That had more likes (and got her more followers), and the comments were more overwhelmingly positive.

The latest was uploaded by Missandei. It didn’t really show her face, but her silhouette did look ‘regal’ enough as she studied her ancestral home. It was a stunning photograph all things considered, and with all the positive comments and likes it was receiving already, Dany was glad she listened to Missandei’s suggestion to post it. The caption read: “The journey begins…” #itisamonstrousbeautybutitshome #rainsquiteabitaroundherebutitsstillbeautiful #cantwaittogettowork

Were her hashtags too long? Not that many were complaining. It seemed like her fans liked it.

She glanced at the scribbled notes scattered around her. They were portions of the speech she had written for the recording tomorrow, but she was finding it difficult to focus. She worried her lip again and stared at her phone.

Call him call him call him…all right goddamnit!

Fervently praying it wouldn’t be Sam’s voice at the other end, for as much as she enjoyed talking to him, she needed a change of pace – she closed her eyes and held her breath in anticipation.

Please please please please please-

“Hello? Dany?”

With a part of her already bracing for disappointment, it almost took her a full minute for the familiar northern twang to sink into her dulled thought processes.

Oh…oh!

“Hello?” his voice was a little more urgent now; impatient maybe? Or was it concern or was it…?

Oh gods! Say something, Daenerys!

“Jo-Jon…hi.”

She slapped her forehead and gave an inner groan at how dumb that sounded. She wished she could rewind the last few seconds, but when he seemed to give a soft sigh of relief, her racing heartbeat eased up a little. She unclenched the fist she was unaware she had formed; her shoulders slumping in silent gratitude.

“I wasn’t sure if someone was messing with me,” Jon said with a chuckle. “How are…?”

See you…I want to see you…

“See your face,” she blurted out before shaking her head at her inability to form coherent sentences. “I meant I want to facetime you. Is that okay? Are you somewhere private?”

“Yeah…sure…hold on…”

She lowered the phone and tugged restlessly at the drawstrings of the hoodie; trying hard not to smile like an idiot when the first shot of his familiar curly black hair filled the screen. It was followed by that face she had dreamed about more times than she cared to admit. She hoped the hoodie hid her flushed features as she waved in greeting to his little wave. He looked much better than she had
expected, though the scars on his face only did more to make him attractive…in some weird way.

“Hallooo,” he drawled with a smirk and playful wink. “Miss me that much?”

She raised her middle finger in response, and he laughed at that; a sound that made her stomach do nervous flip flops as her smile widened. Gods, he was beautiful when he let go like that. Yet, she would have been a fool not to notice the tension within him as well. Considering all the bullshit he’s been through, especially with fucking Robert Baratheon, it was a grim reminder of his current predicament.

Her smile wavered.

“How are you, Jon? And don’t tell me ‘I’m fine’ either,” she said as she cut right to the chase. “I want to know what Robert did to you.”

He rubbed his beard and gave a crooked smile. “Really? We’re jumping right into that already? I thought you were going to give me a tour of the place at least.”

“That can come later,” Dany replied with a frown. She leaned closer. “Jon, Lord Varys told us about your meeting with Robert, though he didn’t say exactly what happened…what did he tell you? Is everything okay? Do you have a plan in motion?”

“Slow down, Dany,” he cut in with a wave of a hand and a sigh. The smile was now gone, and in its place was the familiar pensive expression she was used to. He ran trembling fingers through his hair and let out a rush of air. “How much time do you have?”

She sat back and opened her arms. “All night. Lay it on me. I’m listening.”

And listen she did.

He spoke of the moment he landed in King’s Landing to being arrested and the miserable week he spent in the Red Keep’s dungeons. He talked of Bywater’s line of questioning, though skipping most of the graphic beatings he had received, although Dany was astute enough to guess what must have happened. He recounted being bailed by Robert, who felt it necessary to take Jon to his home. He mentioned Melisandre briefly; only stating she was now probably Robert’s mistress. He did not mention the red head’s flirtations or possible healing of his wounds. He also glossed over the threats made to his family. That would be his burden to bear. He told of his decision to move to a friend’s house where he would be saying until this situation blew over. The lives of his tenants were also important, and he would rather spare them the humiliation of being harassed by the City Watch on a daily basis. He rounded up with the just concluded meeting with Lord Varys.

“ Weird guy,” Jon said with a weary smile. “But he made some valid points, and I learned quite a bit from all he said.”

Dany nodded slowly while trying to digest all the information thrown at her. She knew she had to trust Jon, but a part of her still felt he was holding something back or maybe a lot, it was sometimes hard to tell with him.

“And? With all you’ve heard from Varys…will you take his suggestions to question this Littlefinger, freeze all his Iron Bank holdings, and have all these women come forward with their sordid tales?”

Jon cocked his head; lips pursed in thought. “It’s a start. We begin chipping away at the things that make him who he is…”

Dany raised a brow as his words trailed off. There was something else he wasn’t saying. “And…”
He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, and Dany— for some inexplicable reason— felt her pulse quicken. She suddenly didn’t want to hear whatever he had to say next. She should switch off the phone and end this conversation now, but like watching an accident happen, she was powerless to the invisible string he pulled between them. He expelled a breath of air and lifted his lashes. His gaze was intense and searching, as if hoping to see right into her soul depending on what answer she would give to his potential request.

“This wasn’t my idea, Dany,” he began in a low voice, “but the more I thought about it, the more it made sense.”

Don’t say it…don’t say what I think you’re going to say, Jon. Please…

“But it’s going to be one of the only ways we can not only completely cripple Robert, but we could be preventing a war entirely.” He leaned forward and the intense look was now replaced with regret and helplessness. “I swear if I could avoid it or find some other way for you not to do this, I would but…do you remember what you said to me on the beach in Dorne that night? When I asked how you planned to fight Robert Baratheon and his army?”

“Yes,” she replied with a voice that sounded distant for she now knew what he wanted. “I said I could do nothing but fight him head on in the only way I know how…”

“And I asked if it was going to be with your Unsullied.”

“Yes…”

“And you told me…”

“Perhaps.”

“But you know that isn’t going to be the only way, Dany. You want as little bloodshed as possible, so you know…you must have known deep down that the only way to get things to change was to go back to him, right?”

She made a sound that was between a moan and a cry and slapped her hands over her face. Her shoulders…no, her entire being began to tremble as the memories of being with that man and his people came rushing back with a vengeance. Even with her escape, she had always known she’d return in some form. Drogo’s influence ran deep, and despite his ‘silence’ at her betrayal, he had lain in wait; biding his time until she would have no other option but to go crawling back to him. He had used Robert Baratheon in his game as well, for even if the fat bastard didn’t realize it, if Drogo did carry on with this threat to conquer Westeros, all would truly be lost.

*I save the Syndicate for you,* he had once said in broken Common Tongue. *I control the East and you control the West. It is what I do for you, moon of my life.*

“Dany? Dany are you all right? Please talk to me.”

Jon’s raw concern forced her out of the sinking mire of despondency she might have drowned in. She forced herself to the present and lowered her hands. His sharp intake of breath was warranted, for seeing how haggard and weary her features were would have frightened anyone. She seemed to have aged in mere minutes.

“Look, you don’t have to do this,” Jon said quickly. He was leaning forward now; his features distraught with concern. If he could jump through the screen to her, he probably would. “In fact,
forget the damn thing. Fuck it. We’ll find some other way to-

“What other way?” she asked with a weak smile. “We both know…we all know that’s the only way
to stop this. I don’t know if he’ll listen to me, but at least he knows he’s won one battle by my
returning.”

“Dany-”

“It was fate anyway,” she interrupted as she stared at her hands on her lap. “It’s my punishment for
leaving that way…with no honor. Among the Dothraki, they don’t forgive easily, and it was only a
matter of time before he got me back.” She looked up then, tears brimming in her eyes. Her voice
cracked as she studied the wonderful face before her. “I might not even return, Jon.”

“Don’t-don’t say that,” he growled with a pound of his fist on the table. “Seven hells, Dany, you
don’t have to do this. I can’t make you do it, if you don’t want to. I swear I’ll find another way to…
to-

“It’s okay, Jon-”

“No, it’s not,” he protested; his frustration now evident. He looked like he was ready to burst into
tears as well. “You came all this way to reclaim Westeros, and there’s no way I’m going to send you
back to the East…alone.”

She blinked in confusion. “What…what do you mean?”

He swallowed and took a deep breath. “It means if you’re still determined to go, then…then I’ll go
with you.”

He seemed just as surprised at his decision and his brows knit for a second before he nodded slowly.
“Yeah…yeah…that’s right. I’ll come with you, and I’ll be damned if I let him keep you.”

Dany didn’t mean to. She really didn’t, but the laughter erupted from somewhere before she could
control it, and in seconds, she was having to slap a hand over her mouth to control the helpless
giggles.

Jon looked put out. “What’s so funny?” he asked with a pout. “You don’t think I can deal with
him?”

Through her tears, her hysteria grew. “You…you…they’ll kill you before you even step out of the
plane,” she laughed and cried out at the same time. “The Dothraki are not exactly welcoming of
strangers and besides…what the fuck am I supposed to tell them when they ask what you are to me?
I can’t say you’re my servant like Jorah. They won’t buy that at all.”

Jon shrugged and replied almost flippantly. “So what? You lie and say we’re dating or something.”

The giggles subsided and Dany had to take a breath to control the sudden skip of her heartbeat at his
suggestion. “…do you realize what you’re saying, Jon?”

“…yes?”

“You want to pose as a suitor?”

“If that’s what it takes, then yes,” he replied with a firm nod. “I’m going to be your suitor or fiancé or
whatever it is. If he sees that, then he won’t try to make a move, right?”
“Actually, he’ll want to fight you for me.”

Jon raised a brow. “Oh? Like a duel and shit?”

Dany smiled and shook her head. “Forget it, Jon. As romantic as that sounds and believe me, nothing turns a girl on more than having two men fight to the death over her, it’s not worth it.” She wiped her cheeks and took a deep breath. “I’ll go… I don’t want to, and I know Tyrion’s going to shit bricks when he hears this, but… what has to be done must be done.”

“And if he keeps you? Then what? All your plans for Westeros go to waste?” Jon asked with a scowl. “I can’t let that happen. If push comes to shove, I kill Robert myself, and I don’t care if I get sent to the dungeons for it. It will—”

“Drogo is already on the march, Jon,” Dany reminded him firmly. “Whether Robert is in the picture or not, it will no longer matter. Once the Dothraki are committed to something, they’re going to go all the way. Besides, there was no guarantee Drogo would keep Robert alive. He refuses to take orders from anyone, so Robert was basically his excuse to come to the West. I will have to face him sooner or later. I might as well do it now, or there will be no more Westeros to talk about.”

Jon cursed out loud and rose to his feet. For a minute he was no longer in view, and when he returned from his pacing, he sank into the chair like a log; his shoulders slumped in defeat.

“Dany…”

The expression in his eyes was nearly her undoing. He looked so lost.

“Hey, listen. I have a speech to prepare for anyway,” she said with as bright a smile as she could manage and waved the papers in his face. “So don’t worry about me. Once I get this recording done… I’ll make preparations and leave by the end of the week…”

The door to her bedroom suddenly burst open and Monterys dashed in; dressed in his favorite superhero pjs with a tablet in hand. He dove onto Dany’s bed, and before she could stop him, he was already peering at the phone; pretty lilac eyes wide with curiosity.

“Who are you talking to, Aunt Dany? Is that your boyfriend?”

“Whoa… no, no… no!” Dany replied with a furious blush as she tried to push Monterys away from the phone while Jon looked suitably confused.

But Monterys would not be denied. He ducked from her hands and grinned at Jon. “Are you Aunt Dany’s boyfriend?”

“Seven hells…?” Jon began as Dany all but tried tackling the laughing child back to the bed. She turned back to the phone; breathless and still flushed with embarrassment. “I’m so sorry, Jon. He’s a handful.”

“Who is that?” Jon asked with amusement. “A relative?”

“He’s… he’s just the son of one of the neighboring lords,” she panted with a sheepish smile. “He likes Dragonstone for some weird reason, so he wanted to spend the weekend, and I offered to babysit.”

“I’m not a baby! I’m six!” Monterys argued from where he had made himself comfortable among the pillows. He pointed at his tablet. “You said if I told you some things about Daemon, you’d let me have nuggets in the morning.”
“Daemon?” Jon asked with a raised brow.

“His pet toad,” Dany said with a roll of her eyes.

Jon laughed at that and shook his head. “Wow…had no idea you had mommy duties,” he said with a smile. “At least he’s keeping you company.”

“Yeah…it makes things more…bearable I guess.”

This time, when their eyes met, the weight of their unspoken words threatened to crush them with its impenetrable weight. His lips parted to say something…anything, but he felt it would all seem inconsequential and inadequate. This brief moment of happiness with Monterys was something he wanted to leave with; not the reminder of the tears she had shed at the idea of going back to a man who had loved her in his own barbaric way.

*I might not even return, Jon.*

Seven hells. What was he dooming her to?

“I have to go,” she finally said to break the tension-filled silence. “I’ll call you when I’m about to leave, okay?” She reached out to the screen as if to touch his face, but pulled back at how stupid an act it was. “You…you take care of yourself, Jon.”

“Yeah…you do the same, Dany.”

He would end the conversation before she could say anything else; as if the very sight of her was now too painful to him. She stared at the black screen for a moment longer, until her vision blurred. She couldn’t cry. She wouldn’t cry over this. She had made the choice, and he had tried to stop it, but…but…

“Aunt Dany?” came the small but concerned voice behind her.

He tugged at the sleeve of her sweatshirt, and when she turned to stare into those beautiful eyes – so like hers—her heart burst with the force of her misery and sorrow. She wrapped her arms tight around Monterys and rocked him gently in her arms as he clutched her in kind and begged his dear ‘Aunt Dany’ not to cry.

*I’ll protect you, his little big heart proclaimed. I won’t let the big bad guy take you away. I promise.*

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Tyrion’s reaction, the next day, was just as predicted.

Dany suffered through his lecture on the cons (hardly any pros) of her decision, while cursing everyone under the sun including Lord Varys and Jon for even agreeing to something that preposterous in the first place. In addition, the conference call between Varys and Tyrion had been a sight to see and hear. Both men had argued passionately over it – with Dany adding her opinions whenever she could manage to get a word in. At the end of the day, even Tyrion – with great reluctance - had to agree that the sneaky Spider had a point. The risks were great, but this was a thorn they’d have to get rid of sooner or later.

Jorah, for his part, had looked like Death warmed over. He couldn’t believe Dany would be willing
to throw herself into the lion’s den after all these years. Like Tyrion, he had protested, though not as vehemently. It was as if he had known this inevitability, and not surprisingly, he offered to join her; a proposal she was most grateful for. Goodness knows she would need someone to lean on when the time came.

Missandei had immediately offered to come as well, but Dany refused; for taking her friend there was akin to throwing her right into the hands of Drogo and his bloodriders who would be quick to make her a part of their harem. There was no way she was going to condemn her friend to a life of slavery again. Even Grey Worm looked upset, but he knew he would have to obey his Queen’s orders no matter how much they pained him. He compromised with the impassioned promise to send his Unsullied to Vaes Dothrak should any harm come to her.

Needless to say, an event that was supposed to be uplifting was now bogged with the weight of her announcement. By the time Missandei had set up the camera later that evening, everyone looked as if they were about to head to a funeral.

Dany, dressed in a red sweater and jeans, with her hair done in neat braids thanks to her friend, studied her team with a sigh of exasperation.

“Can you guys at least try to cheer me up? I’m the one who should be crying.”

Tyrion might have grumbled something about it being her choice, but Missandei hugged her tightly and tried to smile despite the tears in her eyes. “You’ll be fine, my Queen. Just take a deep breath and face the lens and…do your thing. We’re not even here, okay?”

Giving Missandei a tremulous smile of gratitude, Dany took a deep breath and studied her notes for the last time. She had worked hard on her speech, and even if she ended up never returning to Westeros, she would at least leave knowing she had made an attempt to change the course of history.

This was going to be a broadcast to her supporters and naysayers; to those who wished for her reign and those who prayed for her downfall, death, or failure. She would have to show herself to be a leader and capable of being the voice of reason they could trust. She would have to dispel all the falsehoods and propaganda flung at her family over the years and wipe the slate clean. This was not just going to be a battle for her role as head of the Syndicate, but a battle for the single mother working two jobs just to put food on the table. It was for the farmer down on his luck due to a poor harvest with no means to continue his livelihood. This was for the sick unable to get adequate healthcare due to their status in life. It was for the children unable to get a proper education because those in power had chosen not to care.

She had no intention of becoming their messiah, but she could plant those seeds of hope and give them the encouragement they desperately needed to change their lives for the better.

She would be their voices tonight, and as Missandei’s voice echoed in the background with the countdown, Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen officially announced her presence to Westeros.
of the morning at Dragonstone almost a week ago. Lord Velaryon had arrived – at her summoning - quite distressed at the news of her decision to leave for Vaes Dothrak.

_I really wish you wouldn’t go, my Queen_, he had said. _But if this is something you believe you must do, then my army…and all your alliances here will be ready to go to war should they declare it upon us. You will return to Westeros, Daenerys. We’ll make sure of it._

The Martells had expressed the same sentiments, but like the others, they too vowed to keep an eye on the happenings with Drogo. Just one word from Dany and they were ready for battle.

_I want no bloodshed_, Dany had reiterated time and time again. _That is why I’m doing this. The first step has been cleared with Drogo even agreeing to the meeting, so we’ll see how things go from there. So please, my dear friends, do not worry about me. All will be well._

That was the brave face she had put before the others, but only he had seen the slump of her shoulders in the privacy of her cabin. Only he had heard the quiet sobs she had shed into her pillows, and that sound had torn him to pieces.

_My dear Queen_, Jorah thought with a pang of sadness and longing. _The burdens you put on yourself…how I wish I could bear them as well._

He pulled the blanket up to her shoulders again, but that little action had her sitting up and blinking back to consciousness.

“Jo…Jorah?” she croaked. “Is that you?”

“I apologize for waking you up, Your Grace,” he replied as he bowed politely. “You should probably go back to your cabin…it’s getting colder tonight.”

“No…I’m…I’m fine,” she replied with a weak smile. “Thank you.”

He noticed the phone she was clutching in her hand, and for a moment, his lips tightened with annoyance. He was also quick to notice the dried tears on her cheeks, and putting two-and-two together, it was clear she had been crying again…probably over that Jon Snow. They were expected to arrive at Pentos sometime tomorrow evening, and he knew she had been trying to reach him, but with no success. Either the young man was ignoring her, or he was too busy dealing with his problems to care for a Queen about to sacrifice her freedom for his.

For the duration of the journey, she spent most of her time cooped up in her cabin; not even interested in seeing the kind of response her ten-minute speech had received after it was uploaded. To say it was a success would have been the understatement of the century. It quickly went viral, with over five million views in the first day alone. All the major media outlets had covered it for the next forty-eight hours, with an influx of squawking talking heads willing to dissect every single line she had spoken. If the excitement among the underground had been crazy, then the speech revved that up to a fever pitch. In no time, the hashtags #justiceforDaenerys, #DaenerysTargaryenRules, #TargaryenRestoration and #TheQueenisBack was trending worldwide. Her Illustrogram account jumped to a whopping 2 million followers, same with her Raven and Maesterbook accounts. Everyone now wanted a piece of the possible future queen of Westeros.

Yet, here she was – all alone on a ship going back to the East unknown to most since she had left in the cloak of secrecy. The limp-haired, red-nosed girl sitting before him was not the powerful queen they were making her out to be in the papers and on T.V. She was simply a young woman barely twenty-three, about to reenter a world that had brought her nothing but pain and suffering for five long years.
“You should smile more, Jorah,” she teased with a weak smile.

Gods, she looked so pale.

“I should say the same to you, my Queen,” Jorah replied with a chuckle. “Perhaps a hot cup of coffee and some cookies will help?”

“You’re too good to me,” she said with her lips quivering. She lowered her head and hugged the blanket around her. “Thank you.”

Anything for you, my Queen, he wanted to say, but seeing she wanted to be alone again, he bowed and left without another word.

Pentos was just as she remembered it; all bustling and colorful with so many sights and sounds it was almost too much for one’s mind to comprehend. How could she have forgotten those high walls of brick and mortar, or those tiled rooftops so commonplace to the Pentoshi? How could she have forgotten the mouth-watering smells of frying fish or roasted pigs marinated with exotic herbs and spices from as far as Lys? Oh how she had missed the sweet perfumes and oils that wafted from shimmering bottles and casks from Myrish and Bravosi traders. Rich silks of gold and velvet glittered beneath the warm sun, and as customers and sellers haggled over prices for their wares, Dany could almost forget what she had come to Essos for.

“Like coming home, isn’t it, my Queen?” Jorah asked as she leaned upon the rail with the ship slowly coming to port.

“Almost,” Dany replied quietly.

She was a little better this evening. She had at least eaten half her meal, but she still looked listless despite the lovely blue silk Grecian-inspired gown she was wore. The weather was now much warmer, and there would be no need for the sweaters and jeans for the next few days…weeks…or years. Who knows?

Among the waiting throng of people on land, it was easy to make out the portly beaming figure of Magister Illyrio; clad as always in his rich robes and brilliant jewelry. Childhood memories of her time with the man who had once seemed larger-than-life, almost brought tears to her eyes. She would have shed them if she could, but after wallowing in misery throughout the journey, she felt she had nothing left to give. Like a lovesick fool, she had clung to the belief that Jon would be willing to speak to her and give some much-needed moral support. She didn’t know if he was still upset over her scoffing of his decision to join her, or if something else had happened to him. Varys would tell her nothing, and even Sam had seemed evasive about things when she had called out of desperation.

For all she knew, his dead body could be lying in a ditch somewhere, and no one would tell her anything.

It was so unlike Jon…or wasn’t it? He couldn’t really be that inconsiderate and disenchanted with her already, could he? Not after everything?

I’m a fool, she chided herself as she took a deep breath and prepared to disembark. I have no time to
concern myself with him. He’s used me for his means, and that’s all there is to it. He’s just like every other man I’ve dared to love, and I’m the bigger fool for believing he could be any different.

So why wouldn’t this ache in her heart turn to stone like it had for the others? Why did it feel like she would look down and see a blossoming red dot forming on her chest where he had wounded her so deeply?

“I don’t believe it,” came the quiet words from Jorah, which had Dany looking up at him in confusion.

“What’s wrong?” she queried before following the direction his gaze.

She could only make out Magister Illyrio, who was now chatting with a dark-skinned man in a turban, and there was really nothing spectacular about him to make Jorah look like he had just seen a ghost. However, when a cluster of bald men in orange robes walked past their chattering host, the reason for his shock had Dany gripping the rail so hard, her knuckles turned white with the pressure inflicted upon it.

No…it can’t be…it’s not…it’s impossible!

It was almost a cliché; something she and Missandei would laugh at whenever such scenes played out in a movie. It was that guaranteed scene where the couple locks eyes and everything dulls into slow motion, and though Dany was sure such things never happened in real life, how then was she to explain the sudden stillness to fill the air around her? How was one to describe the sensation of being drawn to only one person in a sea of thousands? Of realizing that nothing else…absolutely nothing else mattered but that one person.

That moment was now, for there he was; looking so out of place, yet doing his best to fit into the lives of the Pentoshi for he was clad in their native silk robes and belts. He had a small, but warm smile on his bearded visage; and those eyes…oh those chocolate eyes seemed to dare her scoff and call him the biggest fool there is.

“Jon…Jon…” she whispered as the tears she had thought long dried up sprang to the surface all over again. Her heart seemed to swell twice its size; making breathing difficult. She slapped her hands over her mouth, her choked sob of, “Oh my gods…Jon!” managing to break through trembling lips.

He really was here! That fucking stupid idiot!

He just never learned, did he?

She moved before she could second guess her decision; her silk slippers barely touching the ground as she flew down the deck. She ran with wild abandon—not caring how childish or foolish she might appear to others who expected so much of her. She ran and pushed past gruff and bigger men carrying cargo off the ship; almost tripping over her dress and tumbling down the gangway in her haste, while Jon – just as impatient and desperate - shoved his way through the crowd to get to her as fast as he could.

Ohdeargodsohdeargodsohdeargodspleasepleasepleasepleasehurry!

The gangway – which seemed to be lowered ever so slowly - would barely make contact with solid ground, when she all but leapt off it and into the waiting arms of a man she now knew she had fallen hopelessly in love with.

He spun her around as she showered him with fevered kisses; a gesture he reciprocated amidst their tears and laughter. She would eventually stop long enough to stare deep into his eyes; as if hoping to
memorize every single fleck and gleam within them. Her trembling fingertips would dance over his scars and trace the outline of his full lips to imprint them firmly into her memory, and as she moved to claim them again in a proper and thorough kiss, Dany made a silent vow never to let him out her sight.

_Dear gods, help us. We are such fools._
Her body was molten velvet against his, and with every expelled breath from her parted lips ripples of satiated bliss coursed through him.

With great reluctance, he lifted his lashes; forced back to reality after falling into the most restful and dreamless sleep he’d had in weeks. There was a dull throb in his left arm, and it was thanks to Dany’s possessive position; where she was all but lying on him…still dead to the world with exhaustion.

Jon’s lips tugged into a small smile as he looked down at the intricate braids they had both been too impatient to undo in their quest to consume each other. He had assumed his hunger for her was alarming, but it paled in comparison to her fervid reciprocation of his silent demands. He was sure there were scratch marks on his back and a bite or two around his neck and chest; lust filled badges of honor he’d proudly display for as long as they lasted. She was not spared from his intensity either; for the faint bruises of his hard grip on her hips while she rode him, were still visible. The twin globes of her ass remained flushed from the playful spanking she had received as she ‘punished’ him with her lips around his cock; teasing and taunting whenever he felt the need to come until he growled in frustration and paid her back in kind.

It was as if they were determined to leave physical imprints on each other; as if that would make everything more real to them. If she had marveled as his wounds healing that fast, she made no
comment about it. Fortunately, they had been too busy ripping clothes apart to be interested in that particular discussion.

You are a beast, she had panted happily in the aftermath; their breaths mingling as one as he willingly got lost in violet eyes brimming with satisfaction. Or is that the wolf in you baring its fangs?

The wolf in me, eh? You have no idea, Dany, he thought with a wry smile as he tried to adjust his position. He hated to have to wake her, for after their exertions, they just about passed out in weariness. She did have a long sea voyage, so goodness knew she needed all the rest she could get. However, he needn’t have feared her reaction. Her features only scrunched up in annoyance at the disturbance as he slowly withdrew his arm from beneath her. She mumbled something he couldn’t hear and with a sigh, she turned onto her other side to give him more room to move.

He flexed his arm to get the circulation back into it, but stopped long enough to brush aside some tendrils of silver hair from her cheeks to place a tender kiss upon it.

He swung his legs off the large and quite comfortable bed to pad to the bathroom where he eased his bladder and washed his face quickly. His living quarters in Magister Illyrio’s ostentatious manse was akin to his stay at the Water Palace, and not for the first time, Jon had to marvel at how people in other countries tended to live. After being in Winterfell most of his life; his journeys to these new places was rather fascinating.

If anyone had told him he’d be in Dorne, Pentos, and eventually Vaes Dothrak in less than a few months, he would have laughed in their faces. Yet here he was; thousands of miles away from Winterfell coming to a foreign country and possible hostile territory - all for a woman he...

I love.

I guess it is love, he mused with a frown as he stood beside the bed to study the sleeping form in contemplative silence. His heartbeat skipped at this; the gradual acceptance of his feelings leaving him almost weak-kneed. Why else would I come all the way out here knowing how dangerous this could be? I might not even survive…and everything would have been for nothing. Seven hells, Robb would laugh his ass off if he heard about this…or kick my ass for being so stupid.

But that was okay, he decided as he reached for a packet of cigarettes to help himself to one. He had made the decision to live with no regrets. Life was too damn short anyway.

Slipping into a pair of one of the many silk pants provided for him, Jon stepped out to the veranda where he could observe the city still crawling its way toward the dawn. In the distance, he could hear the now familiar chants from the red priests and priestess; a sound that was rather haunting though Illyrio had explained that it was a daily ritual one simply got used to after living in this city for a while.

Jon arched his neck and blew a cloud of smoke to the heavens, where the sky was a dusty shade of obsidian with a sprinkle of stars. Not as clear as the skies up North, but considering the pollution in Pentos; it was a surprise to even see any this early in the morning. He couldn’t say if he loved the place or not, but since his arrival two days ago; Illyrio had done his best to be the consummate host. Whatever Varys must have told him, the heavyset businessman had been nonjudgmental or critical of the ‘naive’ Northerner in his home. He showed up to the airport to pick up Jon, and since then Illyrio had done his best to showcase Pentos as the hubbub of everything good about the Free Cities.

Speaking of The Spider; Jon had to give it to the bald bastard for putting all this together on such short notice.
He must have known that Jon would call, for there wasn’t even a hint of surprise in his response.

“And you are sure this is what you want to do?” Varys had asked in the wee hours of the morning, after Jon had just about paced a hole in the middle of Grenn’s living room and gone through an entire pack of cigarettes.

“It’s not a matter of what I want to do,” Jon had replied impatiently. “I have to do it. I can’t let her face him alone, and I’m going. I know she’s not going to like it, but fuck it. I have to be there with her.”

There had been a brief pause, and Jon could almost picture that smooth face breaking into a smirk at the other end. When Varys spoke, it was in a crisp tone that left no room for argument.

“As you wish, Jon Snow. I encourage you to wait for further instructions from me, and make no mention of your plans to anyone. We want to have this done as discreetly as possible.”

Unfortunately, a certain astute older man saw right through Jon’s nervous antics the next morning and was quick to pull him aside to demand he spill his secrets.

“Then I’m coming with you,” Davos had declared; holding up a hand to stop Jon from protesting. “No arguments, son. You’re going to need a level head around you, and there’s no guarantee you’re going to be able to do so when confronting a man like Khal Drogo. I’ve seen you lose your temper, and it’s not a pretty sight. Besides, your negotiating skills are shit.”

“But what about the apartments? Who’s going to keep things going if we both suddenly disappear?”

“Who do you think’s been in charge when I’m gone anyway?” Davos retorted with a smirk. “I was busy training people who can handle the daily affairs while we try to get your shit together, young man, so don’t you worry about any of that. Your tenants will be taken care of.”

End of discussion apparently.

Varys hadn’t blinked at the addition of Davos either and simply went along with the plan; giving both men specific instructions on where to meet and who to meet. He had even managed to get fake passports for their new personas; where Davos now had a full head of thick black hair with dyed beard and moustache, while Jon who had at first been encouraged to go blond and shave his beard; had balked at that idea. He settled for a long-haired black wig and shaving his beard just enough that it was close to stubble. A pair of grey contact lenses completed the transformation, and even he had to do a double-take at the finished product.

He looked like a struggling rock musician, and his new wardrobe of even skinnier jeans and flannels didn’t help. He couldn’t bear to facetime Arya when he finally called her before his trip. She would have asked a million and one questions he was not ready to answer. Besides, most of the conversation was spent consoling her.

“…she died in her sleep,” she said; with her voice sounding stuffed up from all the crying she must have been doing. Jon wished, with all his heart, he could hold her in his arms and comfort her. Though hearing of Catelyn’s death made him just sad enough to know his siblings were hurting, he felt a rather quiet detachment about the entire thing. Catelyn had made it clear he meant nothing to her, and he had done his best to feel the same way. He hoped she was happier wherever she was now.

“Guests have been coming here since then,” Arya continued quietly. “It’s been busy and Robb has to deal with everyone. He’s got so much to do. Bran and Sansa have been trying to help out, but
Sansa’s no better. She can’t stop crying, and she won’t eat anything. She’s already skinny enough as it is, and now she wants to become a skeleton."

Jon was all too familiar with Sansa’s need to keep a toned figure, but he did worry she might starve herself to death if Arya’s story was true. “What about Rickon? How’s he holding up?”

“The same…not talking much and disappearing for hours at a time. He’d come back home around midnight and Robb thinks he’s been drinking. You should have heard them arguing, Jon. It was horrible. Bran tried to intervene, but then Rickon ran off again. He did come home last night though.” There was a pregnant pause where both knew what was being unsaid. Jon was needed; to be the backbone to Robb and to help keep the peace in Winterfell. Every fiber of his being begged him to get on the next plane to Winterfell; to forget this foolhardy plan and the dangers ahead, and perhaps he just might have made that decision when her next words sent a chill down his spine.

“Uncle Robert’s coming tomorrow. He called earlier today to tell us. He sounded so distraught.”

Jon’s head throbbed with a dull rage at the sound of that name. The memory of Robert Baratheon’s threat to his family’s legacy and what would happen to his siblings should he fail to follow through on his promise was the icy dose of reality he needed. He couldn’t back out now. This was no time to crawl to Winterfell, where Robert would no doubt flex his muscles and try to persuade the North to his side. Getting to Khal Drogo and making sure Dany lived long enough to strike down Robert was the most important thing.

Later that night, he would compose a detailed email to Robb; telling of everything Robert had done and would do when it came to the North’s allegiance to the Stark Estate.

*I know you’ll have a thousand questions, but I ask that you please be patient and trust everything I’ve written so far. Do not try to call me, Jon wrote. I’ll be far from Westeros, by the grace of the Old Gods, by the time you read this. Please remember not to give anything away when in the presence of Robert and do all you can to maintain the faith of father’s allies. I promise to return with someone able to help restore the North, and all of Westeros, to its former glory. I swear, my dearest brother, I will avenge the death of father and Uncle Benjen. Winter is coming. I love you always, Jon.*

He would compose similar emails to his other siblings; nothing as detailed, but just enough for them to also be on their guard when it came to their ‘uncle’ Robert. If he knew them – especially Arya – they would heed his warnings and play their roles perfectly. This was confirmed with Bran and Arya’s response the next morning with Bran astutely asking if this had anything to do with the appearance of a certain Targaryen.

*You don’t have to reply, Bran wrote. But if it’s what I think it is…things are definitely more interesting than I thought. I say this because Tyene (you remember her, don’t you? She still thinks of you) and I discovered something in one of the old Maester’s archives regarding Aunt Lyanna, but I’ll wait until you return to Winterfell. This is something we all need to hear in person. Love and miss you too.*

Ah, Tyene. Jon had almost forgotten about Oberyn’s daughter, and what was all that about Aunt Lyanna? Why would she be in some old Maester’s records? But then again, most of the Starks were historical figures, so why not? However, when the sudden image of his aunt and Rhaegar Targaryen came to mind, he shook his head to get rid of it. Why that would pop in at this time was bemusing.

Arya, for her part, was blunt with her response. *You’re talking about Daenerys Targaryen, aren’t you? Isn’t she just the coolest? Did you watch her video the other night? I think I must have watched it a million times already. I know there was a rumor floating around that you were dancing with her in Dorne…but we all don’t believe it. There’s no way that could be you…could it? Really Jon, you*
have to stop keeping secrets from me. Either way, I can’t wait for you to come back home, and trust me, I’ll keep both my eyes on Uncle Robert. Love and kisses!

The courtyard below was slowly coming to life with the presence of a few servants beginning their morning duties. Neither bothered to notice the foreigner studying them; not that they particularly cared. Most of them could not speak the Common Tongue and were content to serve him as best they could, while Illyrio did most of the translations.

The journey had gone rather smoothly, though Jon had to confess walking past customs in his disguise was slightly nerve-wracking. He had fully expected the City Watch officers would have noticed something odd or started asking questions, but when his fake passport was simply stamped and he was offered a ‘safe trip, sir’, Jon did not realize he had been holding his breath until the plane was several thousand feet above the Narrow Sea.

Davos had eased his tension by ordering several alcoholic beverages during the flight, and by the time they arrived, he was halfway drunk.

“Anything to calm the nerves,” he defended himself before snoring away on the trip to Illyrio’s home.

The merchant was kind enough to give them the rest of the evening ‘off’, providing them with soothing baths and a meal fit for a king. However, after breakfast the next morning, he discarded the mask of gracious host and laid out the bare essentials to his visitors.

“I do hope you know what you’re in for, Jon Snow,” the merchant had said with a frown of concern. His long yellow beard, which seemed to shimmer beneath the midday sun, bobbed up and down as he spoke. “To meet with a man like Khal Drogo is more than just a meeting in a conference room. Despite the advent of technology, they like to keep to the old ways, and sometimes what we might consider diplomatic gestures might not work in the same way with them. The Dothraki have their own codes and rules, but I’m sure Daenerys must have told you about this.”

Not in so many words, Jon would have said, but he was still doing his best to digest all he had heard and studied about the Dothraki. In an attempt to do his ‘homework’, he had gone browsing through the internet - with Sam’s help – about the so-called barbaric tribe. The more he read, the more concerned he became. First, it was a wonder Dany had managed to survive five years with such a people, and he had no doubt she had gained strength from living with them for so long. Didn’t she say she had learned to fight while with them? And if their historical conquests were anything to go by, dealing with a Dothraki army was going to be next to impossible. Dany’s deduction that Drogo might simply be using Robert as a pawn was entirely feasible. The Dothraki followed no kings or queens and lived for conquering territories. Nothing stopped Drogo from wiping out the Baratheons and Lannisters once he crossed the Narrow Sea. He was the leader of the largest khalasar – with over a hundred thousand loyal followers – so what could stop him? He was yet to lose a battle and his enemies trembled with fear at just the thought of his name.

How the hell was a mere Northerner, like him, supposed to face a man like that?

Actually, he’ll want to fight you for me, Dany had said with amusement, and why not? She must have pictured their clash and would see there was no chance in hell Jon could win. For one thing, the man was almost twice as tall, and if he did decide to have an old-fashioned duel; Jon was not an
expertise with weapons. Aside from his hunting rifle and a few shots with a crossbow…and there was the dagger he had used on the Harpy - that was about as much as he could do with such things. He was good with his fists, but he doubted Drogo would want to do anything that simple.

*Fuck,* Jon groaned and took a deep breath. *I'm screwed.*

According to the email sent to Illyrio, one of Drogo’s bloodriders – Qotho – would be arriving in a few days to pick them. In other words, Jon would have about three days to familiarize himself with the Dothraki method of fighting, and there was only one person capable of giving him a crash course in that. Unfortunately, since his arrival, that subtle chill between them hadn’t been resolved. Jon still felt Jorah wanted him out of the picture, but screw the older man’s feelings at this point. He needed Jorah’s help, and he was going to get it even if he had to fucking beg.

With that decision made, he slipped back into the bedroom to get dressed; stopping only to place a warm kiss on Dany’s forehead.

If all went well, Jon had a feeling it was going to be one long day ahead.

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He would find Jorah sitting beneath one of the many porticos around the manse sharpening what looked to be a sword of all things. For a while, Jon stared mesmerized at the steady motion of the smooth stone against the steel blade. He had once seen his father do that, but only because he had a collection of Stark family swords to maintain. Ned never actually had to use them.

“My father had a sword,” Jorah suddenly said in his undulating voice without looking up. “It was a beauty…supposedly made of the famed Valyrian steel. It’s called Longclaw and it’s been in the Mormont family for centuries. I was supposed to wield it, but I guess my niece – Lyanna – will probably have that pleasure someday.”

He held up his sword to the faint light creeping beyond the horizon. The blade glowed in response. It might not have been Valyrian steel, but it was still something to behold.

“Have you ever used one before?” Jorah asked with a side glance at his quiet companion.

“…no,” Jon confessed as he stepped hesitantly closer. “Never felt the need to use one.”

*We are not in the fucking Middle Ages,* he would have added, but felt that was going too far.

Jorah allowed a wry smile to come to his lips. He spun the sword around, so its hilt faced upwards. He thrust it out to Jon. “Go ahead…feel it.”

“Ah, it’s okay,” Jon began quickly. “I don’t really-”

“You came to me for a reason, Jon,” Jorah interrupted curtly. His expression was pensive and perhaps annoyed, though his tone remained polite. “You know full well what lies ahead, and this is no time to pussyfoot around. Here. Give it a whirl. It doesn’t bite.”

Jon bit whatever retort he might have come up with and nodded in reluctant acceptance. His fingers clasped the hilt; admiring the rather intricate design of snakes curving around it. It felt large and awkward in his grip, but he held it up as best he could…though eventually forced to use both hands for it was not particularly lightweight. He felt the heat creeping up his neck as Jorah’s gaze remained
trained on him. Jon had no idea what to do next. Did he swing it or slash it around like he saw in the movies? He almost felt ridiculous doing so, but as he tightened his hands around the weapon, he closed his eyes and pictured Khal Drogo approaching.

From the few pictures he had seen, the man would have features of a feral beast just eager to attack. His eyes would flash with flames of malice, and his mouth would spew smoke and brimstone.

*You will not take her away from me,* this Drogo raged, *I own her, Jon Snow. You are nothing to me. Go back to your Winterfell and remain hidden in the snow like the coward you are.*

Jon knew it was only his imagination, but he’d be damned if he didn’t feel the flicker of rage quicken in the pit of his stomach and flow into his hands. He couldn’t explain it if asked, but he felt he was actually now one with the sword and as he took a steady step forward and slashed at the mirage of Drogo, the once heavy weapon now felt as light as a feather.

*Is that the best you can do?* came the surprising taunt from yet another Drogo now behind him. *Come on, Bastard of Winterfell. Do your worst.*

Jon snarled and struck again…and again…and again…each time slashing through the different ghostly appearances of a man who was slowly driving him insane. By the time he had hacked the last one to oblivion, he was drenched in sweat and his arms felt like they were about to drop off. The once light sword now weighed a ton, and he had to lean on it like an old man to catch his breath.

*Fuck…what the fuck?*

“*A natural,*” Jorah commended with what appeared to be reluctant admiration. “*A bit wild with your form, but considering you’ve never used it before…you have a gift.*”

“*Huh…wha…?*” Jon was so tired - and hungry - nothing Jorah was saying was making any sense.

Jorah plucked the sword from his unresisting grip and slipped it back into its scabbard; a fine sheath of black leather Jon hadn’t even noticed.

“*Have yourself some breakfast and meet me in the courtyard afterwards. We don’t have much time. Illyrio has an arakh in his collection I believe. We could train with that for a bit and then work on your sword skills.*”

“*You really think he’ll want to fight?*” Jon asked with faint hope that Jorah would tell him otherwise. “*I mean…couldn’t we just talk things out with him?*”

Jorah raised a brow. “*You do realize where you are and who you’re about to meet, don’t you, Snow?*”

“Yes,” Jon replied with slight irritation. “*I know.*”

“No, I don’t think you do,” Jorah cut in angrily. He took a step toward Jon, who didn’t flinch and was ready to face the older man’s wrath. He figured Jorah might as well get it all out of his system one way or another.

“You have no idea what she had to deal with being with the Dothraki and being the wife of a man like Drogo,” Jorah spat as the memories came flooding back until he visibly shook with the depth of his feelings. “*I was never in favor of Viserys's decision to sell her to him for his means, but what could I do? I could only…*”

“*Follow Robert’s orders,*” Jon said calmly. At the widening of Jorah’s eyes, Jon shrugged lightly.
“He told me about it, but Tyrion explained what happened…how you changed your tune and devoted your life to her. I guess I can come to forgive you as well for not betraying her.”

“Do you expect me to thank you for that?” Jorah asked with a bitter laugh. “Trust me, Snow, that was not my proudest moment. I have done some shitty things in my life, and my decision to accept Robert and Ned Stark – yes, your pious father’s – offer was to save my hide. I was a coward, and I realized that when I came to know the real Daenerys Targaryen. Despite all the abuse, both physical and emotional, she received from the men around her; she kept her head up and fought through it all. She was able to forgive this pathetic asshole who almost got her killed. She reminded me of what it was to be truly human, and her ability to still see the good despite the evil around her made her the most beautiful person to me.”

Jorah took a deep breath as if to stop himself from going further. When he continued, his voice was quieter, but no less intense.

“Drogo was an unfortunate situation, and if I could turn back the clock, I would have killed Viserys myself to spare her the humiliation and suffering she experienced. She was only thirteen, Jon. Thirteen fucking years and given to a man to become his bride. What the hell did a girl like that know about being a goddamn wife? And to be thrust into the wild and unforgiving lifestyle of the Dothraki? That was double the punishment, but she survived the only way she could. She would force herself to adjust and fit in. It was either that or die within the first year. Sure, in time, Drogo came to love her in his own way, but it’s not the same. I have seen men slaughtered like cattle by this man; sometimes with his bare hands. He is a man of few words, so all talk of negotiations is bullshit. If you want to make an impression on him, and even be considered as a serious contender, you’ve got to prove yourself.”

He thrust a fist at Jon’s chest, causing him to stagger a little.

“I had to kill some members of his khalasar to get in his favor, Jon, and you’re going to have to do the same to even get an audience with him. You came all the way here just to make her happy, correct? And you thought your only plan of action was to talk Khal Drogo into accepting peace with no price to pay? You’re even more naïve than I thought.”

“I didn’t expect things to go smoothly,” Jon argued; feeling heated at Jorah’s condescending tone. “But I didn’t think that…I figured…”

“That Dany might talk him out of it?” Jorah finished with a cynical smile. “She might try, but even she knows that’s impossible. Who knows what else she might have done? She might have taken things into her own hands, with the full knowledge she was never going to return to Westeros. However, you’re here now, Jon Snow. You have placed yourself as her suitor, and you’re going to have to prove that to the khal and his khalasar. You do want to also avenge your uncle’s death, don’t you?”

“Of course, I do.”

“Good,” Jorah said with a firm nod at the flash of anger in Jon’s eyes. “Then after breakfast, you get your ass to the courtyard ready to train until you can barely stand. Once Qotho arrives, there is nothing more I can do for you. You are completely on your own. Do I make myself clear?”

Jon gritted his teeth and took a determined step forward. “Crystal. I’ll be there.”
By the next day, Jon had to wrap his hands with bandages. Blisters had formed on his palms, and despite Dany helping to burst them open before cleansing and applying a soothing balm, they still burned as he flexed them gingerly before reaching for the *arakh* he’d been training with.

Jorah was already waiting for him in their usual training spot, and with a good luck kiss from Dany – who positively glowed in a beautiful yellow chiffon gown that did little to hide a body he had worshipped; though last night was more of a cuddling since he ached all over from Jorah’s punishing training regimen.

Aside from a quick lunch and dinner, every waking moment was spent parrying and slicing his way through possible duel formations. Jon figured he was a relatively fit guy, but his body throbbed in places he didn’t even know existed. His hamstrings felt on fire, his shoulders and arms protested after endless hours swinging weapons he had to force himself to be familiar with. Dany had done her best to massage them last night, but it had taken a couple of pain killers and a large cup of milk of the poppy to finally knock him to sleep.

“We’ll work with the sword today,” Jorah stated as he held out the weapon. “Illyrio was kind enough to donate this as well.”

Speaking of which, the merchant had joined Dany and Davos on the veranda to watch the training session, and Jon could see them chatting as if they were simply watching a gladiator match to amuse themselves. Jon felt anything but amused. It was going to be another hot day, and despite his hair pulled away from his face and wearing nothing but a pair of cotton shorts – to make movement easier – he was already dripping with sweat.

Jorah was dressed in similar fashion, and not for the first time, Jon had to marvel at how fit and toned the man was for his age.

“Ready?” Jorah asked as he fell into his stance and Jon did the same. “Now remember what I said last night; the weapon is always an extension of your arm. The *arakh* might be shorter, and because of its shape, swinging it forces you to maneuver your arm and body to accommodate it. For the sword, it’s a little more straightforward, though the same principle remains. It’s just not about swinging it around like a madman, you’ve got to seek your opponent’s weakness and target it…like this!”

He swung so suddenly, Jon tripped over his own feet and fell to the stone pavement with a grunt of pain. He glared at the tip of the sword pointed at his throat and looked up to meet Jorah’s steely gaze.

“Get up, Snow,” came the quiet command, “And pay more attention. The Dothraki are fast, and your head would have been displayed by one of his bloodriders by now.”

Jon cursed beneath his breath and picked up his weapon, rolling away from the sword before jumping lithely to his feet. He fell into his stance again and held the sword before him.

“Come on then,” he whispered and charged as Jorah came for him again.

“Wake up, my white wolf,” came the husky whisper to fill his ear.
Jon blinked bleary eyes to wakefulness; groaning as his lower back protested at his decision to move. A silky curtain of silver fell over his face before familiar warm lips claimed his parted ones in a languid kiss that just about eased whatever other ache he might have felt.

“Mmmmm…” he moaned in pleasure as their tongues met and danced passionately before whining in protest when she eventually pulled away with a small smile on her lips. Her eyes blazed with something akin to mischief.

“Get up,” she ordered as she pulled her hair back quickly in a rough ponytail. She was still straddling his torso, but as Jon’s focus became clearer, it was to see she wasn’t naked (quite disappointing actually), but was dressed in black tracksuit pants and a pink tank top with ‘PRINCESS’ written across it.

“Huh…?” came his confused query.

“We’re training today,” Dany explained with a smirk. “Time to see how strong you really are now.”

She grinned at his expression of disbelief; his tousled hair and slightly swollen lips making him more than delectable. However, as tempting as it was, there was no time to waste. She got off him, which was a bad idea for he was as hard as a rock and was making no attempt to hide it. Considering the past two nights had involved him crawling into bed and promptly passing out in exhaustion, he desperately needed relief…and fast.

“Seven hells, Jon,” Dany cried out in mock dismay. “You better get that thing to behave.”

Jon fell back to the pillows; his eyes darkening with mischief and something else that sent her pulses racing.

Damn it! There was really no time for…

“It’s not going to take care of itself,” Jon invited with a crook of his finger. “What’s five minutes, Dany?”

“Jorah’s already waiting-”

“Fuck Jorah…honestly, I really don’t give a fuck about him right now,” Jon snapped impatiently. Hell, he was sure he had even dreamt of the man at some point. All this training was doing a number on him, though the idea of fighting with Dany…fuck! He was literally aching now. How the hell was he going to get through their session today if -

Oh…!

“Five minutes,” Dany growled as she ducked beneath the sheet barely covering his lower half, and wrapped her warm fingers around his cock to stroke with an expertise that left him swallowing and simply nodding helplessly in agreement.

Fuck, I’m going to come in a second.

He groaned and closed his eyes; neck arching against the headboard as she soon engulfed him with a hunger that just about drove him over the edge. He knew he was in for trouble afterwards, and as his hands crept down to find her head, he prayed she would go easy on him when the time came.
He spoke too soon.

Dany was an animal.

“Holy shit,” he gasped as he ducked an incoming slash and nearly tripped over his feet in the process. However, he managed to hold his ground and parried another incoming attack from her flurry of blows with the arakh. He could barely keep up with his sword, and considering it was the real thing, he didn’t want to hurt her either.

“You aren’t coming at me with everything you’ve got, Jon,” she admonished when she paused to study him; a frown of annoyance on her sweat-flushed features.

Jon would have taken a moment to admire how fucking sexy she looked with her hair hanging in damp ringlets around her cheeks and forehead; or the patches of sweat now on her tank top especially the way her hard nipples stood out against the fabric. This was so not the time to get turned on, but after almost two hours of this…

“Sorry,” he apologized and shook his head to gather himself.

From the corner of his eye, he could see Jorah watching with a scowl on his features; his arms were crossed before his chest and he looked as if he wanted to jump in to slap Jon around if he could. It was as if his past two-days of training had been all for naught. Davos was watching as well, only he seemed to be giving Jon thumbs up for encouragement…before turning back to the newspaper he was more interested in reading.

So much for moral support.

Illyrio, who had spent a few minutes watching, did have to leave for an important meeting. Only a few other house servants, who had taken an interest in the strange foreign man, sat around to watch. Every now and then, they’d point and chuckle amongst themselves. Jon wasn’t that well versed in Valyrian yet, but thanks to Dany, he could pick up a few of the words here and there. So far, it seemed they were calling him ‘little warrior’, and Jon wasn’t sure if that was a compliment or not.

“Come at me!” Dany screamed in Dothraki and charged again.

Jon was ready this time.

His grip around the sword tightened, and recalling Jorah’s instructions to never lose sight of the arakh’s motion, Jon watched as Dany swung it in sweeping arc from her right. It wasn’t as fast as Jorah’s swing, but it was still powerful enough. He blocked it effectively; the clash of steel almost deafening as his blade caught at the arakh’s curved section. Fearing he might have cut her, Jon pulled back, but only to block again as Dany leapt after him. Unrelenting, punishing, every blow seemed to be an extension of all the pent up anger and frustration she must have held for a race of people she had almost considered her own.

She did manage to nick him; resulting in a cut to his left cheek. He licked away the trickle of blood that dribbled close to his mouth; his breath coming out in harsh gulps as they both sized each other.

The pink tank top was now a dark red; completely soaked with her exertions. She was bleeding as well, causing Jon to wince at the streaks of blood on her upper arms and shoulders. He really should be more careful. However, she didn’t seem to care. With a feral gleam in her eyes, she raised her arm to wipe away the sweat; inadvertently smearing more blood across her forehead.
Seven hells, she looked like a painting of a wildling come to life. Throw in some fur clothing and she could fit in with that ferocious clan beyond The Wall.

“Tih haj lajak, my strong warrior,” she crooned seductively as she held out the *arakh* and fell into her stance again. “Show me what you will do to Khal Drogo when he comes to take me away.”

“He charged for her again, admiring how swift she was to duck his incoming attack. With the grace of a feline, she dashed to her left and swung the *arakh*; her intention to hack at his legs. Sensing her motives, Jon all but did a one-handed back flip to get out of the way; surprising even himself at the move until Dany swept the *arakh* after him again. It nearly took off his right ear, but with a muttered curse, he swung his sword to parry the attack. Only his swing was so hard and fast, they both watched in awe as the *arakh* slipped from her grasp, spun a few times in the air before clattering to the ground.

He smirked and pointed the tip of his sword at her neck as he towered over her, for she was still on one knee.

“I win, my Queen,” he crowed in victory. “I think this is the part where you begin bowing to me or something…whoa!”

She had kicked out a leg to catch him off guard; sending him toppling to the ground with a grunt of surprise. She dove for him and grabbed the sword that had slipped from his fingers; holding it above him as she straddled his lap in one swift move.

“Never let your guard down, my strong warrior,” she warned though her eyes beamed with pride. “You did well…but it’s not going to be this easy.”

“I know,” he replied quietly. He barely flinched when the tip of the blade caressed his jugular, before she lowered it slowly to the ground. His hands crept up her hips to hold her steady as their foreheads met while thundering hearts tried to settle into steady rhythms. “Dear gods, I know.”

He couldn’t sleep, and it had nothing to do with the hearty feast Illyrio had insisted they have as a going-away celebration.

Though it was supposed to be a jovial affair, his guests had tried their best to get in the swing of things. Even the live band– as good as they sounded – had not done much to change the mood. Illyrio had even danced with Dany, who had looked beautiful in a white high-waist gown with golden embroidery, and the portly man teased and praised Dany for looking quite regal. Of course, he made the mistake of recalling the night of her wedding to Drogo, and that put even more of a damper on the festivities.

Later that night, Jon had held a sobbing Dany in his arms; not quite of what he could say or do to make her feel any better. Sometimes it was okay to simply ‘be there’, and when she eventually dozed off, still cradled in his embrace, Jon swore he’d do whatever it took to make sure they…or at least she made it back to Westeros.
He might not have the diplomatic skills of Tyrion or the warrior expertise of the Dothraki, but he was going to try his damnest best.

Slipping out of the bed quietly, so as not to awaken her, Jon chose to have a late night walk around the manse. Maybe if he walked far enough, he’d eventually get tired even if there was only three more hours ’til dawn.

As he walked, he flexed his still bandaged hands and pretended to swing his sword or an *arakh*. He rehearsed every possible move Jorah and Dany had taught him; his mind racing with any and all possible scenarios that could happen.

So engrossed was he in his ‘training’, he nearly cried out in shock as he bumped into someone coming in the opposite direction.

“Good heavens,” Davos gasped with a hand on his chest. “You gave me a fright, young man.”

“Same,” Jon replied with a raised brow. “Where the fuck are you going this early in the morning anyway? Diarrhea again?”

“Funny,” Davos said with a sneer at the crooked grin directed his way. His gastric distress after a particularly spicy meal had not exactly been pleasant. “I should be asking you the same thing.”

Jon sighed and shuffled his feet; hands burrowing into the pockets of the silk caftan. “Take a wild guess.”

Davos nodded and followed after Jon as he continued his walk. “Nothing that can be done now, son. We’re in the thick of it now.”

“She cried last night,” Jon said quietly; the memory of Dany’s warm tears on his chest causing his heart to clench. “I felt so damn helpless, Davos. I didn’t know what the hell to do.”

“Exactly what you’re doing,” came the firm reply. “It’s all you can do, Jon. You’re here and that means a lot to her. She told me that. She says you’ve given her the courage to face him, and she hopes she’s able to give you that courage as well.”

Jon glanced at Davos warily. It wasn’t uncommon for the older man to bullshit him with supposed words of encouragement, but when he met the sincere grey eyes staring back at him, Jon had the grace to blush and lower his gaze. He doubted he was able to inspire anyone, but it did feel good to know Dany thought that highly of him.

“Any word from Varys or Tyrion?” he asked to change the subject.

“Only that Littlefinger remains uncooperative despite his hostage situation with Grenn and his cohorts,” Davos stated with a purse of his lips in thought. “Also Robert did go to Winterfell to pay his respects to your late stepmother. He spent a night at the castle, but has so far been making his rounds to other houses in the North. According to Varys, his last meeting was with the Karstarks.”

“Fuck.”

“My sentiments exactly,” Davos said dryly. “However, we’re yet to see any major moves from any of the fickle houses breaking faith with your family. But it’s early days yet. Dany’s debut, on the other hand, still seems to be making headlines. Many political pundits want her to challenge the Lannisters in a democratic election. Can you believe it?”

“Seems like a fair enough deal. How’s Tywin Lannister taking it?”
“Oh he plans to do some exclusive T.V. interview to address the so-called concerns of Westeros. It’s going to be broadcast on Thursday I think. I’m sure he’ll have to answer questions about his potential challenger. Should be interesting to see what he thinks of Miss Daenerys Targaryen.”

“As long as we get through this,” Jon replied with a grim smile. “All of that will mean shit if we’re not successful with Drogo.”

He stared at his right hand and flexed it gently. The effects of the painkillers were already wearing off. The familiar burning sting would happen again, and it would time to change his bandages.

_I have to be ready. No matter what._

“Are you scared?” Davos asked, and Jon knew it was going to be no use lying to the man he had now come to consider a mentor and friend.

“Yes,” he finally admitted, in a trembling whisper, as he closed his eyes and prayed for strength. “I am scared out of my fucking mind, Davos.”

“Good,” came the quiet sage words. “Let that terror drive you to victory, Jon Snow. Better is he who faces fear head-on than withers in its presence with false airs of bravado. You’ll be just fine, son. I know you will.”

One of the things he had come to learn about Dany was her odd love for bathing or showering with scalding hot water; an anomaly he could not understand. He had dared to dip his fingers into the tub this morning and had to suckle on his fingers in disbelief. It must have been over a hundred degrees!

“I have had fantasies of fucking you senseless in a shower, Dany,” he admitted as she wrapped the bandages around his hand with care. “But if you’re going to keep insisting on keeping the water that hot, we’re going to have a problem.”

“I only prefer it, I didn’t say it was a constant thing,” she protested with a laugh; a pleasant sight to see considering her emotions the night before. “You forget Dragonstone had no hot water for almost a week. I was in agony!”

“Speaking of Dragonstone, you do intend to show me around, right?”

She nodded; a shy almost hesitant motion of her head for she was now unable to look at him for some reason. Not to be deterred, Jon placed a hand beneath her chin to force her gaze up, and wasn’t surprised to see those violet gems shimmering with unshed tears.

“We’ll go back there,” he whispered; his voice thick with the lump forming in his throat. “I swear we will.”

Her lips quivered, but she could only respond with a hard kiss to the back of his hand; for Magister Illyrio was already yelling for them to come downstairs.

Qotho had arrived.

Both seemed to inhale and exhale at the same time, before Jon rose to his feet with an expression of quiet determination on his features. He was dressed in a well-tailored black suit; yet another gift from
Illyrio. Dany had suggested he wear a tie, but he refused, saying it felt like it was going to be a noose around his neck. She didn’t press any further. In turn, she was dressed in a pair of jeans so tight, it could have been painted on. A silk white blouse was beneath a black leather jacket, and a pair of six-inch high black boots completed the picture. Since Missandei wasn’t here to braid her hair in its usual intricate design, she had settled for a single braided ponytail which fell over her shoulder as she moved about getting their things together. He was also not blind to her choice to use darker make-up. She was usually fresh-faced or wore little, but her decision to darken her eyelids, enhancing its appearance with kohl or using dark red lipstick screamed gothic vixen; and Jon had a feeling she was slowly drifting back into Dothraki mode whether she realized it or not.

When they arrived at the courtyard, where Jorah and Davos stood to the side while Illyrio was engaged in conversation with the tall and muscular long-haired man dressed in a suit as well. His rumbling voice sent shivers of revulsion down Jon’s spine, but there was a dull nagging sensation forming in the pit of his stomach as he took note of the man’s long hair adorned with a couple of bells.

I know him…this guy…

“Ah, they are here at last,” Illyrio announced with a wave of his bejeweled hands. “Qotho, my friend, here is your former khaleesi and her current lover, eh?”

Even before he completely turned around, Jon now knew who he was. There was no way he could forget a face, especially not the one belonging to a man who nearly took off his head a few months ago.

“Ah…anha naqis lajak, it’s the little warrior. Long time no see,” Qotho greeted; as his dark eyes widened in recognition. His lips curved into a smirk of derision, and he gave a mock bow to Jon before narrowing his gaze; an icy expression coming into them as they fell on the woman beside him.

“It’s the bitch,” he cursed in Dothraki and spat at her feet. Jorah took a step forward in warning, but was stumped when Jon did the exact same thing. The expression on the Northerner’s face was enough to send chills down his spine.

Dear gods, he truly has the blood of the wolf in him.

“You want to do that again, asshole?” Jon threatened in a quiet growl. “I don’t mind kicking your ass here and now-”

“People, people, please,” Illyrio cut in quickly when Qotho looked ready to drive a fist into Jon’s face. “We’ve barely even said hello to each other like decent people. Let’s not get into a fight already, eh? Drogo will want to see them in one piece, wouldn’t he?”

Qotho muttered something again that Jon did not catch, but if the slight pressure of Dany’s hand around his was any indication, it was clearly another insult. Her features remained painfully expressionless, and it would occur to Jon that she hadn’t even greeted Qotho at all.

She did release him long enough to give Illyrio a long and warm hug of farewell, where they exchanged a few words in Valyrian.

“It’s been a pleasure to know you as well, Snow,” Illyrio said as he pumped Jon’s hand enthusiastically. “I sincerely hope it all ends for the best. I would hate to have to pick up your remains for a funeral.”

“Thanks for everything, sir,” Jon replied with a small smile filled with sincerity. For all his
eccentricity Illyrio had been a great host. “I promise to return…and not in an urn either.”

“There was a waiting SUV for their envoy for in addition to Qotho, there were two other silent Dothraki companions. They barked instructions to each other, though every now and then they would throw cold looks at Dany who was back to clutching Jon’s hand and making no attempt to hide it. She stared back at them defiantly, and at some point, she said something to one of the men who had spent most of the trip glaring at her.

“I told him to basically fuck off,” she explained when Jon asked.

“I’m thinking you’re going to have to teach me all the curse words in Dothraki,” Jon whispered, which earned a chuckle from her. “Something tells me I’m going to be saying that a lot soon.”

Dany smirked and kissed him. “Well, it’s going to be about an hour plus flight, so plenty of time to brush up on your skills.”

When they arrived at the airport’s tarmac, Drogo’s personal jet sat like a silent mechanical beast in waiting. They passed through a laissez-faire customs – where Jon was sure they had been paid off by Drogo – and soon found themselves settling into comfortable leather seats in first class settings.

Dany was quick to snuggle up to Jon; closing her eyes and effectively shutting down any possible conversation. Jon, who had assumed he’d be too tense to relax, found himself nodding off once the plane took off. Not having slept much the night before, he was more exhausted than he realized. Besides, with Jorah and Davos keeping watch, there was little chance they’d be jumped on by Qotho and his crew without being alerted.

In seemingly minutes, Jorah shook his shoulder to wake him up.

“We are here,” came the simple brusque declaration which had Jon’s skin breaking out in goosebumps.

_Drogo’s territory. Shit._

Dany was already awake; her gaze trained outside the window. Jon found it difficult to read her expression and wondered what she was thinking of. Her times with Drogo? The child she lost? The traumatic experiences? It wasn’t hard to see how tense she was all the same.

“Hey,” he whispered into her ear. “Come back to me, Dany.”

She blushed and arched into the kiss to her neck; her lips curving into a shy smile. “I’m here, Jon. Don’t worry.”

There was another sleek, black SUV waiting for them and as Jon surveyed his new surroundings, he marveled at the vast difference in locations. Where Pentos had been a claustrophobic sea of sights and sounds, this place felt like they had been dumped at the end of the world; only there was nothing but miles upon miles of tall elephant grass weaving gently around them. The airport was nothing but a strip of runway, with two hangers and a low building made of woven grass. Qotho and his crew were greeted warmly by the handful of staff, which helped to load Jon and Dany’s luggage into the car.

“What do you think?” Dany asked as she wrapped her arms around Jon’s and rest her chin on his shoulder. “It’s got a savage beauty, doesn’t it?”
“Yeah…and those aren’t fucking horses are they?” He squinted and pointed toward two towering bronze statues in the distance. “Holy shit, they’re huge!”

Dany chuckled and nodded. “Yeah. Those are the Horse Gates leading into Vaes Dothrak. It’s a sacred city for the Dothraki, and they do not believe in shedding blood when in there. So for Drogo to meet us here…I guess he maybe doesn’t want us to get into a fight.”

Jon would have called her out on her insincerity when they turned at the sound of Qotho’s voice rising. The Dothraki was on the phone with someone, and it was clear that whatever conversation was being had was not favorable to him. He was literally turning red in the face and looked ready to murder someone. Dany’s grip tightened around Jon.

“What’s happening?” Dany asked Jorah who was approaching.

“It appears Drogo wanted him to wait here for his arrival,” Jorah explained with a sigh of exasperation. “However Qotho’s upset because it wasn’t part of the plan.”

“Hardly enough to get him all red in the face,” Jon grumbled; and promptly felt the hairs at the back of his neck rise as he found himself staring into Qotho’s hateful eyes.

What now?

Qotho had turned off his device, but was now striding purposefully toward Jon, a torrent of Dothraki flowing from his lips as he came closer. Jon had no idea what he was saying, but if Dany’s shocked gasp and Jorah’s thunderous expression was any indication, it was clear this guy was saying something that was bound to piss him off.

He didn’t have to wait long.

“You follow trouble,” Qotho sneered in broken Common Tongue. “You…and that one with the hair that say he is your uncle. Blood of your blood, eh? He beg for us to leave you alone, but I…” He made a slicing motion across his neck; his teeth baring in his jest. “Me and Haggo…we cut him to pieces! And we cut you too pieces too! You and the bitch khaleesi who no able to give our great khal a son. Bitch who is open her legs for anyone. We all fuck her when we finish with you. We all-urgh!”

Jon had moved before he realized it; his fist now throbbing from the force of the punch he had delivered to Qotho’s face.

The big man was so surprised by the move, he nearly stumbled to the ground; though a thick dribble of blood now flowed from his mouth. He held his cheek in silent awe for a moment before breaking into a grisly grin as the blood lust flowed through him.

“It’s okay,” he growled in Dothraki. “Now I have the right to kill him.”

“No, Jon!” Dany cried out, but Jon was no longer listening; neither did he care. He should have guessed it was this bastard and his companion who had killed his Uncle Benjen. He should have guessed that these were the men responsible for ending the life of a man he had loved as much as his father, and learning that Benjen had gone to plead for Robert to spare him from whatever diabolical plan he had; only to lose his life in the process – made the pain even worse.

“You killed my Uncle Benjen!” he roared and charged forward like a raging bull; or would have if it suddenly didn’t feel as if a hundred pound boulder slammed into his back. He collapsed to the ground; the breath rushing out of him as the pain seared deep into his bones.
He was dragged to his feet by Qotho’s companions and held up on either side like an offering; both laughing and saying something about his fighting prowess as Qotho slipped on a pair of steel brass knuckles to his left hand.

“Stop it at once!” Dany was commanding in Dothraki as she ran before him to block his path. Her features were enraged. “You cannot do this!”

“You are no longer our khaleesi,” came the bitter statement as Qotho reached out to tug at her hair hard enough for her neck to arch at an uncomfortable angle. “Now get out of my way or else-”

“Harm a hair on her head and you’ll die, my friend,” Jorah warned as he pointed his sword at Qotho. “Let her go.”

“We all really should calm down,” Davos tried to get a word in; his features panicked and flushed with his frustration and concern. “We really shouldn’t…”

Whatever else he might have said was obscured at the rapid cloud of sand and dust from the convoy of cars approaching the tarmac. As all five vehicles pulled to a stop, doors began opening and slamming shut; revealing even more tall men in tailored suits; all bronze-skinned with oiled beards and long hair. Many had their arakhs attached to their hips, and a few others did favor having a conventional gun that would flash with the opening of a jacket.

They – about twenty of them in all – formed an intimidating perimeter around Jon and Dany, and as Jon was quickly released by his captors, who now actually seemed to be trembling in fear, he was finally allowed to take a good look at his nemesis.

Khal Drogo was a sight to behold, and it was easy to see why he was respected and feared by so many.

Though most of the Dothraki were tall, the khal seemed to tower them all with his stature and proud posture. His grey suit was easily the most expensive and fit his toned body perfectly. His bronze skin glowed beneath the light, and his hair was so long, it fell past his buttocks. Several gold bells accessorized it and they jingled like a sad song with every step he took. There was a hardened beauty to his carved features, and at the moment it was taut with impatience and annoyance as he surveyed the scene before him.

“Blood of my blood,” Qotho began as he released Dany and fell to his knees in greeting. The gesture was reciprocated by the other two Dothraki in their group, and even Jorah bowed in respect. Only Jon and Dany remained standing, and though he slid a cursory glance at Jon; almost dismissing him as nothing significant, his expression changed when he looked at Dany.

“Zhey jalan athirari anni, moon of my life,” came the husky greeting as Drogo reached out to caress her cheek with a tenderness that was surprising. “Did these men hurt you?”

He nodded toward Qotho and the others, and at Dany’s small nod, Drogo’s eyes darkened with fury.

He barked a single command, and in a move so swift no one saw it coming at all, Drogo grabbed one of his rider’s arakh to hack off Qotho’s head with a feral yell.

Jon forgot to breathe.

For a moment, Qotho’s body remained standing as Drogo walked away; absently wiping his bloody hands with a handkerchief, while Qotho’s head rolled toward Jon’s feet. Eventually the body
dropped to the ground like a log, and Jon found himself staring into Qotho’s eyes which seemed to
glower at him even in death. The blood, so thick it was black, was beginning to flow toward him, but
if he had thought the brutality was over, it was only beginning. There was another sharp command
from Drogo and the other two Dothraki - that had traveled with Qotho - were executed just as
efficiently by their fellow riders.

“Not the kind of welcome I wanted for you,” Drogo said in rather good Common Tongue. He
flashed a small smile at Dany and then focused on Jon; his expression unreadable. “But it is what it
is, yes?”

Jon stared into those stony dark eyes for a long moment as a cold reality soon hit him. He was
surprised to find a sudden calm come over him; a sort of inevitability that was almost exciting in a
morbid way.

I now know why I’m here.

He was going to kill Khal Drogo.

“Yes,” he finally replied with a firm nod of certainty. “It is what it is.”
So, this was a doozy of a chapter to write with a lot of thinking/researching/re-writes/and more thinking. It could be so easy to follow ‘what is expected’, but I came to realize that if GRRM had let Drogo live…just what kind of interaction would he really have with Jon Snow aside from what is expected aka unnecessary drama. Bottom line, this is my interpretation of that possibility, and I’m sure some of you might assume otherwise. That is, of course, completely your prerogative as there really is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to this.

Second, I had to break this into two chapters. That way it completes the ‘Dothraki Arc’ and I don’t leave you all hanging so much. There are still other loose ends to the overall story, so methinks we could be wrapping things within five chapters *crosses fingers*

So! With all that said, sit back and I really hope you do enjoy. It was emotional to write – especially the end – but I hope I did it justice.

Time, like the dying leaves of autumn, fluttered away as the convoy of vehicles made its way past the towering bronze stallions of the Horse Gate and into the heart of Vaes Dothrak.

She was thirteen again; wide-eyed with the taste of terror heavy on her tongue. She fully expected to turn around and see Viserys in the backseat, complaining as usual about one thing or another. She did steal a furtive glance just in case, but was only rewarded with the flushed and sweaty visage of Davos Seaworth. The heat of the East had made his skin a shade of ripe plum, and as he mopped his brow with a handkerchief, he finally noticed he was being watched.
“Forgive me, Your Grace,” he began in his thick accent. “Still not used to the weather, and I thought Pentos was a bloody sauna.”

Dany smiled. She always did get a kick out of his frank manner of speaking. “It gets better in the evenings; much cooler then…you’ll see.” *Ah, all the things you really will see, good sir.*

She met the unreadable dark gaze of Quaro; who had now unofficially replaced Qotho’s position as one of Drogo’s bloodriders. His flat features edged with scars from battles fought, were a grim reminder of the past, and she shuddered as unwanted memories came flooding back. Lowering her gaze, she turned her attention forward. She did not recognize their driver, but then again, most of the faces of the other members of Drogo’s *khalasar* sometimes blurred into one. Jorah was in the passenger’s seat; engaging in polite but banal conversation with the man who would only reply in monosyllabic sentences or grunts.

*It’s different now,* she told herself as her gaze drifted to her silent companion. *I am older…wiser…I hope.*

Jon seemed transfixed with the view outside his window and had been curiously quiet once the journey began. She had to remind herself that this was all new to him; that he hadn’t been there during those grueling years of survival. He hadn’t suffered through the humiliation and the pain laced with brief moments of happiness wherever she could get them. To him, all this was probably as strange as it would be to any first time visitor. She had feared he’d be too awed at the presence of Drogo and what he had done to Qotho and his companions; perhaps become wary and probably second-guess his decision to come here.

However, when he flatly declined Drogo’s offer to ride in the same vehicle, or rather Drogo had sent Cohollo – the oldest of his bloodriders – to ask Dany to ride with him, Jon had stepped in with a calm determination that surprised everyone.

“She rides with me,” he said with a pointed look at Drogo, who had been ready to get into his car. “If that’s okay with you…Your Grace.”

A part of Dany had worried that starting off on the wrong foot with the sometimes volatile *khal* could prove to be disastrous. At the end of the day, they had come here to negotiate and get in his good graces, so doing anything more to defy him was likely to have them all beheaded or sent back to *Westeros* empty-handed. Yet she found herself reaching for Jon’s hand and gripping it tight; her heart a snare drum in her chest as she met those impassive obsidian eyes that did not fail to notice the display of familiarity.

Drogo had dared to call her his ‘moon’ in Jon’s presence despite their troubled history, and Dany could have happily reminded him that she was no longer his.

*Whatever feelings I had for you died the moment I crossed the gate, Drogo. I have a new sun-and-stars in my life, my dear khal. You must understand that now.*

To her relief (and Jorah’s), Drogo only gave a curt nod to Cohollo and soon disappeared into the vehicle, leaving his bloodrider to usher them into another. Though Cohollo said nothing, his features did all the speaking. Drogo’s reaction was indeed a surprise to those already familiar with his ways.

She studied the blood stains on Jon’s suit; her fingers reaching out to brush them away as if hoping they’d vanish that way. He turned his head at the gesture; those eyes of mocha filled with an expression that was a cross between confusion and warmth. He was yet to let go of her left hand, as if perhaps to anchor her to him or to remind her that he was going to be by her side through it all. She would have nothing to fear.
“What’s with all the ruins?” Jon asked as he nodded toward the window. “I thought you said the Dothraki don’t believe in building things.”

Jorah, who had overheard this, replied quietly. “They don’t. These are remnants of the past; spoils of war from pillages of other lands. The Dothraki would gather them here and keep them as prizes, a way to intimidate their captives and remind them of their strength.”

These spoils were mostly in the form of either exquisite statues of gods, goddesses or fantastical creatures alike. Many had been left to ruin; their once marbled or bronzed skins now caked with layers of aged mold. Grass as tall as humans blended in with some of the relics, and Jon was sure he could see a strange animal or two weaving in and out of the structures.

“We should be arriving soon,” Dany said as she pointed head.

Roads of asphalt gave way to broad windswept streets hardened with baked earth. Some areas were covered with a thick blanket of wildflowers; trampled by Dothraki and their unwilling captives over the years. Ahead, bathed in a hazy gray and purple mist, were the mountains deemed Mother of Mountains where tradition dictated sacrifices be made for journey mercies or whatever else they prayed for. Beneath rose billowing clouds of smoke from a mish-mash of lodgings; a result of the different tribes the Dothraki had captured. Each had brought a little something of themselves; hence slaves were apt to build what they knew best. There were manses of woven grass as large as the Red Keep, marble pyramids with seemingly a thousand steps, carved stone pavilions, wooden towers that barely looked stable, and log halls that were opened to the sky. There were even palaces with walls that were nothing more than thorny hedges.

Signs of modern technology could be seen with skeletal phone lines or electrical grids in the distance, but for the most part, the Dothraki seemed content to remain stuck in the past. One was hard-pressed to find a lot of people wandering around with cellphones, headphones, or any other modern convenience.

Nothing has changed, was Dany’s first thought as the car wove through the designated roads. Time had simply stopped once she left; waiting for her return to remind her of all she had ever known.

Like then, she was faced with the harsh living conditions for most of the Dothraki and their captives. While most of the manses and pavilions remained empty, the true Dothraki preferred to live beneath sandsilk tents, dressed in their leathers and painted vests. Their sun-beaten skins glowed beneath the fading daylight; their eyes of midnight watching the procession of cars as if witnessing an anomaly. Mothers, children, and the old were the usual ones to line the streets, and once upon a time she had walked down these same streets as their khaleesi; unsure of what her role truly was yet determined to earn their respect.

I guess I’ve lost that now with my decision to flee, she thought with a rueful smile. If I step out of this car, I might get stoned to death.

If Qotho’s reaction had been any indication, she doubted there was going to be a party thrown in her honor.

“We’re here,” Jorah announced as the cars finally pulled to a stop before the largest timbered manse with a billowing silk tent roof. Several more of Drogo’s khas were waiting at the entrance along with a bevy of beautiful handmaidens; many Dany could not recognize. They looked much younger, and of course there was that underlying strain of fear beneath their polite smiles as they bowed in greeting to the khal who strode into the building with no real acknowledgment of his subjects.
Cohollo was waiting as Jon and Dany stepped out. However, Jon’s tightened grip and barely audible
gasp as some of the once stoic Dothraki guards gave loud primal yells and all but dove for the
waiting girls, had Dany giving a wry smile. Ah yes, she must have forgotten to mention that to Jon.
The Dothraki weren’t exactly shy when it came to displaying their sexual prowess in public.

“What the fuck…?” Jon asked in disbelief. Even Davos was slack-jawed at the wanton display, for
the poor girls were being taken right against the wall like rutting animals in heat. One in particular
seemed to have at least four guards fighting over her and eventually they took turns despite her loud
wails of pain.

“Let’s go,” Dany said quietly and tugged on Jon’s hand to lead him away.

*Once upon a time, I would have asked them to stop, but I fear I no longer have that power,* she
might have added, but was spared when a familiar face had her heart leaping in genuine delight.

“Do…Doreah!”

The young blond-haired woman from Lys, who had been the oldest of her handmaidens, broke into
a warm smile as she approached. She engulfed Dany in a hug; dispelling whatever fears she might
have had about one of her few friends no longer wishing to associate with her. Unshed tears burned
in her eyes as she inhaled the familiar sweet oils and spices that seemed to linger around Doreah. If it
wasn’t for the Lysene, Dany was sure her nights with Drogo might have been a hundred times
worse. Doreah was the one to teach her the tricks to pleasing a man (or woman), and needless to say
her lessons had paid off in more ways than one.

“Welcome back,* khaleesi,*” Doreah said in the native tongue with tears in her eyes as well when they
finally pulled apart. *“You are looking well.”*

Dany blushed and nodded shyly. *“You too. You look… different.”*

It was Doreah’s turn to blush as she looked over her shoulder, where Jhogo – a tall, handsome young
man who had been a member of Dany’s *khas*, walked toward them cradling a healthy baby boy in
his arms. His features were creased in smiles, and it didn’t take a scientist to figure out what must
have happened between them.

“Yours?” Dany asked, while trying to squash down the pang of envy and sadness to fill her.

“Yes, *khaleesi,*” Doreah said with a nod. *“Jhogo and I were wed twelve moons come the next. We
are lucky and blessed to have Mengo.”*

“You should hold him, *khaleesi,*” Jhogo invited as he held out the child.

“Oh, I couldn’t—”

“It would be our honor,” Doreah insisted.

Before she could protest further, the warm mass of flesh was thrust into her arms. He was only clad
in a leather skirt; his tiny legs kicking out as large black eyes stared at the silver-haired stranger above
him. A fisted hand reached out to touch her braid and tugged, causing the tears Dany had thought
she had under control to threaten to the surface again.

*Ah, if only…*

“He is strong,” she managed to say; her voice thick with emotion as she handed the child back to her
parents and forced a smile on her visage. *“And beautiful. You are indeed lucky.”*
Doreah must have finally realized just what this moment meant for Dany, for she shared a quick look with Jhogo and he seemed to get the message. He muttered something about feeding the child and left, but not before giving a curious glance at the newcomers who had been watching the proceedings with interest.

“And who is this?” Doreah asked while leaning closer to Dany with a mischievous smile. “This man who looks at us like so?”

“Oh…” Dany turned to Jon and Davos sheepishly. She had almost forgotten about them. “This is Jon Snow… a… uh…”

How in seven hells was she to introduce him? A mere friend? Goodness knows they had passed that stage, and she couldn’t declare him her sun-and-stars in front of anyone yet. It made things seem like it was set in stone; and as far as she knew she was the only one doing the hoping that things would indeed remain permanent between them.

“Good friends,” she finally said; glad that Jon couldn’t really understand the language to realize what she said. Not that her efforts to hide it did any good. Doreah’s blue eyes gleamed with knowing. Dany wasn’t fooling anyone.

“Your friend is quite handsome, khaleesi. He will be a good suitor, yes?” Doreah said with a nod and courtesy toward the foreigners. “You are welcome to Vaes Dothrak,” she said in the Common Tongue for their benefit. Dany had done her part in teaching her the language, and she was fairly good at it.

“Thank you,” Jon replied with an uncertain bow, since he wasn’t really sure how to respond to the greeting. Doreah’s reaction was priceless, for having anyone bow to her was an oddity in itself. She was but a mere handmaiden after all.

Dany chuckled and introduced Davos as well. The older man was quite intrigued with the customs and began peppering Doreah with questions as the Lysene led them into the manse.

“You seem familiar with her,” Jon prodded as they followed at a leisurely pace. There wasn’t really much in the way of an established theme when it came to the decor within the manse or rather no one had bothered trying to get an interior decorator. There were expensive pieces of art and sculptures littered in the different halls, and instead of chairs, the Dothraki seemed to favor wooden benches and lots of embroidered cushions which actually looked quite comfy.

“She was my handmaiden,” Dany explained as they walked up a flight of stairs. She could feel the eyes of the other handmaidens and more of Drogo’s men watching their journey with varying degrees of curiosity or simmering anger. “One of the few friends I had around here.”

“Ah…”

“Here you will stay,” Doreah was saying as she swept aside the sandsilk curtain – no doors apparently – to reveal her private quarters. Like every other room they had passed, it was filled with more pillows and cushions of feathers. The sleeping area was a mattress on the floor layered with the finest of silk sheets, handspun cottons, and thick furs. The walls flickered with orange glows from the oil lamps placed around the room. In the middle was a large stone pit, where its fire provided warmth and even more light.

Jon was already pacing toward an interesting wood carving to investigate, while Doreah and Dany watched him in silence.
“He is staying with you?” Doreah eventually asked.

“Yes…together,” she replied without hesitation.

The handmaiden’s lips quirked in understanding. “I will let the khal know then. He did say the Andal and his male friends were to stay in a different room.”

Dany frowned at that; knowing full well why Drogo would want her alone. She shivered and hugged herself; fighting the bout of nausea to rise at the recollection of the last time she laid with him. Her thighs quivered with the memory.

“Thank you for everything, Doreah. You have been kind to me.”

“It is good to have you back, khaleesi.”

They exchanged another quick hug, before Doreah left to show Davos and Jorah their sleeping quarters.

“Not much for privacy around here, are they?” Jon observed dryly as he began to shrug out of his stained clothing. His back was still throbbing from where Qotho’s goons had attacked, but it was bearable.

“It is their way,” Dany replied as she kicked off her boots and sank her toes into the soft carpeting.

She reached for him; caressing his swollen knuckles from his punch to Qotho. She closed her eyes and held his bandaged hand to her cheek. All the cuts, bruises, and scars he had received since she met him had all been for her sake, hadn’t it? And she knew he would probably take a great many more if it came to that. She sighed as his arm encircled her waist to pull her into a tighter embrace; his lips caressing her temple before placing a hard kiss to it.

“Are you cold?” came his low rumbled question. “You’re trembling.”

“No. I’m not,” she whispered. She could see some shadows behind the silk curtain and knew their moment of privacy was drawing to a close. “I’m fine…I just…” She looked up at him then; violet eyes brimming with worry. “I wanted to know what you thought about Drogo. You’ve already seen one of them,” Dany added quietly.

“He’s a character, and I can see why people are terrified of him, but so far he’s not really done anything to have my hackles rising. I mean he did kill that asshole who murdered Uncle Benjen.”

“Yeah…one of them,” Jon agreed; his lips tightening. “Haggo was his name, right?”

“He was the large one with the scar across his forehead. He was in the same car with Drogo, and he is one of his bloodriders. They are like brothers to him, so unless Drogo kills him like he did Qotho, I don’t see how you’ll be able to get your revenge.”

Jon took a deep shuddering breath. “I see…”

“We didn’t really come to kill, did we?” Dany asked; perhaps more to herself though the expression in Jon’s eyes now looked incredulous. “I mean, I’m not saying things might not take a bad turn, but we are here to negotiate…and the less bloodshed the better, right?”
“Wishful thinking, but we’ll keep that hope alive.”

“Pardon me,” came the curt greeting as Cohollo poked his head into the room. “The khal invites you to eat with him. He waits in the Great Hall downstairs.”

“What did he say?” Jon asked.

“Drogo wants us to have dinner with him,” Dany translated. She nodded to Cohollo and replied in Dothraki. “Tell him it will be our pleasure.”

Once Cohollo left, Doreah returned with two more handmaidens and a heavyset slave from Tyrosh who was lugging in Jon’s belongings. Before long, the Lysene fell into familiar routines of preparing Dany for a night with her khal, only this time the same treatment was given to the foreign man with the soul-searching gaze that seemed wise beyond his years.

Dinner was an odd affair to say the least.

Dany and Jon had been given the honor of seating right below the high bench, with Jorah and Davos flanking them. The meal consisted of roasted meats, platters of fresh fruits, and jugs of fermented mare’s milk, which Jon had a hard time getting down after learning exactly what it was. Minutes earlier, he had enjoyed the rather tangy flavor and had curiously queried about its contents. He probably shouldn’t have asked about the meat either, for when he heard it was horsemeat, his gag reflex went into overdrive.

Still he knew he couldn’t show any sign of ‘weakness’ in front of Drogo, who had barely said a word to him or Dany all evening. Besides acknowledging their arrival with a tip of his head, the khal had shown more interest in the half-naked women dancing on the low tables for entertainment, or the one or two drunken Dothraki who got into a squabble and had to punch each other into submission. The loser was, eventually, dragged outside by his laughing companions who might have mocked him for being such a weakling.

“So much for no bloodshed within the city,” Davos muttered dryly as he helped himself to another cup of the milk. He did rather enjoy the taste. “Looks like they don’t exactly follow their own rules.”

“There are no guns in here…or their arakhs,” Dany explained. “That is not to say they don’t engage in their brutal activities, but they do try to keep it down to a minimum.”

The hairs at the back of her neck prickled with awareness and not for the first time all evening. She was sure Drogo was watching her again, even though she had stolen a few glances to verify her theory. He would feign interest in whatever Haggo or Cohollo was saying to him, or would stomp his feet and bellow out words of encouragement to the fighters. He never uttered a word to her or Jon…or even Jorah, and having lived with him for so long, she knew it was best not to interfere. Whenever Drogo was ready to talk, he would do so.

“Aren’t you hungry?” Jon asked as he helped himself to a date. At least the fruit looked edible enough.

“I was never really a fan of horsemeat,” Dany confessed with a smile as Jon pretended to gag again. “Do you know I had to eat a raw horse’s heart when I was pregnant?”
Jon’s eyes widened at this. “You’re shitting me.”

“I shit you not. It’s part of their custom.” She grinned and patted her stomach. “Yeah, ate the whole thing and those things aren’t small either. Horses have humongous hearts.”

“You think?” Jon was studying her with such pure admiration; she could feel the color rising to her cheeks. “What did it taste like?”

“Hmmm…eating rubber,” she said while sticking out her tongue in disgust. “I don’t recommend it.”

“Thanks for the tip,” he said with a laugh, and before he could control himself, he leaned closer to kiss her cheek.

Dany stiffened and would have warned him about that, but Jon was quick to catch on with the immediate shift in atmosphere within the hall. Though it was only made up of mostly Drogo’s khas and the dancing women, they all had expressions of shock or fury on their bronzed features. Even the music stopped, and there was hardly a sound save for the crackling fires from the three large stone pits around the room.

“…well bloody hell,” Davos murmured as Jorah shifted uncomfortably beside him. “What now?”

One of the riders suddenly stood up to point at Jon; his lips rattling off a torrent of Dothraki that even Dany found a little hard to follow. She did know he didn’t approve of Jon’s display of affection, considering she was still the unofficial khaleesi despite her desertion. The Dothraki did not recognize divorce, so unless she was dead, she was technically still Drogo’s.

“What’s he so worked up about?” Jon asked even though he had a frown on his features and looked ready to defend himself just in case.

“It’s okay,” Dany began, but she could sense Drogo rising behind her, and she reached for Jon’s hand. If he dared do anything…

“Calm down, Kommo,” Drogo drawled in Dothraki as he sauntered past the couple to face the angry rider. “These are my guests, remember?”

Dressed in a pair of black leather pants that molded powerful thighs like a second skin, and a white cotton shirt that was unbuttoned to showcase his broad chest with its dark tattoos, Drogo placed a hand upon the rider’s shoulder and squeezed hard. Lowering his voice, he threatened almost amiably. “You will not insult them in my house. Now sit down and shut your mouth before I do it for you.”

He turned to face Jon and Dany, and looking pointedly at the northerner, he spoke in the Common Tongue. Though his accent was quite thick, Dany was still amazed at how much he had improved since the last time she was here. Back then stringing along five words was too tiring for him.

“You are ifak, so you do not know our customs,” Drogo explained with a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. “She is still my khaleesi, the moon of my life. You share her bed yes, but she will come with me again. I give you this for now.”

Ignoring the couple’s sharp intake of breath and Jon’s flushed features of growing rage; Drogo clapped his hands loudly and commanded that the festivities continue. When his subjects did as bid, he gave some instructions to his bloodriders before excusing himself for the rest of the night.

It wasn’t until the juice ran down his arm did Jon realize he’d been squeezing the date so hard it burst. Through his thinly veiled haze of anger, he observed the crushed fruit and wondered – for a
brief dark moment – how it would feel to have Drogo’s head in the same position. He would squeeze that proud face until it became nothing more than –

“I’m tired,” Dany suddenly said quietly. Her features were pallid, and she looked like she was going to be sick. “I want to go to bed, Jon.”

No one tried stopping them as they excused themselves as well, and it wasn’t until they were tucked beneath the warm covers of their bed, did she finally whisper the obvious against his chest.

“He’s going to use me as a bargaining chip, Jon.”

“He’s not taking you anywhere,” Jon replied curtly. His features had remained brooding since they left the Great Hall and neither felt particularly amorous tonight considering all they had witnessed. He almost seemed to be holding her with absentminded formality, for his mind was rattling with a million other thoughts.

Dany was unappeased. “He will want to keep me here and-”

He caught her chin and tipped it gently, so as to meet her worried gaze. “I won’t let him keep you here,” Jon reiterated succinctly. “I’m going to make him understand that you are no longer his even if I end up getting beaten to a pulp. I’m not going down that easily, and neither should you.”

“I-”

“I know you’re scared and this place brings back terrible memories for you, Dany,” Jon continued; his voice now a little kinder and soothing. “But you’ve changed. You’re no longer that thirteen year old who was content to let others dictate her future. You’re Daenerys Targaryen – the woman who changed the lives of millions by facing down tyrants and dictators, and you’ve been through enough shit to face someone like Drogo today. So, my dear Queen…you’ve got to drag that new and improved Dany to the surface again.” He smiled and wiped the tear that had made its escape. “I promised I’ll be by your side through it all, and I have no intention of breaking that promise. We can do this. Together.”

“Together,” she repeated in a trembling whisper.

He fell asleep soon after, but it would be a long time before she could truly relax. His words of encouragement would continue to spin within her mind until her lashes finally grew heavy with weariness.

*I am stronger now. I must not forget the blood of the dragon that flows through me and with you by my side, Jon Snow, I feel…no, I know I can do anything.*

The Dothraki Sea yawned endlessly before him. He was in the midst of dark red flowers as tall as his waist; giving the illusion he was wading in a sea of blood. However, something quite large, white, and familiar trotted confidently ahead of him, and he wasn’t that surprised to notice his companion, Ghost, blending in with the grass and almost getting lost amongst their swaying stalks.

“Don’t get too far ahead where I can’t see you,” Jon warned; hardly wondering why Ghost would be this far from his natural habitat.
However, Ghost paid him no attention – as usual – and was soon swallowed by the grass and flowers. Jon would have whistled for him when a terrifying sound erupted from the heavens; an unearthly screech that sent chills down his spine. Jon held up his hands to protect his gaze from the blinding sun, and noticed the bright red streak slashing through the endless blue summer sky. It looked like a comet of some sort, but it did not vanish. It hung in the air like an angry painter’s brushstroke; blazing brighter and brighter until he could look no more.

When he lowered his hands, it was to see them covered with blood so thick they stuck to his skin like molasses. He tried to wipe them against his pants, but no matter how much he tried to get them clean, they got bloodier and bloodier until he was standing knee deep in the congealing fluid where he was likely to drown if he didn’t –

“Hey, Jon! Wake up!”

Jon’s lashes flew open at the hard shake of his shoulder. His nightmare was still so fresh in his mind; he could only stare wild-eyed at Jorah who had awakened him. His entire being was as taut as a bowstring.

“Get dressed,” Jorah was whispering. “We ride with the khal this morning.”

Jon blinked in confusion. “Wha…what?”

“The khal wishes for you to join him and his bloodriders. Don’t ask me why.”

Jorah’s features gave nothing away, and Jon couldn’t tell if this was a trick or some elaborate plan on Drogo’s part. Either way, he rose as quietly as he could so as not to awaken Dany, and dressed in the provided leather riding pants and painted vest that exposed his arms. Pulling his hair back into a bun, he followed after Jorah and into a rather cool morning where the sun had barely broken past the mountains.

Behind the manse was an impressive stable with probably over fifty thoroughbreds eager to get started for the day. Drogo was already mounted on a lean red stallion; looking regal and fearsome in his traditional Dothraki garb. His thick long hair and mustachio shone with flaxseed oils, while those tiny golden bells tinkled softly with every movement of his horse. He merely greeted Jon with a nod; his features impassive and unreadable.

One of their slaves (Jon was more than aware that these people who did not have the same hard features of the Dothraki, and were more prone to look at the ground as they walked, were not here of their will) led a handsome stallion toward Jon. It was an impressive beast, its coat so black it shone wherever the light hit its powerful body. Already saddled and ready to go, Jon accepted the reins and caressed its neck; memories of a childhood spent riding around the grounds and forests of Winterfell rushing back to him. Gods, he missed home.

“You ride, yes?” Cohollo queried with slight impatience. His Common Tongue was passable, and as Jon nodded and swung himself onto the saddle, he met Drogo’s gaze again and he couldn’t be sure, but he might have caught a glimpse of satisfaction in those obsidian depths.

If this is a trick to get me out of the way, then he couldn’t have picked a better way of doing it.

Still, there was no backing out now, for with a sharp command, Drogo began leading the way; though Jon did not fail to notice that his bloodriders were giving him room to trot closer to their khal.

“It’s considered an honor to ride this way with him,” Jorah explained as he caught up to Jon.

“What kind of game is he playing?” Jon asked with a light frown. “Is he trying to get me comfortable
enough to take me out later?”

Jorah shrugged lightly. “I cannot say. But we must remain vigilant all the same.”

As their party of about thirty riders marched past the manse, Jon dared to look back at the building wondering if this would be the last time he saw it. He tried to picture Dany’s sleeping visage, now wishing he had done more than simply holding her. It might have been nice to share one last intimate moment, but a prudish part of him was still uncomfortable at the idea of making out in a place so relatively public. That goddamn silk curtain was barely enough to shield wandering eyes and ears from their activities; and considering Drogo’s clear warning last night, he didn’t want to put her in even more of a difficult situation. Who knew what the khal was capable of doing next?

His concerns aside, Jon did have to admit it felt good to be on horseback again. The undulating sensation of the magnificent beast between his thighs was almost enough to get him hard. He absently stroked the silky mane; the dusty ground seemingly miles below as they made their way down the broad streets aligned with roughshod tents and the now familiar smells of roasting meats and fermented milk permeating the air. Jon stared into curious black eyes that watched him with intrigue. He knew he and Jorah looked different from the others, and that they were considered ‘Andals’ – foreigners or ifak. He couldn’t help smiling at the children who began racing after the horsemen, chanting something that sounded like Lajak! Lajak! – which Jon knew meant ‘warrior’. He blushed as a beautiful young Dothraki woman presented him with what looked like a bowl of curdled milk. He could hear some of the riders behind him laugh and say something, and even Drogo managed a half-smile.

“She is interested in you,” Jorah explained as Jon politely declined the offer with a shake of his head. “…well it seems more of them are…”

For several other women were also lining up the side of the roads, all with various gifts of some kind to offer the newcomer.

“They have to accept at least one of them,” Haggo said to Jorah in Dothraki. “He has no taste in women…except for the khaleesi of course. Perhaps her white pussy has more magical powers than we thought.”

This had more of the riders roaring with laughter as Jon spared him a dark look; almost whirling his horse around to ram it into the smirking visage of the asshole responsible for taking his uncle’s life. He had no idea what Haggo had said, but with the mention of Dany’s title, he was no doubt making fun of her in some way. He might have said something just as rude, when a kerfuffle ahead caused a distraction.

Approaching them was another of Drogo’s khas – about ten men on horseback, leading a long line of roughly thirty weary men, women, and children. They were of olive skin, most with slightly effeminate features, and their clothing consisted mostly of wools and headscarves. Many had piercings on their noses, chins, and tongues, while others sported elaborate tattoos on their faces and bald heads. The riders would bark orders every now and then, lashing out at the slow ones with leather whips that cracked loudly against flesh accompanied by wails of agony and the cacophony of crying children. The reason for the scuffle was one of the slaves had tried to make a break for it, and two of the riders were currently whipping him into submission. His wife (probably) was on her knees, shrieking for them to stop in her native tongue, while two small children clung to her; their faces just as fearful and flushed with tears.

Jon couldn’t believe what he was witnessing. Such brutality, to innocents, was enough to have him gripping the reins tight enough to have his still healing hands to sting with pain.
“What are they doing?” he asked quietly, and then raised his voice loud enough for Drogo to hear. “What the hell are they doing? Make them stop!”

When Drogo simply spared him a glance, Jon cursed beneath his breath and brought his horse to a halt. He leapt off and reached for the wrist of the rider just as the whip was about to make its descent again. For once he was glad this particular Dothraki wasn’t as tall as the others. It would make this relatively easy.

“I think he’s learned his lesson, pal,” Jon said coldly; as he met the surprised dark eyes. “Let him go.”

The Dothraki stared at Jon as if he was a creature from the depths of Hell. He looked back at his partner and then at Drogo, who was still observing things with quiet insolence.

“Who the fuck are you?” the rider finally growled in Dothraki. “Let me go, you goddamn foreigner!”

He made to push Jon aside, but thanking the gods for his relatively slight build, Jon was able to duck nimbly. He wound the whip around the rider’s neck and tugged it hard enough for the man to grunt in pain and fall to his knees. The second rider with the whip dashed forward to help his friend, but Jorah was already off his horse to block him; a stern frown on his features.

“They are already your slaves,” Jon said firmly, nodding to Jorah to translate. “So you might as well treat them with a little more dignity than you’re providing them right now. You will take them to their camp, or wherever the hell they stay, and not deliver one lash to them anymore. If that’s okay with your king that is…”

He raised a brow at Drogo, who had been watching this exchange with interest. After Jorah’s translation, he broke into an uncharacteristic grin and barked something to his riders, which had them laughing raucously.

For a moment Jorah looked like he wasn’t going to translate, but he finally did with a soft sigh. “He says that they should listen to the little angry warrior before he…wets himself.”

Jon felt his features burn with humiliation at the insult, but he wasn’t going to give Drogo and his khas the satisfaction of knowing it bothered him. He released the rider and stepped back with a smirk. “Better I wet myself than know I was a coward to treat others like shit. I wouldn’t want to live with myself after all that. You can translate if you want.”

He got back on his horse, smirking as he noticed the smug expression was off Drogo’s face. The man must have understood what Jon said, for with another curt command, he continued leading the way toward the mountains.

The rest of the ride was relatively uneventful, though it did give Jon a chance to appreciate the expanse of land which made up Vaes Dothrak. Far from the pollution of Kings Landing and Pentos, the air felt rich and fresh; the way it was meant to be. Jorah took the time to explain its history, telling Jon of all the great battles won and lost and how the grass sea could be intimidating to would-be attackers; not that the Dothraki had anyone foolish enough to want to deal with them. They were formidable fighters especially in open fields like these.

They must have traveled for miles, and it wasn’t until they stopped for a break beneath the welcome shade of an abandoned pavilion, did they finally get a chance to eat. Jon sat as far away from the khas as possible, choosing to study them as he leaned against a vine-riddled column while tearing into thin slabs of dry horsemeat washed down with sweet wine (thank goodness). Jorah sat beside him, but was quiet; content to chew slowly on his food. Jon noticed that Drogo was ‘alone’ as well –
well as alone as he could be with his bloodriders and khas chattering and howling away in various clusters around him. For a leader, he was actually not much of a talker. Yes, he did bark his commands and demanded loyalty that way, but for the most part, Drogo seemed more content to remain lost in his thoughts.

“I wonder how old he is,” Jon murmured to himself.

“Three and thirty come two moons,” Jorah replied anyway. “He is still a young man all things considered. He came into power just after he turned eighteen, and had to really earn the respect of his khalasar believe it or not. If you think he’s an asshole, you should have heard about his father, Khal Bharbo. He makes Drogo look like a fucking saint.”

Jon gave a noncommittal grunt and polished off the rest of his meal. He hadn’t realized how hungry he was. According to his watch, it was just past noon where the sun was at its peak. It was causing the leather vest to stick to his skin making it itch in places. However, he would be given no more opportunities to ponder on his discomfort, for Drogo was back on his feet, where with a sharp “Akkovaras!” they were forced to mount their horses again for the journey back home.

Dany had been a nervous wreck for most of the day.

She was doing a good job keeping it under control as she helped change Mengo’s soiled diapers while staring – for the umpteenth time – at the clock on the wall. Jhogo had left with the riding party as well, so Doreah was all alone with the baby and Dany was too wired up to remain in the manse by herself. She had dragged Davos along with her, and though he had done his best to distract her with news from Westeros, he gave up after she kept replying in monosyllabic sentences. He was currently outside, engaged in broken Common Tongue conversation, with two Braavosi traders passing through the city.

To say Dany was worried about Jon’s excursion with Drogo was an understatement. No one had given her a heads up about it, and waking up to an empty bed was nearly her undoing. It didn’t help that word about Jon’s act of bravery, for the slaves from Volantis, was spreading around like wildfire. Though her heart had burst with pride at what he’d done, her head was screaming otherwise. She was sure Drogo wouldn’t let such a thing go that easily, and there was no doubt Jon’s life was definitely in danger. Goodness knows she had been tempted to dash to the stables, steal a horse (her Silver was no longer around unfortunately), and find them. She just might have done it, if it wasn’t for Davos convincing her to wait things out.

Please come back safe and sound to me. We promised to get through this together, Jon. You have to make it back to me.

“You are so good at this, khaleesi,” Doreah praised as Dany finished and tickled the baby’s stomach. His responding chortle was too adorable. “I thank you.”

“I had a good teacher,” she reminded the Lysene; recalling memories of when she and her other maidens would spend hours learning all about raising babies including how to breastfeed, watch out for potential illnesses, change diapers, and everything in-between.

“I wonder what happened to Irri and Jhiqui,” Dany queried in a quest to change the subject. “I have not seen them.”
Doreah’s features fell as she cradled Mengo against her chest and released a swollen breast to his hungry lips. “Irri was sold to a Pentoshi merchant for about ten slaves, and Jhiqui…she died from an illness no one was able to heal. Some say it was the curse of the maegi, but I think it was because she was forced to bed several members of Khal Ogo’s men one night. There were at least ten of them that took her…she never recovered from it.”

Dany felt her blood boil at the news. Jhiqui had been quiet and thoughtful, as well as responsible for teaching Dany the language. To think she had died in such a manner…how cruel.

“But you must eat something, khaleesi,” Doreah stated quietly when she noticed Dany staring out the window with worry. “I am sure the khal will not dare harm your friend.”

Dany couldn’t help scoffing. “I thought you knew who Khal Drogo was. If he has every intention of killing Jon then…then…”

*I’ll have no choice but to take matters into my own—*

“You worry too much, khaleesi,” Doreah said with a small smile. “The khal might be cruel, but he will never do anything to make you upset. I think he learned that lesson the hard way after…that day.”

That day being the day she lost their baby. It was true Drogo’s attitude had changed, but Dany wasn’t all too sure it was for the better. At least he hadn’t sent his khas to kill her immediately after her decision to run away, so he might still have a bit of good in him.

All the same, it would have been nice to call Jon to check up on him, but the sight of his phone still in the pocket of his pants had squashed that plan. And as much as it killed her, Dany knew she could do nothing but simply wait and pray for the best.

She was jarred from her uneasy doze at the sound of the lone horn blast signaling the return of the riders. She sat up so quickly, her laptop nearly crashed to the floor. However, that was the least of her worries as she all but jumped to her feet and stepped out to the terrace to watch their arrival with her heart lodged somewhere in her throat.

It was dusk; and the sky had taken on a rather picturesque shade of plum and burnt clay. It silhouetted the men in shadows of amethyst and gold, as they trotted back like proud warriors from battle. Once upon a time she might have been pleased at the sight of Drogo leading the cavalry; looking so tall and strong on his horse where every eye was immediately drawn to him like a magnet. That barbaric charisma was still there, as obvious with the many maidens giving him googly eyes of adoration, but to Dany, it no longer meant much to her. For riding next to Drogo—well just about as close as he could get without being an official bloodrider—was Jon; looking every bit the part of a Dothraki in the traditional garb. From her vantage point nothing looked out of place; no missing limbs or his head being paraded on a stick. After witnessing his almost maniacal driving skills firsthand, to see Jon riding that beauty of a horse caused her heart to skip a beat. He might not have been as tall or muscular as Drogo, but he looked rather majestic on the creature all the same. It was as if he had been born to ride and simply belonged with the khas.

She clutched the rail as he seemed to finally sense her presence and looked up; his eyes glowing with a sexy confidence that caused the forming wetness between her legs to nearly soak her panties. She
blushed at his knowing smirk; causing her to shake her head at his cheekiness.

Unfortunately, whatever eye foreplay they could partake in was ruined when she sensed Drogo watching them. Dany caught her lower lip between her teeth and took a deep breath. That little girl might have returned to cowering in fear, but as Jon’s whispered words from the night before filled her mind, she took a deep breath and held her ground. She stood a little taller; the thin cotton blouse brushing against nipples that were already stiff with her desire for the man she now loved. She held Drogo’s obsidian gaze defiantly, though giving a barely perceptible nod of acknowledgement at his kindness for bringing Jon back home in one piece. Dany felt if she were back in medieval times, she might have tossed a ribbon or a flower to Jon just to make that point clear.

She refused to be shamed for her feelings.

The old Dany was dead and gone. They would simply have to get used to that.

“So?” she asked impatiently once they were in the privacy of their room.

They were finally able to get a breather, for once Jon was done with his bath, they were asked to join the khal for dinner again. Unlike the first night where Jon had tasted each meal with caution, the excursion must have made him ravenous. He dug into any and everything brought before him; no longer questioning what they were. He did refrain from the fermented milk. His palate would simply not agree with the alcoholic beverage.

“Not that interesting,” Jon confessed with a low moan of pleasure as she urged him to lie on his stomach before straddling his thighs. She dipped her hands in the warm bowl of flaxseed oils Doreah had brought in earlier, and rubbing them together, she slowly and thoroughly began to massage away the tight knots around his shoulders and back.

His exposure to the warmer weathers – from Kings Landing to Dorne and now Essos, had given his skin a light caramel complexion that suited him. In this position, she could truly appreciate his strength. Years of living in the hard North had given him firm muscles that didn’t look too bulgy or grotesque on his physique. There was still a purplish bruise from where Qotho’s cohorts had hit him, and she focused on that region; going easy when he hissed in pain and arched at her touch.

“We just rode around for a bit and did nothing else,” Jon murmured; his voice slightly slurred for he was already getting sleepy. “Guess he just wanted to go sightseeing.”

“Hmm…and he didn’t…well…do or say anything to you? Especially after what you did with the slaves from Volantis? By the way…” She leaned down to place a reverent kiss on his right shoulder. “That was so brave…stupid…but brave of you.”

“Funny,” he replied with a soft chuckle. “Jorah told me you did the same thing a long time ago. Guess we just can’t help being stupid, huh?”

She sank her teeth into his flesh playfully; his shivered response not helping her swelling desire to ride him until he begged for mercy.

“But yeah,” Jon groaned as her fingers worked on his aching muscles. Gods, she was good at this. “He’s a bit odd actually. He doesn’t really talk much…keeps to himself most of the time we stopped for rests and if he did talk, it wasn’t for very long.”
Dany’s hands slowed a little; her brows furrowing with thought. “Yes…he is like that. He’s a man of little words…more content to let his actions do all the talking.”

Well except for that one time he had launched into a speech just before killing her brother. Dany had never seen Drago that passionate before, and she was almost ashamed to admit it had turned her on so much; she hadn’t minded being taken over and over again that night despite her pregnant state.

“How…guess that’s what makes him a good king, eh?” Jon mumbled; forcing her thoughts back to the present. He winced as her hands trailed down to his buttocks. “Fuck, my ass still hurts like hell. I’d forgotten how tough it could be on saddle after a while.”

Dany chuckled and smacked said ass (which was quite a magnificent piece of work…and hadn’t she clutched it a few times already to verify her theory?), though she was quick to soothe his mock whine of pain with a tender caress of the firm globes. She could see the bruises he had acquired and could sympathize with his plight.

“I had saddle sores for weeks,” she recalled with her nose scrunched up in disgust as she recounted the memories of her first days of riding. “I think I must have bled like crazy for a while. Not fun.”

“Hmm…we have horses in Winterfell…beautiful beasts…when we go there…we’ll ride together…”

His voice was getting thicker now; the cobwebs of sleep finally creeping in. Despite her wish to take him, he was already so tired; she didn’t have the heart to push him any further. By the time she was done with her full body massage, Jon was already snoring lightly; his parted lips glistening with just a light sheen of drool that made her chuckle. She tucked away the supplies, washed up, and stepped out of the sleeveless cotton sheath she’d been wearing. Slipping beneath the covers, she wrapped her arm around his comatose form and pulled him closer until he was cradled against her bosom like a babe.

She absentmindedly brushed away tendrils of curly hair from his forehead and looked out the window and into the Vaes Dothrak night sky. Once she might have looked at those sparkling stars and wondered if her fate was to die in this land of sand and grass. Yet…ten years later, she had returned to a world that was still not as welcoming; only this time the circumstances were different. While she had been a naïve infant eager to please and find her place, she had returned as a woman ready to reclaim her place in a society that could be cruel.

She had no idea what the future held for them here, and her brief conversation with Tyrion and Missandei, was a grim reminder that Time was not on their side. Her popularity was indeed growing in Westeros, but at the same time, her supporters were growing impatient. They needed to see more of the future Queen, and her detractors were already trying to turn public opinion against her. The ‘Disappearing’ Queen, they would mock. Where was she now? Just like her mad father, Aerys, she was likely to lock herself away in her castle and not concern herself with the woes of her people. What sort of queen was that? She was simply all talk and no action. Westeros did not need that.

**Please be patient. We need just a little more time. One does not simply rush the Dothraki.**

As for Drogo, and his sudden interest in Jon, she was still skeptical about his intentions. For all she knew, Drogo might simply be stringing them along, but the gods knew she would do all she could to protect and keep Jon safe…even if it was at the expense of her life.

Shekh ma shieraki anni, she whispered into his hair with a tender kiss, causing her cheeks to blossom a lovely shade of pink as she imagined saying those words aloud for everyone to hear and acknowledge.
Someday…

She closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep; the steady rhythms of his heartbeat sounding like the drums in a Dothraki war dance that barely masked faint unearthly shrieks she might have heard once before…many, many lifetimes ago when dragons ruled the skies.
The Dothraki Sea yawned endlessly before him. He was in the midst of withered grass the shade of burnt copper; some as tall as him until he felt he was being swallowed by their slender stalks. There were three suns in the sky, yet he felt no heat as he shielded his eyes from their bright glare. In the distance, that unearthly screech called to him, but he felt no fear this time. He had heard that sound before…many lifetimes ago he was sure. Familiar trotting steps forced him to lower his gaze; hardly surprised to see Ghost on his haunches with what appeared to be golden crown, adorned with brilliant blood red rubies, clutched between his teeth.

“What do you have there, boy?” Jon asked as he reached for it, but a rough shake of his shoulder had him turning around and looking into Jorah’s features.

What now?

“Come,” Jorah invited with a tilt of his head. “The khal wants us to ride with him again.”

The khal…ah fuck.

Jon groaned and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. The weird dream would fade away just as quickly leaving him with lingering tendrils of Ghost fading into the never-ending sea of grass. A glance to his right showed that Dany was still fast asleep; something he wished he could be doing right about now. Hell, it was still dark outside. Didn’t the Dothraki ever sleep?

“Seven hells,” Jon grumbled as he rose to his feet with great reluctance. “How long do I have to keep doing this?”

“Until he gives us an audience,” Jorah replied with a rueful smile; trying hard not to notice that both were nude. He was grateful for Jon covering up her body, before excusing himself quickly to allow him to get ready.
Three fucking days and counting, Jon mused as he dressed and shuffled downstairs barely holding in a yawn of weariness.

As usual, Drogo and his khas were already waiting, and with that now familiar curt nod in greeting; Jon mounted his horse – which he named “Shadow”; perhaps some roundabout tribute to Ghost since he was as black as Ghost had been white.

He was again allowed to ride next to Drogo, and though a few of the riders still had masks of disapproval, most were already more concerned with what lay ahead and did not think anything of the honored position. They had come to grudgingly accept that the new Andal was going to be a part of their daily rides whether they liked it or not.

It was a rather predictable routine now. Ride all day, come home late in the evening, have dinner with the khal where he never spoke to Jon or Dany, before retiring for the night. To their surprise, he was yet to make good on his promise to claim Dany, and a part of Jon couldn’t help wondering if this was really all just a game to Drogo. Was he hoping Dany would eventually give in and go to him willingly? If so, he was going to have to wait a long time for that to happen.

So far Dany kept herself busy by attending to baby Mengo; a sight that left Jon feeling solemn. It entertained thoughts he didn’t want to think about especially when it came to his upbringing and its possible ramifications. In some way, he had resigned himself to living to old age without an offspring. Robb, Bran, and Rickon were more than enough to continue the Stark legacy. Jon’s role was just about insignificant in the grand scheme of things. It still didn’t stop him from having those particular fantasies of one day coming home to the happy cries of ‘Daddy!’ or having to cradle a newborn like Mengo; only he’d probably have silver hair or violet eyes like his mo…

…but he digressed.

In addition to babysitting duties, Dany also walked the streets of the city getting reacquainted with the few old friends she could remember. According to Davos, she was seen as a refreshing change from some crotchety women of the dosh khaleen, and Davos did rather enjoy their outings where he got a chance to meet even more foreigners from strange and distant lands. Who knew Davos had an interest in photography? His digital camera’s gallery was probably filled, at this point, with rather interesting subjects.

Davos’s hobbies aside, Jon was happy to see Dany mingling with the people again, but it was a bit surprising to know he too was becoming quite popular with the smallfolk. Their canters through the city presented him with friendlier expressions, especially from the slaves who seemed to view him as a champion for their cause. It was hardly a title he wanted, but it was nice to receive blessings and handmade gifts he could not accept with good conscience. Oddly enough, there were no more skirmishes – at least not known to him – between the riders and their captives. It wasn’t to say that their quality of life had improved, but Jon did hope it was a little more bearable.

“It’s hard to try to change their ways,” Dany had warned him the other day as she helped change the bandages on his hands. The blisters were healing well, and holding onto the reins for long periods wasn’t as trying. “Sometimes patience is really a virtue.”

Patience.

It was a weird thing to associate with the Dothraki considering their desire to claim and pillage whatever they valued. Yet, there was an unhurried way about them that was almost enviable. It would take Jon a while to realize exactly what it was that made them ‘different’, and it wasn’t just about their barbaric antics or sexual freedoms. It was their indifference to the modern world. They simply didn’t rely on television, cellphones, or computers. Sure those devices were available, but no
one felt the need to really make use of them. None of the riders would be caught dead texting or chatting on a phone while in the presence of their khal, and these daily rides were an opportunity to enjoy the beautiful lands and what they had to offer. It made communication between the men more meaningful instead of simply staring at a tiny screen waiting for written and impersonal responses.

Not that Jon was ready to completely give up on those yet. When he wasn’t too tired after a day’s ride, Davos and Dany would give him and Jorah updates on what was happening back home. It was the way he learned of the attempts to discredit Dany’s legitimacy, and it was a grim reminder that every moment spent here was of dire importance. It was why he hoped Drogo would finally grant him that elusive audience. As much as he was enjoying the sights and sounds of Vaes Dothrak, they would eventually have to move things along if they hoped to get anything done. Besides, Robb had finally sent him an email and he really wanted to read -

“Argh! What the fuck?!”

The sudden bump to his rear was so hard and unexpected; Shadow neighed loudly and stood on his hind legs in protest. Jon’s grip loosened on the reins for a heart-stopping moment, and he felt his center of gravity tilting him to the side where he might have tumbled off the horse and to the ground in the most painful fall yet. However, quick reflexes kicked in, making him reach for the leather straps again to right himself. His whispered commands of comfort to his frightened steed eventually had Shadow settling down, and Jon whirled around to face the cause of his near accident.

“Sorry,” Haggo drawled in thick Common Tongue; his features anything but apologetic. Several of his cronies – and there were about five of them who hung around him all the time – cackled at this.

“You move like snail, ifak,” the older man continued with a cruel smirk. “You make us go like snail. You go like wind if you want lead.”

Jon’s jaw clenched until they ached, his gaze burning with the intensity of his hate for this man. It was clearly a dare; and it appeared that this was something the rest of the khas were in favor for someone shouted something and the next thing he knew, the rest of the riders were now encircling them with hoots, hollers, and chants that sounded eerily like “Dik! Dik! Dik!”

Jorah made his way to closer to Jon. “They want you two to race…to see who’s faster, but you don’t have to do this, Jon. It’s clearly a taunt.”

“And he expects me to chicken out,” Jon replied through thinned lips. He hadn’t torn his gaze from Haggo, who was still openly sneering at him. The level of disrespect was just too much to bear, and Jon could feel the familiar flickering flames of rage intensify within him until he was sure he’d be scorched if he didn’t release it in some way. It was almost akin to how he had felt when he lost Ghost; an insatiable need to get someone’s blood on his hands.

“What is this?” Drogo asked sharply as he galloped through the throng to study the glaring men. Jorah took the time to explain, and when he was through, it was not surprising to see Drogo’s eyebrow raised with interest. He was never one to miss a good challenge, and besides, it would be good to see just how well the Andal could hold his own against one of his strongest riders.

“Let it be so!” he bellowed in Dothraki, causing his riders to holler even louder in approval. This was definitely one of the more entertaining things to happen on their excursions, and Jon had no doubt those who didn’t like him longed to savor his defeat.

Like hell he was going to let that happen.

Drogo was saying something and with a motion of his hand, he urged the challengers to come to the
“You start here,” Drogo said in Common Tongue; his dark eyes flashing with an expression that was a mixture of amusement and excitement. “You end at where tree look like back of *adra*. First to tree is winner. The other go in shame. Yes?”

Jon had a feeling ‘shame’ in this case meant probably losing one’s head, and as he met Jorah’s worried expression, Jon knew this was a risk he’d have to take. He apologized to the older man without saying a word and cantered to the starting line. He could make out the ‘*adra*’ tree, which was indeed curved like a turtle’s shell. It was about five miles away…not much of a distance all things considered. It wouldn’t be too much of a challenge for a powerful horse like Shadow. Just how powerful though? Jon was about to find out.

Haggo snarled something to him in Dothraki; his pale stallion breathing heavily with excitement beside them. Jon paid no attention; his entire being attuned to the task ahead.

He took a deep breath and closed his eyes; trying to will himself into a state of calm. He was six or seven-years-old again, and Uncle Benjen was helping him onto a horse…much smaller than Shadow, but not quite a pony either.

“All it would take was a firm squeeze of his legs and a powerful roar of ‘yah!’ for the race to begin. For if Haggo had dared them to be like the wind, Jon Snow and his Shadow did just that.

Dany did get a horse of her own after all.

It might not have been Silver, her beautiful white horse which had been a wedding gift from Drogo, but he was gorgeous all the same. His chestnut coat shimmered beneath the afternoon sun as she and her handmaidens, with Davos, made their way toward the Eastern Market where traders from Yi Ti, Asshai, and beyond, paraded their wares with infectious exuberance.

Dany had always loved visiting the markets as they had been opportunities to get away from the tedious routines back home. The sight of so many thousands of caravans, trucks, and cars, from all over Essos descending on Vaes Dothrak for a few weeks at a time, was thrilling to the senses.

She recalled the first time she got to meet the beautiful dark-skinned warrior women from Bayasabhad; who seemed to favor adorning iron rings in their nipples and rubies in their cheeks. They weren’t averse to teaching the beautiful young bride new tricks with their exotic weapons, and for a while, Dany entertained their rather personal teachings until one tried to cop a feel of her breast. Jorah had to step in to stop it from going any further.

Today, she was not averse to conversing in Valyrian with the women from Shamyriana and Kayakayanaya and purchasing one or two of their forged steel daggers for Tyrion and Greyworm. From a stall of a Shadow Man, who was rather scary with his full-body tattoos and masked visage,
she purchased a supposed magical gemstone that was quite beautiful when held up to the light. It 
came in a necklace and bracelet set that she was sure Missandei would love though she doubted their 
magical capabilities. From a tall, pale, and soft-spoken Qartheen trader, she purchased a music box 
carved from old ivory and terracotta for Monterys. She was sure the boy would get a kick out of 
seeing the tiny colorful piper spinning around with its catchy medley of songs.

More gifts were purchased for others, but Davos proved to be a riot when dealing with some of the 
traders or testing out some free sampled foods. The poor man nearly choked on a plate of tree eggs 
and green noodles and had to be given a flask of peppervine to wash it down. When he wasn’t sure 
he was going to die of a heart attack, he danced with several lovely ladies from Myr, while street 
musicians entertained them with joyous songs.

She was eventually dragged into the festivities by a dwarf, who was adorned in velvets and 
emeralds. No one was quite sure what region he came from, but he was quite entertaining. Between 
dancing with Dany, and cracking them up with jokes, he even went as far as performing magic tricks 
to the delight of his adoring crowd. The children squealed in delight and couldn’t get enough.

At the end of his act, however, he motioned for Dany to bend to his level, where he whipped out a 
simple crown of blue roses from seemingly nowhere to place them upon her head.

“For the future Queen of Westeros,” he whispered in her ear with a knowing wink, and not waiting 
for her response, he lifted his voice to bellow “All hail the Queen!”

Dany felt the color filling her cheeks as the crowd picked up the chant; her hands reaching up to 
steady the crown before it could fall off. As pleasing (and embarrassing as this all was) it was rather 
odd to be announced in such a way, and she wondered if he had actually come from Westeros. 
Unfortunately, when she looked down to query him about that, her laughter faltered for he was 
nowhere to be seen. He, and his cart of oddities, had simply vanished.

Davos and her handmaidens were just as befuddled, and Dany had to touch her head again to make 
sure the flowers were actually there. She wasn’t crazy. They weren’t all crazy. They had really seen 
the dwarf, hadn’t they?

“They sometimes say that the maegi appear at these bazaars,” was all Doreah could say as if to 
reassure Dany. “It is known, khaleesi.”

“Me nem nesa,” her handmaidens agreed, but Dany was too preoccupied as she lowered the crown 
to study the exquisite petals. They almost didn’t look real for she’d never seen flowers this shade of 
blue before. However, lifting it to her nose, the subtle scent was enough to make her heart ache with 
a feeling of longing and inexplicable loneliness.

Jon, she thought as the shadows of dusk hovered around them like restless spirits. We might be 
running out of time.

Jon was sure he had exhausted all possible ways of getting a real good rush in his lifetime. There was 
the first time he had dared to smoke a joint, with Robb, the first year of high school. Talk about 
having your mind blown. There was the time he had his first official kill during a hunt; scary yet 
intoxicating. Then the first time he got a real good orgasm; and not the one-minute pathetic panic-
stricken one he had experienced as a virgin. He couldn’t remember her name, but it had really felt
good to have an extended release without having to apologize like a bitch afterwards. And then there was, of course, the night he had taken Dany (or was it the other way around?) in that musty library in Dorne. Those were moments where he felt his erection would leave him unable to walk for days, but today… today with Shadow?

Seven hells!

Shadow was the wind.

He was sure his stallion’s hooves had not touched the earth; for there was simply no way to explain just how fast the beast had moved. It was as if Shadow had known how important this race meant to his rider for Jon hardly gave any commands of encouragement.

The result? Haggo was left licking their dust.

“You were amazing!” Jon said with a laugh of pure delight as he rubbed Shadow’s neck and placed a hard kiss on his forehead. Gods, he was still throbbing from the adrenaline rush, and he was sure Shadow might have raced all the way to Pentos if allowed. Unfortunately, it was all Jon would be able to do before being swamped by cheering riders, who either patted his back, or called him “haj lajak!” (strong warrior) before hoisting him on their shoulders and parading him around in a victory dance.

Even Jorah had to smile at the sight until it faltered at the expression he noticed in Drogo’s eyes. Was that possible admiration? It was hard to believe, but Jorah was sure of it. It was the same look that had finally earned him Drogo’s trust all those years ago, and to think that Jon Snow – this northern fool from Winterfell – had finally managed to do that…the gods were clearly on their side. Wouldn’t Dany be surprised at this turn of events? It was probably more than they hoped for.

The celebration went on for a while; no one paying much attention to the loser and his group of five sullen riders watching from the sidelines. Haggo looked like he was eager for blood, but he knew his fate rested on the khal’s final decision…after a lunch break that is.

This time, Jon was invited to join the main group of the khas, and after Drogo was given his share, he had the honors; a large portion of spicy horsemeat Jon tore into with gusto. They laughed and cheered at this, but it wasn’t in derision or mockery, but of acceptance into their brotherhood.

Everyone seemed to want to talk about just how magnificent he had looked racing with Shadow:

“Like the gods were with you.”

“Like a dark shadow from the mountains.”

“With thunder and lightning!”

“Like the wind!”

Jorah would do his best to translate, and it was almost cute to see some of these hardened warriors try to speak to Jon in Common Tongue. Some were so bad; it took several tries of trying to correct them to fully understand what they were attempting to say.

An eternity of an hour later, Jon was ready to take a break. Most of the khas were dozing off the meal they’d just eaten, while others lounged about talking about girls and how they would be fucked senseless when they got back home…probably. Jon might not be an expert at the language yet, but having been around them for a while, he was able to discern a few phrases here and there. He was just about to rise to his feet to stretch and take a leak, where he could find some privacy, when Quaro came sauntering up to them.
“The khal will like to speak to him,” he told Jorah, who translated.

Jon blinked in surprise at the sudden request. Drogo, who had been on his own for a while now, was rising to his feet and heading toward the back of the abandoned manse they had made their resting stop.

Was this it then? Was Drogo finally ready to negotiate or was this for something else entirely? The khal hadn’t gone out of his way to congratulate him, only to give that same curt nod before ordering they take the break. With his heartbeat quickening, and a quick look at Jorah, he took a deep shuddering breath and hoped he didn’t fuck things up at this golden opportunity.

*Dear gods, give me strength.*

Drogo was letting out a steady stream of urine when Jon approached…and stopped a few paces away when he realized just what was happening. Seven hells, had the asshole called him here just to watch him piss?

Either way, Jon’s bladder was at bursting point and there was no point holding it in. He’d just pretend they were in the most public of public restrooms and close his eyes as he did the deed.

“Not so small as thought,” came the sudden dry comment which had Jon’s lashes flying open.

His features burned as he met Drogo’s smirking visage. The taller man was clearly staring at his cock, and Jon was quick to shake off and zip up when done. Unfortunately, Drogo seemed determined to show off, and Jon wasn’t blind to see just how well hung the khal was. The sudden image of that thing buried in Dany, had him shivering in revulsion and a bit of envy. Dany was yet to complain about their lovemaking sessions, but compared to that…damn.

“Come walk with me, ifak,” Drogo invited as he finally tucked away his manhood to stroll through the dancing blades of grass in the color of old bronze. The mountains were much closer now, and there was something rather breathtaking about their oddly conical shapes coated with thick layers of foliage. Jon stole a quick glance behind him. Jorah was keeping a respectable distance, as was Cohollo; the most trusted of Drogo’s bloodriders. The rest of the riders – well most of them, were watching this new development with interest; wondering what their khal could possibly want with the foreigner in private.

“Mother of the Mountains,” Drogo was saying with a nod toward the foothills. “When other khals come, we go hunt. Yes?”

“What?”

Drogo eyed him with impatience. He seemed to be struggling with the exact words to say, but then repeated himself more slowly. “I say, we go hunt…we catch animals…” He mimed shooting and slashing through the air with an arm. “In mountains when sun rise. Khal Ogo and Khal Jommo coming with khalasar this night. It is custom. You come with me.”

Jon wondered if he could opt out of the affair, but recalling Dany’s suggestion to try to keep things as civil as possible until they got what they wanted, he simply nodded.

“But I thought you were not supposed to have weapons in here,” Jon asked carefully. “How do we
hunt without weapons?”

“Mountains okay for hunt with arakh and bow. We offer to the gods our rhoa, and we get plenty azhasavva for next season.”

“He means they offer their animals to the gods of the mountains and receive plenty of blessings,” Jorah translated.

Drogo grunted at this and finally came to a stop before the largest lake Jon had ever seen. Just past the tall reeds along its shores, its still waters shimmered like golden crystals beneath the dying sun. There was something quite beautiful and almost sacred about this place. It gave the same vibes he felt whenever he was at the godswood in Winterfell; as if he had stepped back in Time and fully expected the gods to come racing down the mountains to smite the mere mortals.

“They call this place the Womb of the World,” Jorah said in a reverent whisper, as if he too could feel the power of the lake. “They believe it is bottomless and that the first man rose from its depths over a thousand years ago riding on a horse.”

Jon would have been in awe of that story, if a part of his mind wasn’t racing with the idea that it could be a perfect place to be drowned and no one would ever find his body.

“You…ifa…no…Snow, yes?” Drogo suddenly called out.

Jon raised a brow at this. So far, Drogo had made no attempt to call him by name, and suddenly here before this lake, which he was staring at with contemplation on his bronzed features, Jon felt he was finally seeing the real man behind the Khal Drogo persona.

“Snow,” Drogo repeated as if weighing the name on his tongue. “You are like Dan Ares.”

Dan…? Jon was bemused and it took a moment to realize he was talking about Dany. He kept his silence, realizing the khal probably had more to say.

“Dan Ares make change here,” he continued; his voice far from its usual barking and harsh tone. He almost sounded wistful. “She do the same thing you do and try to stop my people from what they do.” He mimed the whipping of the slave; his lips quirking a little. “You foolish to do that to my khas. You could have your head cut, but you stand up to them. You fight. You have…” His brows scrunched as he struggled to find the right term. He eventually gave up and spewed a phrase in Dothraki; cocking his head in Jorah’s direction.

“He says you have the blood of a warrior…and some magic in you,” this part Jorah added with uncertainty, perhaps wondering if he had translated that correctly.

Jon might have been flattered at the praise, if the sudden image of a certain redheaded woman didn’t suddenly fill his mind. He absently rubbed at the scar on his abdomen, and Drogo was quick to notice the gesture. He simply raised a brow and nodded.

“You touch by maegi? Yes?”

“Uumm-”

“A sorceress,” Jorah explained. “He thinks you might have been touched by…someone like that. I guess I could tell him otherwise…”

“No,” Jon interrupted as he held Drogo’s gaze. “He’s right. A woman did heal me. I don’t know if she was a magician or witch or whatever, but…these scars…they healed much faster after she
touched me.”

“Does Dany know this?” Jorah asked sharply.

“Not yet,” Jon confessed. “I’ll tell her in time.”

Drogo grinned at his deduction and nodded. “I feel it in you. We are same. Touch by maegi when I was khalakka, but not easy. No. Not easy, Snow. All this…” He spread out his arms. “The gods give me all, but my enemies plenty. Everywhere. Many want me dead, even in my khas, so I must be careful. Yes?”

Jon nodded; hoping his expression gave nothing away. Why was Drogo telling him all this? It wasn’t as if he was hoping Jon would feel sorry for him, was it? This was the life he had chosen for himself after all. However, a part of him had to sympathize. From what he had seen of those who were made to lead, that phrase of ‘keeping one’s enemies close’ was never truer. It wasn’t hard to imagine Drogo having so many eager for his head. Hell, hadn’t he felt the same way just a few days ago?

“My people no change easy,” Drogo continued. “They must have strong khal, one to keep them together or they destroy even more. You understand?”

“…yes…but…you are the khal, right? You do have the power to make changes if you wished,” Jon began cautiously. At Drogo’s raised brow, Jon forced himself to continue; hoping his words wouldn’t come out the wrong way. “I know it’s not easy to rule such a people, but as the khal of the greatest khalasar, you can show that there’s more to life than pillaging and raping your women and slaves…hell even that concept is revolting in itself. No offense, Your Grace, but I think you really should reconsider continuing that practice.”

His words died off, and as he waited for Jorah to interpret for it appeared as if Drogo did not completely understand what he was trying to say, Jon held his breath and waited for the admonishment or fury for his speech. Who was he to tell Drogo what to do anyway?

There was a tense silence as Drogo digested this new information, and he seemed to study Jon as one would study a unique specimen beneath a microscope.

“To be khal is like…atthirarido…a big dream for rider,” he finally said; his voice still contemplative. He waved his hand toward the direction of his khas. They looked like shimmering mirages from this distance. “But to be khal is to wake with sun and wonder if it be your last to see it. And Dan Ares, she know this, and she want to take chair of Westeros. She know it not easy, but I promise her that…and she leave me…”

His features tightened with mingled expressions of pain and anger. He seemed to grow weary of speaking in the Common Tongue and resorted to finishing his speech in Dothraki; pausing only long enough for Jorah to interpret.

“He says it was humiliating to accept her escape and had to appease his angry bloodriders who wanted to go after her head. It was one of the reasons he chose to work with the fat man…Robert Baratheon I’m guessing…when he proposed that they join forces to conquer Westeros and stop Daenerys’s quest. He was only doing it to punish her in kind, for there were many nights he had spent dreaming of her, wondering if she was even still alive and hoping she had made it safe and sound. Perhaps they might have even ruled Westeros together; despite how cursed the Narrow Sea is to his people. He was willing to make that sacrifice.”

When Jorah stopped, Drogo spoke some more and even Jorah seemed to have a bemused yet astonished expression on his visage. Jon was just as flummoxed at this rush of verbal diarrhea. It
almost felt as if the khal was desperate to let this burden off him and had finally been given an opportunity to do so.

“He says he knows what a risk it was for Dany to come back and he admires her for it, but a part of him is still angry that she came with you. He wants to punish you both for daring to show your affections for one another in his presence and humiliating him before his khalasar, but he would hate to see the pain in Dany’s eyes if he killed you, which he can do easily if he so chooses. So he is going to make you an offer...since you won the horse race, you will decide what to do with Haggo. The best choice would be to engage him in another duel, but this time, it will be a duel to the death.”

Jon’s breath caught; his eyes widening in disbelief.

“If you are able to defeat him, then he will be willing to give up Dany as well as his quest to conquer Westeros. You still have to prove to be worthy of being her khal, and who knows? You might even end up leaving Vaes Dothrak with your personal khalasar.”

“...is he shitting me?”

“No shitting you,” Drogo said in the Common Tongue; a smirk on his handsome visage. “You fight for blood of your blood, Snow the Andal. It is the way of we who want athhajar, yes?”

“Ath...athhajar?” Jon repeated; the words sounding odd and clumsy on his tongue, only this seemed to amuse Drogo as he threw back his head with a loud guffaw.

“Power...to rule,” Jorah explained with a small smile.

Jon wished he could tell Drogo he had no real desire to rule anything, but he was fighting hard for one woman to do just that, and if it meant finally getting the opportunity to avenge the death of his Uncle Benjen, then so be it.

Unfortunately, if Jon had hoped to have some time to think about a way to bring this up to Haggo, that problem was solved when a sudden loud feral yell from the direction of the khas, had the quartet turning back with varying degrees of surprise on their features.

“What the fuck?” Jon could only whisper as he watched Haggo and his five riders galloping toward them each holding onto weapons; arakhs, or bows and arrows – items the rest of the khas did not have with them as it was forbidden after all. Guess these six had planned for something like this and hid them from the others.

This wasn’t good.

Drogo gave a loud curse and surprisingly stepped forward to face them; not even flinching when one of the riders suddenly stood upon his horse and let fly an arrow directly at his khal.

“Fuck! Get down!”

Jon’s body moved before he could second-guess his decision. Drogo was taller and stronger; but in that moment, Jon mustered all the strength within him to ram into the khal; sending them toppling to the ground and narrowly avoiding the slew of arrows that would have found his chest and head.

Cohollo and Jorah sprang into action; each withdrawing small daggers they must have hidden in their clothing to slash at the incoming attackers. Drogo had risen to his feet; eyes blazing with fury as he snarled a few words in Dothraki. Jon had no idea what he said, but it was clear neither Haggo nor his buddies were getting out of this alive.
Jon watched in astonishment as Drogo gave a thunderous roar and ran into the side of one of the rider’s horses sending it careening off balance and to the ground. It might not have been the smartest thing to do, for the rider was on his feet and hacking away at his khal with the arakh. Jon noticed that the rest of the khas could only watch; many with expressions of frustration on their faces for they knew this was a fight they could not participate in unless their khal gave specific orders to do so.

Haggo was staging a mutiny; his fury at being humiliated by a mere Andal too much for his pride. The situation was made worse for he was one of Drogo’s bloodriders; sworn brothers who were to die for and with their khal. If he meant to take out Drogo, there was no way his brothers of the khas would let him live. This was a suicide mission all things considered, and Drogo had every intention of granting him his wish.

“Fucking Andal!” one of the riders bellowed inches from Jon as he sent an arrow his way. Jon would barely be able to duck in time when he felt the sharp pain lace up his right leg. He had no time to stand around admiring the weapon stuck in his thigh; the adrenaline coursing through had him yanking it out with a loud cry. Without pausing to think, he spun to stab the horse’s neck with the arrow – as much as he hated to do it – causing the beast to neigh in anguish and toss off its rider.

Jon dove for the fallen man; his right fist finding his face over and over again until his entire hand, bandages included, were soaked in blood. However, he knew he was not done for the man was still sneering at him through broken teeth and half-shut eyes. Jon snarled and tore off the arakh attached to his waist, and recalling the lessons Jorah and Dany had taught him, he swung with all its might. Never had blood felt so warm and wet against his skin, but he would have no time to celebrate his first Dothraki kill for looking at the scuffle behind him, he noticed that Jorah was just about caught in a difficult situation.

Fuckfuckfuckfuck! He cursed as he struggled to his feet and fought back a wince as his right leg protested the movement. Let me make it on time!

Dany felt the first stirrings of uneasiness creeping in as they approached the manse. Dusk was falling fast, and she had assumed Drogo and his khas would be home…or almost home by now. It wasn’t unusual to see their rather intimidating silhouettes filling the horizon, and as she allowed one of the slaves to help her off the horse, a sudden loud yell coming down the road had her party looking around in confusion and fear.

It was a member of the khas, galloping so fast, he almost rammed into the group before he could get his horse under control.

“Jhogo!” Doreah cried out at the sight of her husband, who only gave her a quick cursory glance. Out of breath and clearly panicked about something, Jhogo’s widened eyes were focused on his khaleesi and nothing else.

“The Khal and your Andal!” he cried out in Dothraki. “They are fighting…by the Womb of the World! Haggo…Haggo and his friends want to take out the khal and they…they…”

Dany had heard enough.

“My horse!” she commanded; barely waiting for the slave to return it before seizing the reins and leaping upon it again. Common sense might have suggested she use a car, but there was a reason for
the use of horses around here. There were only so many roads one could use a vehicle in and their current location made no allowances for that.

She would have to ride there as fast as she could and hope that it wasn’t too late. Having Jon die now was definitely not an option.

Without his sword, it was all Jorah could do to hold off the frothing rider. The dagger he had smuggled with him had only managed to create a deep gash in the Dothraki’s right arm. Right now, he could feel his windpipe being closed as strong hands tightened around his neck and continued to squeeze until the world went a dizzying shade of white.

Regrets, like an unforgiving avalanche, filled him as he wondered if this was the way he was really going to die. Far from the comforts of his home at Bear Island…never having to see his family or more importantly Dany again. What a disappointment he was to –

“URGH!”

For a second, the rider’s features looked comically surprised before the sharp curved blade of the arakh finished its upswing and successfully sent his head flying off. Jorah spat out quickly; for thick globs of blood had filled his mouth while the body fell upon him like a log. Pushing it off, he coughed and struggled to gather much-needed air into his lungs; widened blue eyes staring wildly for a moment before settling on the panting blood-streaked demon towering over him with an arakh in hand.

Demon? No…that was Jon or what might have been Jon Snow.

For the person standing before him was barely recognizable. Maybe it was the blood or the fiery blaze in those eyes; but for just a brief moment Jorah could have sworn he was staring right into Rhaegar Targaryen’s visage. It was impossible. It simply was. Rhaegar had been taller, fairer, with those striking lilac eyes that could either be filled with warmth or darken with a fury only the dragons could display.

I’m going senile, Jorah thought with panic before he felt the firm hand on his shoulder.

“Are you all right?” Rhaegar…no, Jon asked as he blinked away the strands of blood-caked hair from his eyes. “Are you hurt?”

“No,” Jorah replied and struggled to stand. He must have pulled on Jon a little too hard for the younger man was unable to hide his wince of pain; emphasized when he pulled away with a slight limp.

“Two down,” Jon said as they looked around to see that Cohollo was currently stabbing the third rider repeatedly with his dagger. He had somehow also managed to take out the fourth. There was an arrow protruding from that one’s right eye.

“Shit…” Jorah cursed beneath his breath; forcing Jon to look in his direction.

Drogo was engaged in battle with the remaining two riders: Haggo and the one called Phago. Drogo – though holding onto an arakh he might have swiped from one of them – appeared he was doing his best not to use it. Already cut and bleeding in several places, he was still nimble enough to dodge
finishing blows. He appeared to want to knock out the weapons from his opponents’ hands, and finally managed to grasp onto Phago’s shoulders to prevent him from doing so.

Jon saw the opening he needed, and ignoring Jorah’s cry of ‘come back!’ he leapt forward and swung his *arakh* at Haggo with all his might.

However, when the loud clang of steel against steel was heard; Jon realized Haggo had seen him coming from a mile away and was ready. His ugly features; now streaked with blood, grinned in victory as he sneered.

“Good. I fight you now. Kill you, *ifak*!”

Jon did not see the kick coming and for a second it felt like his entire torso might have caved in from the force of it. It sent him careening into the ground; the taste of grass and sand filling his mouth as he coughed and struggled to catch his breath…but only for a moment. He felt, rather than saw Haggo approaching again, and he was able to roll away just in time to avoid getting the *arakh* buried into his back. He kicked up both legs; ignoring the howling pain to flare through him as he drove them into Haggo’s ribs. The Dothraki grunted and stumbled, but recovered quickly to slash at Jon again; his speed ten times faster than Jorah or Dany’s. Jon cursed as several strands of his hair fell off, and the warmth of his blood from the cut on the right side of his face, where the *arakh* had nearly taken an ear.

“Hahaha! Come, *ifak*! Come fight! Come see what it is to fight a real Dothraki,” he taunted in the native tongue and lunged for Jon again.

Jon would barely be able to hold up his *arakh* to block the attack; his arms quivering with the pressure being inflicted on it as he coughed and struggled to catch his breath as Haggo pushed and pushed and pushed until Jon felt his knees buckling.

No…no…can’t give in now. I can’t fucking give in now.

He could feel it then; the memory of how warm his uncle’s blood had felt in that garbage bag. A garbage bag of all things. This asshole had chopped the man he loved into pieces and stuffed them into a trash bag as if he were worth nothing. There was no fucking way he was going to give in now! Even if it meant doing something Jorah would have warned him against; Jon felt he had no other choice but to take that chance. It was going to hurt like a bitch, but this was for Uncle Benjen; for Robb, Sansa, Bran, Rickon, Arya, his father…hell, even Catelyn. He might not be considered a Stark by law, but they were family and hell would freeze over before he lost to this son-of-a-bitch!

He had no idea where the sonorous bellow came from, but Jon could feel it being ripped from the depths of his gut as he dug in his feet into the muddy banks of the lake, and twisted his body in a way that forced Haggo’s *arakh* to bury itself in his upper left arm. The pain was excruciating, but this forced Haggo’s right side open to incoming attacks and the Dothraki must have realized it, for just as he thought to pull out his weapon, Jon swung up his *arakh* in a sweeping arc; recalling how Dany had done the exact same thing during their training.

The result was Haggo’s right arm sliced off his body to spin in the air for a few moments before splashing loudly into the lake never to be seen again.

But Jon wasn’t done.

He swung again, this time taking off the right side of Haggo’s face. It wasn’t a particularly clean slice, for he had planned to only take off an ear. Instead, Haggo fell to his knees; howling in agony while trying to hold onto an eyeball that dangled on his flapping shredded cheek and mouth.
Jon swung again.

This time he took off the left hand; ignoring the spray of blood to accompany his actions. Besides, it now felt like soaking in a warm bath, and the pungent metallic coppery smell and taste didn’t bother him anymore.

Haggo was muttering something from the remains of his mouth; his one good eyeball now filled with a terror that might have been satisfactory to Jon if he wasn’t imagining how his Uncle Benjen might have begged for his life in this very same position.

_Fucker…you fucking piece of shit! Did you have fun killing him? Huh? Did you? Did you feel good chopping him into bits like he was nothing more than your fucking horsemeat? Did you laugh at him while you did it? Did you? Huh? You sick piece of shit?! Go to hell!_

He swung again; this time putting all he had left to finally take off Haggo’s head. Like his arm, it spun in the air; those grotesque features forever frozen in a state of terror, before sinking into the supposedly bottomless lake.

“Good,” Jon whispered; his voice hoarse – for he didn’t realize he had actually been screaming his thoughts out loud. He failed to notice the expressions on the other men’s faces behind him; perhaps if he did, he might have realized the true impact of what he had just done.

“Good,” he croaked again as his throat tightened with a lump so hard he couldn’t swallow. It was becoming difficult to breathe. “Goo…good…”

_It’s good. It’s all over. It’s good…it’s good…_

The world suddenly began to spin, and he might have crumbled to his knees when strong hands fell upon his shoulders to hold him up.

“No fall,” Drogo said sternly; his dark eyes filled with an expression that was nothing short of pure respect and admiration. “You no fall, Snow the Andal. You stand…they all see you…she see you…Dan Ares.”

_Dan…Dany?_

He turned slowly; the world still moving at a snail’s pace for him. Sure enough, it was as Drogo said. Dany was here looking so out of place; she must have stepped out of the pages of a fantasy. She was an ethereal sight with that beautiful mane of silver almost shimmering beneath the darkening sky. He had no idea why there was a crown of blue roses laying askew on her head, but he was sure he’d find out later…as would half of the city she seemed to have brought along with her.

_I did it, Dany, _he said with his eyes as his vision blurred. _I did…_

Jorah was the first to fall to his knees; the muttered words “qoy qoyi” escaping his lips. Jon did not understand why he would do that, but when Cohollo followed suit and then one after the other, the rest of Drogo’s _khas_, and indeed the entire _khalasar_, fell to their knees and bowed their heads in respect, while chanting the same words “qoy qoyi”, Jon felt he was having an out of body experience.

_I can’t fucking breathe…_

“You saved their king,” Dany was saying as began to walk slowly toward him; an expression on her features he could not really define. “And they are forever in your debt for doing so.”
When she got close enough to Drogo, she gave him curtesy; something he was definitely not expecting. He was unable to mask the shocked and, dare one assume, embarrassed flicker in those usually inscrutable eyes. For a big man, caked in blood and looking formidable, when Dany reached for his hands to grasp them tightly, one had a feeling he might have been the one dropping to his knees to ask for forgiveness. Instead, he settled for receiving a tender kiss to them, and a look of pure gratitude leveled at him.

“Thank you,” she said in Dothraki; her voice husky with sincerity. “For taking care of him…I thank you with all my heart, Khal Drogo son of Bharbo, and I ask of you to please release me from the vows I made to you. I beg this of you.”

She did fall to her knees this time; still not letting go of his hands. Jon, who was watching all this with his heart somewhere in his throat; a part of him wondering if Dany was actually offering herself back to Drogo as a way of thanks – would be stumped when Drogo took a deep shuddering breath and said something to Dany in a voice so warm and different than he’d ever heard before.

Her widened eyes filled with tears and the trembling smile on her lips was his response. With a gentle nudge, he helped her to her feet and without saying another word, led her to Jon. He might have been a stubborn bastard, but even if knew when he had lost a particular battle. In this case, he did not mind keeping his promise to this Andal, from the land of Ice and Snow, who had proven to be more of a man than he gave himself credit for.

“She I give to you,” Drogo declared as he stared hard at Jon as if hoping his words would be properly understood. “You take care of my khaleesi…your khaleesi now, Snow the Andal. Yes?”

“Ye…yes, Your Grace,” Jon stuttered as his cheeks burned at the implication. Drogo gave a satisfied nod and with a last small smile at Dany, he stepped away to give them their privacy.

Now alone…well relatively alone; Jon tried to ease the tension by cracking a joke – though his mind failed pitifully to come up with anything decent enough. However, whatever else he might have thought about faded into oblivion when Dany began stripping out of her leathers; still holding his gaze prisoner.

“Blood of my blood,” she whispered as she came to a stop inches before him; her lips teasing his as their warm breaths mingled as one.

With a low moan of desire, he tried to claim them in a kiss, but she arched away with a teasing smile, but only to tug lightly on the strappings of his vest. When she began taking off his clothes, he did not protest or dare question her reason for doing so. Once upon a time, he might have been embarrassed to be standing in his birthday suit before a throng of strangers, but not today…not in this moment. He was completely at her mercy.

Still not saying a word, she held onto his hand and led them into the lake, which was a welcome coolness to his heated flesh. Something told him she must have done this before, and when they were waist deep, Jon closed his eyes and sighed in helpless relief as she began washing away the blood from his body; paying particular attention to his wounds with a reverence that almost brought him to tears.

She continued to whisper in Dothraki, low sensual words that soothed his aches like no salve could.
It wasn’t until her lips caressed his ear and said the words she would often mutter in her sleep, did it all finally make sense.

“Shekh ma shieraki anni,” she sobbed as she reached for his hand to place them between the searing heat between her legs. “My sun-and-stars…oh yeees…”

*Dany…my Queen…*

They were being watched, and he didn’t care.

They were sharing the most intimate of moments; something the old Jon might have balked at and refused to be engaged in, but he didn’t care.

All that mattered was this woman before him; this woman he would give his heart and soul to whether she needed it or not. Her uneven breathing was in unison with every shiver and tremble of her body as his fingers thrust deeper into her core until her musk filled the air. He swallowed her sharp gasp of pleasure in a hungry kiss as she came; those slick inner muscles tightening around his fingers as she quivered with her orgasm. When they finally broke apart for much needed air, she rested her head upon his shoulder; her broken repetition of ‘shekh ma shieraki anni’ like music to his ears.

He pulled back long enough to stare into her flushed visage; feeling his heart swell with the depth of his feelings. The perfect timing was something he had never mastered, but if there was ever a time he needed to say the words he had begged Magister Illyrio to teach him as a way to surprise Dany – this couldn’t have been a more perfect moment. So, taking a deep breath, Jon Snow took the plunge and prayed to the gods for the best.

“An…anha zhilak yera norethaan,” he finally whispered shyly; embarrassed that he might have mispronounced a few of the words.

But if her widening violet eyes and the lovely shade of pink to fill her beautiful features were any indication, he might not have done such a bad job after all.

“Oh Jon,” she half-sobbed and laughed while wrapping her arms around his neck tightly. It would turn into a blissful sigh, which mingled with his low moan as he finally buried his throbbing length into her waiting heat.

“Anha zhilak yera norethaan,” she replied; her heart full beneath the purple skies of Vaes Dothrak. “I love you completely.”
Voices IV

Yay! So glad you all enjoyed the last chapters, but shit’s about to get real, and I suggest that you all read through this carefully for there are hints here and there you cannot afford to skim over! As always, my sincere thanks to those who take the time to leave feedback *bows gratefully* I truly do appreciate it. Enjoy!

Dragonstone:

“The goal is to open up your stance with feet apart like so,” Tyrion instructed while taking a few practice swings.

It was a little difficult keeping said stance thanks to the strong gusts of winds at this altitude, but the scene was picturesque as it gave one a fantastic view of an aquamarine sea where fishing boats, a cargo ship, and two large yachts floated like miniature toys. Besides, there was no way he was going to lose face in front of Missandei…not that the woman from Naath was paying much attention. She seemed more interested in her phone; her fingers flying across the screen as she browsed or typed with an intensity that was almost mesmerizing. She did look good in the black golf pants and matching long-sleeved blouse. Very casual chic.

“Ahem!” he cleared his throat and took another practice swing. “The stance, Missandei.”

“Uh huh,” came the absentminded reply.
She eventually looked up long enough to notice the dwarf had a petulant expression on his visage. Dressed in loud multi-colored plaid knickers and a cream-colored golf shirt, topped off with a rather ridiculous leather golf cap, Tyrion seemed determined to channel his inner athlete. She wondered, and not for the first time, why she had agreed to be his caddy today. She had a lot of work piled on her desk; after all, running a castle and seeing to the needs of the staff wasn’t a cakewalk. However, it was a beautiful afternoon; not too hot and not too chilly, and she had been cooped up for the past couple of days. The chance to get some fresh air was not a bad idea…if only Tyrion would stop trying to teach her how to golf. She just wasn’t interested.

“Your stance is wonderful, my Lord,” she praised with an indulgent smile.

That seemed to appease him as he grinned and turned to address his ball; his hips wiggling in an interesting manner which had Missandei immediately recording it to show Dany later. She had no doubt her friend would get a kick out of it.

However, just as Tyrion raised his golf club for its imminent descent; their cellphones buzzed with a familiar notification alert. Under any normal circumstance, Tyrion might have ignored it and concentrated on getting his ball onto the makeshift ‘green’ – for this wasn’t really a golf course but simply an untamed open field. He had, however, been warned to be alert for this particular notification. He all but flung the club to the ground and whipped out the device; hardly aware of holding his breath in readiness for the worst.

*If it all goes south,* he thought with his heart pounding at a mile-a-minute, *we are in deep shit. Dear gods, please let it –*

“Aah!” Missandei cried out before Tyrion could finish reading through the text message. It wasn’t particularly lengthy, but the main gist was understood loud and clear.

“They did it!” Missandei squealed in delight as she wrapped her arms around Tyrion to give him an uncharacteristic hug. Not that he was complaining at the gesture, but he was still too stunned to really function much, and he barely heard Missandei rattle something about going back to the castle to complete her Queen’s instructions.

*They did it. Those two rascallions actually did it. I don’t fucking believe…how?!*

Mingled emotions of relief, pride, admiration – though laced with a faint sliver of fear that would not fade no matter how often he tried to will it away - ran through him in waves. Caution was a sledgehammer drilled into him since childhood. Was it any wonder he took all good news with a grain of salt? There always had to be a catch in these things, and one could not choose to sit on their laurels and expect absolute peace and stability. That was the stuff of fairytales. This was reality, and reality stunk worse than horseshit.

“Incredible,” he whispered as he paced toward the edge of the daunting cliff, while dialing a certain man’s number. Tyrion, despite his appreciation of the northerner’s influence in his Queen’s life, still did have a few nagging doubts about Jon’s leadership abilities. Bastard or not, Jon Snow had the blood of the Starks in his veins, and despite their best intentions, most Starks could prove to be irrational and much too hardheaded. Tyrion had already witnessed some of that, and it wasn’t pretty. However, if what Jorah had sent them really was true…

*He can be a formidable ruler…if he chose to be.*

Which led him to his next concern. Not for the first time, the notion of those two taking their relationship to the next level was another scenario one had to take into consideration. He knew of Dany’s history with the opposite sex, and one might assume the northerner might end up just being
another conquest. However, anyone with eyes could very well see that this was just no ‘fling’, and if she should ever consider becoming permanently attached to the bastard...

Too soon to think of that, Tyrion. Let’s focus on the task at hand and then we’ll cross that bridge when we get to it.

“Good news I believe,” were the first words out of Varys once the call went through. “Was there any doubt about the outcome, my dear Lord Tyrion?”

“Oh, cut the bullshit,” Tyrion sneered. “You doubted him as well.”

“Doubted him? I sent him there, remember?”

“To probably get him killed,” Tyrion retorted with a cold smirk. “Knowing you, my Lord, you had a plan B in case things didn’t go as planned.”

“Of course there was the possibility he might fail, but he didn’t, so we move on from there. In fact, as we speak, the wheels are already being set in motion. You should be pleased with what should be gracing the headlines first thing in the morning.”

“And the Iron Bank?”

The Spider gave a girlish giggle that had Tyrion’s skin crawling. There was something decidedly spooky about hearing that man laugh.

“Don’t you worry about that, my Lord,” Varys replied. “For the right fee, those greedy fools will do anything, so let’s just say our dear King Robert will be in for even more of a surprise quite soon.”

“Hmm…”

“And you?” Varys asked. “What’s your next course of action?”

“You know exactly what it is,” Tyrion said with a grim smile as he watched another cargo ship peeking beyond the horizon; a dusty shimmering gray haze against the sun’s rays. “I do believe I am long overdue for a glorious reunion with my father and siblings.”

Varys giggled again. “Indeed, my Lord. I do so look forward to seeing you grace the halls of the Red Keep again. Stay in touch.”

Tyrion remained staring at the sea long after the conversation was over. He had known this was inevitable, but it still didn’t lessen the enormity of the situation. He suddenly felt the urge to expel the rather delicious lunch he’d eaten earlier, but he took a deep breath and willed himself to relax. If Daenerys Targaryen, and that Jon Snow, had been able to convince a man like Khal Drogo to work with them, then what was a mere visit with the man who had tortured him for most of his life?

“It’s all in the stance,” he muttered as he walked back to his golf club and picked it again. He took a few practice swings and addressed his ball, and with a hard swing he watched the white object sail into the air in a graceful arc that brought a smile to his face…until it landed within the depths of the ocean miles below.

“Fuck!”

Ah to hell with it. Golf was a terrible sport anyway.
**King’s Landing:**

Make no mistake about it, the world of journalism was survival of the fittest; a sometimes literal bloodbath when it came to the quest of being the first to feed the insatiable public with the latest breaking news. None was averse to going deep undercover, exchanging bribes, or even sleeping with the enemy just to get the most scandalous of scoops. Nothing was too sleazy or underhanded enough.

There were three major publications; the titans of the industry if you will: *The Westeros Times*, *The Independent*, and *Westerosi Daily*. Each would brag about being the best in the business, and as much as the digital age had overshadowed the need for actual publications, there was still a section of the public who cherished opening their newspapers first thing in the morning even if they eventually became wrapping paper or soiled derriere wipes.

Despite their impressive sales, these giants still knew they were in constant competition with the influx and readily available information on the internet. That desire to be number one was now more imperative than ever and journalists seemed to be working around the clock just dying for something to shake up the competition. News these days traveled at the speed of light, and the goal was to get there before the others even got a whiff of it.

So far, *The Westeros Times* was leading the way in the race. They were the first to print the pictures of Daenerys Targaryen, with her ‘mystery’ date, when she was in Dorne. In fact, when it came to anything about the last Targaryen, they were determined to make it their leading story. It was no surprise that those papers or digital releases sold the fastest, for despite their troubled and doomed history, the Targaryens did always capture the public’s imagination. With Daenerys finally crawling out of the shadows, their offices buzzed with whatever news they could drag out of the few who had managed to catch a glimpse of the elusive would-be-queen of Westeros.

The current rumor was that she was somewhere in Essos, and two of their best journalists had been sent across the Narrow Sea to gather as much information as possible. Unfortunately, either Daenerys was damn good at hiding or she was already onto the media. Those journalists were yet to really find anything concrete, and no one could rely on drunken tales about the silver-headed woman who flew on dragons like her ancestors. What bullshit.

With frustration mounting, especially with her vanishing act after posting that introductory video - which now stood at almost 200 million views and counting – and no updates on her social media accounts, there was a palpable impatience amongst the public desperate to know more about her.

However, all of that would pale in comparison when, on that cold Wednesday morning, a weary Joaquin Meek – whose job was to sort through the thousands of mail in his claustrophobic basement office – would find himself staring at a bulky yellow envelope with the simple words:

**URGENT ATTN:**

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

**THE WESTEROS TIMES**

**RE: ROBERT BARATHEON FILES**
He might have tossed it aside; for it wasn’t uncommon to get such packages with folks sending in alleged videos of famous people/celebrities misbehaving, UFO sightings, or stupid pet tricks in the guise of the latest scandal. However, when he noticed the official stamp of none other than Petyr Baelish - the ex-master of the coin for King Aerys – his eyes widened in surprise. The one many called “Littlefinger” had gone into hiding after the King’s death, though many still insisted he operated in the underground. To suddenly receive an obvious exposé, especially about Robert Baratheon…

“Holy shit.”

He dug through the bin and found two more large envelopes, and not waiting a second longer, he all but ran to the top floor like a maniac. He burst through the glass doors leading into the conference room where his editor-in-chief was in a meeting with some of his top editorial staff.

“What the fuck, Meek?” came the furious roar from the burly man at the head of the table. “We’re in a goddamn meet…!”

“Got…got…something,” he interrupted breathlessly as he held up the envelopes; his sweat-flushed features breaking into a grin of satisfaction. “I think you might want to check this one out, sir.”

Merlyn Hightower was smart enough to know that Meek wouldn’t run up here if it was nothing important, and his theory was proven right once he noticed the stamped mockingbird sigil on the envelopes. Impatient hands ripped the packages open, and as several tapes and documents tumbled to the table, his once thunderous expression faded into one of smug triumph.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he declared as he rose to his feet and puffed out his chest. “Looks like we’re about to shake up Westeros again.

“Fire up the presses! It’s time to bring down a giant.”

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Braavos:

Sensible heels *click clacked* upon the polished marble floors with experienced precision.

The corridor was endless and without warmth; its walls of aged stone and granite garnished with painted glass designed by the greatest artists ever assembled. It was high noon, yet a hushed silence filled the cavernous halls and chambers, where men and women slipped between them like shadows; the many secrets they held within a welcome burden on their backs and shoulders. Behind each heavy door of oak and steel; they spent countless hours calculating and tabulating figures that could make or break entire nations.

She came to a stop before one such door, and pressed her hand against the monitoring system which was quick to recognize her fingerprints. The door glided open noiselessly and she was ushered down yet another lengthy corridor; only this time the activity was a little more noticeable. Monochromatic-clad workers could be seen on their computers typing away or chatting on the phones; their voices rising and falling in a sing-song cacophony of enterprise while wheeling and dealing with potential clients or wayward loaners.
She smiled at the statuesque brunette at the receptionist desk, who smiled back and accepted the large flat envelope.

“I’ll make sure he gets this,” the brunette said in an accent that betrayed her Volantis ancestry, before rising gracefully to her feet.

She walked past several cubicles to the lone elevator, where with a single push of the button (there was only one way up anyway); she was taken to the pinnacle of the institution. The doors opened to a grand hall of marbled floors and flickering oil lamps gracing its walls. It was hardly a hospitable space, for at the apex sat a long table of polished stone with three matching chairs behind it. The rather intimidating sigil of the institution hovered behind it as if to remind everyone walking into the room of just where they were. Two narrow stone benches had been placed before the long table; where clients were scrutinized and judged (unbeknownst to them) by the three men who occupied said chairs now.

These were the top three keyholders; descendants of the original holders of the keys to the greatest vaults in the world. Only they knew all the contents within those hallowed spaces; as well as their secrets they would carry to their graves. Two wizened men with long matted gray hairs and beards flanked the youngest of the trio; a man with narrow features and a pinched expression as if wary of everyone who came before him. He was Tycho Nestoris, and as he looked up from his ledger; a ready frown of impatience on his features, his brow raised as he noticed the envelope being thrust in his direction.

“From Westeros,” the brunette clipped with a polite bow.

At first Nestoris looked bemused, for he got so many requests daily, it was somewhat difficult to keep track. However, when the keyholder to his right leaned close to whisper “the Baratheon affair, I reckon”, Nestoris’s brows raised in acknowledgment.

“Indeed. Thank you, Miss Antonsson.”

She bowed and spun on her heels to leave, but not before shivering at the devious expression on her boss’s features as he ripped open the package.

Only the gods knew just what new secrets it contained.

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King’s Landing:

Sam gave a loud belch as he the drained the last of the beer. He tossed the empty can into the wastebasket beside his desk and frowned at the computer screen. Being an admin for one of the most active forums on the internet was no small task, and lately the members of *The Blind Alley* were becoming more bitchy and disgruntled with every passing day. The impatient fans wanted more from their queen, and it was becoming a chore having to moderate all the hate threads popping up or dealing with private messages from members requesting so-so-and-so be banned for one thing or another.

In addition to this, he still had to maintain the Raven and Maesterbook accounts, and he did his best to update with little nuggets of Targaryen history to keep the fans appeased. He would post old
videos of Daenerys when she was at Slavers Bay or link to the Illustrogram account, which was under Missandei’s watch. Not that anything new had been posted in a while. It still didn’t stop her fanbase from growing. Her Illustrogram account now had five million followers, while her Raven and Maesterbook where approaching the two-million members milestone.

And his job was to keep them all happy. Dear gods.

He did wish she’d at least text him with an update; any bone to throw to the fans, but he realized she and Jon were in dangerous territory, and with every passing day Sam could only wonder and hope they were both all right. He had done more research on Khal Drogo and the Dothraki, in general, and nothing in their history gave him any hope that they would be successful.

*But I’ve got to believe in them. If anyone can do it, it’s you Jon. I’m sure of it.*

He sighed as he noticed his *Blind Alley* inbox was filled with over a hundred messages. Time to dig in and start blocking or banning some folks. However, as he prepared to put on his headphones, a notification on his phone had him glancing at the device with mild irritation. He hoped it wasn’t Gilly sending something inane again. Though he loved his girl, she could be a pain in the ass every now and then.

However, when the letters J-O-N flashed on his screen, he couldn’t control the breathless squeal of delight to escape his lips. It seemed like an eternity since he had heard from his best friend, and for a second, his clumsy fingers nearly dropped the device to the floor as he tried to reach for it.

-U up, Sam?

-Yes, he typed with a goofy grin on his features. Pity Jon couldn’t see it.

-Sorry. Can’t talk, Jon responded. Been a long day. Tired as fuck.

-Got it. What’s up?

-Back in Pentos now. We got Drogo on our side.

Sam’s eyes widened. *U’re shitting me.*

-Serious. Called back his men and all that. Even agreed to sign docu despite them not believing in that shit.

-Whoa…that is amazing.

-Not all me though. Dany did her bit. She’s the amazing one.

-Says the man who’s in (heart emoji)

-Fuck u (middle finger emoji)

-Seriously Jon. That is great. That’s one hurdle out of the way.

-Right.

-See the news lately?

-Yeah. Pretty fucked up, ain’t it?
-Sickening. Who knew he was into freaky shit like that? And all those bastards he’s fathered? It’s all anyone can talk about.

-I’ll bet.

-Things have been tense on the streets in KL. Lots of protests by people who want him gone or in prison.

-...good.

-He hasn’t bothered you, has he?

-No. Not heard anything yet.

-Maybe he’s given up?

-Doubt it. This is Robert Baratheon, remember? What about Gendry?

Sam sighed; his features now morose. Haven’t seen or heard from him in a while.

-I see.

-I did try going to his apartment the other day. Wasn’t home.

-Maybe he’s out of town again.

-Maybe.

-Anyway…gotta get off, but expect a package in the mail soon.

-Package?

-Yeah…finally did that DNA testing thing.

Sam’s eyes widened. For as long as he’d known Jon, he never liked talking about his birth or anything related to his bastard status. To think he would even want to do something like this…

-Dany talked me into it, Jon confessed. Sam was sure he could literally hear his friend blush.

-So, she knows u did it?

-No. Not yet. I want to surprise her with the results.

-Wow. U sure about this, Jon?

-It’s done now. No turning back.

-Yeah. U still have Stark blood though.

-Yeah, I know that.

-Nervous?

-Of course, but don’t wanna think about it now. Gotta go.
-Alright.

-Don’t open the fucking results until I get back!

-Geez! I won’t!

-See you in KL in a couple of days. I missed u, Sam.

Sam’s throat tightened, and he had to close his eyes for a few seconds to gather himself. It didn’t stop the blurring of his vision when he lifted his lashes to type back with trembling fingers.

-Missed you too, Jon…missed both of u. Give Dany my regards.

-Will do. See u soon.

Sam all but gave a whoop of excitement as he bounded off his chair and did a little jig in the middle of the living room; glad for once that he lived alone with no one to laugh at his antics. The past two and a half-week had been the longest of his life, and to think it was all coming to an end soon…well hopefully. Daenerys was yet to really make her impact in Westeros, and although Robert Baratheon’s sins were now being splashed across all mass media, there was still Tywin Lannister to worry about.

“One step at a time,” Sam muttered as he shuffled toward the fridge to grab another six-pack. He might as well get wasted while working on the forum, because he had a feeling he was going to need to be in that state when dealing with some of those members. He was just about to crack open a can, when his doorbell chimed.

He froze in mid-swig; eyes widening for an instant as his heartbeat quickened in immediate panic. He knew it couldn’t be Gilly. She was out of town visiting family, and there was really no one else he knew that would be visiting him at nine-fifteen in the evening. Lowering the cans of beer on the counter, he grabbed the closest ‘weapon’ his hands could get, which turned out to be a frying pan he had left to dry on the dishrack.

He had done his best to be careful wandering around town, for there was no telling if Robert would send one of his goonies after him. Being a friend of Jon Snow was likely to get him killed, and so far, he had done his best to stay out of the City Watch’s radar. If it turned out to be one of them at his doorstep…would hitting him with a frying pan be considered assault? Or could he just plead self-defense when on trial?

“Who…who is it?” he asked once he was close to the door. His breathing sounded like a steam engine on its last legs, and a sheen of sweat had formed on his forehead and upper lip.

“It’s me, Sam,” came the barely audible response which had Sam straining closer still.

“Who?!”

“Gendry! Seven hells, man! Open the fucking door!”

Gendry?! Sam tossed the pan to the floor and jerked around with the locks on the door before getting it open. It was Gendry all right, and he looked like absolute shit.

“Dear gods,” Sam gasped as his friend stumbled into the room reeking of cheap booze and cigarettes. He was still clutching a half-filled bottle of rum in his right hand; the knuckles bloodied and swollen. The left side of his face was a grotesque display of cuts and bruises; some turning a sickly yellow. In
addition, it had swollen to about the size of a tennis ball, and when he spoke, it sounded like his mouth was filled with cotton balls.

“You don’t mind if I come in, do you?” Gendry asked with a crooked smile revealing several missing teeth.

“Not until you clean up first,” Sam said quickly as he shut the door and dragged Gendry back to his feet before he could crash on his couch. His torn tee-shirt was streaked with blood and soot; same with his jeans. He yanked the bottle of rum from Gendry’s grip, ignoring the weak protest this elicited and led him to the bathroom.

“Got towels, plenty of soap, and running water. Get clean, buddy, and then we can talk.”

For a moment, it looked as if Gendry was about to get into an argument, but to both their surprise, all that managed to escape his lips was a strangled sob as tears formed in those startling blue eyes.

That’s right, Sam thought sadly as Gendry backed in and slowly shut the door. All of this is happening to his father. It can’t be easy for him either.

When Gendry finally came out of the bathroom, he looked a little more human. His face still looked like roadkill, but at least he was in cleaner clothes despite the sweatpants and shirt being a size too large for him. Looking sheepish, he accepted the cup of coffee Sam had made and sat gingerly on the edge of the sofa, staring morosely into the drink as if hoping it would give him all the answers he desperately needed.

“Where the fuck have you been?” Sam finally asked when it seemed like Gendry had no plans to start talking any time soon. “I went to your apartment last week and you weren’t there. Called a few times and texted you, no answer. Did you leave town?”

Gendry shook his head and took a sip; wincing as his battered mouth protested the intrusion. He sighed and ran a hand through his wet hair.

“I was here…always been here,” he replied quietly. “Just…it’s been hell the past few days, that’s all.”

Sam said nothing and tasted a bit of his coffee as well. There was no point telling Gendry this was all a plan they had hatched in their bid to destroy his father, but damn it! Even Gendry had to know there was no redeeming a man like Robert Baratheon. For fuck’s sake, he had ignored Gendry for most of his life and only decided to take his fatherly responsibilities recently. In Sam’s humble opinion, Gendry owed him nothing.

Or maybe I’m just channeling my own bitterness towards my father, Sam thought with a tightening of his lips. That asshole would have been happier if I didn’t exist anyway.

“Guess you’ve seen the news, huh?” Gendry asked with a wan smile. “Seen all the shitty things my great father did, right?”

Sam squirmed. “Gen-”

“I sorta knew,” Gendry continued as if Sam hadn’t spoken. “I mean…he did the same thing to my mother, didn’t he? I grew up not even knowing who he was. He was never there for us. Didn’t give a shit when we lived on scraps and mom had to work three jobs just to put food on the table. He wasn’t there when she got so sick she could barely get out of bed. I was the one cleaning up her shit, Sam. All the vomit, the piss, the blood…everything. I did it. Not him. He wasn’t there. He didn’t care. She never spoke about him, and I only got to know who he was because she kept an old
photograph of them in one of her keepsake boxes.” He laughed bitterly. “You wanna know what’s even worse? When I finally confronted him that first time and told him who I was…he couldn’t even remember her name. The asshole didn’t even know…wh-wh-who she wa-wa-was…” His voice broke and he lowered his head; the tears he had long held falling fast now as his heart broke all over again.

Sam, not caring how this looked, moved to sit beside his friend. He wrapped an arm around Gendry’s shoulder and forced him to rest his heated forehead upon his shoulder.

*If Jon was here, he’d probably do the same thing,* Sam thought as he listened to the harsh sobs with a heavy heart. *Hell, if there was ever a time they both needed Jon Snow, it was now.*

“He’s going crazy you know,” Gendry whispered when he was all cried out. He didn’t pull away from the embrace.

“Who’s going crazy?”

“Robert,” Gendry replied. “He’s drinking has gotten worse, and he keeps himself locked away in his ‘war room’; some room with a full-scale map of Westeros on the wall. That room gives me the fucking creeps.”

“Why?”

“Why?” Gendry pulled away with a bitter laugh. “Because he’s obsessed with some woman in a portrait, that’s why!”

“Some woman…?”

“He’s got this humongous painting of a beautiful woman with long black hair and blue roses in her hair. When he’s not around, he hides it behind a curtain, but on some evenings, I peek into the room and there he is, standing before the picture for hours at a time- just freaking staring at it and not saying anything. On the days he gets really wasted, he starts ranting something about that fucking Targaryen bastard and calls her a fucking whore and then smashes his glass against the wall or begins to rip at his hair and shit.” Gendry shuddered; his eyes distant and haunted. “These past few days, his madness has gotten worse. Now, he puts on these old home movies and plays it constantly on repeat.”

“What home movies?”

Gendry snorted. “Who do you think? Not any of the weird underage shit the papers accuse him of, thank goodness. It’s the same woman in the painting, only she’s not dressed in some fancy ballgown. The video shows her, my dad, Ned Stark…gotta be him because I hear the lady calling him ‘Ned! Ned!’ and he does look a bit like Jon, and then…I swear I’m not making this up…Rhaegar fucking Targaryen.”

Sam’s heart skipped a beat. Like most of Westeros, everyone knew Robert Baratheon was responsible for taking the life of the once popular and loved prince. Unfortunately, Robert’s brainwashing claims that all the Targaryens were evil had made the death a celebration instead. To think that those two men might have once been friends…

*Something isn’t right.*

“…called her Lynn…Lyanna…or something like that,” Gendry was saying forcing Sam’s attention to him again.
“What was that?”

“I said, the woman my father’s so obsessed about, I think her name is Lyanna or something. He keeps muttering that name whenever he watches the video and then he bursts into tears before going into another tirade about how all Targaryens need to be burned. Guess someone forgot to give him the memo that there’s only one left, and I’m sure he’s going to try to get his hands on her too. Fuck.”

Oh, if you only knew, Sam mused with a light shake of his head.

“So, Robert is home now?” Sam queried.

Gendry nodded and tried taking another sip of the coffee. “Been locked away in there since the scandal started. There’s been Press hanging around the castle wanting interviews and shit. I’ve had to use the underground tunnels to get in and out of there. But…I’m worried.”

“Worried about what?”

Gendry looked up then; his gaze intense and earnest. “I think he’s planning to do something really stupid and dangerous soon. He was somewhat sober this morning, and I heard him talking on the phone with someone…something about sending a warning message to those who want to fuck with him.”

Sam sat up; his heart now somewhere in his throat. It was just as Jon had predicted. There was no way Robert would let things go this easily. If he was no longer waiting for Jon to follow through on his promise, there was no doubt he was about to do something drastic. Whatever that was could relate to his family in Winterfell.

Seven hells!

“And you have no idea what he plans to do?” Sam asked; hoping his voice didn’t give anything away. He’d have to reach Jon again as soon as possible. He would have to forget plans to come back to King’s Landing. Winterfell should be top priority.

Gendry laughed long and hard; though there was no humor in it. “Look at me,” he said once he was finally calm enough. “This is how I ended up all black and blue. He sent his fucking goon, The Hound, to teach me a lesson. Said he’s noticed me spying on him and was sure I was the one responsible for selling him out to the Press, so yeah…we got into a fight. That monster might have killed me if I didn’t flee the scene eventually. Wish I had my fucking hammer on me. I’d have bashed his ugly face in.”

“I’m sure you would have,” Sam replied absentmindedly as he glanced at his laptop and phone with longing. He had no idea what he could possibly tell Jon anyway, and for all he knew, Robert might have been talking about retaliating against the media.

“You don’t mind if I crash here, do you?” Gendry asked with a loud yawn. “Sorry, but I’m too beat to go back to my apartment. That fucker might be there waiting for me.”

“Sure. You can use the sofa…pulls out and everything.”

He helped get Gendry situated, and in less than twenty minutes, his friend was dead to the world with exhaustion. Sam studied the sleeping visage for a long time; his mind torn with all he had heard especially about the relationship between Rhaegar and Robert, and this mysterious Lyanna that was no doubt the bane of their friendship.

Curiosity getting the better of him, Sam nodded to himself and went to his desk, and slipping on the
headphones, he decided that a little digging into the history books was in order. Perhaps there was bound to be something to give away the real reason behind Robert’s Rebellion and why it was all connected to the events of today.

The impatient members of Blind Alley would just have to wait a little bit longer.

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Winterfell:

It was almost a strange sight; happy laughter and squeals of delight considering the events of the past week. Arya’s snowman was currently under attack by Rickon, who kept shooting snowballs at it, while Arya – as agile as ever – deflected them with a baseball bat.

“They can be so silly,” came the dry comment beside him.

Robb stole a glance at his sister. “They’re just having fun, Sansa. You don’t expect them to be miserable all the time.” Like you, he wanted to add, but then again, Sansa had been the closest to their mother, so it was no wonder she was still in deep mourning.

The simple but well-crafted black wool gown covered her completely; leaving only her pale beautiful features and hands to anyone’s gaze. Their mothers’ favorite cameo brooch was pinned on her left breast, and with that shocking hair of burnt copper and empty blue eyes, it felt like he was standing next to a much younger Catelyn Stark. Robb shuddered. There was something almost eerie about it.

“Where’s Bran?” he asked as he pushed off the railing and prepared to head back to his office.

“Where else?” Sansa replied; her gaze still trained on her siblings below. “Stuck in the library. I’m sure he’s already read everything in there, but nothing stops him from starting all over again.”

Robb chuckled and began walking away, but stopped at her quiet question.

“Do you still know what he wanted to share with us about Aunt Lyanna?”

“No idea,” Robb replied. “But he did say it would be best if Jon was here.”

“He’s never coming back home,” came the flat statement which had Robb feeling a flicker of anger at how dismissive it was.

“What makes you say that?”

“He’s a bastard,” Sansa reminded him, and in that moment, Robb was sure he was staring at Catelyn and not his sister. How many times had he listened to his mother remind him of Jon’s status? “He’s never really felt a part of us, and I’m sure he’s much happier in the South…with his new queen.”

“…that’s probably a rumor,” Robb mumbled, for he too had heard the stories (and seen the pictures) about Jon and Daenerys Targaryen.

“Is it?” Sansa asked with a wry smile. “Guess we’ll see, won’t we?” And with that cryptic comment, she spun on her heels and glided down the veranda; her feet barely making a sound on the worn wood.
Shaking his head, Robb made the turn toward his office, or rather what used to be Ned Stark’s office. Like most of the rooms in Winterfell, its furnishings and décor leaned toward the dark, solid and sturdy. Thanks to the natural hot springs running underground and within the granite walls, the castle did not lack for warmth especially during the winter. Still, there was a welcoming fire in the grand fireplace as he sank into the comfortable leather seat behind the large desk cluttered with paperwork that still needed his attention. His computer screen came to life, and aside from the scrolling menu showcasing the stock market figures, he mused at the headlines regarding a certain Robert Baratheon.

*What a clusterfuck.*

There was no way anyone could survive such brutal character assassination, but then again, any pity Robb might have had for the man was non-existent. With a sigh, he pulled open the top drawer on his left and carefully withdrew the leather-bound dossier with unintentional reverence. Taking a deep breath, he opened it; his blue eyes scanning the fine print as if hoping the words would never change.

*Miracles do happen.*

He still had to pinch himself to be sure he wasn’t imagining things, yet here they were. Winterfell, and perhaps the entire fucking North, saved by someone he was never going to know.

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*My dearest brother,*

*I hope you get a chance to read this email before anything dangerous befalls you. I must say I was quite stunned at your letter, not just because of all you’ve experienced with Robert, and what you hope to achieve by avenging Uncle Benjen’s death, but just how far you’re willing to go for us. Sometimes I wonder if we truly deserve your devotion and love, Jon. I really do. When I think of all the times Mom treated you with such contempt, and how powerless I was to stop it, I wish I could kneel before you and ask for your forgiveness. However, I know this is something you do not want to read right now, so I’ll spare you the gushing.*

*However, I feel I do owe you an apology, because yes, I haven’t completely been honest with you.*

*You once asked if things were going well with the family business, and I believe I might have told you a falsehood. If your gut instinct was to believe that things were at a crossroads, then you’re exactly right.*

*For all his business acumen, Dad wasn’t quite as shrewd as one would believe. According to a mountain of files and documents, Dad had partnered up with Tywin Lannister where they were allegedly supposed to have equal shares in an investment opportunity with a mining corporation set to be opened somewhere near Moat Cailin. Dad sunk more than half of his savings into the project, which ended up being a dud. Tywin was smart enough not to put all his eggs into one basket, and*
left Dad to scramble around picking up the pieces. His pride wouldn’t let him sell his shares to Tywin, who made offers to simply buy out the entire cooperation and keep us out of the red.

In his quest to stop Tywin’s constant harassment, guess who Dad turned to? His buddy and old friend, Robert Baratheon. Robert was more than willing to chip in with the belief that he would eventually get a share of the profits when the company was back on its feet. It’s one of the first things he reminded me of when we had a private meeting after the funeral. It’s just like you said, Jon, he smiles in your face, but has the tongue of a fucking viper. He didn’t really give a shit about us; saying he was only doing things for Mom and was hoping I’d be wise enough to not make the same mistakes Dad did when he was alive.

I then asked, because I was pissed off, if this had anything to do with Dad’s ‘accident’, and he looks me right in the eye and says, “You do not want to get involved in the games of the adults, Robb Stark.” He was treating me like a fucking kid, Jon! Man, I saw red and told him to take a hike, vowing I would get the company back on its feet without his help.

Guess what the fucker does the next day when he assembles a meeting of all the northern lords? Starts going on a rant about how the North was getting weak with me being at the helm, and how Tywin Lannister was proving to be an ineffective leader as well. He planned to unite Westeros by taking control of the Syndicate again, and vowed to give the North the independence it needed instead of being subservient to the Red Keep. As you can well imagine, this went well with a couple of them; especially the Boltons, Grovers, and Karstarks, but guess who stepped in? Greatjon Umber! You should have seen the speech he gave, Jon! He fucking put Robert in his place and pretty much told him to go fuck himself and not show his traitorous face in the North ever again. Anyone who waged war against the Starks waged war against House Umber. Besides, as far as they were all concerned, the North had always been independent anyway. They rarely pay much attention to what happens in the South, so if they wished to kill themselves, they were welcome to it.

Let’s just say Robert wasn’t too happy about this, and stormed off spouting something about all of us regretting the decision to ignore his warnings especially with the Targaryen bitch – no offense if she’s your girlfriend (and that’s something we’ll have to talk about next time, bro) – but those were his words. Trust me, we didn’t all go singing off into the sunset. The Boltons and Karstarks are still fuming about the whole thing and seem determined to work with Robert, but the Grovers reluctantly swore their allegiance to the Starks again. I still don’t trust that rat-faced asshole.

All this aside, there was still the problem of being in debt especially to the goddamn Iron Bank of Braavos. It’s no fun getting phone calls or letters from them, Jon, and those assholes are ruthless. It’s been so hard having to compose the words to tell Arya she won’t be able to go to The Prestige after all…or having to tell Rickon he won’t be able to get into the college of his choice because we can’t afford the goddamn fees. His grades weren’t high enough to get him a good scholarship as that would have helped a bit.
But the gods have been good to us, Jon, in more ways than one. First was the sudden influx of money sent to our private bank accounts with the message that it was for the Stark children and Stark children only. It didn’t take a scientist to figure out you were the one behind that, Jon. You really didn’t have to do that seeing as it was probably the money Uncle Benjen left for you. However, I know if I decided to return it, you’ll be pissed, so trust me when I say that your generosity is more than appreciated, my dearest brother. I think we should be set for the next few months, and at least pay the first semester fee for Arya.

But wait…there’s more.

And this time, I’m still at a loss as to who or what is responsible for this bit of great luck. I even had to go to the godswood for hours afterwards praying that this wasn’t all a dream.

It happened a few days ago. It was the familiar dreaded call from the Iron Bank, but instead of receiving that snippy voice warning us of all the horrible things in our future, it was Tycho Nestoris in person! He was sounding much nicer, saying something about congratulations on all our debt being paid off and having the Stark holdings and estate fully reestablished under our names again. Now, I know Uncle Benjen left you with some money, but it wasn’t that much for you to buy us out, Jon, which leaves me with…who? I’ve wracked my brain trying to figure out who could be responsible for it, and I keep coming up empty.

I haven’t told Sansa or Bran about this yet, because I didn’t want them worrying about things, but as you can well imagine, I am so happy I could cry. Hell, I think I did shed a few tears when the Iron Bank representative showed up with the documents for me to sign. I did pester them to reveal who our benefactor was, but they wouldn’t say anything. All they said was ‘this person simply wishes you all the best’, and that was it.

Do you think it’s Dad from the grave? I know it’s stupid, but what else do I have to go with? I’m sure you’re probably telling me not to overthink things, right? Just appreciate what’s happening and take the company to new heights, and trust me, I intend to do just that.

Holy shit, I’ve written a fucking essay, but this is what happens when you insist on acting so mysterious and traveling to strange countries without keeping in touch often. Bottom line, don’t worry about us anymore, Jon. We’ve got things under control, and I think things will be fine from now on. Just promise to come home as soon as you can, okay? Arya would really like to see you before she leaves for Braavos, and hell, if it means bringing your ‘imaginary’ girlfriend with you (seriously, are you really dating Daenerys fucking Targaryen? How?!?) – that’s fine too. We’ll give her a proper northern welcome.

Take care of yourself, Jon. I (We) miss you lots.
Love,
Robb Stark.

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Pentos:

If he was going to be completely honest, they were quite exquisite. Mesmerizing in fact.

“Seven hells, Jon,” Dany grumbled as she trotted past him and stuffed more of their clothes into a trunk. “How long are you going to keep staring at them?”

“Says the one who kept oohing and aahing over them all day yesterday? You almost fucking slept with one.”

She smirked and sat on the luggage to try to get it shut. “Well considering you’ve got only one functioning arm…”

“Hardy har har,” he replied with a mock pout, knowing full well she was right. His left arm was wrapped in bandages and with the sling to hold it in place, the doctors had said it should be fully healed in a couple of weeks.

*Or sooner,* he thought as he recalled Drogo’s words about being touched by a *maegi.* Hell, the once throbbing pain in his right leg was almost non-existent, though he still visibly limped a little.

“Aww, don’t pout,” she crooned as she leaned close to steal a kiss on his lips. She did stop to stare at the objects of his attention; a beautiful small smile coming to her features as they reflected in her violet eyes.

“I still can’t believe he gave them to us,” she whispered as if afraid of disrupting them, which was rather silly. “Actual dragon eggs.”

“Might be fake,” Jon mused aloud as he placed a hard kiss on her head before reaching into the elegant walnut box to lift one of them. It was supposedly fossilized and had turned to stone over time. Ilyrio claimed they were from the Shadow Lands, and having read up about the place, Jon could almost believe it. They were quite heavy, but it was their intricate scales, with their kaleidoscope of colors, that made all the difference. The one he held was black yet could ripple and swirl with shades of scarlet when raised to the light. The other two were deep green with bronze flecks, and pale cream streaked with gold. If Jon didn’t know any better, they sort of reminded him of certain Komodo dragons back in Dorne.

*…or were these actual Komodo dragon eggs some sneaky master carver had created to fool…*

“Stop thinking so hard, my darling,” Dany chastised with a playful pinch of his cheek. She failed to notice the blush her term of endearment brought to his features as she turned away to focus on the chaos that was their bedroom. He had no idea how they had arrived with only a couple of handheld luggage and were now returning to Westeros with fucking *trunks.*
Well, returning to Dragonstone to be exact.

He lowered the egg back in place and caressed it absently. It would be a quick pitstop at Dany’s new home where he might stay for a day or two before heading back to King’s Landing. He knew he would have to face Robert, sooner or later, though having read and re-read Robb’s letter was a promising start. Knowing that the North would no longer be a factor or leverage to be used against him, Jon could go on the offensive and end things once and for all. With Drogo at their side and the promise to send his *khalasar* across the Narrow Sea, should there ever be a need for his new army, Jon was still too overwhelmed by all that had happened to really deny his generous offer.

He was sure sometime during the endless two days and nights of celebrations back at Vaes Dothrak, they had unofficially made him a *Khal* with about five thousand men now under his command. Of course, there was no way Jon could handle something like that, so they had agreed to let Jhogo be in charge until he returned to visit, or the gods forbid, a war was to break out.

Word spread fast, for even before the plane came to a complete stop at the tarmac, Magister Illyrio was already bowing and praising *Khal* Jon Snow for doing the impossible. The good news had also been delivered to their allies in Westeros (the Martells and most of the Houses around Dragonstone), causing Dany and Jon to turn off their phones after a while as they became bombarded with messages and calls from their excited subjects.

“Ah fuck, fuck, fuckity fuck,” she cursed at the realization she had mixed up some packages. “Fuck! I wish Missandei was here.”

“I’d love to help, but…” He wiggled the fingers of his left hand and looked sheepish.

“Just stand there and keep looking pretty…or sing to me or something,” she grumbled, and tried to swat him away when he ruffled her hair. Gods, she looked adorable when flustered.

He could only imagine her expression when he finally revealed he had taken the plunge and done the DNA test. It was while at the hospital that he had noticed the ad for *The Lineage Tree*; a fast and easy way to learn about your ancestry within 1 to 2 weeks. One of the nurses was kind enough to give him a kit at his request, and to say he had debated with himself for almost an hour before finally giving in, would have been an understatement. Jon almost felt violated while spitting into the narrow tube; a part of him rebelling against his innermost desire to find out who his mother really was. Not that the test would be able to pinpoint an exact person, but at least it would give him a general idea of where to start looking.

“Wouldn’t it be poetic justice if his mother turned out to be a fucking Wildling? Hah!”

DNA woes aside, there was still another nagging question that needed answering, and it had to do with the mystery person responsible for helping his family in the most generous of ways. Like Robb, he too was finding it hard to come up with a name. He had shared the story with Dany, and was rather taken aback at her almost flippant response of “this person wanted no thanks and no recognition, right? I think you should just respect their wishes and don’t dig too much into it, Jon. Sometimes miracles happen for a reason.”

*Miracles?* He could almost believe that –

A sudden knock on their door had them looking up at the same time.

It was Davos, and he looked anything but his usual amiable self. His features were flushed with either exertion or panic, it was hard to tell, but there was a strange look in his eyes; an expression that was a mixture of fear and madness. It was enough to send alarm bells going off in Jon’s head.
“Davos…?”

“Jo-Jon,” came the stuttered reply as he staggered into the room and had to hold onto Jon’s shoulders as if afraid he’ll fall. He was literally trembling all over. Jorah and Magister Illyrio had arrived as well, though they chose to hover at the doorway with concerned expressions on their visages as well.

Just what the fuck happened?!

“Davos,” he began again; surprised at how calm his voice was despite the pounding of his heart. “Take a deep breath and tell me what’s going-”

“Burned!” the older man cried out so loudly, Jon had to pull away from the spittle flying in his direction. “The apartment complex, Jon! It’s burning! The whole fucking thing!”

Wha...what? what the hell is he talking about...?

It wasn’t computing. The words weren’t making any sense. Even when Jorah came forward to show them the video on his phone – breaking news of a huge inferno consuming one of the premiere apartment complexes in King’s Landing – it still wasn’t registering. It couldn’t be the White Castle Apartments. It couldn’t be where he had called home for the past year and a half. It wasn’t his uncle’s first legacy currently being wrapped in plumes of yellow, red, and black. It couldn’t be the possible loss of so many innocent lives, could it? None of this was real, was it?

No...no...this isn’t happening-

“Robert. That fucking bastard did this,” came the fierce whisper beside him as he felt her hand squeeze his right upper arm with a pressure that would have caused him to wince if he was completely functional.

“What do we do?" someone was saying, and Jon could have laughed at how ridiculous a question it was. What were they going to do? He didn’t know about them, but he had a very good idea of exactly what he was going to do.

“King’s Landing,” he said aloud with an expression that gave no room for arguments. “We’re going to King’s Landing now.”

“Then I’m coming with you,” Dany said with a firm nod.

“No,” Jon replied with a frown and a shake of his head. “You go to Dragonstone and-”

“And sit there waiting for news about you? Spending every waking minute wondering if you’re alive or dead?” she quipped back angrily. “No way, Jon Snow. I’m coming with you whether you like it or not.”

“Seven hells, Dany. I can’t risk something happening to you…”

“You can’t treat me with kid gloves, Jon. I’m a big girl. I can handle myself.”

“It’s not about your fighting skills,” he retorted with exasperation. “You could get arrested! They’ll find any reason to lock you away, and I -”

“Fine! I get arrested, but I’m not leaving your side until then! I appreciate you fighting for me, Jon, but this is my fight as well. You forget that Robert Baratheon was single-handedly responsible for destroying my family, and I owe him one. You cannot take this away from me!”
He opened his mouth to argue back when he saw the shimmering tears of anger in her eyes. Her jaw was clenched so tight, he could see the effort it was taking for her not to smack him in the face for being so obtuse.

*Dear gods, help him.*

“All right…all right. We’ll go together,” he finally croaked as he pulled her trembling body into an embrace – as awkward a hug as it was with his injured arm – to bury his face within her hair. With a gentle kiss on the silky mass of silver, he would eventually lift his gaze to his trusted Hands, where without uttering a word, they understood his intentions loud and clear.

It was time to end this.
It was a scene from his worst nightmares.

Plumes of smoke still filtered into the bleak gray heavens nearly two days later; the air so thick with its choking fumes, breathing was a burden. Flecks of ash trickled down like grey snow; a mocking reminder of cold evenings in Winterfell. The once brick and steel building, which was probably considered a landmark around these parts, was now a ruined and charred skeletal shell of itself. It was akin to a child’s morbid idea of a playhouse; with melted walls and roofs mingled with what used to be mementos of the people who once called it home.

Gratefully, the main fire had been contained, but firefighters still had to deal with smaller electrical fires in the basement. According to the official report, it was believed the sparks had started from there, and not from some wayward tenant getting too carried away in the kitchen or dozing off with a cigarette in hand as rumors had it.

However, Jon knew better.

*It's all my fault.*

As he slowly made his way past the thick yellow City Watch barricade tapes and busy firefighters yelling instructions to each other, all he could see and hear were the cries and wails of tenants who had relied on him. They had believed they would be living the rest of their days (or at least until their
leases were up) in one of the safest and most comfortable residential complexes in the city. They had trusted their landlord would be around when they needed him the most, but he had failed them. He had failed to consider just how dangerous a game he was playing with their lives, while assuming reasoning with a madman like Robert Baratheon was going to be feasible.

*This is all your fault,* that nagging voice continued to taunt as he stepped into what used to be his uncle’s office. If he had hoped to be able to retrieve anything sentimental, it was just about impossible. Everything had been burned to a crisp; well except for a heavily reinforced steel safe Davos said they’d been able to salvage. Stalwart Shield had made sure it was hidden in a place no curious eyes or hands could access. Other than that, everything else was gone. It was almost as if Robert had been determined to completely wipe away all memories of Benjen Stark.

*Just as he probably tried to rewrite the history of Westeros with his claims of trying to save the Realm from the ‘evil’ Targaryens,* Jon thought bitterly.

If there was any silver lining to all this, it was that the other four properties were still standing, though under heavy guard…and not by the incompetent City Watch. Dany had sent her Unsullied undercover to protect the residents; making sure any suspicious activity was immediately reported. So far, so good.

Yet, that shrill voice within would not let him rest.

*It’s all your fault,* it screamed repeatedly, *and don’t you ever forget it. Running around Essos like a lovesick fool instead of giving Robert what he wanted. All of this could have been avoided if you just turned her in. Now look. You’ve got even more innocent blood on your hands, Jon Snow. How can you look them in the eye, eh? How can you claim to be a leader now? You should probably run back to the North with your tail between your legs and…*

“Jon? Is that you?”

The husky yet sultry feminine voice dragged him out of his quagmire of misery. Looking up, it was to see Margery Tyrell, the granddaughter to Mrs. O. Tyrell; that sneaky yet wise old woman who lived in Apt 1300. He had only met Margery once before, and that was only in passing for she had simply come to pick up her grandmother for a weekend getaway. Jon had always thought her pretty; a slender woman with curly brown hair and matching eyes that could flash with the same shrewdness that seemed to be a trait of the Tyrell women. Her features were kind though, and there were more so at this moment as she reached out to wrap her arms around Jon in a consoling hug.

Jon couldn’t move; not sure why she’d even do such a thing considering –

“I’m so glad to see you are all right,” Margery said as she pulled away with a warm smile. “No one knew where you were, and everyone assumed you had been caught in the inferno – you know how word gets around here – but it’s good to see you again.” She eyed his sling. “Did you hurt yourself from…?”

“No…no,” Jon replied with a shake of his head. “It was from…something else. I…” He tried to get the words out of his mouth, but suddenly felt so overwhelmed with guilt, it was all he could do not to burst into tears. Why was she being so kind to him? It was his fault that –

“Loras and I just came by to pick up anything we could salvage from grandma’s room,” she said with a light shrug as if answering his unspoken question. Said Loras – her youngest brother who moonlighted as a male model thanks to his stunning good looks – was busy arguing with a firefighter over something. It appeared he wanted to return to the apartment to pick up more things, but was going to be denied.
“I’m…sorry,” Jon managed to croak as he formed a tight fist of frustration. He really didn’t know what else to say.

“There’s nothing to apologize for,” Margery replied as she rubbed his right arm gently in reassurance. “It’s not like you started the fire.”

*But I did,* his mind screamed. *If I had only…*

“Besides, she loved this place. No matter how many times Loras and I tried to convince her to return to Highgarden, she’d say “no. Too many terrible memories for me. I prefer it here, and besides, someone’s got to take care of that Jon Snow.” She really did think highly of you, Jon, and I’m sure she died with no regrets. She’s a stubborn lass if you haven’t figured that out by now.”

Jon’s eyes burned with unshed tears. Whatever words he might have said remained stuck in his throat forming a lump so hard, he wouldn’t be surprised if he choked on it. As he accepted another warm hug from Margery, he noticed Mr. and Mrs. Martin still looking shell-shocked as they waited patiently behind the tapes for permission to be let into their apartment –or what remained of it. It killed Jon to think the writer had lost all his important manuscripts, and he sincerely prayed Mr. Martin had the foresight to invest in a steel safe or at least keep his works somewhere else.

In fact, many of the other tenants were in the same position. Most of them still wearing the clothes they had on that night, looking bedraggled or exhausted despite the kindness of neighbors who had offered them a place to stay and food to eat. It was yet another silver lining to be grateful for. Someone had had the withal to get most of the tenants evacuated once the fire alarms went off. As a result, the casualties had been minimal with three deaths – O. Tyrell, Mr. A. Thorn, and Yoren the maintenance guru – while others were treated for minor burns and bruises at the local hospital.

Jon made it a duty to visit the tenants still at the hospital once they arrived at King’s Landing, with Dany insisting on coming even though she had to wear a disguise so as not to garner unnecessary attention to herself. It almost brought tears to his eyes, when he was welcomed with cheers and long hugs from these families he had lived with over the past year. Like Margery, many had thought he had been caught in the fire, and seeing him with the sling had Jon trying to reassure them it had nothing to do with the incident. He had been so overwhelmed with emotion, it took Dany stepping in to finally speak on his behalf, when words failed him.

They might not have known who she was, but her easy charm and inherent kindness won her fans almost immediately. She was not above helping the nursing staff change their linens or fetch their meals, and her sense of humor was quite infectious. Who knew she could be quite the jokester? Watching her bring smiles to their faces was something that sent Jon’s heart surging with so much pride, it was all he could do not to pull her into his arms and kiss the living daylights out of her in front of everyone. He would have stayed even longer, but she eventually had to ‘shoo’ him away.

“I’ve got this, my love,” she had whispered in an empty doctor’s office they had sneaked into for some privacy. “You go and do what you have to do. I’ll be waiting when you return.”

He had kissed her then, and it wasn’t just out of gratitude for all she had done, but with a desperation for what they were about to do. There was an inner countdown clock ticking away with every moment spent in her presence, and despite his arguments and his pleas, even he knew that the inevitable was going to happen.

In the interim, she had been right at all that awaited him once he arrived at what used to be the White Castle Apartment complex. Though Davos had arrived earlier and dealt with much of the paperwork, Jon still had to answer to the fire department commissioner. Not a pleasant meeting all around, but at least he might have been cleared from any possible assumptions of insurance fraud.
“I do hope you try to get some rest,” Margery was saying; forcing him back to the present. “You
don’t look like you’ve slept in weeks.”

Jon gave a wry smile. “I probably haven’t.”

“Well, Loras and I rented a home in the outskirts of King’s Landing, and you’re more than welcome
to stay with us for a while until we go back to Highgarden. Here’s the address.”

She placed a green business card, with a drawing of a golden rose in the middle, in his palm. Once
upon a time, he might have been oblivious to the lingering touch in that simple gesture, but not
anymore. Besides, the almost sensuous curve of her lips could be considered seductive, and it forced
Jon to take a step back with a polite smile on his features.

“It was nice to see you again, Margery,” he said with what he hoped was a ‘dismissive’ tone. The
last thing he wanted to do was give her the wrong idea. “And again…I’m sorry for your loss.”

With a final hug of farewell, the Tyrells left in their SUV leaving him expelling a breath of air in
relief, only for the tension to build just as quickly as the familiar sight of flashing lights heralded the
arrival of the goddamn City Watch. Sure, there had been a few of them loitering around the place,
but as the markings on the cars became clearer, Jon cursed beneath his breath and squared his
shoulders in anticipation.

He didn’t have long to wait for his nemesis to come sauntering up; that familiar smug shit-eating
expression on his narrow features.

“Tsk, tsk, tsk,” Bywater began with a shake of his head as he looked up at the building. “A shame,
don’t you think, Snow?”

Jon felt a phantom stabbing pain in his injured shoulder; perhaps the traumatic memories of his time
in prison coming back to haunt him. He kept silent and refused to fall into Bywater’s trap again.

The officer was not to be deterred. “It would seem like the fire commissioner cleared you for any
arsonist activity, but then again, I don’t want you getting too comfortable yet. Trust me, Snow. We’ll
get to the bottom of why you’d want this place destroyed. The money your uncle left you wasn’t
enough, eh? Still wanted the insurance money?”

“Jon would never do anything like that,” Davos said, having arrived quietly unbeknownst to the two
men.

“Oh yeah?” Bywater taunted with a smirk. “Haven’t you heard that it’s the quiet ones who are
always the most dangerous? Besides, I don’t recall inviting you to join us in this conversation
Seaworth. Why don’t you run around like the lackey you are and keep yourself busy, eh? I need to
have a private word with Snow.”

Davos and Jon exchanged a quick look that Bywater missed, but Davos obediently left with a look
of pure scorn on his features.

“Now then,” Bywater said with an indulgent smile as he leaned closer to Jon until his onion-heavy
breath filled his senses. “You and I both know the reason behind this, and I’d like to consider myself
a reasonable man. All possible charges can be cleared – just like that – for a little commission, if you
catch my drift.”

“What’s this?” Jon asked with a sneer; unable to resist. “Your funding has dried up already from
your usual source?”
Bywater’s features tightened, and he went red in the face. “You better watch your mouth now, Snow. I’m doing you a favor you know. Most of us in the force never really cared for that fat fuck, but he knew how to play the game, and I suggest you do the same.”

“And what game was that?” Jon hissed as he felt his ire rising by the second. “The one that made you turn a blind eye to his dealings with the Dothraki, of getting my uncle killed, of trying to assassinate an innocent young woman, of getting me imprisoned and torturing me, or burning down my home and all those who live in it? Was it that game, Officer Bywater?”

He took a step closer to the other man until he was staring hard into the slightly alarmed deep-set eyes. “Do you worst,” Jon taunted with a cruel smile. “Because nothing, absolutely fucking nothing you do to from now on will make a difference. The City Watch as you know it, is going to be wiped clean. You and the rest of your sleazy, slimy companions. So, sleep well, Officer. Winter is coming.”

And with that threat, he spun on his heels to deal with his waiting tenants; ignoring the heavy breathing from the officer or the stuttered insults coming his way.

“Don’t think this is over, Snow! We’ll get you! All of you! Don’t you worry about that! You’re going to wish you had never messed with us! This is only the beginning!”

Indeed, it is, Jon thought with a grim smile. Indeed, it is.

In two days, the video went live online at 12:01am.

It was immediately carried by all broadcasting networks with the blaring headlines “BREAKING NEWS.”

In the middle of King’s Landing, large monitors, cellphones, tablets and all other possible devices now had the visage of a poised beautiful silver-haired woman with piercing violet eyes capturing their attention. In that moment, the world came to a standstill as they listened, once again, to their would-be queen.

“Good morning, my dear people of the great Realm of Westeros. I am Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, the First of Her Name, Queen of the Andals, the Rhoynar and the First Men, Queen of Meereen, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Protector of the Realm, Lady Regnant of the Seven Kingdoms, and the Breaker of Chains. However, I come to you today, not as a holder of titles that might mean nothing to you all, for they are just that…meaningless titles, but I come to you as a fellow citizen no longer willing to sit by as those we trusted to protect us continue to use our lives as nothing more than games for their selfish amusement. Today, we take a stand against the corruption and greed of our alleged protectors. Today, we wipe the slate clean.”

12:15am

Captain Janos Slynt eyed the pile of money on his desk. He had spent the past hour counting and re-counting and everything checked out. He licked the tip of his pen and ticked off the latest
councilman, who had offered him this bribe, from his list. He chuckled at the stupidity of those in
government. All politicians were assholes, and it took a special kind to hide his addiction to pre-teen
boys and girls while paying off the City Watch to keep his sick perversions under wraps. In fact,
compared to all the other shit he’d had to keep undercover, this was nothing. He was beginning to
lose count of how many lives he’d ruined over the years; innocents tossed into the dungeons without
being given a fair trial, ‘accidental’ homicides and assassinations all funded by so-called politicians.
Under his command, nothing was too sleazy for the City Watch. He tried to justify its current state by
blaming it on those at the head – the Lannisters who were no fucking saints either. Between them
and the weakened Kingsguards, it was a miracle Westeros was still functioning.

Ah well, it didn’t matter to him that much. All he cared about was right here; the gold dragons in his
purse. He might go ahead and book that vacation to the Summer Islands in a couple of weeks. With
Robert Baratheon’s woes now coming to the forefront, he knew they’d be getting no more money
from that drunken bloated bastard, so he might as well get his profits elsewhere. In fact, he was sure
he had that Councilman Sherwood next on the list to pay for getting rid of his wife’s ex-

Knock. Knock.

“Huh?” He looked up with a frown of impatience on his features. He thought he had sent most of his
subordinates home for the day. Only the runts were left working the graveyard shift, and he didn’t
have the time to listen to any more complaints.

“Who is it?” he grunted as he shoved the purse into his top drawer and tried to present his desk as
clean as possible. “What do you want…?”

He would barely feel the bullet entering his forehead once the door was opened. His mouth would
form a soundless O before his head slammed onto the desk, and as a pool of blood began to form
around it, the silent figure – dressed in City Watch garb – walked soundlessly into the room. He
opened the drawer and withdrew the purse of gold coins, and just as quietly as he appeared, he left
without a word.

“Westeros deserves a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. We should not be
made to wake up each day wondering where we’re to get our next meal from, or if we’ll ever be
able to have quality education, take care of our poor and sick, or live long and fruitful lives. You
should be able to look your councilman and city representative in the eye and tell them they are
there to serve you and not their best interests. We have the power to make the change we want to
see.”

12:32am

They considered themselves ‘The Boys’ – the top brass of the City Watch – who were subservient to
their captain Janos Slynt and no one else. Tonight, they drank and laughed merrily in the brothel;
their loud voices and crass remarks to their whores for the night, making the rest of the customers
uncomfortable. Yet no one dared step up to them. They were likely to get shot for no reason if that
Meryn Trant, who was once a member of the Kingsguard before being downgraded (and he was still bitter about it) rose to his feet; half-drunk and red in the face as he held up his jug of beer and saluted his fellow men.

“All right, boys! Looks like my gals are waiting, eh?”

“You sick fuck!” Illyn Payne cackled; an ugly brute of a man who was known to enjoy beheading his prisoners if given the chance. He loved the lowest sections of the dungeons for a reason. “Make sure you don’t rip their pussies apart, eh?”

“That’s the whole idea,” Trant laughed as he cupped his balls and wagged his tongue in a lecherous manner. “By the time I’m done with them, they won’t be able to walk for days. See ya bastards tomorrow!”

He staggered into one of the backrooms, absently tossing a few coins into the hands of the faggot-looking usher. Guzzling down the rest of his drink, he smashed the jug against the wall as he stepped into the bedroom and blinked at how dim the lights were.

“Fuck…where am I? A goddamn cave? Hey! Someone put some more lights on in here!”

“Why, my Lord?” came the sultry croon from the pile of cushions on the bed.

Trant blinked and forced his drunken gaze to focus on the writhing naked body. For a moment, he couldn’t really make out who it was, but when she eventually rose to her full height, his annoyance grew. This wasn’t what he ordered. Sure, she was beautiful, and her breasts were great, but she was dark-skinned and with that accent, she was probably from one of those obscure places in the East. Shit. Where were the teenage girls he had ordered?

“No,” he groaned and shook his head. “No, you bitch. I didn’t want you. Hey! Who’s running this fucking joint? I asked for some fucking girls! Girls! Don’t you understand the Common Tongue?! You fucking foreigners.”

The woman stepped down from the pedestal, her bare feet barely making a sound on the plush carpet. Her caramel skin glistened with the oils she had been made to rub all over, and every step was a seductive dance that mesmerized the officer despite his earlier aggravations. Hell, it had been a while since he’d had an adult, and this one’s pussy didn’t look too wrecked. He could manage for a while until they brought the real thing.

“Where you from?” he grunted as he began to unbuckle his belt; beads of sweat breaking out on his flushed brow as he licked his lips. “You don’t sound from around here.”

“No,” she replied with that same knowing smile on her lips. She trailed her fingers around his shoulders, and in his drunken haze, he failed to notice her right arm had been behind her all this time. It wasn’t until she was behind him, and her warm breath whispered in his ear,

“…from a country called Naath, my Lord. Have you heard of it? Oh no? What a shame. I’m sure you would have found many girls just to your taste, you sick son-of-a-bitch.”

She moved like the wind, her left hand reaching out to tug his hair to force his neck back and provide better access to the dagger she’d been holding in her right hand. As she slit his throat, Missandei barely blinked at the rush of blood to bathe her body in the aftermath. She released him, watching dispassionately as he fell to his knees; his trembling hands reaching up to try to control the bleeding but failing. He tried to say something, but she was already walking out of the room, but not before
grabbing a robe to sheath her nakedness.

She smiled at the sight waiting for her in the main room, where the whores sat around the comatose bodies of the seven other officers; their features either ashen or bloated from the effects of the poisons that had seeped into their systems.

“Good job, ladies,” Missandei praised as Grey Worm appeared with the purse of gold which he tossed in their direction. “Enjoy. Our Queen and King send their regards.”

“In conclusion, I remind you all that I do not return to claim the Syndicate and rule with an iron fist. I come to you as a reminder of what my family once considered the Syndicate to be; a guiding hand to a government where the people’s voices, hopes, and dreams always come first. We believe in a unified realm where each region is represented equally and given their fair share at the Great Council; not the sham we currently have under the watch of Tywin Lannister and his cohorts. I have been called a usurper, a foreign invader, and one to be feared by those who do not wish to let you see the truth, and I have no doubt they will be willing to arrest me should I continue to expose their lies. They control a government filled with corrupt officials willing to turn a blind eye to the many injustices happening every day, but I swear to you, as your Queen, all those who dare to infringe on your freedoms and rights will be brought to justice.”

12:42am

Bywater was damn good at his job. He knew he was. He had been in this business for almost twenty-years and in all that time, he had seen his share of deadbeats and psychopaths to last him a lifetime. He knew he was just one step closer to getting Slynt’s position, but if that bald fucker was still in charge, he knew he was going to keep being relegated to the shit cases no one else wanted to deal with.

Especially with this Snow kid and Robert Baratheon.

Seven fucking hells.

When Slynt had offered him the job, Bywater had assumed it would be yet another open-and-shut case. Baratheon would keep feeding their coffers while they tortured the brat and his uncle. Bywater hadn’t really given a damn about the real particulars of the case, and he had no real opinion about that Targaryen bitch, but he did have a loathing for foreigners and couldn’t stand seeing them wander around his city with their accents and penchant for causing trouble. Left to him, all foreigners should be persecuted and face a firing squad, but hey, if Baratheon was willing to fork out that much money, who was he to complain?

Except the honeymoon was now over.

Thanks to the scandalous headlines regarding his sexual exploits and misconducts, Baratheon was all but finished. His once famous store had been vandalized by an angry mob, and rumor had it that his accounts at the Iron Bank were also frozen. Not that anyone could blame them. Who would want to
be associated with such a goddamn pervert? Unfortunately, this meant that Bywater’s free money was no longer forthcoming. It wasn’t as if he had a lot of other options and the City Watch pay was abysmal. He had quite an expensive lifestyle as evidenced by the latest entertainment system he had purchased for himself. He was yet to finish paying it off.

Mixing himself a cocktail, he kicked off his shoes and sank into the comfortable leather lounger, while the soothing sounds of classical musical erupted from powerful speakers – yet another indulgent display of his illegal wealth. He closed his eyes and tried to relax; thoughts of ways to get Snow to see things his way seeping through his mind. Still, it had been a chilly sight to see; the pure hatred in Snow’s eyes in that moment. He thought he had seen the gamut of the kid’s expressions, but in that moment, Bywater was sure Snow would have killed him with his bare hands. Rumor was that Snow had gone to Essos to meet with Khal Drogo, but if he had managed to slip through the hands of the City Watch to get there, that would be an embarrassing stain on their record.

Not that it mattered anymore anyway. Robert Baratheon was finished. The Dothraki were no longer going to be a threat to King’s Landing (or Westeros for that matter), so he really had no need to keep dealing with them. No, he was going to start working hard on winning back his ex-wife and their three-year old son; two people he had long abandoned all because of his quest to reach the upper echelon of society. They had left him over a year ago; moved back to the Riverlands and away from his uncontrollable wrath. No matter. He was going to change and become a better man, and the first step would be to pick up the phone and give her call.

Except for the sudden sound of the phone ringing just as soon as he was finished with his thought. 

_Hmm? Wonder who it could be._

Still feeling slightly giddy at his idea of making amends with Carol, he picked up the receiver, with the ridiculous notion that it just might be her at the other end. However, it would take him a second to realize that the low ticking sound at the other end of the line wasn’t a dial tone, neither would he get a chance to finish saying the words ‘hello?’ before the sharp stench of gas overshadowed whatever scream of horror he might have emitted in that moment.

The neighbors would agree that it had been a most spectacular explosion, where Jacelyn Bywater’s home went up in flames leaving absolutely _nothing_ behind.

_“May the old gods and the new continue to be with you, the good people of Westeros. I thank you for giving me an audience, and I wish you all a goodnight and a better tomorrow.”_
When it was all said and done, they’d probably make love beneath the heavens again; not caring if anyone watched or judged them for being so open with their relationship.

Pity only one part of that fantasy was real.

They were in a car all right, but it wasn’t in his beloved Camaro because that had been blown up in the fire, and two, he wasn’t driving. Dany was behind the wheel; a surprisingly good driver and quite the sight to behold considering he had never seen her in such a position before. She had almost looked offended at her offer to do so earlier in the evening, and he retorted with a ‘you? Drive? Since when?!’

“Since I was fourteen,” she had snapped. “Do you think I didn’t learn to drive when I was with the Dothraki? I know they weren’t big fans of cars, but I didn’t sit on my ass all day doing nothing, Jon.”

Point taken.

It still hadn’t stopped him from praying she wasn’t a maniac on the streets, and so far, she had been on her best behavior. Keeping within the speed limits and going at a rather leisurely pace, it could almost give one the illusion they were going on a simple joyride instead of the place of her possible death.

Fuck.

For the umpteenth time, he stole another desperate glance at her profile, wishing he could convince her to turn the car around. She was humming to the song coming from the radio; an upbeat pop tune by an artist she enjoyed. She even knew all the lyrics and would jump in now and again to say the words out loud. With her hair in twin ponytails and brushed back from her features, she looked even younger and fresh-faced; a far cry from the composed and regal persona she had shown to the world two long nights ago. Despite this, there were faint bags of weariness beneath her eyes; a clear sign that she was under a lot of stress – just as he was. So far, their plans had gone like clockwork, but this was the part where everything could go terribly wrong, and the thought of losing her at this juncture…

“I can’t…”

“Hmm? What’s that?” she asked as she glanced at him; a smile so sweet and innocent on her visage, it was all he could do not to force the car off the road and drag her away from here. They could run all the way to the ends of the earth, or maybe even beyond The Wall and live as Wildlings for a while until things became quiet.

“I can’t lose you,” he whispered as she made the turn toward the now familiar narrow stretch of roadway leading to their destination.

“You aren’t going to lose me,” she reassured him though she gave her fears away with the tightening of her knuckles on the steering wheel. “We’ve already talked about this, Jon.”

“He’s a madman,” Jon pleaded; his voice hoarse with despair. “He could…he could have his fucking snipers take you out the moment we arrive. He could even have that bastard, The Hound, finish the job once he gets a good look at you. I don’t think -”

“Jon?”

“I really don’t think we should-”

“Jon?”
“…keep going with this. There’s got to be another way-”

“Jon!”

He stopped rambling long enough to notice the shimmer of tears in her eyes despite the firm
determination in her clenched jaw. Her eyes were still on the road, the towering trees creating dark
ominous shadows around them as she drove on.

“We’ve been over this already,” she repeated as she took a deep shuddering breath, “but there’s no
other way to do this. Our options are pretty slim, remember? If things do go south…then we move to
Plan B. Yes?”

Jon gritted his teeth and nodded reluctantly. He could now make out the massive gates leading to
Robert Baratheon’s castle; the detestable crowned stag sigil upon it almost like a death knell within
his mind. As the car crawled toward it, the gates swung open akin to the waiting arms of Death
inviting them into its lair. If Jon wasn’t so wound up, he might have admired the way the castle was
lit at nighttime especially around the grounds, but he was in no mood for that.

“I was sure they’d be some paparazzi hanging around here,” Dany was saying as she wove her way
down the gravel driveway. “Guess they’ve given up waiting for a statement from him.”

“I thought Varys said he’s not left the house since the news broke. Besides, with your speech the
other day, they’ve got more important things to do besides deal with a fucking pedophile and
pervert.”

Dany gave a wry smile. Her latest video had earned her even more fans and the opposite alike.
Those staunch supporters of the Lannisters had voiced their displeasure at her supposed arrogance;
one pundit even going as far as calling her a bitch on national T.V. for daring to challenge the
establishment. The asshole had been fired the next day, but did find a job quickly in a network that
seemed to favor painting the Lannisters in a favorable light. Some still mocked her decision to remain
in ‘hiding’; calling her videos mere stunts and not worthy of a would-be queen. If she hoped to really
make an impact, she ought to face the music. Let her come to the Red Keep and stand face-to-face
with Tywin Lannister, then they’d see who was worthy of being in control of the Realm.

In due time, she thought as she came to a stop before the impressive entrance; not as dramatic as
Dragonstone, but impressive nonetheless. If I survive this, then you can be sure I’ll be paying the
Lannisters a long overdue visit.

There were two figures waiting at the doorway; their shadows dark against the brilliant yellow light
flooding from indoors. Their heights would have been funny, if Jon didn’t suddenly let out a gasp of
shock as the figures approached.

“Gen…Gendry?” Jon croaked in disbelief. “What the fuck is he doing here?”

Dany frowned at the sight of the shorter, but stocky and well-built young man whose battered
features looked worse for wear. His one good eye – the other was padded with bandages – was a
startling blue that genuinely looked pleased at the sight of Jon. “That is the son of Robert Baratheon,
right?”

“Yeah,” Jon replied as he stepped out of the car; his mind still whirling with conflicting emotions.
They had definitely not foreseen this happening. When they had spoken to Sam, they had learned of
the fight Gendry had with his father – or rather The Hound – who was approaching them as well.

“Jon!” Gendry enthused with a crooked grin as he reached out to give his friend a hug; being careful
not to aggravate the injured arm. “Shit man, feels like its been years since I last saw you.”

“I know,” Jon replied with a small smile. “…a lot of things have happened, haven’t they?”

There was an unreadable expression to fill Gendry’s eye for a moment before he shrugged and nodded. “Yeah, a shit ton of things have happened, but here we are. Alive and well…relatively.” He stopped to notice Dany watching them, and he gave a soft whistle beneath his breath. “So, the rumors were all true then, huh? You and…eh…Daenerys Targaryen, huh? Talk about an upgrade from Ros. It’s like from a 10 to a 110.”

Jon grimaced and leaned close to whisper into his ear. “Don’t talk about her like she’s just some hooker, Gen. She’s my girl, all right?”

Gendry might have ribbed Jon a little more, but when he saw the dark expression in his friend’s eyes, he knew to back off. Besides, there was something quite different about Jon. He had always known the man was strong, but there was something else that seemed to envelope the Northerner like a shield. Gendry wasn’t good with expressing himself sometimes, but if he knew how to phrase it, he would probably go with even more intensity, confidence, and an almost subconscious air of regality Jon wasn’t aware of having. It was even in the way he had gone back to lead his girl toward them for an introduction; holding onto her like the most precious thing in his life.

“Dany…Gendry Waters or Baratheon, who knows what he goes by these days,” Jon teased as Gendry shot him the middle finger. “Gendry…Daenerys Stormborn.”

He bowed awkwardly in greeting at Dany. “Nice to meet you, Miss Stormborn.”

“Nice to meet you as well and you can call me Dany,” she replied with a smile that literally had him gasping. Seven hells, all those pictures in the papers didn’t do her justice at all. It was like literally being sucker punched in the gut at how stunning she was. How Jon could not turn into a puddle every second around her was a miracle.

“This all just warms my heart,” came the bored comment from The Hound, who had been watching the proceedings with an impassive expression on his visage. “But the boss is waiting, and I ain’t got the time to be hanging around watching you all catch up on old times. Let’s go.”

“Charming fucker, ain’t he?” Gendry whispered as they trailed after the big man. “You should see him after a couple of drinks. Then he really lets the Clegane charisma flow through.”

Jon might have smiled at that if he wasn’t suddenly faced with about ten…no…twenty…shit…even more? Black-suited men standing at attention all around the grand lobby like sentry. Each seemed to hold a different weapon of choice; ranging from simple guns to what might have been a steel club with nails attached to it.

“What the fuck?” Jon whispered as his grip on Dany’s hand tightened.

“Sorry,” Gendry said with a light shrug; his once friendly expression now one of indifference and calm. “It felt better doing it this way instead of bombarding you with the guards right off the bat, but if you guys just do as Dad says…we don’t have to end this with a lot of bloodshed.”

“You lying sack of shit,” Jon cursed as he made to lunge forward; only held back by Dany just as the guards and The Hound also moved to protect Gendry. “You are on his side?”

“He’s my father, Jon,” Gendry replied with a cold smile. “Blood of my blood and all that shit. I know you were probably responsible for making his life a living hell, so in a way, this is payback? I mean, I know he can be a jerk, but he’s still the one who gave me life.”

“After all he’s done?!” Jon roared and might have lunged again when the sudden blow to his right side had him doubling over in agony. Shit! For a man that big, The Hound, did move rather quickly.

He might have delivered another blow, but Dany stood in the way; her features tight with barely controlled fury. “Enough,” she said firmly. “I am the one he wants, so let me see him.”

The Hound sneered and might have ignored her, when Gendry raised a hand to still him. “It’s all right. She’s got a point. Dad might want them both in one piece.” He stepped back and ushered them toward one of the doors. “In you go. He’s waiting.”

“Are you okay, Jon?” she asked softly as she tried to help him stand upright, which he did with a grunt and an almost impatient shrug of her hand on him. He took a deep breath; wincing as his ribs protested the motion and nodded.

“Fine,” he ground through clenched teeth; his eyes dark with anger. “Let’s go.”

However, before he could take another step, the hairs at the back of his neck prickled in awareness. He looked up then to notice the woman in red watching them from upstairs. Like before, she was clad in a long maroon gown that swept the floor; that same choker around her neck blazing red amongst the shadows she seemed content to hide in. There was an unreadable expression in those eyes and a small smile on her lips; a knowing if you will.

“Who is that?” Dany asked forcing him to tear his gaze away. “She looks like a Red Priestess.”

“She’s no one important,” Gendry retorted as he led the way into the ‘war room’. “She’s one of Dad’s fuck toys, and that’s about it.”

As they stepped into the darkened den, it was a chance for Dany to see what Jon had described to her. It was even more impressive and intimidating in person. Just like the Painted Table at Dragonstone, Robert’s detailed map of Westeros was an awe-inspiring sight, and not for the first time, Dany felt the overwhelming crush and pressure of her role settling upon her shoulders. So distracted was she by the map, she failed to notice the pallor settling on Jon’s features as he stared at something at the opposite side of the room.

“This really is amazing,” Dany was saying. “Isn’t it, Jon? Jon?”

She turned then at his silence. Jon was struck dumb by a painting he might not have noticed when he was here before. That was because it had been hidden behind one of the many thick curtains around the room. However, Robert had let this particular portrait stand out, and it was of his beautiful Aunt Lyanna. Clad in a gorgeous ballgown – something Jon was sure his aunt might never have worn since she was rumored to be a tomboy at heart – it still managed to capture her essence perfectly. There were the familiar Stark features; the long face with wise grey eyes. Around her head was a crown of…

“Blue roses,” Dany whispered as she stepped closer to the picture. Subconsciously, her hands almost reached for her head; recalling the dwarf that had placed something similar on her head back in Vaes Dothrak.

“That’s my aunt Lyanna,” Jon declared hoarsely. “She was my father’s only sister…and they said she lost her life due to an illness no one could heal.”

“…I’m so sorry,” Dany whispered as she slipped an arm through his and rest her head on his shoulder. “She was beautiful.”

“Yeah…” Jon’s voice was wistful; his eyes wet with unshed tears. “Wish I had met her in real life.
With all the stories I heard of her, she seemed like the best…"

The sudden *whirr* of a machine had them jumping in surprise. They turned to notice the almost archaic movie projector whirling rapidly, and soon the images began flashing upon a screen they had once assumed was a mere tapestry of some sort.

“What in the world…?” Dany began, but stopped when she felt Jon’s body tense at the sight of the man to show up on the screen.

It was a young Ned Stark, just about Jon’s current age, posing before a vintage convertible with a smug grin on his features. He was laughing at something the person filming was saying, and Jon could feel his chest tighten at the sight of the father he missed more than he ever realized. The images changed, and it was now Ned, Lyanna, and Robert at a diner showcasing the basket of fries and burgers they had ordered for themselves. Robert and Lyanna were clearly a couple in this, for they sat next to each other; laughing and making faces at the camera. Another video clip showed them a beach, this one focusing more on Lyanna clad in a one-piece bathing suit while doing somersaults and posing for the camera. She blew kisses at her captive audience; her youthful features alive and glowing with health.

Jon would feel the salt of his tears on his lips before realizing he was crying silently.

He wished he had known her. All this time ‘Aunt Lyanna’ was nothing but an abstract; just a story about a relative who had lived and died in such a short period of time. This video was a cruel reminder that she had been more than just a name on a piece of paper. Once upon a time she had just been like them; probably with dreams of living a long life with the man she loved…even if it ended up being Robert Baratheon.

However, when the images changed again, and Dany gave an audible gasp, it was hardly surprising to see the reason why.

Rhaegar Targaryen was finally coming into the picture; looking for all the world like a god stepped out from the heavens. With his shock of silver hair, piercing lilac eyes, and ethereal good looks, was it any wonder he was the center of attention in the proceeding scenes. Even when the camera wasn’t focused on him, he *still* managed to capture one’s attention. In one shot, he was strumming on a guitar with Lyanna watching in rapturous attention. He had a strong baritone that could caress one’s soul, and as the next few scenes focused on his musical talents, it appeared that Rhaegar had been in a band while in college as evidenced by a performance the cameraman had filmed of them at a local bar. Seeing Ned, Lyanna, and Robert dancing was almost comical, but that was about as far as the humor went.

The next few scenes would show the quartet hanging out in various locations, but it was clear that Lyanna and Rhaegar were becoming closer. Sure, there were shots with his aunt and Robert Baratheon still doing things as a ‘couple’, but anyone could see that she had eyes for the silver-haired man with the beautiful smile, and that point was driven home during a New Year’s Eve party where the camera caught the couple stealing a rather heated kiss in the background. One might have blinked and missed it, due to the crush of people in the foreground, but there it was – a blinding evidence of just what kind of a relationship those two must have had.

Rhaegar and Lyanna…together.

As if to emphasize that painful point, the scene was rewound, and it played again; this time zooming in closer to see the couple at their most intimate yet. It would freeze, then rewind and play again over and over until Dany screamed in frustration.
“Enough! We get it! Goddamn it!”

Jon held her trembling body close to his; absently placing a hard kiss on her head as he forced himself to keep watching his aunt’s ‘betrayal’. No wonder Robert had lost his shit. It still didn’t justify his overreaction to the Targaryens in general, but one could empathize with his feelings of loss at what he thought he had.

“Enough?” came the low growl from the man slowly making his way out of the shadows.

Jon and Dany stepped back without realizing it; their bodies tensed as they took stock of the bane of their existence. Robert Baratheon – if possible – had added even more weight from the last time Jon had seen him. His already bushy beard was now matted and overgrown; some bits of congealing food caught in it. He was wearing his favorite smoking jacket of black velvet, but it reeked of alcohol and was just as stained. He shuffled drunkenly toward them; his features flushed and bloated. There were dark circles around his eyes as well as heavy bags to highlight his lack of sleep for goodness knew how long. With a loud belch, he lifted the bottle of rum he’d be clutching in his left hand to drain its contents. While drinking, his dark gaze was trained on Dany; perhaps trying to digest being in the presence of yet another fucking Targaryen after all this time. Once done, he smashed the bottle against the wall, belched and snapped his fingers impatiently.

From seemingly nowhere, two of his henchmen arrived to tug Dany away from Jon; ignoring their cries of indignance at the sudden separation. Jon tried to reach for her, but was yanked back and forced to his knees by The Hound who held him down with his large hands upon Jon’s shoulders. Jon was sure if he dared move, the man would crush his already throbbing left arm. He could only watch helplessly as Dany was treated in the same manner; shoved to her knees before the projector screen where the damning images of her older brother and his aunt continued to flicker across her features like a morbid display. With the two men holding onto her arms, she could not move; neither could she stop the sudden hard slap to her right cheek which had her head whipping to the side with the force of it. The sharp metallic taste of blood filled her mouth, but Robert wasn’t done yet. He slapped her again, this time attacking her left side. The blood dribbled down her chin, and she could barely hear Jon’s furious roar as her ears rang from the stinging blows.

*He’ll beat me to death to prove a point,* she thought as she struggled to control her breathing. She wasn’t going to give him the satisfaction of crying out, and Robert might have sensed it as she looked up with ice in her eyes. *Go ahead and slap me until you’re satisfied, you bastard. I won’t ever give in.*

The next slap nearly had her head snapped back, and she was powerless to stop the tears from filling her eyes. She could already feel the right side of her face swelling, and she sucked in a harsh breath; the blood making it hard to breathe a little. She spat it out and lowered her head.

*Breathe, Dany…breathe…you’ve been through worse, remember? This is nothing compared to those beatings Viserys used to give you.*

“She’s a tough one. I’ll give her that much,” Robert praised as he seemed to have enough for now. He plopped into the leather chair and reached for one of the many waiting bottles of alcohol propped at its side. “Must be a Targaryen thing. Your foolish brother was the same way. Didn’t know when to quit until I beat it into him. You all have that stupid expression on your faces; as if the world owes you shit and you’re better than everyone else. Well, not today, Miss Thing. I’ll show you exactly why you don’t want to mess with a Baratheon. And as for you—”

He turned to Jon, and if looks could kill, Robert was sure he’d be dead by now. Still it was amusing to see Ned’s boy look just like his father in that moment. Those Starks could be prissy little hotheads.
“I’ve got to hand it to you, Bastard of Winterfell,” he said aloud with a nod. “You tried to play me like a fiddle, but you forgot who you were dealing with. I did tell you not to fuck with me, right? I guess I should blame myself for even giving you a chance to prove yourself back then. Should have cut off the hand that I fed before it came back to bite me in the ass.”

He drank thirstily from the bottle of brandy; almost emptying it before taking a break.

“Ah yes,” he croaked and raised the bottle in a mock toast. “Let’s bring down Robert Baratheon with all his pervious sins and make him Public Enemy number one, eh? Get the Dothraki on your side, cut off my funds from the Iron Bank and what’s this? Get rid of those sleazy fuckers in the City Watch…all thanks to you two little assholes. Who would have thought? I guess Westeros really is in good hands with you two at the helm, eh? Hah!” He threw back his head and laughed long and hard at this. “Guess Tywin Lannister won’t know what hit him when you two come for his head…but then again…”

He stopped laughing to pin an icy look on Dany. “Who says I’m going to give him the satisfaction? By the time I’m through with you both, you’ll wish you had never fucked with me. Oh yes. My reputation might be tarnished, but you’re both going down with me. I guarantee you that.”

He staggered to his feet; having to hold on to the armrests to not faceplant on the floor. When he was sure the world had stopped spinning, he pointed at Jon.

“Yeah, you surprised me, Bastard, but then again…did you ever sit down to really think of the person you plan on supporting? This so-called would be queen of Westeros?” He sneered at Dany, who was still watching him with venom in her eyes. “She paints this picture of a saint, but you do know she’s got to get hands just as dirty, don’t you? You think she managed to conquer Slavers Bay by simply singing kumbaya and wishing for peace and prosperity? Bullshit! Why don’t you tell dear Jon here, where you got all your money from, oh Queen of Meereen. Go on! Tell him all the underhanded dealings with the Great Masters. Tell him of all the lives you offered to kill in exchange for their gold and silver, eh? Oooh? What’s this? She never told you? I’m shocked. I thought you two lovebirds never kept secrets from each other. Hah!”

Dany met Jon’s gaze, but only briefly. His expression of shocked disbelief was enough for her, but if Robert had hoped to make her feel guilty, it wasn’t going to work.

“That’s right,” Robert continued mercilessly. “The so-called Mhysa is just as hypocritical as those she plans to overthrow. She realizes that to rule, one must sometimes get down and dirty, by any means necessary. So, if you truly believe she’s going to control The Syndicate and not do anything to retain her power, even if it means taking down her enemies in cold blood, you’re more naïve than I thought. She’s a fucking dragon all right. Got the madness of her family within her after all. I’d be doing Westeros a fucking favor in getting rid of her right here and now.”

He shuffled toward the back of his desk; mumbling something beneath his breath as he did so, and when he withdrew the largest hammer; a weapon forged from iron that looked incredibly heavy, both Jon and Dany gasped in dawning realization of what was to happen.

“Ah yes,” Robert grunted as he tested its weight. “Still remember ramming this into your brother’s chest that day. Felt as light as a feather then…”

“And yet you spend your days relieving memories of him,” Dany suddenly interrupted with a smile that didn’t quite reach her eyes. “For someone who hated my family so much, you seemed quite obsessed with them.”

Jon’s eyes widened; his unspoken question of ‘what-the-fuck-are-you-doing-Dany?’ clearly evident
in his eyes.

“My brother might have lost his life that day, but he didn’t choose to live the rest of his life being a coward,” she continued as if not noticing Jon’s panic. She was surprisingly calm; the sudden idea of dying not sounding so bad at all. Goodness knows she would have wanted to live a little longer; perhaps until Jon would be brave enough to ask for her hand in marriage or something that cheesy. They could probably adopt Monterys as their own kid, or if by some miracle she was finally able to have a child of her own again, she envisioned him having Jon’s soulful brown eyes and general temperament.

What a nice dream that would have been.

“I am not naïve to believe that life as a queen is going to be easy,” she added quietly, and this time, she did look up, but not to face Robert, but to stare into Jon’s eyes as if hoping her words and all she could not really say out loud would be understood. “I know I’m signing up for a task that will be difficult, but it’s a promise I’ve made to those who fell before me. I am the last Targaryen, and I will uphold my ancestors’ intentions to create a unified Realm. Once you might have had those aspirations, but you’ve let your petty hate and jealousy get in the way, Robert Baratheon. What do you have to show for it now? Nothing but endless nights spent in tirades about my family and the wrongs did to you. I might die tonight, but I’ll die with no regrets.”

The tears she had managed to hold in finally broke free; a sight that had Jon giving a low sound of suffering, for he needed to be close to her in this moment. Yet the hard squeeze on his shoulder had him crying out for a whole other reason.

“I have had the pleasure of knowing true love,” Dany whispered with a smile to Jon. “And I’ll die with that knowledge while you continue to wallow in your misery like the pitiable figure you’ve now become.”

She turned to the older man and took a deep breath. “So, go ahead…do your worst, you fucking piece of shit.”

She couldn’t have said anything else to get him more fired up. Robert was now so red-faced and furious, they fully expected him to blow out steam from his ears. His proceeding roar was terrifying, and one could almost picture how formidable an opponent he must have been in his youth.

“You fucking whore!” he bellowed and swung with all his might.

Dany closed her eyes and lowered her head. Jon’s scream was almost drowned in Robert’s fevered bellows. However, at the sudden heavy and wet sound of something hitting flesh permeated the tension-filled air, as well as the odd croaking sound Robert gave which caused Dany to lift her lashes in bewilderment; it was to notice something odd sticking out of the middle of the older man’s chest.

What…?

Even Jon had a confused expression on his visage before his eyes widened at something only he could see from his vantage point. Robert’s features slackened; his fingers letting go of the hammer, which fell to the floor with a loud thump. As he coughed out a wad of blood; ending up spraying some on Dany and the guards’ faces, Robert looked down slowly at the now gaping wound in the middle of his chest. There was a comical expression of disbelief on his features before he turned around slowly to see who was responsible for it.

“…you…”
“That’s right, Dad. It’s Gendry Waters,” came the quiet reply as the young man held up his own version of a war hammer now coated with blood so thick, it was almost black. It was the same one he had proudly shown off to Sam and Jon months ago. His pride and joy; forged in his father’s shop with his bare hands. Having been ignored all this time, hardly anyone had noticed him retrieving the weapon from its hiding place.

“You never did praise me for doing such a good job with this one,” Gendry continued as he caressed the handle like a lover would. “If I remember correctly, you said it was never going to be as good as yours.”

Robert tried to say something, but more blood gurgled out of his mouth. He dropped to his knees like an oversized boulder, and as the guards behind Dany finally unfroze from the sudden turn of events and tried to reach for their guns; Dany seized the moment. She arched backwards throwing them off and kicked out with her right leg, sending one of the guards to the floor with a loud grunt of pain. She reached for his gun before he could compose himself and sent a bullet into his forehead; spinning just as quickly to send another into the second guard’s chest. She would have gone for The Hound, only to see that he was standing back with no intention to hurt Jon or Gendry. If anything, the big man appeared to be interested in the proceedings; a cynical smile on his scarred features.

“…gua…guards,” Robert was gurgling as he appeared to be trying to point outside, but when the doors were flung open and Grey Worm walked in with Stalwart Shield and Brave Heart in tow, his eyes widened in confusion and disbelief. No one had heard any gunfire, but then again, evidence of the possible melee was seen with the bloodied hands and daggers each of her Unsullied displayed.

“We got them all, Your Grace,” Grey Worm announced as he surveyed the scene with mild interest. “The plan went well.”

“Pla…plan…” Robert gasped as he tried to stand up. “You…fu-fucking…bi-bitch…!”

“As future Queen of Westeros, I do have to be prepared for all possible scenarios,” Dany said quietly as she rose to her feet. “But I can’t take all the credit. This Jon Snow you seem to look down on came up with the idea…with that Hound’s help. He gave us a detailed map of your castle, and we were able to surround it with no problem. I might have lost my life, but there was no way you were going to get through this either. Besides,” she looked at Gendry, “…we weren’t expecting this actual development.”

“Didn’t do it for you two,” Gendry replied with a small smile. “I’ve wanted to do this for a long time. Just had to find the right moment that’s all.”

He walked closer to his father; towering over him with the hammer clutched between his hands. In that moment, one could almost see the shadow of a younger Robert Baratheon, and it must have been an eerie sight to the older man.

“Gen-Gendry…my…my bo-boy…”

“Her name was Moira,” Gendry said quietly; his one good eye filled with mingled expressions of hate and sadness. “She had beautiful blond hair and the sweetest voice. She didn’t speak much about you, but when she did, she always considered you a king in her eyes; despite all the shit you put her through.”

Robert gave a sound that was between a gurgle and a choked sob, and to Gendry’s disgust there were tears in his eyes.

Too little too late.
“There are a shit ton of us running around out there thanks to you not knowing how to keep your fucking dick in your pants, so consider this a gift from all of them to you…Dad.” With a swiftness that took everyone by surprise, Gendry swung again; this time connecting with the side of Robert’s head.

Dany had to cover her mouth to control the sudden rise of her last meal filling her throat. She couldn’t even look at what now remained of Robert Baratheon as she headed right into Jon’s waiting arms to bury her aching face against his chest.

“It’s all over,” he whispered into her hair as she sobbed quietly; the shakes finally coming hard after getting through that experience. “We did it, Dany. It’s all over.”

She could only nod; not trusting herself to speak yet.

However, Grey Worm had other pressing matters. “And what do we do with him, Your Grace?” This he directed to Jon, which was still something Jon had trouble adjusting to being addressed in such a manner. It wasn’t as if he was married to Dany, and yet because of the whole ‘khal’ thing, everyone assumed they already were. Not that he minded the false assumptions, but still…

_I wouldn’t mind a proper…_

He shook his head from his wayward thoughts and studied the man in question. The Hound stared back as if daring Jon to do anything stupid, but the pressures of the day and the ‘excitement’ of the evening was suddenly wearisome, and Jon had no intention of spending another minute around here. All he wanted was a nice long, hot bath in the rented house they were staying in, and cuddling up to Dany afterwards.

“Let him go,” he said with a sigh. “I don’t give a damn what he wants to do, besides, Gendry might have better use for him.”

Gendry, who was still standing over his dead father’s body, finally looked up at the sound of his name. A haunted expression was still in his eyes, but it faded as he noticed everyone watching him.

“What now, Gendry Waters?” Jon asked. “You know the Kingsguard and whatever is left of the City Watch is gonna be after you, and you’ve got this guy to deal with as well.”

Gendry shrugged and cradled the hammer against his shoulder. “Yeah, I figured. But yeah…dunno…I might leave the city for a while. Maybe go East. Did always want to see what all the fuss was about in Braavos. I could lay low for a while until you get in power and grant me a pardon, Your Grace.” He gave Dany a polite bow, a wan smile on his features.

“Consider that the first thing I do,” Dany reassured him. “And…I hope you are finally at peace.”

Gendry shrugged and took a quick look at the body on the floor. “It feels weird. I thought getting revenge would fill me with elation, but I just feel tired. Shit. I just want to lie down and sleep it off, you know? But…guess I better start hightailing it before folks start talking. Or are you just gonna burn this whole place to the ground?”

Jon chuckled. “That was another option.”

“Not too late to do it,” Dany said as she surveyed the room with distaste. “We could wipe clean the slate of the Baratheon legacy, just as he did to mine. Poetic justice, right?”

“Your call,” Gendry said with a shrug. “I’m just a lowly subject in your kingdom, and as for you…” He frowned at The Hound. “Want to go on a road trip with me? I might need a bodyguard for a
while.”

“You paying?” came the gruff response.

“I’m sure Dad has a few gold coins hanging around here somewhere. We’ll go treasure hunting and salvage anything we can before razing this place to the ground. What do you say?”

The Hound grunted and began selecting some choice items he had been eyeing all this time. Might as well get started.

“And what are you two gonna do?” Gendry asked. “Gonna run off into the sunset and get married and shit?”

Jon and Dany blushed and couldn’t look at each other for a moment, causing Gendry to roll his eyes at their bashful display.

Jon recovered first and nodded toward the portrait of Lyanna. “I wouldn’t mind having that with me. It will be a nice addition to Winter—”

“Dragonstone,” Dany cut in quickly; her features so red with embarrassment, she wanted to die.

“…Dragonstone,” Jon agreed with a smile that turned into a grin at her shyness.

“And you’re welcome to come visit anytime,” Dany added with a firm nod.

“Will do,” Gendry said as he stepped forward to give Jon a handshake in farewell. However, he wasn’t prepared for the hug he received instead, and Jon didn’t seem to mind that his left arm was being crushed between their bodies as he held on for dear life. Gendry felt his throat tighten and he had to squeeze his eyes shut so as not to burst into tears. The past few days had been an emotional rollercoaster to say the least, and having it all culminate in this way…

“I’ll miss you,” Jon whispered. “Don’t you dare be a stranger, all right?”

“Back at you, future King of Westeros,” Gendry teased hoarsely as he finally pulled away with a lowered gaze. “You take care of each other, all right. I think I like this new version of you, Jon.”

He would escort them and their silent army out of the castle grounds, and as Grey Worm drove them back to the city, Jon would take one look back with a dreary sense of finality. For as much as he hoped his instincts would prove him wrong, Jon Snow had a feeling it just might have been the last time he would ever see Gendry Waters.

Until we meet again, may the old gods and the new be with you, my friend.
King’s Landing heaved with controlled chaos.

It wasn’t in the form of deadly riots or protests en masse, but rather the influx of breaking news which had the media salivating yet struggling to keep up with. Between the devastating White Castle Apartment complex fire, the mysterious deaths of the City Watch’s top brass, the fall of Robert Baratheon and his subsequent death, as well as the Red Keep having to keep up with increased demands for Daenerys Targaryen to be given a seat at the upcoming Great Council meeting, King’s Landing was a sitting powder keg just waiting to explode.

The current acting head of the City Watch was now, oddly enough, Jaime Lannister, who held a rather awkward press conference that must have had his father losing a few more hairs he didn’t really have. For all his good looks and alleged bravery on the battlefield, Jaime Lannister couldn’t, for the life of him, manage to control himself in the presence of reporters pestering him with questions he could barely answer. A brilliant military tactician he was; a public relations guru, he most definitely wasn’t. At the end of the hour long rambling explanation on the changes to the City Watch and how he planned to make it even better and more responsive to the needs of the people, the blond was soaking in sweat.
With most of the questions focused on that damn Targaryen bitch, it was amusing to watch his usual detached and almost haughty features turn red with increased embarrassment. Many claimed he stormed out of the City Watch offices and straight into the arms (and bed) of his twin sister, Cersei Lannister…but then again those were only rumors, weren’t they?

“Turn that thing off,” Jon grumbled from behind the desk where he was currently reading through the pile of insurance claims from the surviving tenants of the fire.

With several meetings planned with the insurance company later today; where he hoped to get his tenants compensated for their losses, there was also the arduous task of settling them into new accommodations. It’s been about a week since the incident, and it was still tough having to watch those families dig through the rubble to find anything they could salvage.

And I lost everything as well, he thought with a bitter smile. Not that he had much possessions to brag about, but he had been proud of his music collection especially considering how long and hard it had taken him to find the classic vinyl of The Crows first release. That shit had cost him a fortune.

At least he had his health and life, eh?

“I said turn that fucking thing off,” he said louder, when Davos still seemed intent on watching the news on the flat screen T.V. positioned in the corner of the office. It wasn’t as claustrophobic White Castle’s had been, but it was cozy enough.

“Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed this morning,” Davos taunted with a raised brow.

He was rewarded with a gruff ‘hmph’, causing the older man to chuckle at how serious and grumpy Jon looked. So yes, it was only about eight-fifteen in the morning, and the young man had been forced out of the arms of his beloved to trudge to his duties at five in the blasted morning. Unfortunately, those were the ‘perks’ of being a landlord. Jon had more responsibilities now and little to no time to waste idling about as he once did while his uncle was in this position.

“Ah, bloody hell,” Davos cursed as he stuck his bleeding thumb into his mouth.

Jon looked up long enough with a bemused frown. “You’re going to kill yourself trying to open that safe. Don’t know why you’re so intent on seeing its contents. It’s probably just got more shit in it.”

“Shit that could help us out around here,” Davos argued as he sucked harder on the wound. “I’ve tried all the different combinations I can think of, but nothing. Besides, the fire melted a bit of it, so it’s a little tougher to get open…urgh. Fine. Drilling it is.”

“Not in here!” Jon warned, but thankfully, Davos was already leaving the office. Except he still hadn’t turned off the T.V., and Jon was forced to catch a glimpse of Tywin Lannister in a photo op with some of the Lords from the Riverlands.

"In an attempt to gather more support, Lord Lannister and his daughter, Cersei Lannister, welcomed some representatives from the Houses Tully, Frey, Vance, and Whent to the Red Keep for a luncheon. They have expressed a desire to see a stronger Westeros as the Great Council meeting approaches...”

Jon’s lips thinned as he studied the shrewd features of a man they probably should have more reason to fear than Robert Baratheon. One would have expected Tywin to make a big deal of the assassinations of his City Watch leaders or of Robert’s murder, but he had somehow managed to keep it all under wraps. He chose to feed the media, and people of Westeros, with falsehoods by blaming the deaths on foreign terrorists while increasing the City Watch presence on the streets. He
also claimed Robert’s death as an inevitable result of his scandals coming to light. To the rest of the world, Robert had simply drunk himself to death, and the razing of his castle was done by angry citizens seeking retribution for his sins.

If he and Dany had expected the City Watch to come pounding on their door with warrants for their arrest, they had encountered no such disturbance (yet). In fact, it seemed as if Tywin was going out of his way to ignore their presence.

Or he’s simply just waiting for the right opportunity to attack, Jon thought as he worried his lower lip. He won’t do it with loud threats or show of force – unless necessary – but whatever he’s planning…it’s not going to be good in the long run.

He couldn’t help being worried about Dany’s situation. Sure, one big obstacle was out of the way, but she was currently in enemy territory, and every day was a lesson in patience and restrained caution. She still tried to go about her business; choosing to remain in disguise as she visited the hospitals, orphanages, or homeless shelters around the city. It was almost strange seeing her as a brunette and in brown contact lenses, but if that was what it took for her to learn more about the city she hoped to rule someday…then so be it.

Speaking of which…

“Good morning, my darling,” she greeted cheerfully as her features filled his phone screen. Despite the fading bruises on her face, she still managed to take his breath away. “You didn’t even say goodbye,” she added with a pout before pulling away to show off her outfit in a playful twirl. “What do you think?”

She was clad in a black wool coat that hid whatever she might have been wearing underneath from view. On her head was an orange paisley scarf which hid her silver hair, though she was wearing a wig all the same. Her contacts weren’t in yet, but she slid on a pair of oversized reading glasses which had him chuckling at how dorky it made her look.

“Yeah, that looks perfect, babe,” he said with a shake of his head. “I don’t know if you’re going for the Granny vibe today, but you got it down to a tee.”

“Hah! Laugh all you want, Mister Snow, but I’ll have you know that the children love seeing Grandma Dany. Besides…Missandei and I have all these toys we have to give out.” She ducked out of sight and stood up again with a basket of colorful…things. “It’s going to be a busy day.”

Jon sighed and waved the pile of papers in his hand. “Tell me about it.”

“Do you want me to bring you lunch?” she offered, looking hopeful. “I could get you a sandwich-”

“You making it?”

“What’s with that expression?”

“What expression?”

“You looked as if you were going to throw up. I do know how to make a sandwich, Jon.”

“And I’m sure I’ll enjoy it, sweetheart, but not today,” he added with regret. “I’m going to be out of the office most of the time, so…”

She sighed and lowered the basket. “Fine. I get it…guess I’ll see you tonight. Don’t strain yourself too much.”
Jon lifted his left arm. “The pain’s not so bad. Still got the appointment with the doctor tomorrow, right?”

“Right.”

“Heey, cheer up,” he insisted when he saw she still looked upset about his ribbing on her cooking skills. “You can’t go see the kids looking like that, can you? Now where’s that adorable smile I love so much, eh?”

She blushed a pretty shade of pink despite her attempt to maintain her annoyance. She eventually caved and gave him the middle finger in salute before huffing as he laughed at her gesture.

“I hate you, Jon Snow,” she grumbled, pressed two fingers to her lips and placed it against the screen, before adding in a sultry growl. “See you tonight, my sun-and-stars, and you better be ready because I plan to ride you until you beg for mercy.”

_Sweet gods. Yes, please._

“I can’t wait, moon of my life. Love you too,” he replied with a smirk; returning the kiss before hanging up. Just in time (or maybe not since he was now sporting a rather uncomfortable erection) for Davos had returned; flushed with exertion but with a grin of satisfaction on his features.

“Got it open at last,” he huffed and lowered the safe onto the already cluttered coffee table.

“Oh huh,” Jon said with an absent nod as he squirmed in his seat and cleared his throat. He forced himself not to think of a naked Daenerys grinding on him with her porcelain skin flushed with passion, those lips swollen and moist from their kisses, her full breasts swaying back and forth with every motion of those hips and those perky dusky nipples just begging to be sucked…

…ah fuck.

“Ah, what do we have here?” Davos was saying forcing him to swerve from his sinful thoughts. “Hmm…deeds to the complexes…important…ah, more cash.”

“Oh? How much?”

“Thought you weren’t interested,” Davos sneered. He chuckled at Jon’s look of exasperation. “Don’t know…how about this?”

He held up two large bulging velvet purses with the familiar sigil of the Iron Bank etched on them. When opened, they revealed freshly minted gold dragon coins. If that wasn’t impressive enough, there was a medium-sized burlap sack which held five solid gold bars – another ‘gift’ from the Iron Bank. Jon couldn’t believe it.

“Looks like Benjen was smarter than I gave him credit for,” Davos mused with a low whistle of appreciation. “And he’s got these safes in all his complexes. Who knows just how much that bastard was hoarding all this time?”

Jon, who had left his seat by this time to be with Davos, was digging through the rest of the safe; his curiosity now piqued. There were more documents regarding real estate, including properties he owned in the Westerlands. What was even more bizarre was that most had the Lannister sigil on their letterheads, and one or two even had Tywin Lannister’s signature. Just what kind of dealings had his uncle made with the current ruler of Westeros?

“…use these for the tenants,” Davos was rambling on with excitement as he began counting out the
coins. Jon was barely paying attention, and it didn’t help when he came to the innocuous large manila envelope with the letters L.S. written on it.

L.S?

Could it be more stuff regarding the Lannisters?

If so, why was it still sealed? And was that an actual maester’s stamp from the Citadel? What the…?

The sudden buzz of his phone had him glancing at the device with slight impatience. However, seeing Sam’s name had him picking it up quickly.

“Jon?” Sam sounded breathless and excited. “Guess what came in the mail?”

“You finally won the lottery?” Jon asked with a smile as he tested the weight of the envelope in his hand. Light as a feather.

“I wish,” came the response tinged with laughter. “Seriously though, the results for the DNA test are here!”

Huh? DNA test? When…oh…oooh! Shit!

With all that’s happened since he took the test in Pentos, he’d nearly forgotten all about it.

“You have it?” Jon asked as he sat up; his heartbeat quickening with excitement and undeniable fear. The L.S envelope slipped from his hand to the floor, but he didn’t care. He knew it was stupid to feel this anxious already, but to know he was one step closer to having an idea of his mother’s origins was almost too much to bear.

“You home right now?” he asked as he rose to his feet while ignoring the bewildered look Davos threw his way. A trembling hand rubbed his mouth with the instant craving for a cigarette. However, thanks to Dany and her passive-aggressive lectures about its effects on his health, he’d begun wearing a nicotine patch to help kick the habit. This phase was torture for him.

“Yeah,” Sam replied. “I’m off today so-”

“I’ll be right there! Don’t you dare go anywhere!”

He dove for his coat, tossing a quick “I’ll be right back, Davos,” over his shoulder before the older man could ask him any questions.

With Stalwart Shield behind the wheel, during the relatively short drive to Sam’s apartment, Jon’s mind was a whirl of conflicting emotions. Between the nervous tapping of his feet, or resisting the urge to bite his fingernails, he settled for staring blindly at his trembling hands and controlling his breathing. A part of him wanted to call Dany to share in the moment; where she could watch as he opened the envelope and read the results to her, but another part of him wanted this to be a private affair. Even if it turned out to be nothing exciting, it was still something he wanted to savor in private. It wasn’t going to lessen the stigma of being known as a bastard, but this was more to affirm to himself that, at least, he really was Ned Stark’s son.

However, as the car pulled up to the front of the familiar building, the surge of cold feet left Jon paralyzed with terror. He was more than tempted to tell Stalwart to turn the car around and call it quits, and he could almost hear the ghost of his father wondering why he’d go snooping around in matters that did not concern him. Wasn’t it simply good enough knowing Ned was his father and letting things go? Why did he have to listen to Dany? She could be so damn convincing, yet could he
really put the blame on her? Hadn’t a part of him always wanted to know? Hadn’t he lived most of his life wondering just what kind of a woman she was? Or if she had even had an ounce of love for him? Was she still out there? Wouldn’t that be a surprise if it turned out that way. Why he could…?

“Seven hells, Jon. How long do you plan on sitting there?”

Sam’s sudden appearance was so unexpected, Jon just might have squealed like a little girl in that moment. Composing himself quickly, while doing this best to ignore the blink-and-you-just-might-miss-it concerned expression on his bodyguard’s face, Jon took a deep breath and stepped out of the car.

“Geez,” Sam said after a quick but warm hug. “You’ve been out here for almost thirty minutes. You had me wondering if everything was okay.” He paused and really studied his friend’s pallid features. “You don’t look so hot.”

“Let’s just get this over with,” was all Jon could manage as he led the way upstairs.

Sitting on Sam’s coffee table was the large white envelope from The Lineage Tree – their logo of a tree with green leaves, almost mocking in its simplicity. It seemed to scream at him “Come open me. Come see the secrets that’s been hidden from you for years. Come open me, Jon Snow. I’ll destroy all you’ve ever known.”

“I’ll do it,” he cursed beneath his breath and reaaaaally wished for a cigarette to calm his fraying nerves.

“Maybe you want to sit down?” Sam invited with a smile. “Or you could help yourself to a beer in the fridge. Just stop pacing around already. You’re making me nervous too.”

“What if…” Jon gulped and took a shuddering breath; unaware of the desperation in his eyes as he glanced at his friend. “What if…what if something’s wrong…I mean…”

“These things are pretty much a hundred percent accurate,” Sam reassured him. He sank onto the sofa and pointed toward the envelope. “You want to do the honors?”

Jon stared at it for a long moment before shaking his head. “No…you do it. I’ll…I’ll just stand here.” Here being the window where suddenly looking at Sam seemed the most arduous task in the world. He closed his eyes and held his breath; the sound of the envelope being ripped open almost akin to his heart doing the same.

There was the rustle of papers, Sam going ‘hmm’, and Jon being this close to losing his shit. Just what was taking him so long?

“No…no, don’t read it, his mind suddenly screamed. I don’t want to hear about it anymore. I feel like I’m betraying my father’s trust, and I don’t want to –

“Whoa…interesting,” came the quiet words which had Jon’s lashes flying open. With his heart in his throat, he took a step forward.

“What?” he snapped impatiently. “What does it say?”

“Well, there’s a whole shit load of numbers and letters, I can’t make out,” Sam began carefully; his brows furrowed in concentration. “But the basic gist is that they can’t really break this down into which ethnicity belongs to father or mother side, since they’d have needed your parents’ DNA samples as well. However, it is believed that the fraternal side of things have the stronger genes – not necessarily in all cases – but that is-”
“Sam?”

“What?”

“Just tell me what the fucking ethnicity results say. Please.”

“Oh right.” Sam cleared his throat and turned to the next page. He pursed his lips and held the paper closer to his face as if unsure of what he was seeing. Jon, who was now studying every single expression with the intensity of a scientist, could feel his pulse quicken with worry. Something was wrong. Something was definitely wrong. What would make Sam look so confused yet –

“Well…you’re a descendent of the First Men, that’s for sure,” Sam began cautiously. He tossed Jon another smile. “It says you have at least 47.1% of that…and the region most associated with it is of course the North…Winterfell area…nothing in Wildling territory.”

Jon expelled the breath he was holding, though he had to panic again as he did the mental math. “And the rest?”

Sam cleared his throat and gave Jon a look as if trying to discern something on his features. He looked back at the document and took a deep breath before blurring out in a rush. “And it says you’ve also got 52.7% Valyrian, 0.1% Andal, and 0.1% unassigned. Not sure what that part means…” His voice trailed off, and without looking at Jon, he continued reading after a moment. “And it says that the Valyrian side of you comes from Essos…which, if you read the history books, the Valyrian dragonlords did just about rule all of Essos before migrating to the West and-”

Jon didn’t let him finish. He snatched the documents from Sam’s grasp and stared numbly at the colorful pie and bar charts pointing out the damning evidence…which had to be wrong. It just had to be. He couldn’t imagine Ned going to Essos to associate with a Valyrian, waiting until she gave birth and then bringing him all the way back North to raise him. Neither could he really picture any Valyrian being up North. Those were a rare sight, and unless his father had fucked some Valyrian woman during this travels to The Crownlands, there was no reasonable explanation for why he’d be willing to risk bringing his bastard child to the North. It would have been safer for him to remain in the Crownlands, or had Ned been too guilty about his indiscretions that he felt it best to have Jon with him at Winterfell? It just didn’t make any sense.

“My mother’s…Valyrian?” he finally croaked as he slumped down beside Sam. “I don’t…it can’t be.”

“Yeah, you don’t really look like one,” Sam added as he stared at Jon again until he was rewarded with a scowl. “But then again, you Northerners have strong genes, and I wouldn’t be surprised if this was-”

“It’s a mistake,” Jon interrupted with a conviction he didn’t really feel. “There’s a contact number on this thing, right? I need to speak to someone about this. There’s got to be an explanation.”

He was on his feet again, pacing as he waited to be put through to customer service. When he eventually got a human voice on the line, Jon rattled off his woes. When the cheerful receptionist told him to hold again, it was all he could do not to toss his phone away in frustration.

Sam, for his part, figured it wouldn’t be a good time to bring up the interesting discoveries he had found while browsing the internet regarding Robert’s Rebellion. It hadn’t been an easy find, as it appeared most articles related to what he was searching for had been wiped from major historical websites. Luckily, Sam knew his way around the underbelly of the abyss that was the world wide web and had found the answers he sought. Pity Gendry wasn’t around to share in the news. He
already missed his friend, who had called him from an airport in Braavos, to not only tell him of why he was there, but what had happened at the castle with his father.

Sam could only hope that Gendry would eventually find the peace he really deserved.

“Yes, I’d like to speak to someone about my results,” Jon was saying as he ran his fingers through his already messy hair. “Yeah, there seems to be some sort of mistake…my reference number? DLN5812931…yes, Snow…Jon Snow. Uh huh…yes…yes, I know it says I have Valyrian blood in me, but that’s got to be a mistake…what? I’m a Stark. I was born in the fucking North. My father…what…?”

Sam watched as Jon’s pacing slowed to a halting stop and his friend’s features just about drain of color. He could barely hear the whispered. “No…but there’s no definite…it’s just guessing, right?”

Sam wished he could hear what the other person was saying, but he probably didn’t need to. Just watching Jon’s features turn a sickly shade of rotten cheese was enough to tell him everything. In fact, it could also correspond to a theory that had formed in his mind while looking at the results. Jon might be a Stark, but that probably had nothing to do with *Ned Stark*. If *Valyrian* blood was dominant, then it was more than likely it came from his *paternal* side.

And unless Ned Stark’s birth was a complete lie, common sense would assume that he was *not* Jon’s father at all.

“Yes…I understand,” Jon whispered as his knees buckled, and he sat on the floor without realizing he was doing so. His aching head was within his hand as he hung up and stared for a long time at nothing.

“Jon?” Sam finally called out after several agonizing minutes. “What…what did they say?”

Without looking up, Jon answered in a monotone voice. “I’m a descendent of the First Men…but…it’s probably not from my paternal side. The guy…the researcher guy…he rattled off those letters and numbers…something about alleles and shit I lost interest in, but bottom line…my First Men lineage comes from my maternal side. My mother was…”

His brows furrowed; the confusion and anguish on his features almost breaking Sam’s heart. He couldn’t imagine how this must feel for his friend. To think that all you’ve ever known was a lie…where was one to begin picking up the pieces?

“Hey, look…let’s just…forget about this for now, huh?” Sam offered with a clap of his hands. “I mean, if you want to hang out here for a while, that’s cool with me. I don’t mind…”

“…can’t,” Jon said with a slow shake of his head. His features were still haunted as he rose unsteadily to his feet. He could feel his phone already buzzing in his pocket; a cruel reminder of his responsibilities. “Uum…thanks, Sam. I’ll…I’ll call you later.”

“Ok…okay…”

Jon was just about to walk out the door, when Sam tugged his sleeve, forcing him to stop and consider the ruddy features of one of the few people he could really call ‘friend’.

“Listen…no matter what happens,” Sam said with firm tone. “Ned was always a father to you, and not even some crummy DNA result can take that away, Jon. Remember that.”

The urge to break down was so overwhelming, Jon had to physically pull away from Sam before giving into his emotions. He couldn’t remember getting into the car, neither could he remember the...
ride back to the office. One would assume that his mind was filled with all sorts of troubling thoughts, but it was surprisingly blank; almost soothingly so. He went through the rest of the day in that same zombie-like state. He was sure he was watching another Jon Snow deal with the insurance representative in the long two-hour meeting. It was another Jon Snow forcing himself to wolf down a cold sandwich and tepid tea, while wishing he had accepted Dany’s offer to keep him company for lunch. He briefly considered stopping by the homeless shelter she was visiting today, but decided not to interfere. His gloomy disposition might make everyone else feel miserable.

Besides…where do I even begin to tell her I’ve got more Valyrian in me; that we’re from the same side of the world after all. Talk about irony.

Davos, who had noticed Jon’s mood, had tried his best to get the young man in better spirits, but eventually had to give up when Jon remained stubbornly mute. Davos was wise enough to know that whenever Jon was in this state, it was best to let him be. When he was good and ready, he would talk.

The rest of the day went by in that same snail-like pace, and it wasn’t until Jon was about to close the office for the day, did he finally notice the envelope he had discarded in his haste to see Sam. He picked it up; the same LS letters staring back at him. Sealed. Geez. What other fucked up news did this contain? And did he even want to read it?

As he settled into the backseat of the car, he tossed the envelope beside him before kicking himself inwardly when he remembered he had left the DNA results at Sam’s place. No matter. He didn’t care anymore. He closed his eyes and arched his neck; hoping that thinking of other things not family-related would help. However, when his phone began buzzing in his pocket, it was all he could do not to scream.

“Who is it now?” he groaned. He just wanted to be left the fuck alone. Was that too much to ask? However, when he forced his lashes open and read Robb’s name on the device, he felt the tears he had long held back spring to the surface.


His dearest siblings…or were they? How fucked up would it be if it turned out they weren’t his actual brothers and sisters? That he’d been living with them as a real intruder, and that Catelyn’s hate for him had been warranted. Perhaps she had known about his real lineage. Perhaps she had –

The buzzing stopped, but only to be replaced with the words which had Jon’s heart skipping a beat with immediate concern and fear.

CALL ME AS SOON AS U CAN. WE NEED TO TALK.

It was all Bran’s fault.

The gods curse his penchant for trying to stick his nose into things that were of no concern of his. All Robb had been doing was trying to rearrange the clusterfuck that was their father’s office, when Bran had offered his services.

I got nothing to do, and listening to Sansa yak about her upcoming fall fashion ideas is literally going to kill me, his baby brother had begged.
Sure, Robb agreed; assuming Bran would help move a few boxes around and dust up a few shelves, but nope. The busybody had gone snooping around like a bloodhound until he discovered the false floor beneath the heavy oak chest Robb had wanted to get repainted. How Bran had even discovered something so well hidden was a miracle, but there it was.

A part of Robb had screamed for Bran not to tug on the heavy and slightly-rusted knocker; that there was something in there they weren’t meant to see. Yet, a much louder voice had urged his brother to continue the quest to dig up whatever secrets Ned might have hidden in there. Besides, it was possible it might contain something to help with the running of Winterfell. So, a win-win all around, right?

However, nothing and absolutely fucking nothing had prepared him – or them – for the cruel reality that was eventually spread out on the table in their private living room.

The carved wooden table, where intimate family meetings were usually held, now had five solemn faces staring at documentation that had effectively shattered everything they thought they knew. It wasn’t as if Robb and Bran had wanted anyone else to see it, at least not until the subject of the discovery was back home, but when Arya and Rickon had run into the office – arguing over one thing or another – and they noticed their older brothers looking so shell shocked, their curiosity had been piqued. There was no use hiding such a thing from them, and of course, there was no use keeping it away from Sansa.

Hence, the family meeting.

Fuck, Robb thought as he ran his hand through his hair for possibly the millionth time. Where could they even possibly begin?

“…this is…weird,” Rickon finally broke the tense silence as he read the official birth certificate again. “Are you sure it’s real?”

“Why would Dad hide all this in a sealed box beneath a false floor?” Sansa asked impatiently. She was thumbing through a dusty red leather-bound diary with contents so shocking, she was still trying to wrap her mind around it despite an inner voice cheering that she (and her mother) had been right all along. Hadn’t she always felt there was something different about Jon? Sure, he had the blood of the Starks flowing through him, but he wasn’t one of them. All of this…everything here before them now was making a lot of sense.

“You think Mom knew?” Rickon asked.

“Doubt it,” Bran replied as he studied the print out he and Tyene had discovered in the archives at the Citadel. Gaining access to that section of the massive library was no small feat, and though Bran had only wanted to research on a thesis paper, stumbling across that gem had almost made him piss his pants in excitement.

It was the very important thing he had wanted to share with his siblings; that their ‘mysterious’ Aunt Lyanna had been married and to none other than the would-be King of The Syndicate Rhaegar Targaryen. The document was a detailed record of the maester who had orchestrated the private wedding. It included the date, time, even what the couple wore, the kind of rings they exchanged as well as an official registration form that made it a lawful union by Westerosi standards.

Anyone reading that information might have scoffed and considered it an old man’s folly, but when there were photographs – two rather lovely images of the happy couple in a most picturesque setting; looking so enamored with each other, there was no denying the truth. The lovey-dovey shots might have been too saccharine to some, but not to Arya.
There was something so romantic about it all, and besides, she had such a fascination with the Targaryens, any news regarding them was gold in her eyes. ‘Prince’ Rhaegar looked tall and handsome in black pants and a maroon silk shirt with an exquisite silver three-headed dragon broach on his lapel, while her Aunt Lyanna looked gorgeous in a simple pale blue Grecian gown with a cobalt blue rose in her long brown hair. One photo was an official pose of the couple in each other’s arms staring at the camera, and the second had them staring into each other’s eyes…where one could tell they would probably kiss in the next shot if another had been taken.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen her this happy,” Arya muttered.

There were a couple of pictures of Lyanna in old family albums, but most were of their aunt as a child or as a teen; almost always having serious expressions in most of them. She caressed her aunt’s face, biting hard on her lower lip as the enormity of the situation seemed to hit her all at once.

*Oh, Jon. We finally know who your real mom is,* she thought with a heavy heart as tears filled her eyes. Only she had been privy to Jon’s desire to know who she was, for there were nights when they would lie on the trunk of his truck, watching the stars and confessing all their innermost secrets to each other. *I just wish you were here to learn the news. Would you be happy or just as sad as I feel?*

“Heeey, what is this?” Robb finally snapped; perhaps more to himself than to his siblings. “Why are we all looking like we’ve lost someone again?”

“Haven’t we?” Rickon said with a low sniffle. “Jon’s not…he’s not…”

“He’s not what?” Robb asked with his brows drawn into a frown. “He’s not our brother? Is that what you’re going to say?”

“Not according to this,” Sansa replied as she held up the birth certificate and adoption papers. “Jon Snow is the son of Lyanna Stark and Rhaegar Targaryen, which makes him our cousin.”

“I don’t care!” Arya suddenly cried out as she abruptly rose to her feet and sent her chair tumbling to the floor. The tears were hot and wet on her flushed and furious features. “He’ll *always* be my brother! I didn’t care if he was a common whore’s son either! He’ll always be my big brother!”

“That’s right,” Robb said with a smile of pride as he pulled his sister into his arms to give her a warm and comforting hug. He looked at the rest of his siblings with something akin to a warning in his eyes. “No matter what these papers say, nothing’s going to change the way we feel and act toward him, got it? Besides, this isn’t going to be public knowledge until he returns to Winterfell. He gets to decide what he wants to do about it, so everyone shut the fuck up until then.”

“But when is he coming back?” Rickon asked as he wiped away his tears. “I don’t think he wants to.”

“Jon’s got a lot of stuff going on right now,” Bran reassured his sibling. “But I’m sure if we tell him about this…he’ll want to come home right away. I think he’s always wanted to know about his mother.”

“Boy, is he in for a surprise,” Sansa muttered beneath her breath. She looked at the adoption papers again; her features now carved into one of sadness. “And to think Dad did all this, not choosing to reveal the truth. It must have been so hard on him. Everyone thought he was some idiot for choosing to raise a bastard, and Mom never really forgave him. I wonder why he never told her the truth.”

No one said anything to this, though there seemed to be the collective thought that something this explosive was unlikely to be held in secret for that long. They all knew how their mother could be,
and it was possible she might have eventually spilled the beans to someone else.

“Robert was out to kill all Targaryens, remember?” Bran said quietly. “If anyone had known of Jon’s real father…we wouldn’t have him here today. Sure, what Dad did was pretty shitty in the grand scheme of things, but it saved Jon’s life.”

“At what cost?” Sansa asked. “Being raised to think he was unworthy…?”

“Not that you helped,” Arya sneered. “You were always quick to remind him of what he was whenever you two got into an argument.”

Sansa squared her shoulders and prepared to retort, when Bran interrupted with a raise of his hand. “Umm…isn’t everyone forgetting something rather important here?”

“What’s that?” Robb asked with a raised brow.

“Well, I don’t know if the rumors are true or not, but…I thought Jon was dating Daenerys Targaryen or something like that.”

For a moment no one could really piece together what Bran was trying to say, until it clicked in Arya’s mind first. Her widening eyes and mouth would have been comical if it wasn’t for the seriousness of the situation. “Oooh.”

Robb was still confused. “What is oooh…?”

Sansa sighed and rubbed her forehead. “Daenerys Targaryen is Rhaegar’s baby sister, isn’t she? Which means…”

“Which means Jon is Daenerys’s nephew!” Rickon deduced…and then winced as the realization of the implications sank in. “Yikes,” he added beneath his breath.

“But it’s okay,” Arya added quickly, as she studied the various uncomfortable expressions on their faces. “They’re Targaryens…technically…well biologically and that…I mean they used to marry each other and the such, right? So, I don’t think it’s that big a deal for them.”

“Hah!” Sansa couldn’t help scoffing. “Do you really see Jon jumping for joy at that news? I thought you of all people would know him well enough to know he’ll lose his shit. Besides, incest is not something that’s going to sit too well with a lot of people especially seeing as she plans to take over The Syndicate. If their relationship is going to be public, do you really see them parading around as Targaryens? Let’s get real here.”

Arya scowled. “If he loves her, it wouldn’t matter. Jon’s not going to be petty enough to quit their relationship over something like that…I hope.”

Sansa rolled her eyes and rose to her feet in a graceful motion. “As wonderful as that dream would be, we must remember that Jon was raised as a Stark, and he might not be that quick to jump onto the Targaryen bandwagon. Color me surprised if he does, but until then…I think I’ll just sit back and watch the fireworks.”

“Like you always do,” Arya muttered beneath her breath.

Seeing as his sisters were about to get into another row, Robb was officially done for the evening. He was suddenly mentally and emotionally exhausted. “All right, let’s pack it up everyone. Meeting adjourned.”
“Can I keep this one?” Arya asked quickly as she held up another photo that had been a part of the ‘birth package’. It was an adorable image of a chubby baby Jon being kissed on his cheek by his mother.

“Maybe we should just wait until Jon sees everything,” Robb said with a hard lump forming in this throat.

He began gathering up the papers, unaware of his trembling hands or the knowing looks of empathy on his siblings faces. It wasn’t until he was in the safety of his office, did he finally crumple to the floor; his entire body heaving with the depth of his sorrow. He had to bite hard on his hand to stop himself from being too loud, for the last thing he wanted was to show them how much this affected him.

Jon…my baby brother…or not really…fuckfuckfuck!

Why did everything have to be so complicated with this fucking family anyway?

All the fond memories of playing with Jon, of sharing private bonding moments with his usually solemn sibling, all those attempts to break Jon out of his shell and make him more like the ‘Stark’ he really was, of protecting him from bullies, or being protected in return, of crying in each other’s arms, or laughing until their stomachs hurt…how was he to suddenly force himself to think of Jon as a cousin? No way. No fucking way.

“He’s still my brother,” he whispered fiercely as if trying to defy the taunting voice within. “I don’t care what some fucking pieces of paper say. He’s always going to be my brother, and nothing will change that.”

He rose to his feet unsteadily; wiping his face on the sleeve of his shirt as he held the damning carved wooden box within his grasp. He came to a stop before the fireplace; staring into the blazing orange flames as if dazed.

All I have to do is toss these in there and that will be the end of it. I’ll tell all of them not to say a fucking word to Jon…and we’ll continue living in oblivion…like nothing ever happened. We’ll go back to the way things used to be. I just have to burn it…that’s all.

Unfortunately, the words his dear Aunt Lyanna had written in her diary suddenly swam into his hazy vision.

…I know how much of a burden this must be for my dear brother, Ned, but I have no other choice. My hour grows nearer, and I grow weaker not just in spirit, but my body withers from the strains of medicines the doctors and maesters insist will make me feel better. However, I know they only do this out of obligation. I see the resignation on their faces, and know that there is nothing more that can be done. My time on this earth ends, but there is so much more I wish I could do.

I wish I could watch my little boy grow up to be strong and wise like his father. I wish I could be there to watch his first steps, or to hear his first words. I want to hold his hand and stare into his eyes and tell him of how wonderful his family is, and how lucky and blessed he is. I want to take him to his first day of school, and watch him fall in love with a woman who will make him happy, and grow up to have his own family someday. So please…please promise me Ned, that you will not abandon him. He will need you more than ever, and I pray you will love him as you would love your own children.

Robb’s vision blurred again. He spun away from the fireplace with a grit of his teeth. He would call Jon and try to break this to him as easily as he could; perhaps tease him about the truth which would
make him want to return to Winterfell to hear the whole story. Somehow, mailing something this important didn’t seem feasible. It could fall into the wrong hands and then what?

It would be the longest twenty-four hours of his life before he finally got the courage to make the call. All he could do was hope and pray Jon would really listen rather than cave into despair or anger.

I am Jon Snow.

The wharf was just as he remembered it; ancient and dilapidated with its haunting hulking relics. The air still stunk of rotten fish and pungent salt, but the cool breeze wafting from the sea was a welcome sensation to his feverish flesh.

I am Jon Snow.

Once upon a time, on those docks, he had been an ‘ordinary’ young man being introduced to a group of strange powerful people led by a breathtaking silver-haired woman with eyes of vivid amethyst. Once upon a time, he had stood on these shores striking a deal with a dwarf with ties to the most powerful man in the land, hoping for an opportunity to be with the intriguing female that had seized hold of his every waking moment and dreams.

I am Jon Snow.

One might say he now had it all; the money, the recognition, and of course, the girl. He was one lucky son-of-a-bitch, and anyone in his position would take his lot and thank the gods for his good fortune.

So why did he still feel like ripping his hair out, screaming into the heavens or possibly drowning himself all at once?

I am Jon Snow.

He paced toward the sea, watching the foamy waves coat his shoes and bottom of his pants until they were soaked. On autopilot, he dug into the pocket of his pants for the packet of cigarettes…and came up empty-handed. The heated curse burned on his tongue, but he held himself in check and reached into his other pocket for the pack of gum to keep his mouth busy. It tasted like shit, but it was better than nothing.

I am Jon Snow.

He had sent Stalwart Shield home. No need keeping the man around for the rest of the night, though Jon was sure the Unsullied was still hanging around here somewhere. The man might not be a talker, but he was the most loyal bodyguard anyone could ever ask for. Pity he was currently working for a boss with the worst case of identity crisis.

I am...Jon Snow.

He walked until the lights from the shore were nothing more than fireflies in the distance. He walked
until his hamstrings throbbed with exertion and his breath came out in ragged gasps. It would take him a minute to realize he had been running, and it wasn’t until he slumped onto the damp sand, did he take in huge gulps of air into his burning lungs.

_I am Jon Snow. I am Jon Snow. I am Jon Snow._

And for probably the third or fourth time since the damned phone call from Robb, Jon’s vision blurred as the tears came. He drew his knees to his chest and buried his face against them; sobbing hard and loud; not caring if the entire fucking world heard his misery.

_It’s all been a lie, that little voice whispered incessantly. You must have known…deep down inside. Everything has been one big fat lie, and you were simply being pulled along for the ride. Now look. Who are you really? What are you? Where do you truly belong?_

“You are still our brother, Jon,” Robb had said; his voice thick with his emotions as well. “No matter what this thing says, you’ll always be my baby brother, and I love you…we all do, you hear me? Don’t you ever think we’ll abandon or disown you over this, and I don’t give a fuck what your official name is…you’re always going to be Jon to me.”

They had all tried calling after that, but Jon had been too distraught to answer any of them. He couldn’t even get himself to read their text messages, and seeing Arya’s name popping up several times was more than he could bear.

And there was Dany of course.

_Oh, dear gods…Dany…_

He would almost laugh, if he wasn’t too busy wallowing in his despair. The fucking irony of it all was too preposterous to comprehend. A part of him had wanted Robb to stop talking, yet hadn’t his hand moved as if on autopilot, toward the L.S. envelope; now realizing what those letters stood for? _Lyanna Stark._

Though the envelope did not have a diary, it still contained every important document Jon would ever need to prove to anyone who dared to ask about his heritage. From the marriage certificate and license showing that indeed Lyanna and Rhaegar had sealed their love for each other in a private ceremony somewhere close to Harrenhal, to the birth certificate showing he had been born in fucking _Dorne_! Dorne of all places! Lyanna…his mother…seven hells that was still impossible to wrap his head around – must have fled there to get away from Robert’s rampage on anything and everything Targaryen. Or did she simply flee there just because of the secret marriage? Why hadn’t anyone else known…well besides Ned and Uncle Benjen apparently? There were still so many questions that nagged him, but the worst experience was the painful realization of something he had clung onto for most of his reason for existing, being nothing more than a sham.

Ned Stark hadn’t been his real father.

Was that what he and his Uncle Benjen had tried to tell him in that dream? Was that why they had been full of regrets?

_I am not his son…_

_So, what?_ Sam’s voice screamed in his head. _He took care of you, didn’t he? He might not be biological, but he sure as hell did a good job raising you._

_As a bastard, another voice sneered; the darker and more cynical side of himself no doubt. I was_
raised as a fucking bastard, and suffered because of it. Do you have any idea how difficult it was being looked down upon and spat on by people because they believed that I was the child of infidelity and sin? Do you know the shit Catelyn put me through?

Yet here you are, Sam’s voice argued back. Would you prefer you were the son of an unknown woman rather than your dear Aunt Lyanna? You heard what Robb said, she clearly loved you and would have wanted to watch you grow. It’s not her fault she died before her time, and I’m sure she had no regrets having you. Also, I’m sure if Rhaegar had lived, he’d have been one kickass Dad too. With all the stories about him, you would have made one hell of a Targaryen prince.

Jon groaned and fell onto his back, not caring if the sand got into his hair or clothes.

I am Jon…Snow…

That’s not what the birth certificate says, that darker voice scoffed. Maybe you should look at it again to remind you of what your dear mother wanted you named.

No…no…I’m not…

Yet, his hand slipped into the pocket of his jacket to pull out the folded piece of paper. Some of the ink had been smudged from his tears, but it was still easy to make out the text even if he was blind as a bat.

NOTIFICATION OF BIRTH REGISTRATION

This certifies that the following Record of Birth is registered and preserved in the Office of the Registrar of Vital Statistics at, SUNSPEAR, DORNE

Name: AEGON TARGARYEN VII

Sex: MALE

Date of Birth: DECEMBER 26TH, xx83

Place of Birth: PRINCE’S PASS, DORNE

Name of Father: RHAEGAR TARGARYEN

Maiden Name of Mother: LYANNA STARK

Aegon…Targaryen…the seventh? Seven hells. Were the Targaryens that low on names for their sons? It was a ridiculous name and he sure as hell did not feel like a Targaryen let alone a goddamn ‘Aegon’.

I am Jon Snow, and I was never a bastard.

“I am Jon Snow,” he said aloud as he crumpled the paper into a ball…and then promptly sat up to smoothen it out again; a surge of guilt seeping into his heart as the sudden image of his aunt…no, his mother (dear gods) looking disappointed filled his mind. Something wet fell upon his trembling fingers as he continued smoothing out the document until he could barely make out the words.
I'm sorry, Aunt Lyan…Mom…

He thought of her portrait now sitting somewhere in Dragonstone where she might have ended up living with the man she loved, if she had lived just a little bit longer that is. Who knows how things could have turned out then? He could have been the one walking down the halls of that castle; being raised as the next leader of The Syndicate by his father and an aunt he might have never fallen in love with…since they’d be aware of each other’s presence in their lives.

My…aunt…huh?

He sniffled as a reluctant smile tugged at his lips.

Sorry, but try as hard as he could, he could not really see or picture Dany in that familial position. Granted, she could be bossy sometimes, but there was nothing ‘aunt-ish’ about her…at least when it came to their relationship. All the same, he had to wonder how she’d react to the news. He was sure she wouldn’t mind, after all Targaryen traditions did dictate that they could marry within family lines, and she would have ended up being Viserys’s bride anyway. Crazy to imagine, but there it was. Second, it would dispel that melancholy thought of being the last of her family.

I'm here now…and I guess the world hasn't seen the last of us, Dany, but then again…what will the rest of the world think? Jon mused, as he rested his aching head against his raised knees again.

Sure, ‘pure’ incest had been accepted (reluctantly) by Westerosi when the Targaryens ruled, and if history was anything to go by, many hardly blinked with all the intermarriages. However, that was then, and this is now; and the now was not so forgiving. Many still scorned and mocked the relationship between Jaime and Cersei Lannister (and recalling Robert’s rant about it didn’t exactly help either), so if he and Dany dared flaunt their relationship to the world; especially with the public knowledge that he was Rhaegar Targaryen’s kid…they would never hear the end of it.

That was a distraction they could most certainly do without.

It would be so easy to pretend none of this had happened. He could just burn all this and go back to living life like before. Tell Robb and the rest of his siblings…well cousins now…to do the same. If they were still willing to accept him as a brother, then there would be no need for those papers being in their possession, would it? Surely that was the best thing for everyone, wasn’t it?

However, as he dug his hand into his jacket to pull out the lone photo that had been in the envelope; that of a weary but happy Lyanna kissing his cheek as a newborn, Jon’s heart throbbed with an ache that was indescribable.

He had always wondered about the woman who had brought him into his world; had always prayed and hoped that she had loved him even a little bit. All of that and so much more was in this simple image, where scribbled at the back were the poignant words “My Little Prince Aegon. Mommy loves you always” written in black ink.

There was the proof he had always searched for.

She had always loved him. She had never abandoned him. She had always been with him in some way, and no matter how much this revelation hurt and shattered all he had ever known, Jon Snow could at least find comfort in knowing his life had meant something to the most important person in his life.

Whatever happened from now on was all up to the gods.
Since GRRM has said that the concept of DNA issues (aka the incest et al) does not really apply to the world he’s created, it was a little tricky applying this to the modern setting I’ve created so far. I did have to do a little research to get things as close to reality as possible, and personally, I’m almost tempted to send in my saliva to some random lab to see my ancestry too, but that shit is expensive. Yikes.

Another issue was Jon’s actual birthday/name day. We have the year, but no date. So, digging around the interwebs regarding his personality and astrological sign, it seemed to be a consensus that he’s a Capricorn, and lo and behold a certain actor (KH) is also a Capricorn, so there you go. December 26th. Happy fucking birthday Jon Snow/KH *lol*

Finally, I’ve read and seen a lot of speculation on how Jon is bound to react at the idea of sleeping with his aunt, with most assuming he’ll be too distraught and will be emo and want to keep his distance etc. etc. But after musing over this for so long, and not just based on their history in this story, I really don’t see Jon moping about that aspect of things. His anguish will come more from an identity crisis; of trying to adjust to knowing he’s got Targaryen lineage and not being a complete Northerner. If anything, he’s bound to need Dany more than ever to keep him sane, not shun her presence. Butuut, that’s just me. Hah.

Anyway, hope you enjoyed the chapter! As always, all feedback is cherished and appreciated. *bows gratefully*
“Ooh careful! Here’s another tray!”

Someone, Dany wasn’t sure who, grabbed the aluminum pan full of steaming mac and cheese from her and herded it to the grand dining room. She spun back into the bustling kitchen, where several volunteers were hard at work preparing meals over hot stoves or packing dinner plates for the many hundreds of the homeless, poor, and hungry drifting into the shelter.

The once abandoned castle had been transformed into a haven for the downtrodden, and though many of the rooms (especially upstairs) needed some major renovations, the first floor held the main offices, main dining area, and a rec center where visitors could play games like table tennis, chess, or simply watch T.V. Another grand ballroom now contained over a hundred cots for overnight stays, and the hope was that with more funds coming in, they would be able to open even more rooms to house at least a hundred more people.

_Just one more thing to my never-ending to-do list_, she thought as she was thrust another pan; this one full of delicious-looking green bean casserole, which she had to hold slightly above her head so as not to have it knocked down.

“Here’s another one!” she called out, and just as quickly, it was snatched from her hands and taken
It was organized chaos in here, but Dany had never felt more exhilarated yet exhausted at the same time. It was the kind of fatigue that made her feel a sense of pride and satisfaction at all she’d managed to accomplish in the past eight and a half hours. It was hard to believe time had gone by that fast. She had spent the entire day at the center, from helping prepare breakfast to serving the first group of timid and wary stragglers eager to get something into their empty stomachs.

It broke her heart to see the families; most in shabby clothing and little to call their own when it came to personal possessions. Some hadn’t had a shower in days, and thanks to the ‘beauty parlors’ set up by the volunteers, Dany gave a few children much needed introductions to soap and hot water. For the adult males, she offered to give haircuts and trim a few beards; no thanks to Jon allowing her to use him for practice a couple of times. Second-hand but clean clothes were picked from the many donations they had received, and it felt good to see the difference once the families were situated looking ten times better and feeling just as much.

Dany was sure there was nothing more fulfilling than hearing the most heartfelt ‘thank you’, or receiving the warmest of hugs from these people.

*My people.*

“You should take a break, Your Grace,” Missandei said quietly as she came up behind Dany. Like her friend, she was dressed in casual clothing of jeans and a shirt with the shelter’s logo on it. Her hair was held back with a scarf as well, and her caramel features were flushed and slightly sweaty from her exertions. Considering she’d spent most of the evening dishing out the meals or serving them, it seemed she was the one who needed to be off her feet.

“I’m fine. Maybe you should…” Dany began, but the chairperson of the center – a portly, rosy-cheeked woman in her late forties – approached with a huge smile on her features.

“Ah there you are, Lyanna! It’s good to see you taking a break at last. I was beginning to worry you might collapse on me soon. You’ve not had a seat all day I think.”

Dany blushed and shook her head. “I’m fine, Mrs. Creek. Thanks so much for allowing me to help.”

“Are you kidding?” the redhead just about squealed and pulled Dany into an exuberant hug.

“You’ve been a lifesaver, young lady. You and your friend, Marianne. We couldn’t have been this successful without your assistance. I’m still puzzled as to why those extra food trucks arrived, but ah well! We’ll take all the blessings we can receive. Now go have a sit in the backroom and rest a bit. We should be closing our doors soon anyway.”

Before Dany could protest, she was being ushered into a quieter area of the castle, what used to be the servants’ dining room, where a few other volunteers were taking breathers as well. They hailed her in greeting, and though Dany still felt weird being called ‘Lyanna’, it was all to maintain her anonymity. Jon had seemed to get a kick out of her using it as her pseudonym, but he was sure his aunt wouldn’t mind ‘his-beautiful-moon-and-stars’ using it for a good cause.

Dany could feel her cheeks blossoming with color at the memory of Jon’s whispered words; that now familiar husky northern drawl making her want to fan herself. Dear gods, she was hopeless when it came to him. She glanced longingly at the clock; the reminder of her vow to fuck him senseless now making her wet with desire. It was almost eight in the evening, and though he tended to work late these days, she was sure he’d be eager to close ‘shop’ as quickly as possible. She might as well get started and clean up a little.
Excusing herself from the group that had gathered around her, she slipped into one of the restrooms. With a sigh of relief, she tugged off the scarf and wig, fingers digging into her scalp to get rid of the nagging itch that’s been bothering her for most of the evening. She hated wearing them, but blast her tell-tale silver hair. The contacts were another problem, and as she removed them carefully, her eyes stung and watered with gratitude. She blinked at her reflection in the mirror and was just about to turn on the tap to wash her face, when the door burst open behind her.

“Oooh, so sorry!” came the hasty words as Dany spun around; an action she immediately regretted. Just seeing the teenager’s eyes widen like saucers, and her mouth nearly forming a perfect O was enough to let Dany know she was screwed. It didn’t help when the girl whipped out her cellphone to snap a quick picture before breaking into a grin.

“Holy shit! I knew it! I knew it was you!”

“Ah…”

“They’re not going to believe this,” she continued to gush. “Can I give you a hug, please? You’re such an inspiration, and you’re sooooo much prettier in person.”

Torn between telling her not to post the picture anywhere or tell anyone she was here, Dany was still unable to deny her request. She accepted the hug, listened to another long minute of praises, before wincing inwardly as the girl begged to have a proper selfie this time. Dany wasn’t sure if she smiled for the shot, but the girl didn’t seem to mind. Her squeal could still be heard long after she finally left the restroom, but Dany wasn’t sticking around to find out if more of her friends would show up wanting autographs as well. Slamming the wig and scarf back on, and choosing to slip on sunglasses instead of the contacts (which looked odd to wear indoors and at night, but her eyes were hurting), she sent a panicked text to Missandei to meet her behind the kitchens. If they could get Grey Worm to pick them up from there, that would be great.

Hugging the coat around her; as if wishing it could hide her completely, she kept her head down and walked/jogged down the hallways toward her destination. However, she was so focused on looking at the floor that when she turned the corner, she bumped into something big and cuddly with a low ‘ooooofff!’ escaping her lips.

“Oh, so sorry,” the person said as strong hands reached out to steady her.

Dany might have muttered a quick apology as well and darted away, but that voice sounded much too familiar. Looking up, it was to see the smiling and flushed visage of Samwell Tarly. What in seven hells was he doing here?

“Sam?” she asked in surprise.

“One and the same,” Sam replied and hoisted the heavy bag of what looked like clothes from one shoulder to the other. “Do I know you? Or are you the one accepting our donations? We’re from the Children’s Army and we were supposed to bring in all the winter coats that were donated?” He nodded toward a group of other young people carrying the same bags of clothing behind him.

Dany blinked and then remembered that she was in disguise. Of course, Sam wouldn’t know who she was.

“It’s down that way,” she said as she pointed toward the end of the hallway. “Just make a right, and it will take you to the Donation Room.”

“Thanks so very much,” Sam said with a grin. He turned to his friends. “You heard the lady,
everyone! Let’s move it.”

He was just about to leave, when Dany tugged his sleeve forcing his attention to her again. This time he looked bemused.

“Can I help you?” he asked with slight impatience. The bag was kinda heavy.

“It’s me…Dany,” she whispered as she lowered the sunglasses for a brief second. Sam’s eyes widened as he gave a breathless squeak of surprise. He cleared his throat and composed himself quickly; looking around to make sure no one else had noticed.

“Good heavens, Dany,” he whispered as he reached for her hand to lead her away from the others. If he noticed her bruises, he made no mention of it; besides Gendry had already given him a play-by-play of what happened at Robert Baratheon’s place.

When they were in a relatively quiet area, he lowered his bag to give her a bear hug full of warmth. They had never seen each other in person, but with all their conversations over the phone, it felt like they were long lost friends reuniting again. She hugged back as hard as she could; burrowing her face against the warmth of his sweater and inhaling his goodness. He smelled like ‘home’, and that was a lovely…

“Ahem!” came the sudden loud cough which had them pulling away with embarrassment. A homely-looking girl, dressed in similar clothing like Sam, was watching with a raised brow of curiosity and slight annoyance.

“Ah, Gilly,” Sam began quickly. “Uum…this is…eh…this is-”

“Lyanna,” Dany introduced herself with a smile. “I work at the center. Sam and I are old friends.”

“Gilly Craster,” the girl replied as she accepted the handshake. “Sam’s never spoken of you before.”

“I’m hardly surprised. We were mere acquaintances in high school,” Dany said with a shrug of her shoulders. “And I was just as surprised to see him again. You are?”

“His girlfriend,” came the firm declaration that dared Dany to even think of hitting on her man. She turned to Sam; her lips still downturned with distaste. “You coming, Sam?”

“In a bit, honey,” Sam said with a nod. “I just-”

“I promise to return him to you as soon as possible,” Dany interrupted. “There’s just some really important business I have to discuss with him. You are one lucky woman. He’s a gem.”

“I know,” Gilly replied with a possible ghost of a smile on her lips. She leaned close to place a hard kiss on Sam’s cheek before walking away.

“Whoo…if looks could kill, I’d probably be dead by now,” Dany stated with a chuckle.

Sam, who was now a nice shade of red, shuffled from one foot to the other, “Yeah, she can be quite possessive, but I love her to bits. She’s the only one who looked past…all this.” He pointed to his body. “Besides, I think I’m just about ready to pop the question.”

“Oh…”? She tried hard to squash down the pang of envy to fill her, but was genuinely happy for him as he blushed even harder and nodded like a child caught doing something naughty.

“Well any woman will be lucky to have you, and I mean that,” Dany said with a gentle squeeze of
his hand.

“Thank you,” Sam muttered shyly. “And you…wow…well, I knew you did stuff like this, but I had no idea you were here, and in disguise too. And here I was hoping we could take some shots and post it on your social media accounts.”

“Think someone will already beat you to it.”

“Huh? Someone recognized you?”

Dany sighed and rubbed her forehead. “Some random girl walked into me taking off my wig and took a couple of pictures. I’m sure she’s already posted it on-”

“Hang on,” Sam said as he dug into his jacket and whipped out his phone. “I usually get notifications of anything huge happening…. aaaaaaand yep.” He winced at the flood of emails and PMs from The Blind Alley. “Turns out the girl is a member, and she’s already posted it on her Illustrogram account. See?”

He showed her phone, and sure enough, there was Dany and the grinning teenager, whose name was apparently Daria, with the selfie they had taken less than twenty minutes ago. The hashtags were almost hilarious, if Dany wasn’t still weirded out about the whole thing. ‘When you run into the Queen of Westeros in the bathroom.’ #nicest person ever #more beautiful in person #i love her so much’

Seven hells.

“Hah, well…I guess this could be a good thing,” Sam was saying as he tucked the phone away. “Now that folks know you are out and about doing good for the community, your positive points go way up.”

“That’s the least of my worries right now,” Dany grumbled.

Sam’s smile wavered as he assumed what could be making her feel upset. “Ah…I guess Jon must have told you about it then, huh?”

Dany’s eyes widened behind the glasses. Jon told her about what? Luckily, Sam had not noticed her confused expression, so she was quick to play it off.

“Yeah…” she began slowly. “It was…a surprise indeed.” At least she sincerely hoped whatever it was, was indeed a surprise.

“I know right?” Sam enthused with a purse of his lips. “Who would have thought he’d have over fifty percent Valyrian in him? And it’s more than likely it’s from his paternal side. He said the researcher verified that over the phone, but there’s nothing definite. How’s he doing though? I mean when he left my apartment, he looked kinda upset as one would be after hearing such a thing.”

Dany couldn’t speak. All she could hear were the words ‘fifty-percent Valyrian’ and ‘paternal side’ ringing incessantly in her mind. She suddenly felt the urge to sit down, her knees nearly buckling. It didn’t help that her heart was beating so fast, she was afraid Sam would hear it.

He’s…Valyrian? Jon Snow is Valyrian?

“Dany? Are you okay?”

“Ah…I…” She blinked and shook her head slowly. She licked her lips and struggled to gather
moisture into her throat. Why was she acting like this? It wasn’t as if this concluded anything, but still…to think that Jon was a descendent of her race…that alone was huge.

“Dany?”

“I’m so-sorry,” she finally managed to whisper. “It’s just…”

“Oh shit,” Sam groaned as he slapped his forehead. “I’m such a fucking moron. You didn’t know, did you? Oh, dear gods, Jon’s going to kill me.”

“It’s okay,” Dany reassured him with a tremulous smile. “I’m sure he would have told me soon anyway.”

“He did do it to surprise you, and I’ve ruined everything. Why can’t I just keep my big fucking mouth shut?”

“It’s really…” Her words fizzled out as her phone buzzed. Trembling fingers reached for the device, and she read the text from Missandei with a shuddering breath. “Yeah…I think my time’s up here.”

“Huh?”

“Missandei says there are a few reporters who have come into the center pretending to be homeless people. That picture already has them figuring out where I am, and now they want to see for themselves.”

“I’m sorry,” Sam apologized looking quite dismayed. “For everything, I mean…”

“It’s not your fault,” she insisted with a quick hug. “Thanks for letting me know anyway, and I’ll talk to you later, okay?”

She fled before he could continue seeking her forgiveness. Fortunately, Grey Worm was waiting somewhere near the old stables, and as they sped off into the night, Dany stared blankly out the window; her mind still whirling with the information Sam had involuntarily given.

“How’s he doing though? I mean when he left my apartment, he looked kinda upset as one would be when hearing such a thing.”

Jon was upset.

And why not, a small voice whispered within her. If you had lived most of your life thinking you were a true Northerner, suddenly discovering you’ve got more Valyrian blood in you is bound to get you all fucked up.

She bit hard on her lower lip and blinked back the sudden tears to fill her eyes. She held her phone tight in her grasp; torn between wanting to call him, yet knowing he was probably not in the mood to speak to anyone. If she knew anything about Jon’s moods, it was that he was to be left alone at certain times; this being one of them. It was best to let him come to her when ready.

But will he?

Nothing stopped him from staying away from home for a while to figure things out, and knowing how sensitive he was about his bastard status, Dany wasn’t sure if he’d want to return to Winterfell especially with this discovery. He’d feel like he didn’t belong.

“My Queen?” Missandei called out quietly when she noticed how morose Dany looked. “Is
Dany, not trusting herself to speak, could only nod.

Thankfully, her friend refrained from pestering her with more questions, and as the car pulled up to the picturesque cottage they had rented just a few miles past the Iron gate, Dany couldn’t shake off the feeling she might be spending the night alone.

Perhaps she might have asked Missandei to keep her company, but she could tell her friend was just as exhausted and needed to be in the company of her partner. With an inner sigh of resignation, she allowed the couple to retire to their private quarters – a quaint guest house behind the cottage – with quick hugs of farewell.

As soon as the door was shut behind them, Dany felt the crush of loneliness descend upon her like a boulder. She briefly considered calling Tyrion, but decided against it. Still at Dragonstone, he’d probably be drunk or too busy preparing for his meeting with Tywin. Besides, the last thing she needed was one of his many lectures. The second option was calling on Jorah, and though he lived about a mile down the road, the notion of spending the rest of the evening with him was not that appealing. As loyal as he was, she could do without the blind adoration that came with it.

With a heavy sigh, she rubbed down her arms and paced around the living room. The once cozy area now seemed too spacious and devoid of warmth despite the roaring fire in the fireplace. It was a beautiful home, and Missandei had done a great job finding this location with homeowners hoping to eventually put it on the market. They were getting on in years and could no longer afford upkeep of the property.

Dany had fallen in love the moment she saw photos of its interior and grounds. She was almost embarrassed to admit it would have been a home for her if she wasn’t too busy trying to gain control of the Red Keep. If things had indeed been different, she could picture living the rest of her life in such a place. It had a lovely front porch with clusters of roses, peonies, violets and daisies, including rocking chairs where one could observe Blackwater Bay in utter privacy. The garden was just as delightful, where vegetables and fruits grew in the backyard. The homeowners had cultivated tomatoes, peas, beans, carrots, lettuce, onions, potatoes, and two large orange trees. As if that wasn’t enough, there was a hen house with six hens who produced fresh eggs daily, as well as two spotted goats who seemed more content to graze on grass all day with no care in the world. There was also a stable which housed two fine horses. They weren’t quite as powerful as the ones in Vaes Dothrak, but they were strong enough to take one for quiet rides in the evening.

For Dany, it was everything she had ever dreamed of as a little girl; a place to really call home.

For both of us... if there’ll still be an ‘us’, she thought sadly as she sank onto the sofa and tucked her legs beneath her. She turned on her phone and began browsing through it listlessly.

Once upon a time she had wished she’d have more pictures of she and Jon together, and she had made that wish come true in more ways than one.

After their trip to Vaes Dothrak, Dany began taking as many pictures and videos of Jon whenever possible. At first, he’d been squeamish about being the center of attention, and was too shy to engage in random selfies. Eventually, he warmed his way into it, and was now sometimes prone to capturing her in the most awkward moments.

She half-sobbed and laughed at the memories of each photo; from the goofy one of him pretending a spatula was a microphone while serenading her with one of his favorite rock ballads, to one of her dressed in nothing but his favorite sweatshirt as he gave her a piggyback ride. There were the more
'quiet’ shots; some of him sleeping or vice versa; or moments when he was caught being pensive/brooding. He had such a great profile, and she could easily see him becoming a model if he chose to be. Not in this lifetime though. Jon would rather eat nails than commit to something that superficial.

She eventually came to her favorite image. She planned to have this blown up and put on a wall someday; maybe in this cottage (when she got the guts to talk Jon into buying it), or at Dragonstone, which she vowed to make homelier when she returned.

It was a black and white photograph of them at Pentos. Magister Illyrio had organized a romantic evening in celebration of their ‘conquest’ with the Dothraki; much to their embarrassment at the time. Fortunately, it had turned out to be the best night for them yet. Though Jon had on the splint, he still looked dashing in the traditional colorful robes the Pentoshi males tended to wear, while she was clad in a sleeveless shimmering cerulean high-waisted gown that left little to the imagination. Which meant, she had worn nothing but lace panties beneath. She might have given Jon several heart palpitations throughout the evening, for she was sure he never took his eyes off her. Well maybe except for those moments when he pinned death glares on any other male who dared look longer than necessary.

She couldn’t remember who had taken the photo (probably the gondolier), but it had been after a ride on the wooden vessel across the Bay. The evening had gotten a little cooler, and Jon had thrown his silk cloak over her shoulders before pulling her into an embrace. She remembered his passionate kiss to leave her flushed and breathless, before releasing her only to kiss her forehead next. *That* was the moment the picture was taken. She lay against his chest; her eyes closed and with a smile so happy and peaceful, her heart clenched tight at the memory. Jon’s eyes were closed as well; his lips forever pressed against her forehead, though with a hint of a smile. Dany could still remember Missandei gushing and wishing it was something she could post on Illustrogram.

*Not yet…perhaps not ever,* Dany thought as she raised her knees to her chest and wrapped her arms around them. She had no idea why she was making herself feel depressed, but considering it was almost midnight, and Jon was still not home, was there any doubt of her fears not coming to fruition?

Jon was clearly not happy, and there was really nothing she could do about it unless he let her in.

However, it now begged the question…from whom did Jon get his Valyrian roots from? If he had fifty percent of that in him, it would make sense that the rest did come from the Starks, since Ned was…but wait…hadn’t the researcher said the Valyrian roots had come from his *paternal* side? Which would mean Ned was anything but Jon’s biological father.

*Think, Dany, think,* she mused as she closed her eyes; her brows furrowed with concentration.

She had studied Jon’s face so many times, she could see him clearly in her mind. She really had no idea what she was looking for, but she traced the outline of his features starting from the roots of his black curly hair – definitely a Stark thing – to that high forehead…could be Valyrian…to those eyes that were a deep-set brown with flecks of grey and gold (depending on his mood) within them. That was his Stark side again. His nose…hmm…his nose did sort of give off hints of Viserys especially when he became angry, so she could chuck that in the Valyrian column. And then there were those lips she could savor until her dying day. Now *that,* she was sure was not a Stark thing. From the few pictures she had seen of Northerners, and even his brother, Robb, Jon’s lips were much fuller and generous especially when he laughed. That was clearly the Valyrian in him.

And his temperament?

Stoic. Loyal. Thoughtful and pragmatic – that could fall into the Stark column.
Impulsive, ferocious, passionate, a leader – those could fall into the Valyrian column.

She sighed and was just about to consider her line of thinking useless, when something suddenly flashed within her mind to force her lashes open.

Wait…wait…wait a minute.

She brought her phone to life and scrolled through her gallery again. She came to a stop at the photo of Lyanna Stark’s portrait; something she had taken as a memento of sorts before being shipping it off to Dragonstone. She enlarged the image until she had Lyanna’s features in complete clarity. It was something small and probably insignificant, but it was there…that hint of a dimple on her left cheek. Jon had the same thing! It wasn’t a full-on dimple, except when he really laughed, but that was something the two had in common.

So, what are you trying to say, Daenerys Targaryen? That Lyanna Stark could be Jon’s mother?

“I don’t know,” she groaned out loud. “Geez, I’m just grasping at straws here, all right?”

She slumped against the sofa again and prepared to sink into more morose thoughts when the sudden glow of headlights, in the driveway, had her sitting up with her heart in the throat.

He’s home! Oh shit! What do I do?!

She rose to her feet; now wishing she had at least taken the time to take a shower and look more presentable. She was still wearing the jeans and shirt from the day, and she was sure she stunk to high heaven. She hadn’t even washed her hair and it still itched in places, and her face was a mess and as she heard the locks of the front door being open, she raced into the kitchen and pretended to be searching for something in the fridge.

Fuck! Why am I acting so scared? She thought frantically as she heard his heavy footsteps approaching. What’s there to be scared about? It’s not as if he’s going to tell me he wants to end things and that we should go our separate ways and...oh gods, what if he says that? What will I do? I’ll kill him probably, but then I’ll kill myself too and then –

“Dany? That you?”

“Oh…yes!” She pulled her head out of the fridge quickly, while grabbing the nearest thing her hands could reach.

Jon was approaching and shrugging out his jacket; looking no different than he usually did...if you could excuse the redness of his eyes and the puffiness of his face (an obvious sign he might have been crying). He looked exhausted, though a brow raised with a small smile tugging at his lips.

“You that hungry at one in the morning, babe?”

“Huh?”

He jutted his chin toward what she was holding, and looking down, she realized she had grabbed the entire baked ham a kind neighbor had brought over yesterday. Feeling her entire face turn a bright red, she mumbled something akin to ‘this wasn’t what I wanted’ and shoved it back into the fridge. She might have remained hidden in there, when she felt his arms suddenly encircle from behind.

Oh Jon…

He held on and buried his face into her hair; not caring that it still itched, and she hadn’t washed it
yet. He held on not caring that she hadn’t taken a shower or looked like hell. He held on as his body trembled and his harsh sob was muffled against thick silky silver tresses he revered.

She gripped his arms in return and placed hard kisses on his right one; her fingernails digging grooves into his flesh.

Neither knew how long they remained in that position; the fridge door still opened letting in the only source of light in the otherwise dim kitchen. Nothing needed to be said, not even when they finally broke apart and she silently led him upstairs without letting go.

If she noticed the traces of sand on his hair and shoulders, she said nothing. She would strip him out of his clothes and remove his splint to keep it from getting wet. He watched as she peeled out of her clothes as well; his dark gaze unreadable as he studied every inch of her as if hoping to memorize a body he had worshipped so many times before.

When she was completely naked, she began to make her way toward the cabinet to reach for her usual precaution. However, just as she was about to pop the pill into her mouth, Jon gently plucked the bottle from her grasp.

“Jon…” she gasped in surprise, but he wasn’t listening.

His lips were on her neck as he tossed the medication into the wastebasket, her parted lips forming an O of pleasure as his right hand trailed down the side of her breast, her waist…caressed her stomach with an extra attention she did not miss, before roughly seeking the molten heat between her legs. She gave him permission willingly; hissing as his fingers thrust hard and fast into her. He knew just the pace to set to get her off, and in no time, he was rewarded with the quivering tremors to wrack through her body.

“Jon…Jon…oh gods Jon,” she panted as her knees began to buckle. She knew his left arm might be throbbing with having to hold her steady, but he didn’t seem to be complaining; if anything, he was able to maintain his grip; his breath shallow and hot against her flesh. His teeth grazed the crook of her shoulder as she soaked his fingers; her inner muscles clenching and unclenching with every fevered plunge into her eager cavern.

“I love you,” he growled as he bit harder; causing her to cry out as her toes curled in pleasure. She came so hard she must have blacked out for a second; that or she was completely weightless and boneless. She could feel her orgasmic response slowly trickle down her thighs and she clamped them together, trapping his hand in place as she arched against his body sensuously and tilted her head to find his lips.

They devoured each other greedily; their kisses filled with desperation, pain, and yet all the love they could muster into it. Tongues met and wrestled for dominance; breaths harsh and loud yet getting lost in the steady rush of the shower she had turned on earlier.

He tore away with a harsh gasp, those eyes still dark and unreadable.

“I love you,” he repeated with an intensity that made her blush yet go aflame with more desire for him. She didn’t argue when he nudged her onto the sink and spread her legs apart. She didn’t care that they were knocking down toiletries and whatever other kick knick was behind her as she wrapped her legs around his waist and all but forced his throbbing cock into a body that was more than ready for him.

He steadied himself with his right hand on the counter; slamming into her with a ferocity that left her breathless. Perhaps it was knowing that he had prevented her from taking the pill; that there was a
high probability (she wasn’t keeping her hopes up, but still…oh dear gods, what this could mean if… if…)

“Oooooh fuck!” she screamed as she threw her head back; fingernails digging into the clenched powerful muscles of his back and shoulders. It was a miracle she didn’t crack the mirror, but with his face buried against her neck and the rough sensation of his beard against her flesh an even added turn on, she tightened her legs around his waist and strove to match his frenzied thrusts.

I love you Jon Snow I love you love you love you love you so fucking much oh gods yes just like that yes yes yes yes yes! It would take her a moment to realize she was probably saying that out loud, but she was past giving a damn. The world was no longer a factor, for this had to be the equivalent of being sent into orbit; a place where no one could reach her except for this man who was everything. Her sun and stars. Her life.

“Aaaaah fuuuck…Dany,” came his low guttural sound of imminent completion.

She captured his cheeks between her hands, forcing him to finally look up and straight into shimmering violet eyes that said all words could never truly articulate.

I am yours, Jon Snow, they beseeched. I will always be yours.

As I am yours, he might have whispered, but he wasn’t sure.

He did know that it was suddenly too difficult to swallow and that he was going to start crying in a second. He kissed her then; not with the same desperation they displayed earlier, but a deep, slow, and thorough exploration of lips he wanted to continue kissing until he was old and grey.

That he was half-Targaryen? That she was his aunt? So, what? None of that matter right now. He loved her for who she was, and not for a name or whatever title she hoped to get. He had fallen in love with a woman who had shown him how wonderful and exciting being alive could be, and how rewarding it was to open one’s heart without being prejudiced and judgmental. He might have come to King’s Landing with the mindset of a young man at war with the world, but she had changed him; something those who once knew him were quick to point out. She had made him become a better man by managing to harvest an inner strength he had not known he possessed. Not once had she called or considered him a bastard; not once had she thought him less than her equal, and if he was going to ever come to terms with what the world was forcing him to accept, then by the old gods and new, he wanted her by his side until the very end.

She came with her (their) native Valyrian tongue on her lips; her body quivering so hard, she nearly slipped off the sink. He smiled against her lips as he soaked his cock with her juices; only to stiffen as he too felt the familiar rush of his orgasm threaten to make him pass out. With a choked sob, he filled her; thrusting and staying in as deep as he could until she got the message he hoped to put across.

He wasn’t going to sit around thinking of the ‘what-ifs’. It was a decision he had come to on the way home, and if he hoped to make good on those promises, he’d have to get started sooner than later. She had said something about not being able to have kids again, hadn’t she? Well, there was no harm in still trying, was there?

It wouldn’t be until they were lying in bed hours later - for he had taken her again in the shower - did he finally force himself to say the words he had been practicing for goodness knows how long.

“…Dany?” he whispered with his heart somewhere in his throat.
“Hmm?” She lifted her lashes; the weariness of the day and Jon’s enthusiastic lovemaking finally hitting home. She was pleasurably sore and too satiated to want to move a muscle, but she still shifted even closer to him until their breaths mingled as one. However, she was quick to notice he wasn’t smiling. His grave expression had Dany wondering if he was about to reveal everything to her now. She wished he’d do it in the morning when she was more clearheaded and could truly digest the information, but if he wanted to do it now…

“What will you marry me?”

Huh?

He had said that so matter-of-factly; in that blunt Northern way of his, she had to blink a few times to wonder if she might have misheard something.

“…what?” she finally managed to squeak out.

Jon took another deep shuddering breath and tried again; kicking himself inwardly for the tremble in his voice this time. “I said…will you marry me?”

Yep. She had definitely not misheard him.

Oh…shit.

She sat up so suddenly, it took Jon by surprise as well. She wasn’t sure of what expression was on her face, but Jon wasn’t looking as confident now. If anything, he looked as if he suddenly regretted asking it, and she wanted nothing more than to dispel that idea from his mind. She was happy…confused…happy…no…more confused…what the fuck?!

“Are you sure?” she finally asked.

“Usually the girl says ‘yes’ or ‘no’,,” Jon replied with a raised brow. “Or if you’re waiting for a ring…” He sighed and ran fingers through his damp hair. “Sorry…didn’t exactly really plan for this. I mean, it’s something I’ve wanted to do, but I was thinking more along the lines of a bit later when things have settled down and -”

“Are you saying this because of your…results?” Dany interrupted quietly; forcing her confused elation to be dampened. If Jon was simply doing this as a byproduct of his identity crisis, then what was he really marrying her for?

“Results?” Jon looked confused. “What are you…?”

“Sam told me...by accident. He thought you and I had already discussed it, and I came to learn that you’ve got…Valyrian blood in you…a lot of it.”

She held her breath; hoping he wouldn’t explode at Sam’s betrayal. However, when all he did was expel a soft whoosh of air, rub his beard and sit up as well, Dany let out a small sigh of relief. She watched as he got out of bed and padded across the room to where his jacket was. She might have taken the moment to admire his tanned physique, his taut ass, or the evidence of their passionate lovemaking with her fingernail imprints on his back, but she was still too wound up to really focus on those side of things.

He returned with several items in his hands, and as he sat cross-legged on the bed facing her, she mimicked his position and accepted his silent offering.

Her breath caught as she read the birth certificate – wrinkled and smudged yet still legible – a couple
of times as if hoping the words would sink into her numbed mind. Suddenly, those vivid images of that film at Robert Baratheon’s castle began playing again, and it was easy to see how those two could have fallen in love and decided to elope to seal their union. Rhaegar and Lyanna had done the unthinkable; choosing to defy their obligations to society and going with their heart. In the end, they had both lost their lives for the wrong reasons.

"To think... you have the blood of my brother in you, Jon Snow," she thought in silent awe.

Was it why she found herself so attracted to him in the first place? Had a part of her soul simply yearned to be completed; knowing full well that the yawning void within her could only be satisfied by another of her kind? One who also had the blood of the dragon flowing through his veins? Hadn’t there been moments when he had unleashed that side of him; moments when it had crossed her mind that there was more to this Northerner than met the eye?

She had never met Rhaeger Targaryen in person, but she had always imagined that if he had lived, he would have been much more of a brother to her than Viserys had ever been. Perhaps the gods had answered her prayers in such an indirect way; that Rhaegar had always been with her in spirit. He had simply chosen to manifest himself in this way, and if she closed her eyes, she could almost imagine him whispering:

*You were never alone, my dearest Daenerys. Our family will always live on, all you must do is open your eyes and you’ll see him (me) right before you.*

If her heart was already aching over this revelation; it just about broke at the sight of the poignant photo of Lyanna and Jon. His beautiful mother. How unfair was it that she would never live to see him grow into the fine man he had become? It was also a cruel reminder of growing up motherless as well. All she knew of Rhaella were photographs or portraits and stories from others…but never had she felt the real warmth of a mother’s love either.

It wasn’t until she sniffled, and Jon’s finger was upon her cheek did she realize she had been crying silently. He brushed away her tears, still not saying a word, and she suddenly found she could not really look at him. What could she say? What words were in the lexicon suitable for a moment like this?

“I am Aegon Targaryen…apparently,” he finally broke the silence; his voice husky yet tinged with weary amusement. “Hi, Aunt Daenerys.”

She bit her lower lip and tried really hard not to smile, but when he nudged her chin gently; she was finally forced to look up. *Damn him for choosing to be this adorable now.*

“Don’t call me that,” she whispered with a shake of her head. “Or I’m going to start calling you Aegon.”

“Brr,” he mock shivered, but let his smile waver when he noticed she wasn’t reciprocating the gesture. He sighed and plucked the photo from her hand. “Trust me, Dany, I’ve cried enough for both of us. I’ve got nothing left to give.”

He rubbed his scarred chest absently as he studied the image now imprinted in his mind. “It hurts, I won’t lie. It hurts knowing Ned isn’t my real father, but...it could have been worse. I could have been dead by now.”

At Dany’s raised brow, Jon gave a cynical smile. “Robert Baratheon had it out for all Targaryens, remember? Isn’t that why you and Viserys had to flee Westeros? That fucker was determined to wipe us from the face of the earth. I’m guessing this here...because Robb said her diary...”
Dany blinked in surprise. “Robb? He knows?”

“He, Bran…the whole lot.” He explained the way Lyanna’s items had been discovered at Winterfell, and he might have laughed at the incredulous expression on her face as he spoke, but knew laughing now would be weird and not appropriate. Dany could have the dorkiest looks on her face when she didn’t know it. It was just one of the many things he loved about her.

“…oh my…” was all she could manage when he was done. “And they are okay with it…us? They do know about us, don’t they?”

“I’m sure they do, but from the way Robb sounded on the phone, I don’t think he – or the others – really give a shit,” Jon said with a small smile.

Dany might have asked if he – Jon – was okay with it as well considering his skepticism about the taboo Targaryen tradition. However, if their lovemaking and the discarding of her pills wasn’t enough of a sign that he wasn’t fazed by the revelation, she didn’t know what was. She could feel her entire body flushing with heat at that knowledge; not sure how much more her heart could take when it came to this man.

“They even want me to come home,” he was saying; forcing her out of her reverie.

Dany perked up at that. “And you said ‘yes’, right?”

Jon leaned back on his right elbow; a brow raised. “I’m still thinking about it.”

“But she’s got her diary there,” Dany urged as she leaned closer to place a hand on his thigh in gentle persuasion. “Come on, Jon! This is a chance for you to know more about the truth and all that happened. I’m sure she must have kept detailed information about their relationship…and besides, it would be a nice way to get to know a little more about my brother. All I’ve heard are the ‘hero’ versions of Rhaegar, and how wonderful and amazing he was, but no one could have been that perfect.”

“I’m sure Robert would have been glad to tell you of how much of a dick he was for stealing his girl,” Jon added with a smirk.

“It still didn’t give him the right to kill him over that.”

“Under the guise of a rebellion against The Syndicate, right?”

“Right,” Dany agreed with a frown. She looked at the certificate again. “So, you were born in Dorne.”

“Funny, huh?”

She slid him a glance. “No wonder you fit in so well when you were down there. Just think, you might have lived your first years as a Dornishman.”

“Or called Jon Sand.”

“But you wouldn’t be a bastard,” Dany reminded him. “You’d be the son of Lyanna Stark and the great Rhaegar Targaryen.”

“Hurray.”

She lowered her gaze. “Sorry…I wasn’t making fun…”
He silenced her apology with a tender kiss to her temple. “There’s nothing to apologize for, sweetheart. I was just messing with you too. Though… I was thinking about something else as well.”

“What’s that?”

“Notice the signature on the birth certificate?”

Dany looked again. “Yes… there’s Lyanna’s signature, your father… I mean Ned’s signature, then the officer of the registrar and then… ooh.”

“Oh huh.”

“… but I guess it’s just a standard thing for all certificates there,” Dany deduced although her mind was racing a mile-a-minute now. “It’s not uncommon for the King or Prince to sign such things.”

“I don’t know,” Jon remarked as he took the certificate and studied it himself. “Wouldn’t it be just a coincidence that Oberyn Martell was around to sign this as well. So, he must have known about me.”

“I wouldn’t be too quick to jump at that conclusion,” Dany warned cautiously. “He definitely didn’t act like he knew you.”

“The Martells are great actors,” Jon contended. “And wasn’t it also a coincidence that Tyene would be the one to help Bran find that document about Aunt… I mean my mother’s marriage to Rhaegar? There’s too many damn coincidences happening here, Dany.”

“So now you’re going to blame the Martells for keeping a secret from the rest of the world? Maybe they did it to save your life as well.”

Jon might have retorted back, when he realized they were actually arguing over this. He took a deep breath to control himself. “All I’m saying… is that we ought to speak to them again to find out the truth. They might know more than they’re letting on.”

“If you wish…”

“You don’t think it’s a good idea.”

“I just don’t think we need to go bothering them over something like this. We’ve got bigger things to worry about. I’m sure if Doran and Oberyn wanted us to know that you were my brother’s son, they would have spilled the beans the moment we landed in Dorne.” Dany sighed softly. “You should consider going to Winterfell, Jon. You can’t keep avoiding it forever.”

“I’m not…” he began to protest, but the words faded away as he met the knowing expression in her eyes.

Fuck.

He was avoiding it; for no matter how often he tried to tell himself that being half-Targaryen was okay and that he could learn to live with it… eventually; returning to Winterfell was going to be akin to walking into foreign territory. Sure, they were still family, and yes, he had lived most of his life there, but in addition to always feeling he had been ‘different’; the realization he was not a full Northerner was a recipe for triggering even more of his deep-rooted insecurities.

Something in his expression might have given away his inner turmoil for the next thing he knew, her arms were around his neck; her naked body pressed against him as if hoping to transfer all her warmth and support into his trembling form. She forced him to stretch out his legs as she straddled
him; being careful to control his cock from acting inappropriately in a moment that was meant for mere consolation.

She half-rose to bury her face into his hair; his right arm holding her tight as he inhaled the fresh smell of soap, and that unique scent that was just Dany, with a hunger that was almost frightening. It wasn’t until he closed his eyes and lay his aching forehead against her gently heaving breasts, did the lump rise to his throat again. No, he was all cried out, wasn’t he? He had nothing left to give, right? So why get so emotional again? Fuck his life.

“I know you’re scared,” Dany was whispering; her voice seeming coming from somewhere high above; the heavens perhaps – soft, soothing, and caressing to his tumultuous thoughts. “And I cannot begin to imagine how you must really feel about all this, Jon, but guess what? Sometimes it’s the fear that makes us the strongest.” She pulled away slowly, but only to settle down on his thighs, so they could be face-to-face. She caressed his face; that oh-so beautiful scarred face she adored.

“How do you think I felt coming back to these shores, Jon? Knowing that I’d be vilified and considered a foreign invader to a people who once loved my ancestors? You must now overcome your obstacle, Jon Snow, and I have faith that you can do it. You are lucky to be born into a family who loved you, and still loves you no matter what. Ned – for all his flaws – only did what his sister asked of him, and for that we can all be grateful for his selflessness. He was a wonderful father to you, Jon, and that is a memory I hope you never forget.”

“But he could have told me,” Jon whispered; his vision blurring with the depth of his suffering. “He…Uncle Benjen…they could have told me…”

“And perhaps they might have someday,” Dany insisted. “Maybe they knew that with Robert still alive, it was a risk they could not take.” She reached for his right hand and placed a kiss on the back of it. “Can you imagine the burden and pressures they must have been under as well? I know it caused you to live your life being treated differently – and unjustly so in my humble opinion – but all of that has helped shape you to become the man you are today. You are strong, brave, kind-hearted…loyal…a true Stark. You will always be a Stark, Jon Snow; no one can take that away from you.”

Jon didn’t bother hiding his tears as she leaned close to kiss them away, though her next words would make his chest tighten with the raw emotion in her voice.

“And I know you’ll still not want to fully embrace your Valyrian or Targaryen side, and I understand that. It will take some time to get used to it...if at all, but...but...knowing…”

This time, it was her voice that broke, and she could barely look at him. “…I’ve always thought I was the last,” she finally whispered with a choked sob. “But now…I’m no longer alone. I have…you are…I’m…I’m sorry…I know you don’t want to-”

His lips seized hers in a kiss so hard and determined, it forced her unto her back though he was quick to reposition her for fear of hurting her. She kissed back as forcefully; her body heaving into his as the salt of their tears baptized their questing mouths.

They finally broke apart for air, but only far enough to rest their foreheads against each other’s; their heated gazes locked with the gamut of emotions to flood through them in this moment. Perhaps he couldn’t really understand how happy she was at ‘finding him’, neither could she truly grasp the depths of his insecurities, but they were getting there. Together, they would reach that point where words would be unnecessary to convey their emotions. He might not be ready to completely accept being the son of Rhaeger, but he was sure as hell not going to make the mistake of losing the most important thing in his life.
“I love you, Daenerys Targaryen,” he whispered, playfully capturing her lower lip between his teeth before sucking tenderly on it. “All of you…every single fucking inch of you.”

Ah, if only he were more poetic, but alas – that was not his forte, and he could only blurt out the truth as he knew it.

She blushed and tightened her grip around his neck. She would take the blunt route any day. Save the flowery stuff for some other girl who might enjoy such things.

She nuzzled him and smiled shyly in return, “Right back at you, Jon Aegon Snow Targaryen.”

He raised a brow at that. “Hey now…”

“Fine. Jon Aegon.”

“Dany…”

“AeJon?”

“Dany!”

“Seven hells, Jon then. Sheesh.”

She grinned at his attempt to look pissed, before bursting into helpless giggles as he worried her neck like an overzealous puppy. “Oh gods, Jon! I’m going to get the worst beard burns ever! Stooooooooooooooop!”

He prepared to ignore her, but did obey and sat up to pin her with a look that was a cross between adoration and exasperation. “Don’t think I’ve forgotten my earlier question, Dany.”

“Earlier question?” she blinked innocently.

He narrowed his gaze and gripped her hips to position her in place. His left arm was literally throbbing from all the exertion he had placed on it so far, and he was sure the doctor was going to bitch about it later today. In the meantime, he had more pressing matters to attend to. For instance, making his woman come for the fourth (or was it fifth?) time this morning.

He shook his head as if admonishing a child; knowing damn well she was stalling. Seven hells, most girls in the movies usually squealed and became babbling fools when their men proposed to them, but then again…when had Daenerys Targaryen ever been an ‘ordinary’ woman? If he had thought getting a simple ‘yes’ from her would be this easy, he was sadly mistaken.

“Yes…my question,” he grunted as he thrust her legs apart and found the familiar V of heat just begging to be taken again. When he slid home, effortlessly, her sigh of pleasure was nearly his undoing.

However, he deliberately went slow; taunting and teasing her with every cautious thrust until she just about cursed him out with impatience. He smirked and nibbled on her earlobe before asking again.

“Do you want me to repeat the question?”

“Aaaah…. mmmm….”

“What was that, babe? You’ve got to speak up you know.”

“Aaaah…. fuck you,” she panted and arched her hips off the bed; hoping he’d take the hint.
“Wrong answer,” he sneered as he reached down to lift her leg slightly off the bed, giving him a better angle to thrust even deeper into her. Her whimper and subsequent mewl of desperation had him barely hanging on. He struggled to think of the worst things to prolong his orgasm, though he did still have to try to get an answer.

“Dany? Moon of my life?” he urged with a ragged gasp. “Will you be mine?”

“I’m…I’m already…yours,” she protested in a whine.

“Making it official for fuck’s sake.”

“What kind of a proposal is that?” she snapped back, though it was an impotent attempt at being upset considering he was picking up the pace again and she was slowly losing her damn mind.

“Fine,” he grunted and pulled out, but only to spin her onto her stomach, spreading her legs apart and thrusting in again.

Her cry of ecstasy was muffled against the pillows; her teeth gripping the cotton fabric until she feared she might rip it. Not that it mattered; nothing fucking mattered except the fire roaring between them as he just about pounded her into the bed; his sinewy length hard and frenzied upon her back and ass.

Ohgods, I’mgonnacomesofuckinghardfuckfuckfuck!

She might have screamed something in Valyrian or Dothraki, she didn’t know, but as she felt his loud groan of satiation above her, and the warmth of his seed coating her insides again, she sagged in utter exhaustion and bliss against the sheets. Dear gods. She was officially done. She wasn’t sure she would be able to walk after tonight…and they had a doctor’s appointment first thing today, didn’t they?

Shit.

“You really are a pain in the ass, you know that?” Jon groaned into her hair before rolling off to flop onto his back. He was still struggling to catch his breath, and despite the satisfaction on his features, it was still contorted in pain. He had really overdone it now. His arm felt ready to fall off.

“You never make things easy for me,” he complained.

With a weary kiss on his cheek, she slid closer to the nightstand for his painkillers and the bottle of water.

“Here, you big crybaby,” she offered fondly; forcing him to sit up and take the medication, which he did without protest. “Maybe we should reschedule the appointment…”

Jon was already shaking his head; his eyes closed. “No…we’ll go. Can’t miss it.”

“Okay.”

She prepared to tuck them beneath the covers, when his next words would have her heart beating a little faster.

“Winterfell…we’ll go…together,” he said with a weary yawn. “I’m not going there without you…also I guess I’ll have to work on my proposal skills too. I’m not giving up yet, Dany. I’m making it official whether you like it or not.”
You stupid, stupid lovable idiot, she thought as she buried her heated face against his chest; now unable to sleep long after his light snores told him he was out like a light.

Anyone from the outside looking in, would consider him a fool to want to be tied down to a woman like her. She brought nothing but trouble, and despite their small victories, there were bigger challenges ahead to test even the strongest of relationships. There was no guarantee he wouldn’t come to regret his decision, especially with him returning to Winterfell where he was going to be clearly more comfortable no matter his current situation. Perhaps he needed more time to really think this through, for emotions had run high tonight after all. However, if he was still determined to marry her…then who was she to say ‘no’ to such a tempting and wonderful offer?

Ah, to become his wife…living in this home instead of that monstrous Red Keep or even Dragonstone…wouldn’t that be the perfect life?

If only…

She sat up then, being careful not to wake him. She studied him for a long moment before coming to a firm resolution. She knew Jon was still not ready to fully embrace his Targaryen side, which meant he was unlikely to want to make their familial relationship known to the public. That was fine, but she’d be damned if she was going to keep hiding her feelings from the rest of the world.

It was about damn time to put all those rumors to rest.

It would be the first thing Daria and her other 20 million plus Illustrogram followers would see after seemingly weeks of ‘silence’; a most intimate and beautiful black and white photograph of their Queen and the mystery man she had danced with at the Water Palace all those months ago.

The simple caption would say it all:

My sun and stars.

#Love
He stood at the edge of the world with Ghost by his side.

The wind was biting up here; the thick layers of clothing barely able to keep the chill from settling into his bones. From his vantage point, he was sure he could see all of Westeros, or at least most of the North and what lay beyond. In the cloak of darkness, The Haunted Forest was nothing more than an inky stain spread like a wet nurse’s blanket over ice and snow. Frightening tales, he had heard as a boy, came back to mind as he studied the landscape. Tales of creatures that never died and walked the earth as zombies ready to eat anyone that came across their path. He had to wonder how the Wildlings could survive such a place, but that was the least of his worries at this time.

He spun on his heels to trot after Ghost; not bothering to ask how he had managed to get onto The Wall in the first place. He was sure this was just another dream or vision or whatever it was these days; it was hard to keep track. His steps were sure and steady, as if they had walked these graveled path a thousand times before. He could see flickering fires from various watch points, though there were no other humans around as far as he could see. It literally felt like he and Ghost were the last living beings on the planet, and there was a melancholic feeling to that realization.

_Does anyone even know where we are?_ Jon thought with a bitter smile as he came to the archaic elevator, which was nothing more than a wooden cage operated by a lever that was yanked and supposed to be cranked by someone below. However, once he stepped foot into the small space, he
blinked and found himself standing beneath the grounds of Winterfell; the crypt to be exact.

His breath came out in short gasps; as if he had run a marathon. Puffs of smoke escaped his lips as he exhaled and he realized that the familiar warmth, which seeped through the walls of the castle, was not in effect. He still felt as if he was on The Wall, and if anything, it felt even more frigid here.

Ghost, not bothered by the temperature, was already padding ahead of him; his paws scraping much too loudly on the washed stone floor. Jon followed; his flashlight paving the way despite the dim glow from the installed fluorescent lamps. As much as they would have loved to continue the tradition of oil lamps, Catelyn had gotten rid of those a few years back thanks to an accident that almost had the entire place incinerated.

Ghost gave a low mewing sound as he stopped before a familiar crypt. He flopped onto his haunches and appeared to be studying the statue…or whatever was around it. When Jon finally caught up, whatever shock he might have felt at the sight of Lyanna Stark sitting on her stone burial site, was numbed considerably. After all he had experienced in the past week, seeing her apparition was almost a relief.

Unlike her honorary statue, where she had been carved wearing a traditional Northern gown from centuries past, this version of Lyanna was modern. This was the version in the videos he had watched at Robert Baratheon’s place; fresh-faced, full of life, and so very pretty. Clad in a black turtleneck sweater beneath a varsity jacket and a pair of jeans, she hopped off the crypt, her sneakers barely making a sound on the ground when she landed. Her athleticism was evident in that move, which shouldn’t have been a surprise. Several trophies she had won, for various sporting events in her high school days, still adorned the great halls of Winterfell.

With a rueful smile on her visage, she walked closer to Jon and placed a hand upon his cheek; her eyes wet with tears. It was a warm touch…a soothing caress, yet Jon could not get himself to reciprocate for some reason.

I’m so sorry, she said without opening her lips. I should have told you everything…we should have told you everything. You suffered so much because of what we did, and if we could do it all over again…maybe we would. But not you…oh not you, Aegon. She took both his hands in hers and held on tight.

A love that caused so many problems, Jon thought bitterly, though if her pained expression was any indication, she had heard him all the same.

I was naïve and young, but I make no apologies for what happened, Aegon. I loved your father very much, and if he had known you existed, he would have done all he could to protect you. I know it. You must believe me, Aegon-

Jon, he interrupted almost impatiently. I am Jon Snow. Not Aegon.

She lowered her lashes with a heavy sigh and released him. Just as she did that the chill returned with a vengeance. His teeth chattered as she seemed to waver before him like a candle’s flame fluttering in the breeze. His breath caught, and he tried calling out to her; immediately regretting speaking so harshly. This was an opportunity to get some answers, but he had allowed those traces of bitterness to take control of him. With desperation, he dove for her, only to find himself standing on the parapet of The Wall again. The transfer had been so fast, he couldn’t help crying out in surprise as he tethered dangerously over the edge. One false move and he could be nosediving seven hundred feet to an icy death.

“We can’t afford to lose you now, my Prince,” came the quiet words which had him spinning around
so fast, he almost lost his footing again. Ghost growled and took a threatening step toward the newcomer, but she didn’t seem fazed. If anything, she gave an indulgent smile at the beast, her red lips curving upward with a knowing that sent chills down Jon’s spine. The ruby within the choker around her neck glowed as bright as Ghost’s eyes. He hadn’t seen her since that night at Robert’s castle, and he assumed she might have met her fate at the hands of the Unsullied. However, if she was still appearing in his dreams -

“You…” Jon panted and struggled to steady himself as the wind whipped relentlessly at their bodies. Yet she remained steady and unbothered by the elements. Her cloak framed her body like red flames; her unblemished features almost ghostly in the darkness.

“You purpose is yet to be fulfilled,” Melisandre continued as blood-red fingernails trailed upon his injured left arm. “You must not perish before then for the night is dark…and full of terrors.”

“What?”

He sucked in a harsh breath as he felt the surge of warmth to race into his arm. It was akin to being given a shot of electricity, and though Ghost continued to growl in protest, Jon felt powerless to stop her sorcery. What else was this to be called?

“May the Lord of Light continue to be with you…in this life and the next…” She whispered into his ear; her voice husky with restrained passion.

She pulled away before he could ask her what she meant; her body blending effortlessly into the shadows until he was left alone with his direwolf.

Wh-what the fuck just happened?

Ghost gave that low mewling sound again and licked his master’s hand; a rather surprising expression of concern on his usual feral features.

“It’s all right, Ghost,” Jon tried to reassure his companion as he flexed his arm gingerly. “It’s okay… it’s going to be okay…”

Or was it?

Jon’s lashes flew open; his unfocused gaze staring at the wooden beams above him for a long minute. It would eventually sink in that he was still at the cottage in King’s Landing and not stuck on The Wall or at the crypts in Winterfell.

With a groan, he ran his hand across his face and forced himself to be more alert. It didn’t help that his phone was buzzing like crazy on the nightstand, and as he stretched out an arm to grab it, he swung his legs out of bed and winced as his lower back protested the sudden motion.

Shit, I’m getting old.

He glared at the device; scrolling through several missed calls from Davos, Sam, and the current culprit – Tyrion Lannister.

What did the dwarf want with him now?
Tossing the phone aside with a muffled curse, he staggered into the bathroom to begin his morning routine. He was getting used to doing things one-handed, but after his dream, he dared to test if any changes had occurred to his left arm. As he unwrapped the splint, a part of him scoffed at his willingness to believe in such follies. It was silly to think some woman might have healed him from a dream, but if his abdominal wounds could heal that fast with just her touch, what stopped his arm from doing the same?

He took a deep breath and dared to flex the arm carefully. Though it was already healing as it should, and he could move it a bit more these days, a part of him assumed Melisandre might have given it an extra ‘umphf’ to make it work like brand new. Unfortunately, he tried his luck a bit too much and ended up having to stifle a cry of agony.

So much for dream miracles.

It wasn’t until he was in the kitchen getting some toast and coffee into his system, did he finally turn the device on again. Tyrion had tried reaching him twice more since then, and with a roll of his eyes, Jon figured he might as well return the older man’s calls.

…except the panic set in at why Tyrion would be trying to speak to him so urgently. Had something happened to Dany?! She returned to Dragonstone about a week ago, and though they had spoken to each other last night, maybe something had happened and Tyrion was calling to tell him the terrible news.

Please let me be wrong…

“He’s alive!” Tyrion hailed as his misshapen features filled Jon’s phone screen. “Good gods, man. You can’t tell me you’re still sleeping at almost ten in the morning.”

“It’s Sunday,” Jon replied with a raised brow as he took another bite of his dry toast. “I think I’ve earned the right to sleep in a little longer. Is Dany all right?”

“And a good morning to you too,” Tyrion greeted with a sneer. “Not to worry. Your precious Dany is safe and sound. Last I saw her, she was courting the attention of Lord Yronwood.”

Jon frowned. “Who?”

“Lord Anders Yronwood,” Tyrion explained with an exaggerated sigh. “He is the current lord of House Yronwood…in Dorne? Remember?”

“Ah…”

“At least try to recall all those who are aligned with your girlfriend’s cause,” came the impatient retort. “What do you think she’s been doing in Dragonstone all this time?”

“Avoiding all the chaos she’s caused here with her Illustrogram post,” Jon grumbled as he scrolled through his email on his laptop. “I mean…I get she did it as a spontaneous thing, but she didn’t stop to think about the consequences, did she? Now, I’m everywhere.”

“You were already everywhere,” Tyrion reminded him. “Just not ‘everywhere’ enough.”

“I can’t even walk the streets without being observed like some alien,” Jon continued to whine as he noticed yet another paparazzi image of him walking into a local grocery store. Seven hells. The caption wasn’t even that flattering. They were ragging on him for not dressing up to the nines…just to get some milk and toiletries? He wasn’t a fucking celebrity for the gods’ sake!
“Who am I to understand the fascination with social media and all it entails,” Tyrion replied. “Besides, let’s not forget it was your idea for her to gain more exposure that way. So, what if she decides to broadcast her feelings for you? Is that such a bad thing?”

Jon might have rebutted that statement, when the memory of Dany’s features the day after their night of several passionate consummations, had him giving a sigh of resignation. She had shyly shown him the post, which already had a whopping five million likes overnight. The comments were just as astounding; over 200,000 of them and most were positive. A part of him had cringed at the sudden notoriety and no longer being as anonymous; but another part soared with pride and love for Dany daring to do something that insane. It was a huge risk all things considered, and though they were both of the mindset that his real parentage would remain a secret; this public declaration of her feelings would have sufficed as a ‘yes’ to his impromptu marriage proposal.

Which he still had to work on anyway. Shit. He hasn’t even purchased a ring.

Either way, because of the post, his life had gone from relative obscurity to becoming the object of daily scrutiny and discussion amongst the small folk. His usual hangouts were now frequented by ‘fans’ eager to see the man who had managed to steal the heart of their dear soon-to-be Queen. It was strange having to stop for selfies with people he didn’t even know; sometimes not having the heart to tell them that he was really no celebrity and was nothing more than a landlord with a lot on his plate. Davos found himself having to field off requests for television or magazine interviews, or even more befuddling, wading through the packages of free swag from fashion designers hoping to dress the possible ‘King’ for future public events.

His tenants were not immune to this as well, especially those who had survived the fire of White Castle and were now living at the location near the Streets of the Sisters. He got teased mercilessly by some of them, in good fun of course, but Mr. and Mrs. Martin seemed to get the most kick out of all this for some reason.

“You would be a King, eh?” the grizzled old man had said with a puff of his pipe one afternoon as he paid a visit to Jon’s office. He was in relatively good spirits as he’d had the foresight to save his manuscripts in a safe that survived the fire. “Who would have thought? Though I must say you’re much different than the Jon I knew over a year ago. You’ve changed…don’t have that naïve and dumb expression on your face anymore.”

“I’m not a King,” Jon had muttered with embarrassment, but Mrs. Martin would have none of it. She placed the tray of cupcakes she’d baked on his desk; her rosy features glowing with pride for him.

“Well, it doesn’t matter whether you marry the Queen or not, but we all think you’re already a prince in our hearts.” She pinched his cheek playfully. “You have already done so much for all of us, and we wouldn’t be here without you today.” She lowered her voice. “Besides, I think you will do a much better job running this country than those people up there right now. Pfft! Some government we have.”

She wasn’t the only one thinking it, for Jon found himself bombarded or slyly being encouraged by those he met, to take a more active role in helping to change Westeros. He longed to tell them that he was not interested, and had no real desire to get into politics, but he realized how hypocritical that was. His decision to get involved with Dany had brought this into his life, and whether he liked it or not, he was up to his neck in politics now. He hated it, but he’d have to learn to adjust as best he could.

“Are you still with me, Bastard?” Tyrion’s voice seeped into his thoughts.

Jon’s lips twitched with an effort not to smirk at the term; a part of him wanting to blurt out that he
was not actually a bastard. However, he kept his peace and figured in due time Tyrion would be privy to that knowledge.

“I’m here,” he replied as he gulped down the rest of his coffee and began attending to the pile of online paperwork that needed his attention. Thanks to the extra cash his Uncle Benjen had stashed away, Jon had plans to reconstruct White Castle from its ashy ruins. It would be bigger and damn better than the original and a big ‘fuck you’ to Robert Baratheon in his grave. “Why did you call me?”

“To congratulate you on your ingenuity,” Tyrion replied. “Just when I think you have nothing else to surprise me with, you come up with even better ideas than I could have predicted.”

Jon raised a brow; eyes still trained on the computer screen. “What did I do now to warrant such high praise?”

“Why taking the Queen to Winterfell! She says you both plan to go there at the end of the month.”

“Ah…”

“What better way to shore up the northern vote by letting her meet with the lords of the different houses and to make her case. With Robert now out of the picture, and your brother on board…I do believe your brother is on board?”

“He knows we’re coming,” Jon replied carefully; not wanting to tarnish Tyrion’s ideas on the real reason they were going there. He hadn’t even considered the political side of things. All he had cared about was talking to his siblings (cousins), learning more about his aunt (mother), and hightailing it out of there when possible. The thought of having Dany deal with those grumpy Northern leaders was not appealing in the slightest. Jon had been to one or two of those meetings in the past, though he sat at the back of the room to observe the proceedings, and it was a damn miracle Ned hadn’t taken off the heads of some of those men. They could be belligerent, rude, impatient, and downright stupid most of the time.

Could Dany survive them?

“…already secured Dorne,” Tyrion was continuing. “And if we get the North, we are just about halfway there. My father has already shored up support in the Crownlands, Westerlands, Riverlands, and most of the Stormlands. However, we’re going to have a devil of a time getting The Reach on our side…and there’s of course the Iron Islands…good grief.”

Jon sighed and rubbed his forehead. “I swear to the gods; this whole thing is giving me a fucking headache.”

“And how do you think Dany feels?” Tyrion snapped impatiently. “Do you think she’s hanging around Dragonstone frolicking in the grass all day? She’s performing her duties as a future Queen and that involves hobnobbing with anyone and everyone willing to fight for her cause. I suggest you begin doing the same.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“That means, with the Great Council approaching, we need all the help we can get. You can begin now by building up Dany for your brother and his cohorts up north. Sell her good points and prepare them for her visit. If it involves you kissing as many asses as possible then do it.”

“And why? Why the hell is all this necessary? I thought you were going to see your father about getting her a seat at the Council anyway?”
Tyrion snorted. “My visit to King’s Landing is merely to have an audience with him, yes, and to present a case as to why Daenerys Stormborn deserves to have a seat. However, do you really think he has that much power when it comes to the Great Council?”

“What is this Great Council thing anyway?”

“I see you paid a great deal of attention during your history lessons at school,” Tyrion replied with as much sarcasm as he could muster. “It’s when lords from all over Westeros descend upon King’s Landing and begin kissing each other’s asses or giving figurative – or literal - blow jobs to get favors done. It’s where decisions that affect Westeros are made, and for one week, King’s Landing becomes a chaotic mess of politics and backstabbing that will make your head reel.” Tyrion took a deep breath. “That is why it’s important to get as many supporters as possible. The more votes we have at the table, the more secure we’ll be. If father sinks his teeth into the Iron Islands and The Reach, we are done for. I am saying this with the hope that we at least get the North on our side.”

Jon stopped typing long enough to purse his lips in thought. He leaned back on the chair and studied Tyrion’s features for a while before speaking quietly. “Something tells me you are the one more eager to get this done than Dany is.”

Tyrion blinked in surprise; his features slackening for a moment at the accusation. He finally let out a tense. “What are you trying to suggest, Jon Snow?”

“Oh nothing,” Jon replied with a light shrug though his expression remained unreadable. “You know so much about all this, I get the feeling that sometimes you wish you were the one leading and not Dany.”

“Why would you…?”

“Do you know what she really wishes for?” Jon interrupted as he suddenly leaned forward as if speaking intimately to Tyrion. “Not for some shitty throne in the Red Keep, or even her dragon throne at Dragonstone. It’s for this.” He waved his hand around him, causing Tyrion to look confused.

“This cottage, my Lord Tyrion,” Jon explained with a small smile. “This little cottage just outside the chaos and cesspool that is King’s Landing. It’s got three bedrooms, a kitchen, living room, den, storage, a garden, some goats and chickens, a couple of horses, and a wonderful view of Blackwater Bay from the front porch. It’s a beautiful home, Tyrion, and she asked if we could purchase it. Now tell me, my Lord, does that sound like a woman who has any interest in spending the rest of her life kissing the asses of belligerent lords squabbling amongst themselves?”

Tyrion’s features turned red as if struggling not to burst into a slew of insults, so he settled for helping himself to a glass of wine to compose himself.

“A wonderful dream, Bastard,” Tyrion finally said when he was sure he could speak again. “And one we all wish for. Believe me, if I could find myself a woman that could love me for me, and not my family name, and live in a quaint little cottage by the sea, I’d do the same. However, you must snap your fingers and wake up from your fantasy, my boy. This is the real world; and in the real world, there are no shortcuts to getting what one truly desires. For Daenerys, it’s been to restore her family name and to change Westeros for the better. If she’s got fanciful thoughts of living in peace, then she must fight to achieve that peace and it begins with her sitting on that throne at the Red Keep. Do you really think she’ll be content to sit around twiddling her thumbs while the rest of the world goes to shit? You are even more naïve than I thought.” With his features tightening with barely suppressed annoyance, Tyrion lowered his voice. “Do not…under any circumstance, Bastard, try to deter her from her goal. We’ve already had this discussion before, and I refuse to reiterate myself
again. She came from nothing, Jon Snow, and she has worked her ass off to get to where she is today. Do not forget that."

He downed the rest of his drink and made a show of looking at his watch. “Ah, look at that. I’ve already spent too much time here-”

“What do you know about Rhaegar Targaryen?” came the sudden quiet question from Jon, who had tolerated the tongue lashing from the dwarf with a clenched jaw and fist.

It was Tyrion’s turn to raise a brow at the sudden turn of events. “Rhaegar Targaryen? What about him?”

“What did you know about him?” Jon repeated himself; his expression dark and inscrutable.

Tyrion shrugged. “Just about as much as everyone else I suppose. The son of the Mad King, Aerys, and lone surviving child of poor Rhaella until Viserys and then of course, Daenerys came along. I had a chance to meet him on a couple of occasions when he visited Casterly Rock. Besides his extremely good looks, he seemed preoccupied most of the time and didn’t quite waste time with small talk. Some say he had the same streak of madness his father had, but what do I know? The Targaryens have always been a puzzle to me.” He paused and studied Jon. “Does this appease your curiosity?”

“Seems odd that’s all you know about him,” Jon replied with a cynical smile. “I would have thought someone like Varys, would have shared some more information with you.”

“The Spider keeps his information to himself. He can be greedy when it comes to sharing them, and I for one, would rather not know whatever insidious detail he’s got lurking in that brain of his.” Tyrion glanced at his watch again. “Well, as interesting as this conversation has been, I must take my leave. I should be arriving at King’s Landing later tonight, and I doubt you and I will be having a wonderful reunion, so I’ll stay at a nearby hotel. Feel free to visit when you get a chance.”

“Try not to get your ass arrested or killed,” Jon said, which earned him a chuckle.

“Ah, the exact same parting words of farewell from the Queen. Except she also added a threatening “I will send my army to the Red Keep should anything happen to you.” I should be honored she’d go that far for me. And with that, Bastard, I bid you farewell. Until we meet again.”

Jon hung up and remained sitting in silence. He ran over every word Tyrion had said, including his warnings and threats, before one word slid to mind.

Liar.

He liked Tyrion well enough, but there was also a part of him that couldn’t shake off the Lannister’s desire for power and status; that all this was simply done not just to get Dany in the Red Keep, but for Tyrion to take control in some way. And perhaps that was a good thing. Tyrion wasn’t as unreasonable as the rest of his family, and had so far gained Dany’s trust, but there was still no denying his ambitious streak. And that thing about only knowing Rhaeger from tales he had heard… bullshit. There was no way Tyrion didn’t know more than he was letting on. Perhaps not about Jon being his son, but probably about the relationship he had with Lyanna and Robert…and even Ned.

I’m overthinking things, he groaned as he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Nothing good ever came out of exerting his mind in directions that could lead to conspiracy theories. Fortunately, a welcome distraction came in the form of a text from Sam saying he was just around the corner.

“Got your favorite bagels with cream cheese,” Sam greeted once Jon let him into the house. He
waved the brown paper bags with a big grin on his face; his cheeks pale with the cold to accompany him.

“You’re a lifesaver,” Jon said with a chuckle as he dug in. “Got the other stuff?”

“Yep,” came the excited response as they made their way to the dining room, where he was quick to set up his laptop. He dug into his backpack to whip out the dossier; placing it before Jon who opened and scanned through it with a bagel stuck between his teeth.

“Is that what you wanted?” Sam queried with a raised brow. “Wouldn’t want to upset Your Grace this early in the day.”

He was rewarded with a middle finger from his friend, who was still focused on the papers before him. Jon eventually chewed down on the pastry, swallowed, and spoke. “Figures…I knew they had something to do with this.”

“You want to tell me why you’re suddenly so interested in Rhaegar Targaryen?” Sam asked. It wasn’t odd for Jon to ask him to gather information, but to get this request was strange. A part of Sam had wondered if it had anything to do with the DNA reveal, but why it would have Jon wanting to know all about the late Targaryen prince’s life pre-Rebellion was confusing. Had Dany asked him to do this?

“I just had a theory, and I’m glad to see it wasn’t just a figment of my imagination.” Jon waved the paper. “Looks like the Martells were quite intimate with him after all. He was actually dating Oberyn’s sister at one time…Elia Martell.”

“Hmm,” Sam agreed as he began typing on his laptop. “Not only that, she was apparently pregnant when they broke up. This was right after Rhaegar graduated college. She was still a senior, and he had returned to King’s Landing to work for his crazy father. There was even plans to get married…”

“…all this while being with Lyanna?” Jon muttered in disbelief. So much for Rhaegar being some saint.

“I know right?” Sam gushed; eyes wide with interest. “I mean, the man was a player, you’ve got to give him that much.” He chuckled, but the laughs faded when he saw Jon wasn’t amused. Coughing lightly, he continued. “So yeah…he hooked up with Lyanna on the side, and that was what made Robert so pissed off. Robert and Lyanna were supposed to be the IT couple back then, and everyone was sure those two would get married, but lo and behold, Rhaeger made his final move and ‘stole’ her away…first to Harrenhal to get married and then to Dorne. Of all places.”

“Where his other to-be-wife was waiting.”

“Not really.” Sam said with a sad smile. “Elia had passed away by then, leaving her two kids behind…Aegon the Sixth and Rhaenys…though those two didn’t last long as you can see.”

And Jon could see indeed. Robert – who was probably just as mad as Aerys – had ordered that all and everything Targaryen-related was to be eliminated, and guess who had done the honors of getting rid of Rhaegar’s children? Tywin Lannister; the current head of Westeros. He had sent his henchmen to do the job, and the details of their gruesome deaths made Jon sick to his stomach. How the Martells hadn’t sought to incinerate the Lannisters or even Robert back then was still a mystery. He would think that family would do all they could to exact their revenge, or had they simply been waiting for the right person to do it on their behalf?

“Rhaegar,” Sam continued, “who had been out of sight for a while, heard the news and finally
decided to get involved with the battle. Too little too late, as they say.”

“…so, he never knew Lyanna was pregnant?”

“The timeline’s all messed up,” Sam admitted. “On one hand, it would seem likely he did know she was with child, and that’s why she was left at Dorne after their shotgun wedding, but another theory seems to assume that he had no fucking clue. He just headed off to King’s Landing to settle matters and died in the process. Robert got his revenge and didn’t even get the girl in the end. Lyanna allegedly passed away by some weird illness no one can figure out ‘til today.”

Weird illness, Jon thought with a rueful smile. *I’m the weird illness, Sam. Go figure.*

“I searched everywhere, Jon, but that’s got to be the best kept secret out there. Why did Lyanna die? Was it because of the baby? And if so, where is the baby? Why did she remain at Dorne? Why… hmm?”

He stared blankly at the envelope Jon pushed toward him. He opened his mouth to ask what it was about, but noticed the silent request in his friend’s eyes.

**Just look at it. Don’t ask too many questions.**

Wondering why his heart was now beating a little faster than usual, Sam opened the envelope and read its content with his eyes and mouth opening wider by the second.

“…I don’t…” He gawked, looked up at Jon, looked back at the certificate, and then back up to Jon again. “Is this…are you sure…I mean…”

“Yes,” was all Jon could say. He knew it was a risk sharing this with Sam, but he trusted the other man, and knew this secret would be safe with him. Besides, it felt good to be sharing this with someone else.

“Holy fucking shit balls!” Sam cried out with a slap of his hand against his forehead. “I don’t…you are…you’re fucking… *Aegon Targaryen the seventh*?”

“Keep your voice down,” Jon said with a smile, though it was pointless, Sam was already too far gone in his disbelief as he continued studying the birth certificate as if holding a pot of gold.

“Does Dany know?” Sam squeaked.

“Yes.”

“Whoa!” Sam had to stand up. This was too much for his brain to take. He paced around the dining table, still holding onto the certificate. He stopped long enough to open the fridge, grab a beer and nearly guzzle its entire contents before giving a loud belch and continuing his pacing. “Holy fucking shit balls!”

“Seven hells, Sam! Sit the fuck down. You’re making me dizzy.”

“This is fucking huge!” Sam bellowed as if Jon was failing to see the magnitude of the situation. He plopped onto the chair and pinned the most intense look on Jon yet; his brows furrowed with concentration. “…but you don’t even look like him…at least I don’t see the resemblance.”

“And it’s a good thing too,” Jon replied. “It might have saved my life in more ways than one. Can you imagine if I had silver hair or something? I would have probably been dead in about a week.”
Sam sat back with a whoosh escaping his lips; still staring at his friend and seeing him in a whole new light. To say that this was an amazing discovery would be an understatement, and suddenly all those teasing about him being a future King, no longer seemed funny. The irony of it all was too much to comprehend. Sitting before him was a man who had the right to The Syndicate, but could have no real claim to it, unless he was willing to reveal his identity…oh, and there was that little issue about his current girlfriend…his aunt.

“…hmm…”

“Now what?”

“I mean, I’m not saying that it’s bound to be weird or anything, but…Dany…”

“I told you she already knows,” Jon said with a raised brow. “And?”

Sam blinked and then whispered. “She’s…isn’t she your aunt though? I mean I know you love her and all, but doesn’t it feel…weird?”

“If I think too much about it, yeah, but since I’m not…no.” Jon shrugged. “I didn’t get into this relationship knowing I was going to be sleeping with my aunt for fuck’s sake. We didn’t know each other existed until …well recently.”

“Fair enough but…but…” Sam gulped. “What if this gets out? And your family in Winterfell! What will they do? Wait…how did you even find this?”

Jon took a deep breath and decided to tell Sam the whole story. By the time he was done, a fly could have settled into Sam’s mouth with no fear of being swallowed. His friend was frozen in complete shock. Jon slowly plucked the certificate from Sam’s unresisting fingers and tucked it away again.

“Needless to say, this is strictly between us,” Jon stated firmly. “Let’s not try to make this too much of a big deal. We have to focus on what’s important, which is trying to shore up support for Dany at the Great Council.”

“Huh? Oh yeah…that. Shit…nearly forgot all about that.”

“Tyrion wouldn’t let me do so, that’s for damn sure,” Jon complained as he recalled Tyrion’s lecture. “So hopefully this trip to Winterfell will help. I hate to put her before those Northern lords, but hey…”

“…she’ll have you there to back her up,” Sam added with a smile. “No one messes with the dragons, right?”

Jon chuckled as he forced himself to focus on his work. “A dragon and a wolf,” he corrected with a knowing wink. “A deadly combination if you ask me.”

The flickering flames of the candles illuminated the eggs; giving ethereal sheens to their colorful scaled stony surfaces. She caressed them absently; their warmth making her feel safe and secure for some reason. In the background, Missandei was still reciting her itinerary for tomorrow, but Dany could care less about it. After an exhausting evening of entertaining the Dornish contingent, all she wanted to do was put her feet up and sleep for the rest of the week.
As for Missandei, she was sure her Queen’s attention was somewhere else…as it had been for most of the week despite her numerous meetings and duties. It was in the moments when Dany would have a lovely small smile on her features even if there was nothing worth smiling about. It was in the moments when she’d have to call her twice or more just to get her attention, for her Queen would have a distant look on her face…as if she were a million miles away. It didn’t take a scientist to figure out just what had her so enamored or who she was thinking about most of the time.

“…and you will go fox hunting with Lord Gulian Swann of House Swann before dinner with his contingent in the Great Hall,” she finished as she lowered the tablet. As expected, Dany’s focus was on the eggs; that lovely smile on her features. Curiosity finally getting the better of her, Missandei had to inquire.

“Forgive me for being so bold, my Queen, but ever since we left King’s Landing, you’ve been in good spirits. I know this might have something to do with your latest post on Illustrogram…but did something else happen?”

“Hmm?” Dany shook herself as if coming out of a stupor. “Oh…it’s…” Her cheeks blossomed with color; making her look years younger. She spun away from the eggs and twiddled her hands as if unsure of what to do with them now. “It’s nothing,” she finally muttered with growing embarrassment.

Missandei rolled her eyes. “Really? Come now…”

Dany paced to her dresser, where she sat on the stool and began brushing her hair. “Oh…I mean…it’s no big deal really.”

“No?”

Dany took a deep breath and blurted out in a rush. “Heproposedtomethatstupididiot.”

Missandei blinked, not quite sure of what she had heard. She eventually fell to her knees beside Dany, her eyes wide. “What did you say?”

Dany blushed even harder and stopped brushing her hair. “I said, Jon proposed to me. He wants me to marry him.”

“Aaaaah!” Missandei’s squeal of delight and subsequent warm hug had Dany laughing and hugging back in kind. Both speaking excitedly at the same time until Dany had to slap a hand over Missandei’s mouth to keep her silent.

“I haven’t officially said yes though,” she admitted causing her friend to raise a brow in confusion. She withdrew her hand and went back to fiddling with the hair brush.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean…it was all kinda sudden,” Dany admitted with embarrassment. “I wasn’t mentally prepared, and he just sprung it on me like that. I didn’t exactly say ‘yes’…”

“But it’s not a ‘no’ either, right?”

“Right,” Dany agreed; not sure if she wanted to share the real reason for her trepidation; that Jon had simply done it out of the need to validate his existence after such a bombshell. Perhaps this trip to Winterfell would be the eyeopener he needed to see and evaluate if he really wanted to spend the rest of his life with her. It didn’t help that his opinion of Rhaegar wasn’t getting any better. He had revealed the Martell connection, and even Dany had to admit that the whole plot was a fucked-up
situation. Perhaps her ‘saint’ of a brother really was a man with as many flaws as any other normal human being after all. Pity it only made him look better in her eyes. Having to live up to expectations of a ‘perfect’ Rhaegar was a pedestal she feared she would never conquer.

Missandei reached for her hands and clasped them tightly; her brown eyes shimmering with tears. “I am so happy for you, my Queen. He is a good man, and I don’t think I’ve ever seen you this happy and content.”

A hard lump formed in Dany’s throat as she considered her best friend. Missandei had been with her long enough to see through her attempts to find comfort and belonging in the arms of other men. To know that her numerous failures was finally being rewarded with a man who literally shared the same blood with her, was almost too much to comprehend. Maybe someday she’ll share the truth with Missandei, but now was not the time. Not trusting herself to speak, Dany settled for giving her another tight hug; only for the intimate moment to be broken as a certain rambunctious silver-haired boy dashed into the room in his pajamas.

“Aunt Dany! Aunt Missandei!”

He dove into the embrace, causing the women to laugh as he was smothered with kisses and the attention he craved. Hovering at the doorway was his septa, with an expression that was a mixture of exasperation and amusement on her weary features.

“Thank you, Oleanna,” Dany said to her. “He’ll spend the night with me.”

The septa gave a polite bow and left, though Missandei took the opportunity to make her escape as well. “I’ll leave you two,” she said with a smile as Monterys was already flying onto Dany’s bed to make himself comfortable. “Have a good night, my Queen.”

“Ooh, your phone is ringing,” Monterys announced as Missandei let herself out of the room.

“Who is it?” Dany asked as she prepared to braid her hair; hoping it wasn’t Tyrion with bad news already.

“My sun and stars,” Monterys read, causing Dany’s features to darken with color. She rose to her feet and tried to grab the phone from him, but the cheeky bastard was already speaking to a bemused Jon…and facetiming him to make matters worse.

“It’s you again,” Monterys accused. “Why is your name Sun and Stars?”

“Uum…”

“Gimme the phone, Monty,” Dany begged as she dove for him, but being small, quick, and agile, the brat was already off the bed and running around the room with the device.

“What’s your real name? Isn’t it Jon Something?”

“Jon Snow,” Jon replied with a chuckle. “And isn’t your name Monterys?”

“Yes, it is. My father is Lord Velaryon of House Velaryon.”

“That’s good to know.”

“Do you have a house?”

Jon cocked his head to the side and seemed to ponder this for a moment, but apparently the kid
wasn’t done interrogating him yet. “Aunt Dany says you lived in a place called Winterfell. Are you King of Winterfell?”

“…well we don’t have Kings anymore…”

“Are you Lord of Winterfell then? Like my father?”

“…no…my brother is Lord of Winterfell…”

“Why aren’t you Lord of Winterfell?”

“Monty!” Dany cried out as she tried to grab him again, but he dashed between her legs and climbed onto the bed again.

“I heard it snows a lot in Winterfell,” Monterys continued. “I’ve never seen snow before.”

“Really? Well maybe someday you can…see it…” Jon began cautiously.

“Aunt Dany’s never seen snow either. She says we can see it together if I get good grades on my next test.”

“…did she now? Do you mind if I spoke to your Aunt Dany for a second?”

“Is it really cold in Winterfell?”

Jon fought back a groan, despite the smile twitching at his lips. This kid reminded him of Arya, and how persistent she could be sometimes. “It’s terribly cold in Winterfell,” he finally replied. “You’re going to need lots of layers of clothing to stay warm.”

Monterys eyes widened. “Does this mean I can come to Winterfell too?”

_Ah fuck, knew this was a trap_, Jon thought with a shake of his head. Smart kid.

“I guess so…” he said aloud. “If your Aunt Dany says it’s okay.”

Monterys finally turned to his pouting aunt. “He says it’s okay if I come. See?”

“Give me that,” Dany snapped as she grabbed the phone from him and smacked his bottom lightly. “Now stay put and watch T.V. or something.”

She was rewarded with a grin she would be powerless to resist, and he didn’t help by suddenly wrapping his small arms around her to give her a hug. “Thank you, Aunt Dany. You’re the best.”

_Fuck my life_, she thought as she finally pulled away with a quick kiss on his head before pacing out to the balcony for some privacy.

“Please tell me I didn’t just agree to bring a seven-year-old kid along with me to Winterfell,” Jon groaned.

Dany giggled and shook her head. “Don’t look at me. I’ve tried resisting his charms, believe me. It’s not working so far.”

“But you promised he’d come anyway. What was all that about getting good grades…”

“I said I would consider it, only if you agreed that is,” Dany added in a rushed mumble. “You try telling him ‘no’, it’s impossible!”
Jon raised a brow. “You’ve got to be stricter with them, babe. If you don’t, they’ll walk all over you. Don’t think I’ll go easy on our kids when the time comes.”

Dany’s face suffused with color at the insinuation; the memory of Jon discarding those pills rushing back to mind. She hated to remind him that she was probably barren, and those pills were just an unnecessary precaution, but it was nice to dream, wasn’t it?

“Big talk for now,” she said aloud with a smirk. “But I get the feeling you’ll be complete putty in their arms when that happens. Hell, let’s see you get out of Monty’s charms when he shows up. Ten gold dragons, he’ll have you eating out his hands in no time.”

“Doubt it,” Jon replied with a grin. “But you’re on, sweetheart.”

“Did I tell you that he actually sits in on council meetings? All this week, he just hangs around watching me work. He doesn’t actually interfere, and it’s almost cool to watch him absorb all the stuff going on around him.”

“He’s going to be Lord of his house someday,” Jon mused. “He might as well start learning early, right?”

“Right.”

“And his father?”

“Given up on him,” Dany said with a chuckle. “Not really. I mean…Monterys rarely wants to go home now. As long as I’m in town, his father knows he’s never getting his son back.”

“And he’s okay with him coming to Winterfell?”

“I’m sure he’ll have no problems with it.”

“Speaking of Winterfell,” Jon cleared his throat; his expression now grave. “I know we’re going there for my personal issues, but…I also remember you have to try to earn their trust…regarding the Great Council and all that. Soooooo…”

“…did Tyrion speak to you?”

“How did you guess?”

“You hate talking about politics, Jon.”

“Geez. You think?”

Dany laughed. “I get it. I know all about that, and trust me, I got a lecture from him too. I must make the most of the trip and try to suck up to as many people as possible. Urgh. With all the stories I’ve heard about your Northern lords, I have a feeling this is going to be a doozy.”

“Robb’s aware of it, and he’ll try to help as best he can,” Jon said quietly. “And besides, I’ll be there with you…”

“…but?”

“What?”

“There’s a hovering ‘but’ in that sentence, my darling. What are you concerned about?”
Jon took a deep breath. “In their eyes, I’m still a bastard, Dany. And bastards never, if ever, get the respect they deserve. Robb can try to talk a good game and build me up as legit, but as long as I’ve got that label tagged on me, I might as well be talking to brick walls for all the attention they’ll pay to me.” He might have noticed the expression on her visage, for he added quickly. “But I won’t abandon you, trust me. I’ll be there by your side, so don’t worry.”

“I’m not,” she said with a small smile. “You’ve forgotten I had to deal with the Great Masters from Slavers Bay, and those bastards were just as bad. If I can suffer through their sexism and not-too-subtle insults, then I can handle a couple of Northern lords, right?”

“If you say so.”

“Come on! Have a little faith in me, will ya?”
Jon laughed softly. “Sure. I trust you.”

“In other news…anything from Tyrion yet? He’s not contacted me in a while…and I mean the last time he did was yesterday when he arrived at King’s Landing.”

“I spoke to Varys today,” Jon admitted. “He says the meeting has been scheduled for tomorrow, and as you can well imagine, everyone’s in a tizzy at seeing Tyrion in the Red Keep again. Apparently, there weren’t a lot of happy memories the last time he was there.”

Dany fell silent in thought; her brows furrowed. “He’ll be okay, won’t he? They wouldn’t dare do anything to him, will they?”

“He tells me you plan on sending your army to King’s Landing if that happens.”

“And I will,” Dany stated firmly; a flash of fire within her eyes. “So far Tywin’s not made any overt moves toward us, but I’m sure he’s planning something. I can’t and won’t trust that asshole.”

“Same here, but we do what we have to do in the interim. Get a hold of the North and then we focus on The Reach and the Iron Islands.”

“Wow…Tyrion really did speak to you then.”

“More like scolded, but it’s okay, I needed the reminder I guess.” He paused and then asked the question that’s been on his mind; something he had even tried to ask The Spider, but the words had failed him at the time. “Do you think he knows?”

“What?”

“Varys,” Jon explained carefully. “Do you think he knows who I really am?”
Dany fiddled with the hem of her gown; the cool evening breeze from the sea basking over her. Behind her, the T.V. hummed a cartoon – one of Monterey’s favorites – though a quick glance showed that the boy was already fast asleep.

“If he does, then he’s one hell of a secret keeper,” Dany finally replied with light shrug. “We could always ask him, but I’m sure if he wanted to reveal it, he eventually will.”

Jon sighed and nodded. “Yeah…anyway, I can’t wait until you get home. This place is too damn empty without you.”

Dany blushed. “I feel the same, my love. I’ll be home soon. I just need to wrap up a few things
here…”

“As long as none of those fucking lords try to get fresh with you-

“Jon Aegon Snow! Language!”

He sneered at her mock shocked expression. “I swear Dany…”

“And I shouldn’t be worried about any Northern girls having their eyes set on you, should I?”

“Eh?”

“Oh? Trying to act innocent now? Because if anyone dares give you an extra look-

“Babe, if they haven’t already heard we’re an item now-

“That won’t stop them. They already have a bias toward me being a Targaryen and all.”

“So?”

“So, those Northern lords will do their best to pair you up with any of their eligible daughters.”

“You forget I’m still a bastard in their eyes, Dany. I’m not worth a crap to them at this point.”

Dany groaned. “I wish you’d stop saying that.”

“Saying what?”


“Sorry…I’ll refrain from saying it in front of you…deal?”

Dany sighed. “You might not, but I’ll be walking into territory where you’ll be reminded of that every second.”

“True, but we both know the truth, don’t we?”

“And your siblings.”

“That’s right. Now cheer up, babe, and start getting those winter clothes ready.”

“Okay…I love you, Jon Snow.”

His adorable reaction to her sudden statement brought a smile to her face and a flutter to her heart. It was almost as if he still couldn’t believe anyone would feel that way for him; for the combination of embarrassment and shyness to overcome him was endearing. Well, except when in the throes of passion, and he became an entirely different animal.

“I love you too,” he whispered. “And come home soon, okay?”

With final blown kisses to each other, Dany but chose to remain sitting outside for a while; her thoughts racing toward what lay ahead. As things stood, she clearly had Dorne on her side and a few Houses of the Stormlands breaking faith with the Lannisters to join her. However, if Tyrion’s assessments were correct, she still had a lot of work to do. If she could convince the North to join her, and convince Theon Greyjoy – who was still cavorting around the world on his private yacht – to set up a meeting with his eclectic family…and somehow get The Reach on her side…
Dear gods, I am tired, she thought with a pang of guilt as she rubbed her aching forehead.

Though she felt it was selfish of her to feel this way, she still couldn’t help wishing things had been different; that she hadn’t been born a Targaryen and she wouldn’t find herself in this position. How many days and nights had she spent dreaming of being ‘ordinary’ – of being able to walk the streets without being in disguise or having to protect herself from those wishing to eliminate her? If she really thought hard about it, her life was anything but a fairytale. Sure, she had her prince now, but she would kill to be able to spend an entire day with him doing something normal and fun…like any other couple.

Maybe when this is all over, she thought with a rueful smile as she rose to her feet and made her way into the bedroom.

She climbed into bed beside Monterys, pulling his small body close to hers before placing a tender kiss on his forehead.

When this is all over, she vowed as her lashes grew heavier, maybe we’ll get to live a life less extraordinary.

About a week later, chaos descended on King’s Landing.

Jon was sure he had faced his share of formidable foes. Unfortunately, no one had warned or prepared him for Monterys Velaryon. I mean, Dany had tried, but it was nothing compared to seeing the kid in the flesh.

From the moment they arrived at the cottage, and he dashed out of the car, the mini-Dany was determined to make his presence known.

“So, you’re Jon Snow! Nice to meet you!”

“Is this your house?”

“Do you live here with Aunt Dany?”

“Are you two getting married?”

“Do you want to see Daemon? He’s my pet toad, and I think he might like Winterfell too.”

“Can I stay in this room?”

“Can I sleep with you and Aunt Dany? Pretty pleaaaaaaaaaaaaase?”

“Do you have ice cream? I want ice cream.”

“This city stinks!”

Seven hells!

Jon was sure he didn’t spend a minute with Dany except to steal a kiss or a hug whenever they could
manage it, and it wasn’t until late at night, did they finally get a moment to breathe…with Monterys fast asleep between them.

Jon stared down at the tousled head of silver for a long minute before looking up and into the amused amethyst eyes staring back at him. It was all she could do not to laugh, and goodness knows she had spent most of the day trying not to do so. Monterys had stuck to Jon like glue; which was a good thing as it allowed her and Missandei to pack their things in readiness for the trip.

“Is this the way it’s going to be from now on?” Jon whispered with slight panic in his eyes. “Is he going to keep sleeping with us?”

Dany shrugged; her lips curving into a playful smirk. “You said be stricter with him, so you tell him to be a big boy and go sleep in his bedroom.”

Jon groaned and slapped a hand over his forehead. “Shit.”

“Not easy, eh? I told you it would be hard to scold him.” She arched up to place a kiss on his lips; wincing when Monterys stirred at the disturbance and cuddled even closer to Jon. “He really likes you.”

“Yay,” Jon replied with a roll of his eyes, though it would be hard to miss the blush to fill his cheeks. “This trip is going to be fun, that’s for damn sure.”

She reached over their ward to clasp his hand; her smile fading into an expression of understanding as she sensed his trepidation.

“It’s going to be okay, Jon,” she reassured him quietly. “I know you’re scared, but…we’ll get through this together. I promise.”

He would have denied feeling that way, but another look into her eyes and he settled for cradling her hand against his chest and holding it there for the rest of the night. He was nervous. Excited. Nervous. Terrified probably. Nervous. Sick to his stomach with the threat of vomiting in a second. Going back home was something he hadn’t really entertained for a long time yet, but now that it was already here…

*Just breathe, Jon,* he thought as he closed his eyes and forced himself to get some rest. *What’s the worst that could happen?*

He tried to maintain that positive attitude the next day as their mini-entourage which included Jorah, Missandei, Davos, Septa Oleanna, Grey Worm, Stalwart Shield, and five other of her Unsullied, arrived at the tarmac in the wee hours of the morning. A private jet had been chartered for obvious reasons.

Monterys was having the time of his life; already bundled up in winter clothing as he swung between Jon and Dany while chanting “Winterfell! Winterfell! We’re going to Winterfell!” over and over again. Dany’s arm was beginning to hurt from having to hold onto him, and Jon – noticing her discomfort – swooped a giggling Monterys into his arms and onto his shoulders.

“How’s that big guy?” Jon asked with a grin as Monterys laughed even louder and held on to Jon’s hair.

“It’s fine, Uncle Jon! Let’s run to the plane!”

“You sure about that? I can go pretty faaaaaasst….whoooo!”
Davos, who had been trailing right behind them all this time, was quick to notice the wistful expression on Dany’s features.

“He will make a good father,” he said aloud as if reading her thoughts. “A big deal for a man who was made to believe he would never be able to hold a son of his own someday. Bastards are never treated with the honor they deserve. Maybe things will change this time.”

“He is not a bastard,” Dany corrected quietly while trying to squash down the pang of sadness to fill her. “But I appreciate the sentiment.” She gave him a warm smile and a brief hug, before jogging to catch up to her loved ones.

Once in the plane, as they tried to organize themselves regarding sitting arrangements and overhead luggage, Dany felt her phone buzz in the pocket of her jeans.

She would have ignored it when she remembered Tyrion had promised to call her sometime today.

She wasn’t disappointed.

Jon was the first to notice her pallid features; and his brows furrowed as he wondered what could have her acting that way.

“Is everything okay, Dany?” he asked as Monterys stopped climbing the seat long enough to notice his Aunt Dany didn’t look herself.

Everyone else on the plane stopped what they were doing; all attention now drawn to their silent Queen. Had something happened to Tyrion? Would they have to cancel their trip after all?

“It’s…it’s Tyrion,” Dany finally said aloud. “He’s fine…says the meeting went well – all things considered – but…”

She took a shuddering breath; looking up to meet Jon’s eyes as she said this. “Once we return from Winterfell, I have orders to appear at the Red Keep. Tywin Lannister wishes to see me in person.”
I’m back! And let me just say that my ‘absence’ was no choice of mine. To cut a long story short, I woke up one morning to find myself being taken into detention by the U.S. immigration despite committing no crime. I’ve lived in the States for 22 years, and have done my best to become a citizen (legally!). Unfortunately, that was not enough.

Bottom line, thanks to the new laws, everyone gets the boot, and I found myself three weeks later on a plane with no belongings and not even getting a chance to say ‘goodbye’ to my friends and family. It’s been a rough month, and this chapter was already half-way written before I was taken away.

Luckily, my family in the States, have been sending over my things, and I finally got my laptop and writings earlier this week.

So, here’s the long-awaited chapter, dear Readers, and please know that each single feedback, comment of encouragement and support, I’ve received so far, really means a lot. *bows gratefully*

Dany tried.

She really did try not to regress to acting like a giddy child, but ended up failing woefully. The snow-capped landscape had her glued to the window; all eyes and mouth wide in silent awe. Jon just had to record her reactions for posterity…or perhaps to tease her mercilessly later. However, she wasn’t the only one all agog, for Monterys – who was the most vocal with his ‘ooohs’ and ‘aaahs’ –
Missandei and the Unsullied (despite their attempts to look stoic) were just as impressed. Even Septa Oleanna, whose features were prone to being grim most of the time, was not immune to the magic of a true winter.

The only ones not as enamored were Davos, who had been up North in his many travels over the years, and of course, Jorah, who looked more pensive as their destination approached. Jon had to wonder what those guarded blue eyes were really seeing. Was Jorah regretting the way he had left his home all those years ago? Or was he wondering if he’d even be accepted again?

Jon could almost relate. Not that Jorah had been a bastard, but being shunned by one’s family was a burden too much to bear. He could only hope that the current head of House Mormont would be kind enough to give their prodigal son another chance. The gods knew he had more than earned it. Perhaps sensing he was being watched, Jorah turned away from the window to lock gazes with Jon. A silent understanding passed between them, which was simply acknowledged with brief nods.

“So white…” Dany whispered beside him; her attention still trained on the outside. “It’s so beautiful, Jon.”

Why her simple assessment of his home would make his heart swell with emotion, he had no idea. He settled for leaning closer to place a kiss on her shoulder while squeezing her hand gently. She was in considerably better spirits after their phone call to Tyrion to verify the text he had sent earlier. Yes, Tywin did want to see them, and yes, the Lannister patriarch did know they were going to Winterfell. He was smart enough to know that Dany would want to shore up the Northern votes, but it didn’t mean he was willing to sit back and let it be an easy task (Tyrion’s assessment). The only three houses they had to worry about was Karstark, Bolton, and Glover. Everyone else was likely to be convinced if they played their cards right.

Dany had fallen into glum silence after the call, and Jon - determined to cheer her up and keep her mind off the goddamn Red Keep for a while - had facetime Arya as a distraction. Arya and Rickon – for he had joined in the conversation, were just the pick-me-up Dany needed. Dany, who had wondered if Jon’s family would be that receptive to her visit, had her fears appeased almost immediately. Arya’s enthusiasm was infectious, and she had barely let Jon get a word in; content to pester Dany with as many questions as she could get in before Monterys grabbed her attention. Jon had a feeling Arya was going to be doing babysitting duties since they got off quite well; a perfect solution to his concerns that he and Dany would never get enough alone-time with the kid hanging around them so much. When he could finally butt into their weird conversation (mostly revolving around one of the more popular cartoon shows on television), Arya was able to give them a brief update. As things stood, Sansa was still busy getting the castle ready, while Robb and Bran were waiting at White Harbor as promised. It had the only major airport, in addition to its bustling port, and it was considered the hive of industry and commerce of the North.

Lord Wyman Manderly, who just about controlled everything in White Harbor, was no doubt going to be an ally they’d hope to rely on when the time came.

“We should be there soon,” he murmured as white cotton candy clouds dispersed to reveal miniature houses of white stone with gray roofs below. Though Jon had tried to describe the North as best he could to Dany, nothing compared to seeing it in person. After the ‘clutter’ of places like King’s Landing, Water Gardens, Pentos, and even Vaes Dothrak (despite its expanse of grasslands), the ‘emptiness’ of northern Westeros could be slightly jarring to a first-time visitor. White Harbor was going to be as close to a proper city as they were going to get.

Unfortunately, as the plane began its descent, Jon could feel the nerves he had managed to control during the three-hour flight, settle in the pit of his stomach with a vengeance. The last time he had
been at White Harbor it was with his Uncle Benjen, most of his personal belongings, and a huge chip on his shoulder. The thought of living in the South had enraged him back then, especially knowing it was all Catelyn’s doing, but here he was; almost two years later returning with a whole new family.

And what an eclectic family it was.

If anyone had told him he’d be coming back to Winterfell with Daenerys Targaryen by his side, Jon might have thought them soft in the head. Perhaps his Uncle Benjen might not have thought it too odd, after all his cryptic words of “you never know what the future has in store for you, Jon,” now made more sense than ever.

Dany, who had finally torn her attention away from the landscape, must have sensed his tumultuous thoughts for she squeezed his hand in return just as the flight attendant announced they all had to strap in for the landing.

“Relax, Jon,” Dany murmured.

“What? I’m relaxed.”

“Your left leg is bouncing up and down again,” she replied with a small smile.

Jon stared at said leg and cursed softly. With a deep breath, he forced himself to stop fidgeting and closed his eyes. He was now so close to knowing a whole lot more about his birth and still unsure of how to really react to two people he had always considered ‘brothers’…who were now mere cousins. Perhaps he should have taken solace in Arya and Rickon not treating him any differently, but Jon’s go-to disposition in matters like these was always one of cautious pessimism. Talking on the phone was one thing; seeing them in person was a whole other matter.

Fortunately, all his fears were eradicated once they stepped onto the tarmac. The first thing to hit him was the cold; a drastic departure from the warmth of the South and Essos. Once upon a time, this might have been considered summer to him, but after being away for so long, it was all he could do to control his teeth from chattering, and they weren’t even at Winterfell yet!

“Holy shit, Jon!” came the exuberant cry from an all too familiar voice, and before Jon could gather himself, he was engulfed in a bear hug and nearly lifted off his feet. Helpless laughter burst out of him, his good arm encircling his big brother- screw what a piece of paper declared – and returning the hug in kind.

“I’ve missed you, man,” Robb whispered thickly into his ear; his eyes stinging with tears that were matched in Jon’s when they finally pulled apart, but just far enough for their foreheads to meet. He ruffled Jon’s hair; taking him back to their days as boys, and if Jon had tried to keep his emotions in check, it failed miserably as the tears escaped to wet his cheeks.

“Welcome home,” Robb added with a hard kiss to his forehead before motioning for Bran to get in on the action.

“Holy cow, Bran,” Jon sniffled as he hugged the slender bespectacled young man. “You’ve grown taller! Look at you!”

Bran, who was hard pressed to get emotional for anything, did look like he was holding back his tears as well. “And you look different too, Jon. It’s good to see you again. I’ve missed you.”

“Same here,” Jon admitted as he gave him a kiss on the forehead. He pulled away to study his brothers; his heart full of words he could not express. However, as Robb coughed and nodded to something behind him with a cheeky smirk, Jon almost smacked himself for forgetting his entourage.
Blushing in embarrassment, he turned to face the silent crew, who had been watching the proceedings with varying degrees of amusement on their features.

Dany, who was doing her best not to shiver despite the blue wool hat, matching scarf that was just about covering her nose and mouth, and probably two jackets beneath the already layered clothing; raised a gloved hand to wave shyly. Jon chuckled at the sight and reached for her hand to tug her closer.

“Robb, Bran…this is actually Daenerys Targaryen. She’s hiding in there somewhere. Dany? My brothers, Robb and Bran… Stark.”

He was rewarded with a playful jab to his side as Robb moved forward to accept her hand; though instead of a handshake, he bowed and kissed the back of it as a true gentleman.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you at last, Daenerys. We’ve heard so much about you,” he greeted with a warm smile; his handsome features lit with unabashed curiosity and interest.

“The pleasure’s all mine,” Dany replied; before lowering the scarf so her voice wouldn’t sound so muffled.

Bran repeated his older brother’s gesture and introduced himself albeit shyly. Jon introduced everyone else and was quite pleased to see Monterys behaving himself…or maybe the boy was just getting tired. The past twenty-four hours had been an exciting one for the little tyke; though Robb had made a mock show of wiping his brow when Jon introduced him as Monterys Velaryon.

“Was worried for a minute there, buddy,” Robb taunted. “Thought you and the girlfriend already had a head start without letting anyone know.”

Jon turned a million shades of red at the insinuation; glad that Dany was now helping to haul the luggage into the waiting trucks and had not heard the joke. Great. He had almost forgotten how Robb was bound to tease him whenever possible. This was going to be a long fortnight.

“Still can’t believe you ended up meeting the prodigal son, Jorah Mormont,” Robb observed as they loaded up his truck. He was unable to mask his surprise when the older man was introduced earlier.

“Think they’ll welcome him back to Bear Island?” Jon asked, while they studied him talking to Davos.

“They better,” Robb replied with a snort. “Though Lyanna’s in charge now, she’s just a kid and she’s going to need someone stronger and older to help run the place. Anyway, she’s attending the dinner party we’re hosting for you guys this weekend, so you can all talk to her then.”

“Wha…? Dinner party?” Jon asked with panic. “Why?”

“Why the fuck not?” came the incredulous reply. “You’re our guests for fuck’s sake, and this is a homecoming, Jon.” He pulled Jon into another warm hug. “Besides, this was an excuse for Sansa to show off her hostess skills. I couldn’t say ‘no’ to her offer to run the whole thing.”

Once the two trucks were filled, Robb clapped his hands together to get their attention. “All right, folks! We’ve got about a two-hour drive to Winterfell, but first…a picture, eh?”

“Gotta update my Illustrogram page,” Robb added with a smirk as he noticed Jon roll his eyes.

Still, everyone obeyed and posed for an ‘official’ portrait taken by one of the airport staffers. It turned out to be a pretty cool shot, and Missandei urged Dany to post it on her Illustrogram page as well;
something Dany vowed to consider as she hadn’t exactly planned to make this trip public knowledge.

Since the two trucks could only hold so many people, an extra van was available for the rest of the crew. Jon, Dany, and Monterys rode with Robb, and though they had expected the boy to be as energetic as ever, he fell asleep the moment they were on the road.

“Cute kid,” Robb observed as he led them past the towering stone buildings of White Harbor. He glanced at Dany. “Are you related? He looks like you.”

“Distant relatives I think,” Dany replied with a small smile as she stroked Monterey’s hair gently. “The Targaryens and Velaryons came from the same Valyrian Freehold.”

“Oooh. Well, Bran would know all that shit,” Robb agreed with a nod. “He’s into history and all that.”

If the proverbial elephant in the room was going to be addressed anytime soon, this was not the time to do it. Jon, who was sitting close to the window, stared at familiar sites especially as they sped past the intimidating White Knife river. Unlike the South, this region was not that populous, and as they went further north, towns became mere spatters of huddled homes interspersed with farmlands blanketed in snow.

Robb, ever the consummate host, was doing his best to describe various landmarks to an interested Dany. At some point, she giggled over something he said, which had Jon finally tuning into their conversation. He knew he didn’t have a need to feel worried when it came to their relationship, but this was Robb, and Robb’s ability to charm the pants off anyone was something Jon had silently envied. If he was already weaving his spell over Dany, what stopped her from second guessing her decision to be with him?

Okay, hold the brakes right there, Jon Snow, he thought with an inner kick to himself. This isn’t the time to worry about Robb putting the moves on Dany. Besides, didn’t Arya say he already had some girlfriend...Jeyne or whatever...back in Winterfell?

“...undefeated season!” Robb bragged loudly to jar into Jon’s conflicted thoughts.

“Oh?” Dany answered politely. She really had no interest in sports, but at Robb’s incredulous look, she blushed and looked to Jon for help.

“You mean to tell me you haven’t told your girlfriend about our undefeated football team?” Robb accused Jon; actually looking offended about this. “The Winter Wolves are this close to claiming the world championship again.”

“That’s true,” Jon agreed with a sheepish smile. “The game is next week, isn’t it?”

Robb nodded vigorously. “We take our sports seriously here,” he huffed. “Between our football, hockey, and basketball teams, we’ve won a shit ton of championships. Lemme guess, Jon never told you he was actually on the football team, did he?”

Dany shook her head. “It never came up in conversation-”

“Didn’t think it was that important-” Jon began, but was interrupted by an indignant Robb.

“Not important? Pfft! This guy led our high school to two championships in a row!” Robb pounded the steering wheel; his features animated with his enthusiasm. “Don’t worry. When we get to Winterfell, I’ll show you all the awards he won.”
Jon’s face was a permanent shade of red. “That’s not really necessary…”

But Robb was not listening. Dany had to hide a snicker as Robb seemed determined to tout his baby brother’s achievements. She thought it was endearing how proud Robb was of Jon and wasn’t ashamed to show it. In no time, both were arguing over something about a baseball game’s scores, and Dany, who was stuck in the middle, had to slink down her seat not to get in the way of the passionate young men. Sheesh. Would Viserys and Rhaegar have acted like this if they had lived? Somehow, she doubted it. Viserys had never really been interested in sports either, and from all she had heard of Rhaegar, he seemed more of the scholarly type.

She might have dozed off in the middle of Jon’s vehement argument that someone named Bob Gerwin was the best pitcher of all time, when she was jarred awake by a particularly bumpy patch on the road.

“Sorry about that,” Robb apologized with a smile tossed her way. “We’re almost home. Roads get a little trickier.”

Dany sat up, being careful not to awaken the still sleeping Monterys. She looked ahead, not sure of what she had been expecting. Jon had told her Winterfell was pretty much a big castle surrounded by a smattering of homes that made up its main town, but that was about it. He hadn’t been kidding. Thanks to how fast darkness fell around here, what should have been a beautiful sunny afternoon, was now cloudy, gray, and almost bleak. It wasn’t snowing yet, but the skies looked like the promise of some tonight. The houses they passed were small and neat; made of logs and undressed stone. Many had warm lights and smoke pouring of their windows and chimneys, and due to their environs, most seemed to favor the 4-wheelers as their mode of transportation.

Dany could make out the basic town essentials; a bank, an urgent care center, post office, fire station, police station, and a couple of shops here and there. There wasn’t much else in the form of entertainment, and Robb would explain that all the ‘good stuff’ was actually in White Harbor.

“All the way there?” Dany asked incredulously.

Jon chuckled. “Yeah. If you wanted to really party, go to the clubs and all that stuff, it was in White Harbor. Sorry…Winterfell’s not really that exciting if you really think about it.”

“We make do with what we’ve got,” Robb added with a laugh. “We might be country bumpkins, but we do know how to have fun every now and then. Ah, here we are.”

He needn’t have announced it, for Winterfell loomed before them like a silent hulking sentry of mortar and stone. Though not as massive or intimidating as Dragonstone, it was still an impressive piece of real estate. With two large walls protecting it, as they drove past the North Gate, Dany marveled at the architectural ingenuity Jon’s ancestors employed to make this such a fortified castle.

She gasped at the sight of the low glass buildings, which Jon explained were greenhouses to grow vegetables especially beneficial during bitter winters.

“And over there is the…eh…crypts,” Jon explained with a slight lump in his throat, as he pointed toward what appeared to be a large ironwood door. “It goes underground, and I think it’s even larger than Winterfell.”

“Goes way deep,” Robb agreed as he maneuvered his way past seemingly a maze of narrow cobbled roads and curved walls. Those wandering around the grounds would stop what they were doing to observe the entourage of vehicles arriving, and Dany might have felt weird about the whole thing when something else got her attention. She leaned forward; forcing Monterys to grumble and rub his
eyes as he finally awakened. It did nothing to deter her fascination with what appeared to be a towering bush of crimson leaves attached to skeletal white branches. It was a stark contrast to their surroundings, and Jon, noticing her expression smiled at the sight.

“Pretty, isn’t it?” he said quietly. “That’s the weirwood heart tree that’s part of the godswood. I’ll show you the whole thing later. You can’t really see it from here, but it’s pretty large.”

“The whole castle was built around it,” Robb explained as he finally pulled up to the main building. “Our ancestors didn’t believe in destroying something that belonged to the gods. Speaking of destruction…look who’s ready to see you, Jon.”

Jon’s grin couldn’t be contained, and Arya, who had just about been bouncing on her heels in anticipation, barely waited for the truck to stop before racing toward it with arms outstretched and Jon’s name like a joyous song on her lips.

Jon threw the door open; nearly stumbling to the ground in his haste. His laughter and tears were soon muffled in Arya’s hair as he engulfed her in a tight hug and spun her around in excitement. She clung to him just as tight; both speaking at the same time and not giving each other a chance to finish a sentence.

Dany observed the reunion with that same pang of envy and happiness in her heart. So much for all his concerns about not being welcome home. It didn’t look like any of his cousins had missed a step. When they finally pulled apart, Jon showered the same affection for the tall, sheepish-looking curly-haired young man called Rickon.

“Arya and Jon were close,” Robb said quietly with a shake of his head at their antics. “They had a language all of their own, and I don’t even bother trying to figure it out.”

He helped her out of the truck, and as Dany allowed her gaze to drift over the rest of her surroundings, there was an odd sense of stepping back in time. She couldn’t explain it. As grand as the castle was, there was a simplicity about it. Old stones spoke of a clan that was used to hard work and grit. There was nothing ostentatious about Winterfell, neither did it reek of excessive wealth. The ‘barbaric’ North had no use for such pretentiousness, and it was clear with her unassuming arrival. No wonder they couldn’t handle the Southerners and their delusions of grandeur.

“Oooh! A wolf!” Monterys suddenly cried out, causing Dany to blink in surprise at the declaration. Sure enough, slowly approaching them was the largest direwolf Dany had ever seen. She had thought the pictures of Ghost had been amazing, but seeing the majestic creature with its thick smoky grey fur staring at them with golden eyes, took her breath away. It was as large as a pony, and at Robb’s sharp whistle, it trotted toward them before sitting on its haunches obediently beside his master.

“Grey Wind, Daenerys Targaryen. Daenerys…Grey Wind…say hi, buddy.”

To her amusement, the direwolf lifted a paw as if waiting for a handshake, and despite her heart racing with slight trepidation (those jaws looked like they could swallow her in one bite), she took the large appendage in her hand and shook it gently. Despite the cold, it felt warm and she was sure the beast was studying her with such a critical eye; she suddenly felt inadequate in its presence.

Monterys, however, showed no such fear. The boy was already enamored with the creature, and much to their chagrin, he tried to wrap his tiny arms around Grey Wind, who snarled and backed up until his master tried to reassure him that the kid meant no harm. She would later come to learn that only Grey Wind was still alive. Every other Stark kid’s direwolf had met an unfortunate demise or simply vanished (Arya’s Nymeria).
“So, we finally meet face-to-face,” Arya declared as she marched up to Dany to examine her with that same level of curiosity and interest her other siblings had exhibited. Dany was beginning to feel like an oddity in a curio shop. All the same, compared to the photos she had seen of the young woman and their facetime chatter, Arya looked much different in person. For starters, she was androgynous with her crew cut and choice of clothing; not that wearing jeans and sweaters counted as being masculine. However, there was no mistaking the athleticism in that slender build or the boundless energy barely restrained within. Her grey eyes sparkled with a wisdom that was beyond her years, and unlike her siblings with their telltale hair of red, hers was as dark as Jon’s. In fact, it could be said she looked more like Jon than the rest; no wonder they were that close.

“Valar morghulis,” she suddenly greeted with a bow; catching Dany by surprise at how good her Valyrian was. She stole a quick look at Jon, who was just as surprised at his sister’s linguistic skills, and unable to control her smile, Dany nodded and responded effortlessly.

“Valar dohaeris.”

“I’m still learning,” Arya confessed. “I figured I have to learn the language since I’m going to Braavos soon.”

“Well, you already sound like a pro,” Dany praised earning a blush from the girl. “But if you like I’m sure Missandei will be glad to teach you. She was my teacher as well.”

“Oh yeah? Cool!” Arya grinned at the girl from Naath before turning her attention back to Dany. “Jon says you’re good with weapons and hand-to-hand combat?” came the blunt query while deliberately ignoring the wince from her brother at her nosey queries.

Dany nodded warily; not sure if this was a side of her she was willing to reveal so early. “Ah… well…”

“Great! Then maybe you can train with me tomorrow?” Arya pounced with eyes glowing with anticipation and an unmistakable glint of primal excitement that spoke of the girl’s fighting spirit. “No one else around here’s brave enough to challenge me…”

“That’s enough talk about weapons and fighting,” Jon began with a glower at his sister. “We just arrived for fuck’s sake, Arya—”

“Ah, there she is,” Robb interrupted loudly; forcing everyone to follow his gaze as he looked up. Standing on one of the many winding balconies was a striking stately redhead, with features that could have been chiseled from polished marble. Unlike her siblings, clad in more casual wear, Sansa Stark seemed more content in a heavy black wool gown, cinched at the waist with a sterling silver belt depicting the Stark sigil. Her piercing blue eyes held no real warmth, but were not unwelcoming either. There might have been a hint of a smile for her now cousin, but it was barely perceptible. If she was just as intrigued as the others about the newcomers, her features revealed nothing.

“The gang’s all here, Sansa.”

Sansa might have rolled her eyes at her brother’s enthusiasm, but it was hard to tell with the casual dip of her head in salutation. She did, however, raise her voice to greet them. “Welcome to Winterfell. You must all be tired from your long journey. We have rooms, warm baths, and meals ready for you. If you’ll all follow Jeyne and I.”

No one had even noticed the quiet woman standing beside Sansa until she was introduced. With hair of chestnut and doe-like brown eyes, Jeyne Westerling, bowed politely and blushed as she met Robb’s loving gaze. She allowed Sansa to lead the way while everyone else followed.
Dany, who had subconsciously reached for Jon’s hand – which was squeezed in quiet reassurance as his warm gaze met hers for the briefest of moments – was yet to really get a feel of the oldest Stark daughter. She did not give off any air of hostility, but if she had been expecting the exuberance exhibited by Arya, that notion was completely wiped out. Sansa’s attitude aside, Dany allowed her gaze to drift over the gray stone walls aged with Time.

Despite the presence of modern lighting, there was still that dark ambience that was pervasive in old castles (Dragonstone was a prime example). There were no grand balustrades of gold like Robert Baratheon’s abode in King’s Landing, however there were tricky and, sometimes, uneven steps of heavy stone which gave off haunting echoes as they walked.

There was also something quite distinct about the walls as she touched them. It could be her imagination, but they seemed to thrum with palpable heat beneath her fingers; as if there was some unseen energy vibrating behind them. She imagined it to be the ghosts of Starks past; men and women who had once trod this same path over the centuries whispering their stories to those who cared to listen. She almost shared her theory with Jon, who on closer inspection, seemed tense despite his assurances earlier of being ‘okay’. She might have queried him about his concerns now, but they were now on a landing and the rest of their party was being ushered into their private quarters.

Grey Worm and the rest of the Unsullied had been taken to an adjunct building, where the rest of the guards stayed. Davos, Jorah, and Missandei all had rooms next to each other, while Septa Oleanna and Monterys had a room of their own across the hall despite Monterys protesting at not being made to sleep with his Aunt Dany. However, a sharp reprimand from his nanny about his manners, had the young Lord finally muttering his apologies and slinking into his room to prepare for dinner.

Jeyne tried to stifle her chuckle at the boy’s antics, while Sansa seemed to shake her head before muttering something that sounded like ‘just like Rickon’ beneath her breath. With most of their party no longer with them (Robb had excused himself earlier, as had Arya, Bran, and Rickon), it was just the four of them. Jeyne tried to make small talk with Dany, and as they climbed yet another set of narrow winding steps, Dany found herself responding to the other woman’s polite though earnest queries about what King’s Landing was really like.

It was amid trying to explain how most of the streets looked, that Sansa gave a light cough to interrupt them. They had come to a stop before a door of thick oak, so aged it shone beneath the gleam of the lamps.

“I figured you’d want your old room back, Jon,” Sansa stated as she gripped the brass doorknob and turned it firmly. “We did make it cozy enough for two now.”

Jon might have given a slightly choked sound of embarrassment at that statement, but Dany was already stepping into the room; eager to see where Jon had spent most of his life. She wasn’t sure of what she had been expecting, but it certainly wasn’t to be assailed by the slightly stronger smell of –

_Aha! Sulphur! That’s what it is, _came the flash of thought, which almost had her yelping in relief. It was a smell that was almost choking around Dragonstone and its many volcanoes, and it had been driving Dany crazy in her quest to figure out what was so familiar about the air in Winterfell…at least within the castle. Jon mentioned something about Winterfell being built on an existing hot spring, hadn’t he? Or had she imagined that?

Sulphuric stench aside, Jon’s room was almost as she might have pictured a man of his disposition to be. Keeping with his spartan upbringing, and despite the pale gleam of light filtering through the windows, there was a running theme of deep, rich, and dark colors in the furnishings. There was a crude, almost ‘uncivilized’ ambience about it, but there was no denying the careful choice of each
item within.

For a supposed ‘bastard’, he definitely hadn’t slept in pitiful conditions. The bed was large enough for two; its heavy wooden frame of black cedar adorned with a headboard upon which carvings of direwolves and weirwood trees wound around each other in a rather pleasing design. It was impossible, however, to miss the odd scratches upon it though, and Jon would later explain it was all thanks to Ghost, who had a terrible habit of waking him up in that manner.

Looking past the poignant memento of his late direwolf, the plain grey cotton sheets were covered with two layers of such heavy, thick fur; its supple texture begged for Dany’s fingers (or naked flesh) to rub upon them. In fact, it wasn’t really that difficult to picture she and Jon both nak –

Ah…

The heat crept up her neck slowly; her skin breaking out in goosebumps of delightful awareness. She could sense and feel the weight of his gaze on her, and she was sure if she turned to look at him now, Sansa and Jeyne might just have to be kicked out of the room this instant. She settled for taking a deep breath, squaring her shoulders, and pacing toward the fireplace where several framed photographs of Jon, Ghost, and his family, sat upon the mantelpiece. Most were taken as a boy, and one in particular – where he was sitting on Ned Stark’s lap – was naturally the centerpiece of the display. Dany studied Ned’s smiling features, and not for the first time, wondered what he must have been thinking holding onto a son that wasn’t really his. Had he been burdened with that knowledge? How many times had he considered revealing the truth to the boy who stared at him with all the love and adoration reserved for a man who hadn’t really fathered him? She tried to imagine Rhaeger in that position…and just couldn’t manage it. For all she had seen and heard about her brother, being a ‘father-figure’ just didn’t seem to fit.

There was also a small collection of trophies flanking the photos. Absently, she picked up a miniature gold trophy, on which the words ‘First Place – Archery Junior League’ were etched upon it. Archery? Jon hadn’t mentioned he had done that. Another trophy; this one slightly smaller, but golden all the same, had the words ‘Winner – Spelling Bee Regionals Class AA’. Now she really gawked in surprise. Jon? A spelling bee champion? This Jon who would scrunch up his face, at their King’s Landing home, desperately trying to remember how to spell something as simple as ‘dissected’?

“That Jon was a spelling bee champion? Impossible.

She turned to him then, her brow raised with a smirk forming on her lips. Jon – his features flushed with embarrassment – hastened to her side to snatch the trophy away.

“That was years ago,” he mumbled and tried to shove it behind the large photo of he and his cousins at a circus or something of the sort.

“The winning word was ‘sanctimonious’,,” Sansa offered with a rare teasing smile, which had Jon huffing and glaring at her, while Jeyne laughed in glee. “I should know. Dad made us watch the whooooole thing, and I swear that shit went on forever. We sat in that damn hall for almost six hours. Seven hells.”

Dany’s jaw almost dropped at Sansa’s language, for she had assumed she was all too prim and proper for such talk. However, as she folded her arms across her chest, her nose turned up as Jon retorted to her remarks, Dany could almost picture the two as children bickering in the same manner.
It was a painful reminder of a sibling rivalry she wished she could have had with Viserys. She would have done anything to be able to tease him without fear of being punched, slapped, or simply ignored.

Smiling to herself, she surveyed the rest of the room with unfeigned interest. Along one side of a room was a shelf – about chest high – with several books ranging from required school reading to bestsellers she hadn’t imagined Jon being interested in. At least his apartment in King’s Landing hadn’t revealed that side of him. There were, of course, piles of video games, auto-geared magazines and a couple of brochures belonging to several military academies across the globe. Had Jon been interested in joining the army at some point? Dear gods, there was still so much to know about this man.

A simple desk, made of sturdy oak – faced a window with a rather pleasant view of those rustling red leaves in the godswood and a sea of white fields leading to distant mountains in the horizon. The desk was clean except for the etchings on it, which on closer inspection showed that Jon might have channeled most of his anger and frustration into the ancient wood.

*I hate studying! / Reading Sucks! / I Win! / I Hate Her! / Freedom! / Class of ’12 RULZ*

Or the most poignant of all…

*Who is my mom?*

That had been written in small letters – almost hidden within the mish-mash of scribbles and scratch marks (probably from trying to scrub them off) over the years. Dany ran her fingers over the words and took a deep breath. That little boy’s answer had finally been answered, though in the most unexpected of ways.

At the other side of the room was his recreation center; made up of a worn leather sofa, a matching ottoman, and a side stool. The flat screen T.V was propped on a low cabinet, in which a gaming console and several more video games sat waiting patiently for their owner to return. There were no portraits on the wall, but there were two rather interesting framed images positioned above the television. One had the silhouette image of the members of ‘The Crows’ – a rock band Jon had gotten her interested in despite how ‘loud’ their music was. This was a classic vintage poster that signaled an era of peace, love, and a shit ton of psychedelic grooving. The second image was yet another classic poster, this time displaying the names of all the bands that had attended one of the most famous rock concerts Westeros had ever hosted. Jon hadn’t even been born then, but it was clear he was appreciative of good music, and Dany had to wonder if that was the Rhaeger side of him manifesting. After all, her brother had formed a band of his own, so perhaps Jon was musically inclined after all.

That theory was proven when she noticed the dusty black guitar case propped – almost forgotten it seemed – in a corner of the room. Jon had never mentioned he played an instrument, let alone a guitar. However, it wouldn’t have been surprising for him to splurge on something he felt he might be good at. In addition to the guitar, the ‘cluttered’ corner also had a pair of bongo drums, several music sheets for the piano, a book – with tattered ears – of classic rock songs to jam to, several ‘how to play a guitar’ guides, a couple of stuffed backpacks, an old record player and, of course, several classic vinyls which had Dany shifting through them with increased awe. Jon’s taste in music was eclectic to say the least but –

“Seven hells, Dany, didn’t take you long to go diving into my stash, hmm?” came the tease as he plopped to the floor beside her. She hadn’t even realized she sat down to continue her exploration; watching as he plucked the record from her unresisting fingers to study the artist on the cover with an inscrutable expression on his visage.
“Winston Byrne,” he finally murmured in quiet reverence. “Greatest jazz pianist in history. Did you know he was blind from birth? And yet he churned out twenty of the greatest classical jazz albums ever created?”

Dany shook her head. “No…I’ve never heard of him.”

Jon made a mock sound of shock. “Then we have to rectify that, don’t we? Gimme a sec…I gotta plug this back up and hope it still works.”

He got onto his hands and knees; giving Dany a wonderful view of his ass trapped in those jeans she longed to rip off…eventually. Right now, she felt warm and cocooned in his haven; her eyes darting around the room – which wasn’t even as large as her bedroom at Dragonstone – but just perfect enough for a boy/young man who must have felt more secure in this place than being thrust to an unforgiving outside. They were alone now, and Dany felt she ought to probably apologize to Sansa and Jeyne for not saying a proper farewell.

“It’s cool,” Jon said aloud causing Dany to blink in confusion, until she realized she must have spoken her concern out loud. “You were so busy looking at stuff here, you didn’t even hear us calling you. But they’ll see us at dinner anyway…ah, here’s the goddamn wire…almost there, babe. One more second.”

The equipment came on with a loud popping burst of static which had them both yelping in surprise until they giggled at their jittery reactions. She helped to wipe away the layer of dust on the player’s cover, before settling back as Jon began rattling off information about the LP he was about to play and its significance in music lore.

She watched and listened in rapturous attention as he spoke; his voice low and soothing as he carefully placed the needle upon the vinyl and returned to her side. Together they watched the almost hypnotic rotation of the black plastic, and with another stutter of static, the first soothing notes of Mr. Winston Byrne filled the air like a lover’s caress.

She couldn’t remember leaning her head upon his shoulder, or closing her eyes, or feeling his good arm wrapped around her waist to pull her closer still until they seemed to want to merge into one. She might have dozed off to the rhythm of track #2 – Solstice – when Jon’s quiet question clawed her back to reality.

“So…what’s your verdict on home sweet home?”

“Hmm…so far so good,” she crooned; raising her head a little to smile at him. “I haven’t been eaten alive yet, so that’s a plus.”

Unable to hide the mild concern in his eyes in his initial query, his relief was almost palpable with the breathless sigh to escape his lips. She was given a little squeeze of gratitude around her waist and he was rewarded with her tender kiss at his neck, which had him shuddering with helpless desire. He would have moved in to claim her lips then, but she lowered her head to his shoulder again and closed her eyes; denying him the pleasure.

“It’s got a rustic feel to it,” she continued. He raised a brow at this.

“Rustic? All this…rustic?” He chuckled at the term. “Doubt the architect was going for ‘rustic’ when he created this.”

“By rustic, genius,” she scoffed with a pout. “I meant the whole countryside, non-pretentious design. I mean compared to Robert’s place, this is…”
“Yeah…I see what you mean…and Dragonstone? Is that place…eh…rustic?”

Dany laughed. “Eh…our ancestors weren’t quite as humble. They were determined to show the ‘savages’ of Westeros what real living was like.” She fell silent for a moment as her mind drifted to the many empty halls and rooms at the place she called home. “I’m sure once upon a time it was even more of a real palace…with gold, silver, and everything else they could have taken from Valyria with them. I’m sure there were grand parties with crystal chandeliers and polished floors that shone like diamonds as men and women in their finest livery came gliding down those massive steps like ethereal beings from heaven…”

“…while the Northerners toiled and growled from their trenches and walls of snow and ice at the foolishness of the foreign invaders who knew nothing about rustic living,” Jon finished with a smirk she reciprocated.

“Speaking of walls… Sansa…she wasn’t as bad as you painted her to be.”

“She’s not shown her claws yet,” Jon muttered. “Wait ‘til she’s had a couple of beers in her.”

“What?”

Jon chuckled. “She can be a bitch, and yes, there were times when she seemed determined to be a mini-Catelyn, so I wouldn’t get too comfortable yet. I’m not saying you should treat her any differently, but just…you know…be careful. She’ll want to get under your skin eventually.”

“It’s natural,” Dany mused. “I mean if some girl came along to try to get into my brother’s pants, I’d be wary of her motives as well.”

“Oh?” Jon sneered as he pulled away a little to eye her with amusement. “So, you do admit to only wanting to get into my pants. For shame, Daenerys Targaryen.”

She raised her brow; her lips curling into a wicked smile to match the glint in her eye. “Why of course, Mr. Snow, because goodness knows it wasn’t all about your spelling skills. Seriously though…spelling bee champion?”

“Could we please just drop that?” he groaned and made to playfully cuff her, but she ducked from the incoming attack, laughing as he fell onto his stomach with a low grunt. She nudged his side with her boot.

“And what’s all that about anyway?” she pointed at the guitar case. “You didn’t tell me you played the guitar.”

“Played being the operative word,” Jon admitted with a grumble without making any effort to lift himself off the floor. He eyed the equipment and sighed in weary resignation. “I sucked at it to be honest. See all those books? I really tried to get the hang of it, but it wasn’t right. I was a little better at the piano, but that’s only because Catelyn made us all take classes – to gain some culture or whatever she said it was. Sansa and Bran were the best at it. Robb hated it, but stuck with the classes despite bitching to me about it all the time. Arya…bleh, she was even worse than I was, and Rickon tolerated it as best he could. Well after a couple of months of torture, I had enough. I stopped going as in when we were dropped off at Septa Mordane’s house, I’d run off and do whatever I wanted for those two hours, only to return home for a spanking or having no dinner. I didn’t care, seeing as it was only once a week, but Dad…I mean when Ned finally got word of my truancy, he really laid it on me. Got me off the football team that year for punishment. Sheesh.”

He finally sat up with a light grunt and crossed his legs. “And that, my dearest is about as far as my
musical talents go. You already know about my singing...oh fuck you,” he added when she winced and put her fingers in her ears in jest. “You’re just as bad as I am.”

“Really? Weren’t you the one who said I had the voice of an angel a couple of nights ago…”

“Only when you scream out my name,” he taunted as he rose to his feet; eyes darkening with quiet but blatant intent. “Besides, I noticed you appraising the fur on the bed earlier. If there’s one thing we northerners are known for...it’s for making excellent bed covers. Warm, soft...like silk against your body…”

“Hmph.” She was rising to her feet as well; an expression of feigned indifference on her features despite her obvious movement in direction of said bed. “Words, Jon Snow. Mere words. As your guest, it’s only right that one has to...evaluate said furs to make sure they’re up to standard, yes?”

“Well, my Queen,” came the exaggerated expression of compromise as he began kicking off his boots; his right hand tugging restlessly at the strap of the sling around his left arm. “We are indeed inclined to provide demonstrations of just how effective said furs can be at any given time.”

“Fascinating,” she replied as she tugged off the scarf around her neck; dropping it deliberately to the ground to join the boots she had kicked off as well. She yanked off her wool hat; licking her lips slowly in appreciation as he began to shrug out of his jacket with an impatience that roiled off in waves to match hers. He had already taken off his hat earlier, causing those thick curls – which had been slightly damp earlier from the cold outdoors – to frame his handsome features like Grey Wind’s shaggy fur.

Dear gods, she hoped the door was locked and the walls were thick enough. It wouldn’t do for their wonderful hosts to assume that their guests were horny, impulsive beings who just had to fuck each other senseless before dinner...would it?

Unfortunately, if that oh-so-brief-thought of getting Jon to see reason had crossed her mind, it was immediately erased at the knee-weakening sight and sound of him tugging off his belt and unzipping his pants.

...ah fuck it.

“Shall we go ahead and begin the demonstration, my Queen?” came the raspy invitation she could only respond to with the unclasping of her jacket and a breathy sigh of resignation.

Just an hour should be enough.
laughter even as Sansa continued to sip her lentil soup in silence. She had sent one of the handmaidens to get the couple down earlier, and it was safe to say that her embarrassed whisper to the lady of the castle on her return was more than enough to let the others know why their honored guests would be joining them much later.

All around, dinner was a light affair as Robb engaged everyone in conversation, and even managed to get Missandei to speak more of her native country despite her apprehension to do so in the past. Arya, and even Rickon, expressed desires to visit Naath one day; a motion that was seconded by Dany who had always been intrigued by her best friend’s hometown. Jorah, who was usually quiet during meals, seemed much more comfortable after a few cups of ale had been consumed. He appeared eager to return to his birth place, and though wary of speaking to his young cousin, Robb reassured him Lyanna Mormont’s bark was worse than her bite.

“Trust me, she’ll welcome you with open arms…after threatening to cut your balls off for leaving her alone for so long,” Robb stated bluntly.

“Language, Robb,” Sansa hissed with a nod toward Monterys who was gnawing on a chicken leg and looking wide-eyed at Robb before asking innocently.

“Why would she want to cut his balls? Doesn’t she like playing with them?”

Jon was the first to burst into laughter; unable to control himself despite Dany kicking him under the table while trying to control her amusement as well. Robb, as well as Jorah, choked on their drinks, while Davos pretended his mashed potatoes were extra interesting. Rickon and Bran exchanged knowing looks and snickered, while Arya guffawed in mirth. Jon sobered up quickly and leaned across the table to ruffle the boy’s hair with a big smile. “How about me reading you a bedtime story later, hmm? If you do as your nanny says and be a good big boy, I’ll come tuck you in later. All right?”

“Promise?”

“Promise.”

Jon held out his pinky finger, which Monterys accepted with a hook of his around it. They grinned at each other before Monterys bounded to his feet and all but darted out of the room in excitement; not before remembering his manners and giving them all polite ‘goodnights’ with a special hug reserved for Dany.

“Aww, too sweet,” Arya crooned playfully once he was gone. “You used to read bedtime stories to Rickon and me too.”

“Yeah, because Robb never wanted to do it.”

“Hey now,” Robb protested. “That was actually Sansa’s job, but…”

“And since when was it my job to read you all bedtime stories?” Sansa interrupted as she savored the rest of her ale. Dany wondered if she was on her second or third cup. If so, things could really get interesting fast.
All the same, watching the siblings…cousins…interact was actually fun. No one had thought of bringing up the subject of Jon’s real parentage – not that it would have been the appropriate time anyway - but from the way they ribbed each other, interrupted sentences, reached out to jab ribs or swat arms, ruffle heads, or make faces at one another, it was clear that their bond went beyond mere names on pieces of paper. Just when Dany was beginning to feel a little left out, Robb suddenly rose to his feet and left the room with no explanation; not that any of his siblings were paying much attention. Jon and the rest were currently arguing over who had really set Ned’s favorite boots on fire several goddamn years ago, when Robb returned with what seemed to be the largest book Dany had ever seen.

“Shut up, you morons!” Robb cut in forcing them all to stop their bickering.

“What are you doing with that?” Bran asked.

Robb placed the book before Dany; a weathered leather-bound object that spoke of its age and importance. All that was upon it was a fading silver snarling direwolf, and as Robb carefully opened its yellowed pages, the overwhelming smell of dust, faded ink, and Time, overwhelmed her.

“All guests to Winterfell have to sign this,” Robb explained as the others fell silent as if about to partake in a solemn ceremony. “As you can see, there’s already tons of signatures, and rumor has it…even your ancestor signed it…but I doubt it. You can check later if you like.”

Bran, who must have left the room as well, returned with an old-fashioned quill and ink for her to do the honors. The last time Dany had written anything with a quill, it had been at the signing with the Great Masters at Slavers Bay. However, unlike the gravity of that ceremony, there were nothing that dire or burdensome about adding her name to an already impressive list of visitors to this wonderful castle.

She studied the last name before hers; a certain Lady Donella Hornwood. She had a nice cursive handwriting that was befitting of the use of a quill. Dany was sure her signature would look pathetic in comparison, but with a deep breath, she dipped the equipment (with its rather plain though slightly tattered red feathered tip) into the ink-stained bottle and scrawled out “Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen” upon it. She winced at the lingering blot of ink that remained, but it didn’t seem to bother the others as they all applauded. Blushing in embarrassment at the extra attention, she met Jon’s eyes and then lowered them quickly at the pride within his gaze. She hated how he was able to reduce her to mush with just a look and was extremely grateful when Arya suggested they go look around the rest of the castle before calling it a night.

She might have politely declined; for the events of the day were finally catching up to her, but she noticed that Robb was already tugging Jon away for a no doubt important one-on-one conversation.

_Not yet, she thought with a nod to Jorah and Davos who were saying their goodnights. He’ll show me everything in due time. I just have to be patient._

They would have all the time in the world to share those intimate details, she was sure. And goodness knew she couldn’t wait.

“Seven hells,” Jon muttered as he paced his father’s (uncle’s) former office after about an hour of banter where more alcohol was consumed, and their adventures of the past year were exchanged. It
turned out to be Jon doing most of the talking, for his life seemed to be more of a fantasy by the time he was through regaling his brother with everything. He went as far as removing the sling to show off his battle scars with that inherent pride all males seemed to possess.

“You weren’t kidding when you said you had to clean up the place a little. I barely recognize it,” he added; wincing at the slight slur in his voice. Shit. He must have had one too many of that ‘special’ brew Robb had bragged about.

“Had to do it. Dad wasn’t exactly a neat-freak and besides, it was the way we found…everything,” Robb was saying; though Jon was too busy staring at the photographs on the wall to notice the cautious tone in his brother’s voice. If he had been more attentive, he would have noticed his brother still staring at the visitor log book, before digging into the desk’s drawers to pull out the leather-bound dossier he was sure he was never going to open again.

“So? Where is it?” Jon asked with a shuddering breath, for he had done his pacing more to control the jackhammering of his heartbeat and to control his nerves. This would have to be done quickly because he was just about ready to call it a day. After reading to Monterys, which hadn’t taken too long for the kid passed out half-way through the story of some golden-haired girl and three bears - all he wanted to do was cuddle up to Dany – maybe sneak in one last quickie, if she was up to it – before sleeping for the rest of the week.

He sat on one of the chairs facing the desk; a desk he had once thought so huge especially when Ned sat behind it with that grim expression of displeasure on his features. Anyone being called to Ned’s office, especially during his work hours, was almost always in trouble. It was safe to say Jon had found himself on the receiving end of such calls one too many times. Seeing Robb in that position now was too weird.

“Right,” Robb forced himself out of his musing to focus on Jon’s strained and pallid features. His heart stirred at the sight, and he resisted the urge to pull his baby brother into his arms and hug the living shit out of him. Why the hell did he have to have that puppy lost look on his face at times like these?

“Kept it in the safe just in case,” Robb said aloud as he opened said safe which was hidden behind a rather lovely portrait of Winterfell, to withdraw the small, and rather plain, wooden box containing the final pieces to the jigsaw puzzle that was his life.

Robb placed it on the desk before Jon and stepped back, a small smile on his face as he watched Jon study the object for a long while as if afraid to touch it. Jon shifted restlessly on his seat, wiped his mouth with the back of his trembling hand, and then looked up with clear panic in his eyes.

“I know what it contains,” he began in a small voice that was barely audible. “I mean…I’ve already dug a little into their past and can put the pieces together but…I mean…”

“Her diary probably has more information in it,” Robb stated quietly as he stooped to his haunches beside him. He pushed the box a little closer to Jon. “None of us have really read it, so you’ll officially know all the secrets Aunt Lyanna held near and dear to her chest all those years ago. You get to find out how you really came to be and what went wrong. You don’t have to read it right away, Jon…take as much time as you need. This is all yours to keep anyway.”

“Ah…”

Jon’s breath hitched and for a second, he almost felt like blurting out how sorry he was for not being a real half-sibling to him. That there were mere cousins was a travesty, but at the familiar sensation of Robb’s arms encircling him in that warm embrace that never failed to get him emotional, Jon closed
his eyes and settled for keeping his mouth shut. It was obvious they did not care about that, and they
would not hold his parentage against him. If they were wary of his taboo relationship with Dany, no
one had acted any differently about it; not even Sansa…which was still a miracle in itself.

“You okay?” Robb asked when he finally pulled away. “You’re not going to start bawling all over
me, are you?”

“Says the asshole leaking tears already,” Jon scoffed as he playfully poked Robb’s wet cheeks.
“You’re worse than I am.”

“Fuck you,” came the jab even as Robb bound to his feet and shook his head as if in awe of the
entire situation. “And I really should throttle you considering how well you lied about the whole
thing. Fuck. I really do have to cry now because of it.”

Jon was bemused. “Lied about what? I didn’t know about any of this…” He tapped the box. “Until
you called-”

“Not that,” Robb interrupted. “This.”

He reached across the desk for the black leather dossier which had the engraving of the Iron Bank’s
sigil, to toss it onto Jon’s lap.

“Did you two plan this or what?” Robb asked as he leaned against the desk, arms crossed upon his
chest, with that awe-stricken expression still on his visage.

Jon looked blank. “Robb…I’m not sure what you’re talking about…what is this?”

He opened the dossier to see what it contained. It was only a single page of fine parchment with
elegant calligraphy all garnished by stamps and sigils of the Iron Bank. The words read that all the
Stark debts had been paid off, and they were simply under no obligation to the Iron Bank or their
debtors. The Stark holdings and estate were now completely under Robb’s control and indeed for
future Stark generations to come. There were three signatures at the bottom. Tycho Nestoris – the
head of the Iron Bank, Robb Stark – obviously, and the third…a mere scratch of a name, though it
wasn’t difficult to make out what looked like a looping oversized D …and was that a T or a slanting
S?

“This is what you talked about in your email,” Jon said slowly. “You said someone had helped with
our debt, but you didn’t know who it was. I’m guessing it’s this third person, right? How come no
name was written under it like yours and Nestoris’s?”

Robb opened his mouth to retort, but must have seen something in Jon’s face for his brows furrowed
in thought. “…are you being serious, Jon?”

Jon sighed and looked up with impatience. “If I knew what the fuck you’re going on about, then this
would be such a-”

With a growl of frustration, Robb grabbed the large visitor log book and nearly slammed it on the
desk before Jon. He pointed at Dany’s signature and then at the dossier. “Something look familiar to
you?”

Jon stared at both signatures for a moment; a part of him still unsure of what Robb was getting at.
However, if the oddly-shaped slopping D was any indication…

*Wait a minute…how…what…it’s probably just a coincidence. That’s all it is. Just…just a
coincidence.*
“…just a coincidence,” he began, despite his mind screaming at what his heart was really beginning to tell him. “They just probably sign the same way.”

“And the T?” Robb insisted. “Don’t those two look familiar? Seven hells, Jon! She could have tried forging her signature for the bank, so it wouldn’t be too recognizable. And you’re sure she never told you about this?”

“I never even told her we were in debt!” Jon cried out in disbelief. “I skipped over that side of things because I didn’t want to get her involved, and I have no idea how she knew…”

He hadn’t told her about it, but he had shared the good news after reading Rob’s email when they were at Pentos. So excited had he been to let her know everything would be all right, although he was still concerned about who had actually done the bailing, he was almost hurt at her somewhat dismissive statement:

"This person wanted no thanks or recognition, right? I think you should just respect their wishes, and don’t dig too much into it, Jon. Miracles happen for a reason.”

Miracles my ass, he thought with a clench of his jaw.

“…just how fucking rich is she to be able to buy us out like that?” Robb was still musing despite the throbbing headache Jon was beginning to experience.

She lied to me.

“…I mean, dear gods, she must be loaded…not surprising since she’s a queen…”

She fucking lied to me.

“I’ll bet those sneaky Targaryens had shit ton of property stored up in the Iron Bank. You got to believe they do…”

She…lied to…me. Fuck!

“Jon?” Robb blinked and stopped long enough with his rambling as his brother had suddenly risen to his feet; wooden box forgotten though he still clutched the dossier as he stormed out of the office. “Jon? Where the fuck are you going?!”

Unfortunately, by the time he reached the door and looked out the hallway, there was nothing left of his brother but the lingering scent of persimmon and the stench of simmering fury.

She was fast asleep.

All the accusatory words he had prepared to hurl in her direction, as he burst into their bedroom like a one-man hurricane, faltered at the sight of her curled beneath the furs they had used for their torrid consummation just hours earlier. Her porcelain features were soft and almost childish in repose; those pink-tinted lips still slightly swollen from their passionate kisses. Damn. Even as he swallowed, he was sure he could still taste her…every fucking inch of that body he still craved like a drug. To make matters worse, her hair was unraveled from the girly ponytails, and that familiar cloak of spun silver seemed to beckon his fingers to sink into them and to erode away the feelings of hurt and betrayal at…
her lack of trust in him.

Why? His heart screamed as he sat heavily on the bed with a low moan wrenched from his throat. Why couldn’t you share something that important with me? Did you think I would stop you? Or not approve? Do you really think me that unapproachable when it comes to my family matters? And how on earth did you even know about it? I was sure I never told you; not because I didn’t trust you, but I just didn’t want to burden you with that as well. So how did you know, Dany? Did you have spies working around the clock keeping tabs on me? Did you have Varys digging into my family’s sordid history to realize we needed your imperial help, Your Grace? Did you take pity on us? Feel sorry for the poor bastard and his pathetic family who can’t get their shit together? And speaking of knowing our secrets...did you know about my real father as well? Have you just been acting all this time? I mean, I knew I considered the Martells great actors, but I’m beginning to think you’re in their league as well. Seven hells! You all probably planned this from the beginning, didn’t you? You all probably knew damn well Rhaegar was my father, and this...this... was all just a grand ploy to get me on your side to conquer the North, wasn’t it?

“Fuck,” he hissed and rose to his feet; pacing away from how dark and dangerous his thoughts were becoming. “Fuckfuckfuckfuck!”

He wanted to shake her awake; to make her answer all his burning questions, to make her feel as much pain as he felt at this moment. He wanted to strip her raw and to make her as vulnerable as he had become.

What other lies? Huh? What other lies have you hidden from me, Daenerys Targaryen? Why should I trust a single thing you do from now on? Why?!

He strode to the fireplace; the dossier trembling in his clenched fist. He wanted to burn it all; the damming document, even that goddamn wooden box his mother had left behind. Nothing fucking mattered. Bringing Dany here had been a mistake, and in his tortured mind, he could almost hear Catelyn’s cynical laughter.

What more do you expect, Jon Snow? Even if she never actually called you that name, she still treated you like one, didn’t she? Look now. You can’t even trust her.

Stop it, he pleaded as he squeezed his eyes shut to drown out the voice. Please...please...you win. You fucking win goddamn it. Just...make it stop.

A pained sob of distress would echo around the room, causing Dany to stir restlessly. His name might have escaped her lips in a breathless whisper, however, it would end up being a troubled sound of yearning at the crack of dawn when the pillow beside her was yet untouched.
By midmorning, cheerless gray skies held the promise of even more snow to join the mere five inches that had fallen overnight. The potpourri of Winterfell’s scents; sharp nips of frigid frost, spotty mounds of horse or dog shit, burning gasoline, nearly choking smoke from heavy-duty plow trucks, or tantalizing rabbits or hens roasted over old-fashioned spit fires, permeated the air in copious layers. In the main (and largest) courtyard, the locals went about their business as if the threat of slipping and sliding around slushes of ice or marching through ankle-high snow was child’s play. Conversations were mostly grunted words accentuated with thick Northern twangs that were sometimes difficult to decipher. It was clear that the smallfolk had a language and a way of life all their own. There would be no need for exuberant smiles or gaiety unless necessary. Until then, it was mostly glum, grim, or blasé expressions on pallid, weathered, and hardened faces.

Speaking of child’s play, at least one member of her entourage was having an absolutely wonderful day. Monterey’s shrill laughter bounced around the courtyard like a breath of fresh air. The snowman he, Arya, Rickon, and two other neighborhood children (wards of the Frey clan), were still building stood like a giant, silent sentry in the midst of organized chaos. It had a rusted metal bucket for its hat, large pieces of coal for its eyes, mouth, and buttons, with several skeletal tree branches for arms. Rickon, who had disappeared into the castle a few moments earlier, returned with what appeared to
be a threadbare blanket of deep coffee. Much to Monterey’s delight, the older boy wrapped it around
their snowman’s ‘shoulders’ before Arya whipped out a wicked-looking dagger? Knife? Sword?
attached to her waist and ordered her wards to kneel while knighting Ser Snowman the Fearful in
dramatic fashion.

Dany watched all this from the balcony; arms wrapped around her as if in dire need of protection
from the elements despite her comfortable cashmere sweater, scarf, jeans, and oversized wool jacket
the same shade as her eyes.

As one of the Frey kids began crying out for Arya to make him a knight as well, she unwound an
arm to stare at the device which had been gripped tightly in her right hand all this time.

Seven unanswered phone calls and five unanswered text messages.

_That asshole!_

He couldn’t have picked a worse time to get into one of his sullen moods, and it _had_ to be that for
why else would he ignore her after their passionate evening yesterday? It wasn’t as if he had
forgotten his phone in the bedroom, and each message had obviously been seen/read, which meant
Jon was deliberately ignoring her for some reason.

Just what had he and Robb talked about last night? Or did this all have to do with Lyanna’s personal
items? Had Jon found something else to make him want to question their entire relationship? Was he
now too disgusted at the idea of being with her because of their familial ties? It was ludicrous to think
he’d change his mind that quickly considering what had transpired that night at King’s Landing. He
had insisted he was okay with it, even going as far as wanting to have a child with her. However, as
she sighed and kicked absently at a jutting piece of splintered wood, Dany was more than aware that
one of her fears was already coming to fruition.

Hadn’t she assumed that once he was back home, to where he was most familiar, and to a life that
was less chaotic than what she could ever give him, that he would get cold feet and want to back
out? He had scoffed at the notion, hadn’t he? But here it was. Just one day in, and she was having to
lie through her teeth about Jon’s whereabouts.

There was something rather ‘frightening’ about waking up alone especially in new surroundings, and
goodness knows she had felt around the bed - like a child tossed to fend for herself on a turbulent sea
- for his familiar sinewy length for seemingly endless minutes. When she was sure he wasn’t hiding
under the covers (or the bed), she had done a thorough search of his bedroom and bathroom just to
make sure he hadn’t fallen asleep in the bathtub and drowned. When rewarded with nothing but
overwhelming solitude, she was tempted to run down the hallway and bang on all the doors or
simply bellow his name from the top of the winding steps to get his attention. Or she could simply
text or call him…which had not helped in the slightest.

With that burgeoning sense of foreboding, she took a quick bath, dressed, and trudged down for
breakfast with Missandei in tow. Because she was late (again), the rest of the household had eaten
without her, though Arya stuck around to keep her company. If she noticed Jon wasn’t around, she
made no mention of it, though she tossed around a ‘the guys usually wake up really early to help get
wood for the fires’ – perhaps hoping to assure Dany that Jon was _indeed_ out with said guys and not
moping around somewhere deliberately pretending she didn’t exist.

After a quick meeting with her council, which included a video conference call with Tyrion and
Varys, she gave Jorah permission to begin preparations to return to Bear Island with Davos willing to
go with him for the short visit. If any of them noticed Jon’s absence, they respectfully kept their
silence. Besides, if their queen’s rather somber demeanor and half-hearted replies were any
Curbing her growing frustration, she made her way into the castle; her plan to return to the bedroom and probably sulk for the rest of the day until he decided to show up, and maybe then she’d smack him hard across the face for doing this to her. With Tywin’s looming presence back at King’s Landing, and the pressures of showing her mettle to the Northern Lords, never had she needed his support more than ever. So yes, perhaps he had the right to mull over his mother’s history, but was it so terrible of her to want to share in his grief or his joy? Wasn’t that moment supposed to be where their bonds could be deepened? Where she would hold his hand, kiss away his tears, and tell him that he would always be Jon Snow to her; no matter what a birth certificate stated?

Her steps faltered as she came to the landing; realizing with a muttered curse that she must have taken a wrong turn. However, the rather impressive sight of several towering glass display cabinets, aligned on either side of the lengthy hallway, forced her forward to sate her curiosity.

Wow.

Robb hadn’t been kidding when he claimed that the Starks took their sports seriously. Dany was sure she had never seen so many plaques, trophies, and other carved awards in all shades; gold, silver, bronze, and was that ivory? collected in one place…well besides a museum. This section of the castle could very well pass for that, for every accolade bestowed upon a Stark over the years (going back to the last century) was on display for all to see. Interspersed were framed photographs of the athletes responsible for winning each award. There was the very first winter football game held between the The Direwolves (composed of all the Stark males) and the Black Axes (members of the Cerwyn clan) where the Starks won by a whopping score of 49-10. If one wanted to have an idea of how tough and gritty the Northerners were, you looked no further than the image of the players. All looked like they could wrestle bears with their bare hands, and the concept of trimmed beards or proper hygiene were probably not important back then.

As Dany walked on, the years rolled by like an endless spool. The prizes became less crude and the photographs were more colorful. The Starks not only excelled in football, they were also adept at ice hockey, basketball, baseball, swimming, archery, shooting, and of course, equestrian activities. This seemed to be Lyanna’s forte, for most of the plaques and trophies bore her name, while the photographs ranged from her caught riding a beautiful chestnut thoroughbred in a dressage or beaming proudly beside (what was obviously her favorite horse – Sunset) in her breeches, boots, and helmet. There was even her ‘lucky’ crop kept in the cabinet as a memento of the very first (and last) competition she participated in.

In college, she switched to the more physical sports; Lacrosse and Volleyball. She led her school to the national championship in her first year, and won a few other awards for ‘Player of the Year’ or ‘Highest Goal Scorer’ etc. etc. However, it was clear to see that sports would eventually take a back seat, as the last award she would ever win was not for a sporting event at all, but for finishing her second year with the highest GPA. The photo to accompany that was even more telling, for this was the Lyanna she had been introduced to at Robert Baratheon’s castle. There was a hint of a smile on her face as she held on to her certificate, and though she looked pretty in the floral print sundress, it was clear that those grey eyes were filled with a longing and sadness no one else would understand until it was much too late. Dany wondered if this was the period when Robert got wind of her forbidden relationship with Rhaegar.

With a shake of her head, she forced herself to focus on the other members of the Stark household. She would come to learn that Ned Stark had been excellent at Football and Shooting, as did his brother, Brandon, while Benjen Stark excelled at Archery and Ice Hockey. However, things got a little more interesting when it came to the present brood.
While Bran brought home most of the scholastic booty (he was a walking encyclopedia apparently), and Sansa had only won a couple of equestrian contests, she made up for it by earning praises for her Home Economics skills as evidenced by the first garment she supposedly designed and created at eleven years of age. It gave the illusion of being a simple shapeless azure smock until closer inspection revealed the hidden seamless functional pockets including the ability to wear it inside out. It only highlighted the more intricate white lace handsewn patterns upon it. The showcase even had Sansa’s preliminary sketches, and it was clear to see that the eleven-year-old had a talent no one could deny. Dany’s respect for her went a few more notches.

Arya and Rickon had seemed to be in competition with one another, for the two youngest Starks weren’t shy at trying their hands at everything. Eventually, they would both excel at Fencing (a rarity) for Arya, and Basketball for Rickon. However, Arya’s love for the military came with her decision to join the ROTC early, and most of her photos showed her in various combat uniforms displaying awards she had won for best cadet in one thing or another. Hell, there was even a picture of her proudly showing off her hard-earned third-degree black belt in martial arts. Dany couldn’t wait to spar with her when the time came. It would be interesting to see just how strong the prospective soldier really was.

_Ah, Robb Stark…_

His showcase was any proud parent’s fantasy. It seemed as if he was destined to be good at every damn thing, and it was evident in the tons of awards with his name etched on them. Perhaps it was to make up for his not so stellar scholastic side, but who cared? If he kept making the Varsity football, basketball, and baseball team year after year, while looking dashing in his various uniforms, he was all set to conquer the world.

By this time, she had almost reached the end of the hallway, and for a moment, Dany felt panicked at not finding anything for Jon, when his section finally came in view. It wasn’t particularly as impressive as the rest of his siblings, and Dany recalled the few he had kept in his room. It made her wonder if Catelyn had balked at the idea of the ‘bastard’ being showcased as a part of the Stark tradition. It was probably unheard of for any illegitimate child to be given such an honor. Perhaps she and Ned had a heated argument over it, and eventually a compromise was reached. That compromise would include Jon’s high school football championship rings, plaques, and trophies for the national title and being MVP for two years in a row. There were only two photographs of him; one being his first year in the baseball junior league. He looked rather adorable in the gray and white striped uniform with the too large face cap nearly covering his pouting features, and a baseball bat held over his right shoulder. He might have been eight or ten years old at the time, and with the telltale band-aids on his jaw and above his right eye, it was clear someone had gotten in a scuffle before the picture was taken.

_Typical,_ Dany thought with a wistful smile and shake of her head.

The second picture was of Jon in the latter years of high school. He looked so much younger than his seventeen years, and one could see why he would be desperate to start growing facial hair. Making other teen models swoon with envy, he was in the traditional pose of taking a knee with helmet and football before him. The uniform appeared a bit oversized, but it failed to hide the strength in those toned arms she had caressed lovingly so many times over. His hair lay in unruly black curls around his face; said features unsmiling though not scowling either. Dany was sure she could see more of Lyanna in that expression and -

“If you know how long it took us to get him to pose for that shot, you’d think we were asking him to commit murder,” came the sudden wry comment, which had Dany turning around with a breathless gasp of surprise. She had been so engrossed, she hadn’t even heard him arrive.
Robb – dressed as if he had just gone hunting – stood behind her with a smile; arms crossed behind his back as he studied the image as well. His blue eyes sparkled like the icicles she had noticed dangling from the rafters earlier; his features flushed with the warmth of the indoors though his clothing remained slightly damp from whatever activity he had engaged in outdoors.

“Admiring our little hall of fame, eh?” he queried; his smile broadening as he took off his hat and gave a polite bow. Just like Jon, his hair was a messy mass of auburn curls that seemed to give the Stark men that distinct feral look. “What do you think?”

“Impressive,” Dany replied when she could finally find her voice.

She thought she smiled back in return, but Robb was already nodding in agreement and turning away to lead her down another hallway. Only this time, they were assailed with majestic portraits of his ancestors (and current family members) as well as antique weapons that any collector would kill to get their hands on.

She had to do a double take at the sight of the largest sword she had ever seen. Placed above a portrait of a wizened man with crafty features (one of the first Lords of Winterfell), it sat upon a sword stand of wrought iron; deadly in its silence. Its hilt shone like hardened porcelain, probably due to the many hands that had grasped it over the centuries. It was the blade, however, which told the real story. Almost as wide as a man’s hand, and longer than most average-sized men, its smoky and dark sheen (which gave the illusion of swirling ripples) was almost mesmerizing. Dany’s imagination pictured how one could get impaled by such a weapon. She shivered at the notion of the sword eager for blood; its raging, unquenchable thirst never satiated. Had any man actually wielded such a thing?

“That’s Ice, our greatsword and heirloom,” Robb explained when he noticed what had her so riveted. “Forged from Valyrian steel and acquired by my ancestors over five hundred years ago. You must have heard of Valyrian steel, right?”

Dany nodded. “A rare metal forged from the fires of Valyria…or as some would suggest; the breath of dragons.”

Robb gave a low grunt. “You Targaryens have always been associated with those mystical creatures, haven’t you? Your fiery nature and all that…rather explains quite a few things when it comes to Jon now that I think about it.” That last bit was muttered under his breath, but it was enough for Dany to start as if pricked.

Oblivious to this, Robb continued to show her around the castle; his knowledge of his family’s history quite admirable despite his insistence that he knew nothing compared to his brother, Bran. His charm was evident in every anecdote or flippant joke told; and despite her earlier feelings of gloom, Dany found herself becoming more comfortable in his presence. She prodded him with questions, and he did his best to answer them. He even had her giggling a couple of times, and a tiny voice within warned her to reign her enthusiasm in. She did not want to give him any ideas.

In the course of the tour, they did stumble across Bran in the library and for the next hour, she shared a piping hot cup of coffee and polite conversation with the brilliant young man. He was more expansive on some of the questions she had posed to Robb earlier, and by the time he was done, Dany was sure she knew more about the Stark family than any other visitor. For a moment, she entertained the thought of him eventually becoming a Grand Maester for her court, but as she watched him bend over another ancient text; his youthful features furrowed with intense concentration, she didn’t have the heart to subject him to the toils and troubles of a place like King’s Landing.
Winterfell will need you always…

She loathed to leave, considering how attached she had already become to the intimate yet affable setting (and goodness there were so many books to explore!), but Robb was impatient to complete his tour.

“The library is always open to you whenever you need it,” he offered as they climbed another flight of steps toward a much quieter section of the castle. “In fact, you’re more than welcome to consider this your second home, considering you’re the reason we still have it in our possession.”

Dany might have ignored those words, as she realized she was being ushered into his private office, however, the full context of his statement soon sank in like a stone. She did her best to maintain a neutral expression; even smiling as he motioned for her to sit before walking toward the cabinet which held several wines and spirits. He held up the bottle of fine brandy with a raised brow, and she nodded; hoping he’d fill it to the brim in readiness of what she felt was to come. For though Robb seemed just as relaxed as always, there was no mistaking the firm tightening around his mouth as he offered her a glass and raised his for a toast.

“To Winterfell and your future reign as Queen of Westeros. Cheers.”

“Cheers.”

Resisting the urge to swallow it all in one gulp, she took a ladylike sip; allowing the fiery heat to sear down her throat until it settled blissfully in the pit of her stomach. Robb was less classy, for he downed his in one go and reached for the bottle again, only this time he was moving behind the desk to plonk himself into the leather chair.

“No need to hold back, Your Grace,” Robb invited with a cheeky smile. “Jon’s told me about your appreciation for fine liquor, so…” He refilled his glass, then shoved the bottle in her direction. “Enjoy.”

She eyed him for a moment as if gauging if he was messing with her, but at his genuine expression of encouragement, she guzzled down the rest of the beverage and grabbed the bottle. It was only almost noon, but hell, after the kind of morning she’d had (all thanks to his brother), she didn’t mind getting wasted this early. Perhaps it would make the day go faster.

“Seven hells,” Robb whistled in admiration. “I take it you learned how to control your liquor hanging around the Dothraki, eh? It’s not everyday you get to see a gal willing to chug down a bottle of brandy that quick…”

His words trailed off as he noticed her behavior. Leaning forward, he carefully plucked the bottle from her trembling hand and kept it aside; blue eyes filled with quiet understanding as he studied the lowered head of silver before him. Her barely audible choked sob and sniffle broke the sudden silence, and as her shoulders shook, Robb sighed and cursed Jon for leaving him with this mess to clean up.

“I’m sor-sor-sorry,” Dany finally blubbered as she wiped her face with the sleeve of her jacket. “I’m just…it’s been a long day already…” And I hate being all alone when he’s supposed to be by my side. I wasn’t supposed to do this alone.

“Your apology is no good here,” Robb interrupted with a warm smile. “Hell, I’m glad you’re even showing such emotion. All those rumors of you being a stone-cold bitch were not true after all.”

Something about the way he said those words made her give a reluctant chuckle, and when his
handkerchief suddenly appeared before her, she accepted it with a shy nod of gratitude. She pressed the warm cloth to her face, inhaling the masculine scent of pinewood that almost reminded her of Jon.

“I guess this is all my fault,” Robb was saying, forcing her to look up with bemusement. He was leaning against the desk, arms folded across his chest with a pensive expression on his visage. “I shouldn’t have pried, and I realize you wanted to keep it a secret, but I was just so excited about finally discovering who it was that helped us out…I just had to share it. I mean I assumed you two were on it anyway and—”

Dany held up a hand to slow him down. Nothing was really making any sense. “Forgive me, Robb,” she interrupted with a wan smile. “I know I’m not that drunk, so you’re going to have to explain what the hell you’re talking about.”

Taking a deep breath, Robb proceeded to do just that, and by the time he was done, he stared at her with that unnerving penetrating stare that seemed to be a requirement for all Starks. It was as if he dared her to dispute his claims that she was responsible for bailing them out, and though her first instinct was to deny everything and play dumb, she had a feeling that was going to be unnecessary and foolish.

“Yes,” she finally said quietly. Wincing at how small she sounded, she shook herself mentally and sat up a little straighter to meet his gaze and hold it prisoner. She might as well confess. “Yes, it was my doing, and it was never intended for you to know I was behind it. My intentions were purely altruistic with no ulterior motive to gain your trust or use it as a bargaining chip for my hope to secure the North. I just…” She shrugged and looked at her hands. “I just hated seeing Jon look so frightened and unsure of what the future held for a family he loved so much.” She looked up again, this time with a hint of defensiveness and defiance in her eyes. “You have no idea how terrible things were back then. Robert…Robert was giving him an impossible ultimatum, and I just wanted to ease the burden off him.”

“Is that why you didn’t share it with him?” came the quiet question which had her stumped for a moment.

“I…I don’t—”

“Jon didn’t know you were behind this,” Robb explained with a ghost of a smile on his lips. “I think that’s what really pissed him off.”

“Pissed…he was upset?” Dany asked incredulously.

“Well, yeah,” Robb replied with a shrug. “At first, I wasn’t sure why he did a complete one-eighty on me, but when I ran back our conversation in my head, I realized he must have felt you were holding out on him. He probably felt betrayed…or that you didn’t trust him enough to share something pretty huge. Knowing Jon, he might have tried to talk you out of it in the first place, but…” He shrugged again as if helpless to the whims of his brother.

Dany, who had now risen to her feet to pace around, returned to Robb; still incredulous. “You’re telling me he’s upset because of this? That’s why he couldn’t speak to me? Or answer my calls or my text? All because of…this?! I don’t fucking believe it…”

Robb ran his fingers through his hair and gave a loud sigh. “How long have you two known each other?”

“What?”
“Seriously…how long have you two really been together as a couple?”

Dany shook her head as if trying to wrap her head around the odd question before doing the mental math and replying with a wary, “Give or take six months…why is this important?”

“It’s important because you’ve barely scratched the surface of who Jon Snow really is,” Robb replied with a wave of his hands. “I’ve grown up with this guy for the past twenty-three years, so I’m more than aware of his quirks, but you’ve been with him for only six months, and it’s been a crazy six-months at that. I bet you two haven’t really had a chance to spend more than a couple of days in each other’s presence just…living like a normal couple, right? Between you trying to get to the Iron Throne, and him dealing with Robert, his job, and now this new bombshell about his parentage…you two haven’t had the time to breathe.”

Dany frowned and tried to refute his statement. She almost felt offended at what he was trying to insinuate; that after all this time together, she still didn’t know the real Jon. Oh, please. Yet as she sank back into her seat, she knew – deep down -that Robb was right. Hadn’t there been nights when she and Jon would whisper to each other about wishing they could just run away from it all and go live in some shack in the Summer Islands where no one knew who they were? Only for morning to arrive to see them leaving each other to attend to their harsh realities?

Normalcy? Where was the normalcy in their torrid relationship anyway?

“I know he gets into his moods,” she admitted with an almost petulant pout. “And I’m used to them, but-”

“It’s more than just getting into a mood,” Robb explained with a sad smile. “It’s…” He gave another heavy sigh, and to Dany’s surprise, he sank to the floor at her feet to cross his legs as if ready to read her a story. “It goes way deeper than that, Dany, and I guess my mother’s to blame for most of it.”

“What…what do you mean?”

Robb rubbed his chin; the rough bristles of his beard loud in the silence. His eyes looked haunted and miserable at the same time. “We were only kids…me…Sansa and maybe Bran at the time, only he was just a wee baby, but hell…what did we know? We were only doing what our mother asked of us, and we were too little and stupid to realize how much it must have hurt Jon at the time.” He began digging his fingernail into the weathered wooden floor. “She hated him, Dany. Really hated him with a passion that’s kind frightening now that I look back on it. How he even survived sometimes is a miracle in itself, and I guess knowing he wasn’t going to just cave in and die, was what pissed her off even more.”

“Are you saying she tried to murder him?” Dany asked as pinpricks of disbelief and fear stabbed at her heart.

Robb’s barely perceptible nod was enough to have her groaning. “She did all she could to keep him away from us, warning us never to interact with him because he had some strange weird disease that would kill us – not that we listened anyway. However, if any of us got sick, she’d blame it on him; claiming he had the ‘bastard curse’ infecting all of us. If we even came home with a scratch, she’d whale on Jon and assume he was the one who hurt us even when we told her otherwise. Things would get really bad when Dad had to leave for his business trips. Without him watching and protecting Jon as best he could, she’d do things to make sure he was never seen or heard for a while.”

“Oh, dear gods…”
“And it wasn’t as if he didn’t try. He really did try to be good for her…to please her you know? If we had arts and crafts things to do at school, he’d paint her a picture or bring home flowers. He’d study real hard, sweating it out especially in subjects he didn’t really like, just so he could show off his report card.” Robb rubbed a hand over his eyes. “Only Dad ever gave him the praise he needed. Nothing was ever good for my mom. I don’t think I ever saw her congratulate or smile at him for doing something…anything good.”

Dany could feel the lump rising to her throat; the lonely image of Jon as a child desperate for approval almost making her sick to her stomach.

“Did you notice that odd-shaped tower on your way in yesterday?” Robb asked.

“Yes…”

“We call that the Burned Tower…got destroyed centuries ago and no one bothered to have it fixed. Anyway, she’d have the servants take Jon there and keep him locked away at the highest room for days at a time; no food…no water…and I swear we could hear him screaming, crying and cursing all the way down here…until he just stopped after a while. That was the scariest part…the silence. Sometimes we never knew he was dead or alive, and even when we all begged for her to let him out…we’d get a thrashing ourselves. Even Ghost…dear gods, poor Ghost would try to go after his master, but Mom had him kicked out of the castle. You could hear him howling just as loud every damn night until he was let back in.

“She never let him celebrate his birthday, though she’d throw the rest of us the biggest parties we never really wanted. If Dad was home, Jon could stay, but if he wasn’t, it was back in the tower until the party was over. And then…for a while, we noticed he was getting sick – throwing up and shit – and no one could really understand why, until I overheard Maester Luwin say that his food was being poisoned. You see, Jon wasn’t even allowed to eat with us…and of course, this was again when Dad wasn’t around, so we figured Mom was probably adding something to his meals that eventually had him sent to the hospital to get his stomach pumped…”

Robb’s voice broke; the pain too much to bear. Dany was more than tempted to wrap her arms around him in comfort, but she was too stunned to move a muscle. Jon’s wounds ran deeper than he had ever admitted and to think–

“Trust,” Robb whispered. “He could never trust anyone after all of that…not really. Even though we – the kids – would eventually grow up and come to defy our mother’s unsubstantiated claims. He tried to assimilate and be as ‘normal’ as he could, but as you can well imagine, the trauma, emotional, and physical abuse he received changed him…made him different. It fucked him up, and why wouldn’t it? He began having two default settings; either being quiet and contemplative aka moody or switching to his rage mode just like that.” He snapped his fingers as if to emphasize that point.

“We all assumed it was his Stark side making him withstand all he went through, but I guess it was probably that Targaryen fire that made him resilient. Whenever Mom thought she had him beat, he’d rise again like a fucking vengeful phoenix and give her more hell. So, you see, for him to really give in to you and accept you as the woman he hopes to someday marry…you’ve done damn well shattering some of those walls he’s built around himself and his heart. Jon doesn’t love easily, but when he does find something he wants, he’ll go for it and give it his all no matter what. He is loyal to a fault, and that can sometimes be his downfall.”

Robb stopped talking long enough to look up at Dany. “Perhaps to you, not telling him about this might be trivial, but to Jon, it’s like you felt it necessary to hide the truth from him. If you love him as much as you say you do, then sharing something this important shouldn’t have been a problem.”
“He doesn’t share every single thing with me either,” Dany interrupted with a plaintive cry. She scrubbed at her tear-streaked face with furious swipes. “I’ve…I mean…I’ve tried…and…and-”

“And you have to try harder…both of you,” Robb replied with a tender squeeze of her trembling hand. “Seems to me that this relationship is the most important thing in your lives, and it’s a scary thing especially when you’ve fallen that deeply for someone. Because trust me, Jon is just as scared shitless at the idea of losing you. You both have powder-keg personalities, so you both have to figure out how to navigate your way through that incoming explosion…aaaand I think that explosion is happening right now.”

“I don’t…understand-”

“He’s angry, hurt most likely, but yes, probably somewhere sulking at this moment. I could send you in his direction, but I wouldn’t know where to begin. Arya could tell you, but my suggestion is to wait until he comes to you. Give him the space to vent in private and then you can both ignite your kegs until the explosion is doused by rational thinking. Sound like a plan?”

Dany looked like she was ready to protest, but her shoulders eventually sagged in weary resignation. Her eyes stung with tears again. This wasn’t the way she had hoped to begin her stay at Winterfell; sobbing and bawling like a baby in the arms of a potential subject. How was she to be taken seriously?

“I’m sorry,” she began, but when she felt the strong arms engulf her in a warm hug, she was powerless to control the outpouring of grief; not just for herself, but for the little boy who had run around these halls just hoping to be accepted for who he truly was.

“It’s cool,” came the muffled voice above her. “We can both cry together. Besides, if anyone had told me I’d be giving relationship advice, I would have knocked them senseless. I’m supposed to be the alleged playboy with no scruples!”

Dany couldn’t help laughing softly and was a bit relieved when Robb finally pulled away, but only far enough to wipe her tears with a slightly calloused finger.

“Feel better? Good! Now where’s that beautiful Targaryen smile Jon keeps raving about, huh?”

She blushed and pushed him away playfully, where he collapsed to the floor and held his hands above his chest as if she had stabbed him instead. “Ooooow! My heart! Shattered! Broken! Ruptured!”

“You ass,” came the breathless giggle. “You’re impossible.”

And as he continued to try to cheer her up, neither would notice the silent shadow of a third participant blending into the darkness, where it carefully made its way downstairs with a thousand swirling thoughts rampant through its mind.

Arya found him.

Not without some effort, for she had assumed he’d be in his usual brooding spot within the Burned Tower. Fortunately, some inquires among the locals had her pulling up the truck beside Cley Cerwyn’s lumber shop and hopping out with a brisk blow of warmth into her gloved hands.
Seven hells, she missed summer.

Greeting a few familiar faces, she jogged toward the back of the log-cabin where a group of men could be seen hauling large bundles of firewood into waiting vehicles. Everyone was preparing for the incoming snowstorm; a not unknown phenomenon around these parts, but something they had most definitely not foreseen coming this early. It was the reason Robb had left the castle so early in the morning; having to make sure Winterfell residents were prepared for the possible onslaught. If history was anything to go by, the roads could be impassable for weeks!

One could only hope it wouldn’t be that bad this year. Sad it would put a kibosh on the welcome party Sansa had planned for tomorrow night though. She was sure her big sister was less than thrilled about it.

“Hi, Cley!” Arya hailed as she leapt nimbly over a pile of plywood with a wide grin. “Making all that money today, huh?”

Cley Cerwyn, who was about five years older than Robb, chuckled at the tease. He tossed the pile of wood into the truck and shook his head. “Money? You know no one pays around here. I’ve got IOUs stacked to the ceiling. No wonder Jonelle thinks we’re going belly up soon. Whatchu doing here anyway? Shouldn’t you be helping to get the castle ready? You know folks are gonna come crawling to you guys when it gets too bad.”

“We’ll be ready,” Arya declared smugly. “The castle’s got plenty of room to host them. Speaking of which…” She craned her neck around. “Where’s he?”

“Hmm?” Cley, who had been momentarily distracted as a ledger had been thrust in his hands, looked up with a blink of bemusement. “Where’s who?”

“A sulky young man with black curly hair about this tall,” Arya replied, while waving a hand above her head. “He would usually have some white direwolf running around giving you a headache, but he’s solo this year.”

“Oh,” Cley chuckled again and nodded toward the stretch of evergreens about a mile behind his building. “Last I saw him, he was still helping the fellas to chop up the wood. I figured he’d want to take a break by now, but he’s not been out yet. Still working I guess.”

Thanking Cley for his help, Arya made her way in said direction. Even as she approached, she could hear the whirs and shrieks from the machines including the yelled commands each man gave to the other as yet another towering tree began to cave beneath the pressure before collapsing to the ground in a heap of pine and snow. While some seemed content with modern technology, others preferred the old-fashioned way of chopping down the smaller trees with a good ol’ axe. It was there she found her brother, hacking away at one with a ferocity and determination that did not betray whatever fatigue he felt.

Making herself comfortable on a freshly chopped tree stump, Arya wrapped her arms around her legs and watched him work for a while. It had been so long since she last saw him in the flesh, it was wonderful to be this close again. However, there were some changes even she couldn’t deny. For one thing, he never used to keep his hair in a bun. It would make sense to do so now as it prevented it from getting into his eyes while he worked, but he had arrived that way as well yesterday. It was the way their father had dressed, and Arya couldn’t help wondering if Jon was subconsciously trying to channel Ned without realizing it. Hairstyle aside, there were other differences especially in the way he carried himself now. The old Jon would have been more uptight and guarded; and though she wouldn’t consider him as completely relaxed as Robb, the latest version seemed more confident and comfortable in his own skin. He had an aura of…what was the word she was looking for?
Intensity? No, Jon had always been intense. Pride? Perhaps, although it was something deeper than that.

She was unable to articulate what others might have assumed as ‘completion’; of being in love and having found the person you wanted to spend the rest of your life with. One could even consider it as ‘inner peace’ and ‘contentment’. Although with the frown on his visage, as he finally stopped swinging to take a breath and stretch his arms gingerly, it was hard to tell just how ‘content’ he was at the moment.

“Arya?” came the bewildered call as his gaze fell on what might have been an apparition of his sister. However, when she raised a hand and waved, he sighed and prepared to continue his task. “What the fuck are you doing here?”

“Good to see you too, you jerk,” she greeted with a middle-finger raised in his direction. “You’ve not been home all day.”

“Busy,” he retorted and swung at the tree. “As you can see.”

“Really? You brought guests here and you leave them to come hacking at a goddamn tree?” Arya asked incredulously. “I mean I know you’ve got some major antisocial skills, but this has got to be the worst. You’ve got a fucking girlfriend now, Jon! You should be showing her around the castle, not Robb!”

At the mention of his brother’s name, the axe froze in mid-swing. He looked up then; conflicting emotions of annoyance and worry flickering across his features. “She’s with Robb?” he finally asked.

“No duh,” Arya replied with a roll of her eyes. “Bran said they were going on a tour and he wondered where you were. You missed breakfast and lunch, and she’s been looking for you even if she doesn’t say it. Geez, Jon. You’re making her unhappy.”

At that Jon scoffed and went back to swinging, only this time, they were a little more erratic. He might have muttered something that sounded like ‘good. I hope she’s unhappy,’ but she assumed she was only imagining things.

“Did you two fight last night or what?” she asked with a raised brow. When she was ignored, she cupped her hands around her mouth and shouted loud enough for the other men to hear. “Did you two fight last night or what?!”

“Shut the fuck up, Arya!” he hissed angrily; stopping long enough to glare at her. “What’s wrong with you?”

“What’s wrong with you?” she asked back with a frown. “If you two have a problem, don’t you think you should be talking to her about it instead of running out here to cut down trees for no reason?”

“In case you didn’t hear, there’s a fucking snowstorm coming,” Jon growled. “The firewood isn’t going to appear by magic to folks’ doorstep.”

“No one asked you,” Arya rebutted with a sneer. “We’ve got enough men to help without you sticking your nose in. Cley says you’ve been here all damn day, and I’m sure they’ve got enough, so what’s still keeping you here?”

Jon gave nothing but a grunt and prepared to continue swinging when he suddenly found himself staring at Arya’s thunderous features. How she had leapt off the stump to block his path would have
been admirable if he wasn’t too busy still feeling pissed off.

“Get out of my way, Arya,” he warned in a tone both knew meant he wasn’t fucking around.

In the past, she might have slunk away and left him alone, but she was older and smart enough to know that despite his fury, he was hurting, and whatever was hurting him involved the woman he couldn’t keep his eyes off all throughout dinner last night. She had never seen her brother that enamored over someone before, and besides, seeing Dany’s long face this morning was even worse. These two were hopeless.

“Make me,” she dared in a voice just as cold.

“I’m not in the mood for this-”

“Well guess what? Neither am I,” Arya huffed. “So, you’re either coming with me back to Winterfell or you’re going to just have to cut through me. Your choice.”

“Eh…everything all right here?” Homer Garrison asked as he turned off his chainsaw to blink owlishly at the squabbling siblings. “You two need some-”

“We’re fine,” Jon and Arya snapped at the same time without looking away from each other.

Sensing he was likely to get a tongue lashing, if he didn’t excuse himself soon, Homer spat out a wad of tobacco and muttered something about the ‘goddamn Stark kids’ before lumbering over to his buddies to continue working.

“Go back home, Arya,” Jon stated firmly as he took a threatening step forward. “I won’t ask you again.”

She stepped up to him until their noses almost brushed, and Jon was slightly alarmed to see that there were angry tears forming in those grey eyes. “I’m not leaving without you. So, you might as well cut me down now, Jon Snow.”

“Seven hells,” he growled and tossed the axe to the ground with a frustrated curse. “Why won’t you just leave me the hell alone?!”

“Because you’re my brother, and I love you!” she yelled back. “But someone else loves you more and you’re making her unhappy! Whatever problems you two have, you’ve got to work it out! For the first time in as long as I remember, you’re more…you’ve been really happy, and I know she’s the reason for it, and I hate to think you two are going to break up because of whatever stupid argument you had. So, please…” Her breath hitched, tears streaming down her face mingling with the snot she didn’t bother to wipe from her nose. “Go back to her, Jon. You didn’t bring her here for this…did you? Did you?!?”

By this time, the other men had long given up pretending not to notice the argument, but with a thunderous glower from Jon, chainsaws were turned on and harried conversation started again.

“Seven hells, wipe your face,” he finally grumbled, though his subsequent act of pulling her into his arms defeated her completing that order. She gladly wiped her tears and snot on his jacket as she hugged him just as hard. Neither knew how long they remained standing that way, while ignoring the odd looks they received from the others, until the first sprinkles of snow began falling.

“We should go back,” Arya mumbled against his chest. Gods, it felt so good to hold him like this. His hugs were the best.
“…do I really have to?” Jon groaned into her wool hat.

“You can’t keep running away forever,” Arya replied. “Besides your stomach is grumbling. We can get a bite at Nan’s and then go home, okay?” She pulled back with a loud snuffle but a tremulous smile on her visage.

“Ah…”

“Okay!” She cut in before he could change his mind. She all but dragged him away from the rest of the crew, not even giving him a chance to thank them for putting up with him.

Goodness knows he had received a lot of widened eyes and slack jaws when he showed up at five in the morning offering to help. Cley, who had heard of Jon’s return, had assumed they’d be meeting at the dinner party. Seeing him so soon was a shock, but he had accepted Jon’s offer, until the younger man had insisted he work with the axe instead of the easier chainsaw.

“But ain’t you got a splint there, Jon? You really shouldn’t be working with a broken arm-”

“That’s fine. It’s almost healed anyway.”

And that had shut down that argument fast.

Jon eyed his raw and blistered hands and rubbed them slowly, wincing as his joints – especially the arm he had not favored at all – throbbed in agony. The left sleeve felt too tight, and there was no doubt he had aggravated his supposed ‘healing’ arm. Fighting the urge not to grimace too loudly and ignoring Arya’s concerned expression plus her bitching about why he had even gone wood chopping with a broken arm, he made her stop by the pharmacy, where he purchased some painkillers and prayed that Maester Luwin would have some milk of poppy to knock him out for a while. Yet, as they approached the castle, it was a whole other pain that now gnawed at his chest.

She’s unhappy. You didn’t bring her all the way here just for that, did you?

Arya’s accusation burned within him, and as he stole a glance at his baby sister – who was now currently singing off key to a popular pop song – Jon felt the weight of his burdens crushing him again. He had spent most of the night pacing the castle; going into old yet familiar rooms while trying hard to think of how he could approach Dany when the time came. He had seen her phone calls and text messages, and though every bit of him had wanted to respond, the more stubborn side would surface, aptly reminding him of what she had done. He had to remain angry, so she could truly understand where he was coming from.

“Ah ha! Now I realize what else is different about you,” Arya all but shrieked to jar him out of his morose thoughts.

“Geez, has anyone told you how loud your voice is?” Jon winced and stuck a finger in his ear. “And what the fuck are you talking about anyway?”

“You’re not choking me to death with your cigarette smoke!” She slapped the steering wheel with a grin. “I knew there was something off. Usually you would have gone through a pack by now.”

Jon rubbed his mouth; the oh-too-familiar-urge settling in again. “Trust me, I’ve never wanted to smoke more in my life.”

“But she made you stop, eh?” Arya teased despite the pride her eyes. “Seriously though, I’m glad you quit. Sansa tried to stop you, but you just about chopped her head off for suggesting it, and then this dragon queen comes along, and you say, ‘yes ma’am’ just like that.”
“It wasn’t… just like that,” Jon argued weakly, while trying hard to forget the rather promiscuous circumstances that had occurred while he agreed to quitting in the first place. It had mostly involved a very naked Dany going down on him, almost bringing him to completion, before stopping to kill the mood with yet another side lecture about the dangers to his lungs etc. etc.

*Fuck.* Now he couldn’t get *that* image out of his mind.

“Home sweet home,” Arya announced as the truck came to a jerky stop in the courtyard. How this jalopy hadn’t broken down on the way back was an act of the gods. But then again, considering it was his old truck -

“Uncle Jon’s home!” came the happy cry from Monterys, who had been standing in the courtyard with his tongue sticking out trying to taste the snow. The Frey kids, who were watching this with dual expressions of intense amusement (weird Southern kids, eh?) turned as well to see the new arrivals.

Despite his overall mood, Jon couldn’t help smiling as Monterys skipped up to welcome him. Unfortunately, the Lordling was unaware of his ‘uncle’s’ aching state, for once he got the door open, he enthusiastically tugged on Jon’s left arm eliciting a near unearthly howl of anguish that had everyone staring at him in shock.

*Fuckfuckfuckfuck!*

Beads of sweat broke out on his brow as the white-hot pain continued to wash over him in waves. He felt that death was probably better than what he was experiencing at the moment, unfortunately, his anxiety level increased when Dany ran out of the castle with a look of panic, and something else he couldn’t define, on her pale features.

Their eyes met and locked, and for a heart stopping moment, nothing and no one else seemed to matter. He hoped to communicate his hurt and anger, but it was a different kind of communication that came through as a groan escaped his lips and his legs buckled beneath him.

*Fuck it all.*

Dany had seen enough.

“Quick! Prepare him a hot bath, Sarah, and Missandei, get his supplies ready,” she ordered as she moved toward him and held up his weakened left side, while Arya held onto his right. Together, they led him into the castle; past concerned servants and soldiers until they came across Robb, who was descending the steps with Jeyne, Sansa, and Rickon in tow.

“What happened to him?” Robb asked as he motioned for the girls to move aside, so he could hoist his brother upon his shoulder in a fireman lift.

“He was cutting down trees,” Arya replied. “He had his splint off and-”

“Goddamn it,” Dany cursed loud enough to have the others looking at her in surprise. “He’s just so fucking stubborn.”

“Hah! Welcome to knowing Jon Snow,” Arya said with a laugh, though it fizzled as he was laid on the bed gently and his pallid features plus shallow breathing had her even more worried. “Is he going to be all right? He took some pain killers on the way, but-”

“Get Maester Luwin,” Robb ordered. “The milk of poppy will help, right?”
Dany, who was already busy taking off Jon’s boots and working on his pants, gave an absentminded nod. She was too concerned with how swollen his left arm had become, for it was clear Jon had broken something again.

“He’s going to need an x-ray…scan…something-”

The siblings shared a worried look.

“There’s a snowstorm coming,” Sansa began quietly. “And the closest-”

“I saw an urgent care center in the town. Surely, they must have those services at least,” Dany cut in with a hitched breath. She was doing all she could not to burst into tears, and as she worried her lower lip so hard she thought she might bleed, Robb nodded firmly and headed toward the door.

“I’ll call Doctor Horwath and tell him its an emergency, in the meantime…”

His words faltered as he watched Dany give up the fight to pull herself together. With a choked sob, she lay her head upon Jon’s chest; barely audible words that seemed to be a mishmash of curses and prayers escaping her lips.

Robb, realizing this was a private moment, motioned for the others to leave the room so they could be alone. Besides, he was sure those two would have a lot to talk about.

Dany, too caught up in her grief to notice, remained immobile against Jon. She stopped sobbing long enough to listen to the steady rhythm of his heartbeat despite the layers of clothing between them. She wished she could punch some sense into him, wondering why he would go so far as to risk even more injury – with the likelihood of never using his left arm again – rather than speak to her.

Why? Why? Why?

“I don’t want to be shut away, Jon. Why won’t you let me in?” she whispered and fist ed his shirt as if planning to shake him into consciousness.

However, at the familiar sensation of his fingers sinking slowly into her hair, she looked up with a breathless gasp of surprise. For some reason, she had assumed he was passed out, but at the hooded and inscrutable gaze trained on her, he must have been awake the whole time.

Her cheeks blossomed with color; her heartbeat quickening with an awareness that made her want to begin apologizing profusely. “Oh…Jon…I…”

He shook his head once and despite the grimace it elicited, he managed to grate out through clenched teeth, with no room left for argument;

“We need to talk.”
We need to talk.

Ah, those four irritating words that almost always spelled doom for most relationships; or at least the likelihood of a shouting fest before it was all said and done. So far, they had managed to steer clear of that sentence; unwittingly maneuvering away from having full blown arguments in their unconventional yet passionate courtship. How had Robb put it again? That they were both highly-charged kegs just waiting to explode or something of the sort?

She mentally braced herself for the onslaught; pulling away to sit up with hands crossed upon her lap. It gave the illusion of regal composure, but observant ones would have noticed the tension slowly building with every subtle fidget of her fingers or the jut of her jaw, slightly held high in an almost haughty pose.

So, he wanted to talk, eh? That was fine with her. This was what she had wanted, wasn’t it? For him to be more open, even if it meant him starting with those words. She was ready for him and –

“What are you trying to do?” she had to finally ask with a raised brow.

For the past few minutes, the silence had been filled with his grunts and grimaces, interspersed with colorful curses as he writhed and squirmed on the bed like an oversized worm.
“Trying…to…sit…up,” he ground out through clenched teeth. More beads of sweat had broken out on his brow, and as he attempted to put some weight on his already swollen arm, he all but cried out and collapsed back to the pillows; panting as if he had run a marathon.

“Are you kidding me?” Dany asked incredulously. “You’re already injured-”

“I need to sit up to talk to you,” he blurted out when he caught his breath. “I can’t-”

“Oh, for the gods’ sake,” she muttered, and before he could protest, she was squirming into position beside him until they both lay side by side. She crossed her legs and placed her hands on her stomach feigning a relaxed pose. “There. How’s that?”

“Dany…I can’t argu-talk to you like this,” Jon protested with an indignant huff. “It’s…weird.”

“You want to sit up, so we can talk on an even level, yes?” Dany deduced, while biting her inner cheek to stop from smiling. She could feel the weight of his accusatory stare almost akin to a petulant child not getting what he wanted. “So instead of me sitting up and towering over you, I’m going to lie next to you, so we can talk it out that way.”

“Or you could just help me sit up,” he murmured.

“Not fucking likely. Your arm’s the size of a watermelon, Jon. It will be a miracle if you ever-”

She stopped talking, but he had caught the wobble in her voice, and for a brief irrational moment, he contemplated rolling on top of her to kiss away her fears; to hold her tight and reassure her that losing a limb was nothing to compared to the harrowing thought of losing-

Wait just one goddamn minute, Jon Snow! We were going to talk about her not trusting you, right? Get your head back in the game for fuck’s sake!

He cleared his throat and writhed again, inadvertently moving a bit closer to her. Physically, he was in agony, yet being in this position was the worst possible way to get his anger and frustration out effectively. He was painfully aware of every little thing about her despite his gaze stubbornly trained on the granite and cedarwood ceiling. From the tickle of the tiny hairs of silver against his cheek and arm, to the sweet smell of jasmine and rose that almost always accompanied her like a gossamer cloak, to her goddamn breathing; that slightly uneven inhalation and exhalation that told him all about her current state of mind. Seven hells, just how deep did their bond go if he was able to tell what she was thinking with simply the way she breathed? Or was this just a normal thing between couples?

“Since you have no intention of saying anything, I’ll start,” she interrupted his wayward thoughts with a heavy sigh. “You’re pissed off at what I did…helping your family without telling you, correct?”

Jon tensed, then gave a snort of derision. “It’s not as simple as that, Dany. There was a reason I didn’t go into details about that in the first place. It wasn’t something I wanted to burden you with.”

She turned her head to him then; noticing the rigid clench of his jaw – either in pain or with his fury – it didn’t really matter. His features, though flushed, was strained. His eyes were uncompromising flints of determination. She sincerely hoped that at least Maester Luwin would show up with the milk of the poppy soon. For despite how ‘lovely’ it was this have this long-awaited conversation, one still had to remember that Jon was not in the best of shapes. However, if it appeared he was upset about something more than just her altruistic gesture, perhaps this wasn’t the right time for that discussion.

“I appreciate you looking out for my burdens,” she replied. “But I don’t really think you should
“It’s my family,” he interrupted coldly. “And I think I do have that right to determine if it’s your concern or not when it comes to them. This was my decision to make, Dany, and perhaps I might not have been able to buy them out like you, but at least I would have thought of something else.”

“Like what?” she asked; unaware of the scoff in her tone, though if Jon’s tangible bristle was any indication, she had touched a nerve. “What could you have done before Robert sunk his claws into the North, eh? For the gods sake, you make it seem like I did something evil. I realize you want to take all the glory, but you’ve got to remember that I didn’t do this to be noticed in the first place.”

“This isn’t about taking all the fucking glory,” Jon hissed; finally turning his head to meet equally furious orbs of amethyst. “All I asked is that you be honest with me. Would it have killed you to admit you were the one responsible after I told you about Robb’s email? The way you brushed it off—”

“I brushed it off because it wasn’t supposed to be a big deal!”

“It was a big deal! This is my family we’re talking about!”

“And you’ve made that painfully clear every goddamn step of the way!” Now so heated, she forgot her promise to argue on his level and sat up to glare down at him. “I did what I thought was best, Jon. I hated to see you torn over what to do with them, and I felt this was the best way to get it all out of the way and—”

“Who told you?” came the quiet but cold query that had her faltering.

“What?”

“Who told you about our financial woes?” Jon repeated. “It was Varys, wasn’t it?”

Dany opened her mouth; her immediate answer to deny it, but Jon’s curl of his lips in derision had her hunching her shoulders in defense. “What if it was?”

“You had Varys digging into my family, telling you all the minute details, didn’t he?” Jon continued relentlessly. “Which makes me wonder just how much more you knew about me.”

“This is ridiculous—”

“Is it?” Jon sneered. “Actually, I did a whole shit load of thinking about it, and it hit me that this whole thing…from the beginning…it must have been planned out.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Being in our apartment,” Jon explained impatiently. “You had your choice of any other goddamn complex in King’s Landing, and yet you chose the one run by a Stark. It was your intention from the beginning, wasn’t it? Some grand plan to worm your way into the North and drag me along with you.”

Dany suddenly felt it impossible to gather enough air into her lungs. She closed her eyes and tried to take a deep breath; not sure of exactly where to begin. Seeing the distrust, wariness, and perhaps hurt in those brown eyes was all too much. Just how far had he gone into this state of paranoia? And what could she possibly do or say to yank him out of it?

“You…you are tired,” she finally whispered. “And not thinking rationally right now, Jon. Perhaps—”
“Don’t do that,” he grated with a frustrated punch of the bed with his good hand. “Don’t you dare try to make it seem like-”

“We’re back!” Arya’s loud voice slashed through like a cleaver. If she had knocked, they hadn’t heard it, but as she stepped into the room, closely followed by the hassled maester, the couple knew they’d have to put their bickering on hold for now.

Grateful for the intrusion, Dany couldn’t get off the bed fast enough, though Jon’s muttered ‘this isn’t over yet, Dany’ followed her like an anvil of guilt as she paced to the window. Wrapping her arms tight around her, as if seeking the comfort, she desperately needed, she stared glumly at the uninspiring sight of the Broken Tower. Recalling Robb’s story about that place, she bit her lower lip and struggled not to allow the tendrils of pity to overwhelm her thoughts. She was sure the last thing Jon would want was that emotion from her, and considering how astute he already was–

“Is everything all right?” came the quiet words from behind.

Dany turned. It was Arya, concerned yet wary with arms held behind her back while rocking slowly on her heels. She might have sounded polite in her query, but there was no mistaking the cautionary tone in those simple words. For all her friendliness and willingness to welcome Dany into their fold, her loyalties would always lie with her brother first.

“I-We heard your voices out there,” Arya explained, “And Maester Luwin wanted us to leave, but I figured it was best to butt in before things got out of hand. I know what it’s like to get into an argument with Jon. Trust me, it’s not pretty.”

As if on cue, a loud curse from Jon - where he was telling the poor maester where he could shove the scissors he was currently using to cut the sleeve around his swollen arm, into a place where the sun doesn’t shine – had both women smiling a little. Apparently, the maester must have dealt with the stubborn man one too many times in the past, for he simply ignored Jon’s protests and eventually settled for keeping him quiet by stuffing another spoonful of the milk into his mouth.

“Still as grouchy as ever,” Arya remarked with a wistful expression on her visage. “You should have seen him when we were kids. Jon hated being in hospitals.”

The subtle surge of envy, at that expression, seared through Dany’s heart. It was clearly one of pure love and adoration and considering how Jon reciprocated those feelings for his sister and how upset he was with her at this time, Dany couldn’t help feeling even more left out than ever before. She tried to squash down her concerns; telling herself she was only allowing Jon’s accusations to affect her more than it was worth. As his girlfriend, she ought to be at his side right now, no matter how angry he was. She should be holding his hand, wiping his brow, and trying not to let the size of his arm or the forming discoloration on said arm to have her stomach roiling with unease. She might not be well versed in medicine, but it was obvious to anyone that things were not looking good.

“Internal bleeding,” the maester stated as if hearing her unspoken concerns. “This is beyond what I can do. We really have to get him to an emerg-”

A sudden commotion outside the bedroom had them all looking up with bemusement. Jon, who was now blissfully passed out, was spared the sight of his older brother, Grey Worm, Missandei, Davos, Jorah, and Bran barging into the room with a familiar redheaded woman held amongst them like a prisoner.

Dany gawked in disbelief. What in seven hells was she doing here?

“We found her loitering outside the castle walls, Your Grace,” Grey Worm said with a frown on his
“Who is she?” Robb asked with a matching scowl. “She’s not even dressed warmly enough. No normal human can withstand the cold dressed in only a robe and hood. Just what is she?”

“A red priestess,” Bran answered in a voice filled with awe. “I’ve only read about them in books, but they basically believe—”

“In R’hllor, the Lord of Light,” came the serene interruption as Melisandre detached herself from their grip as if they were nothing more than children. Her crimson gaze was trained on Jon, and Jon alone, for no one else in the room seemed to matter. However, as she took another step closer to the bed, Maester Luwin rose to his feet with a stern expression on his wizened visage.

“There will be no black magic here,” he insisted. “My Lord, Robb, we must get her out of here.”

“I thought she was taken care of that night,” Dany asked Grey Worm. “Why is she still alive?”

Grey Worm shrugged. “We looked everywhere, Your Grace, but she disappeared before any of us could find her. However,” He unsheathed a dagger from his waist. “We can finish the job now.”

“Not in here, good grief!” Robb protested. “As much as I’d love to have her eliminated, why are we doing so in the first place?”

“She worked for Robert Baratheon,” Dany replied tightly. She clenched her fists and walked up to the red woman. Staring into the unblemished features, while contending with the subtle scent of brimstone that enveloped the priestess, Dany made her point clear. “She was on his side, and now she’s returned to probably finish what he started.” Switching to Valyrian, she declared firmly. “You have two choices. You leave now and never show your face again, or you will meet the blade of my soldier.”

“I will meet neither, Your Grace,” Melisandre replied in the same tongue, a small smile on her face as she bowed her head in respect. The ruby within the choker around her neck seemed to glow a shade brighter. “I am only here to offer my services to you-him…before it’s too late.”

“What are they saying?” Robb was whispering in the background, and Jorah, who had been watching intensely, took the time to translate. Arya had her features scrunched in concentration for she too was trying to comprehend what was being said.

“What do you mean ‘before it’s too late’?” Dany asked with a raised brow. “Do you mean his—”

“He bleeds internally,” Melisandre replied causing Dany to start in surprise. She shared a quick look with Maester Luwin, who was confused for he hadn’t understood her words. “The more we stand here arguing, the less time he has. I must heal him now before it takes control of his body.”

“Heal him?” Dany eyed her from head to toe. “I do not see any medical equipment with you. What could you possibly do?”

“Did he not reveal that I was the one responsible for healing those wounds on his abdomen?” came the almost condescending query. “I see he did not. However, my request remains open, Your Grace. Will you let me heal him?”

Dany struggled; torn between wanting to believe her yet concerned that she might end up doing more harm to the man she loved. She looked to the others, and those who had understood her request, all had the same conflicting emotions on their faces.
Missandei was the first to speak up. “Your Grace, perhaps we should give her a shot. You did tell me how surprised you were that Jon’s wounds had healed that well and fast, and if she was the one responsible for it—”

“But she is a red priestess,” Jorah argued. “And they are not to be trusted. Besides, aren’t we forgetting her track record? Everyone she’s been involved with has not met a particularly good end.”

“I might not be the sharpest knife in the drawer sometimes,” Davos interjected, “But even I’m willing to give this bloody priestess a chance to do what she must. But…what do I know? I’m just a smuggler…ex-smuggler.”

“Same here,” Arya piped up. “If she can make him better, then she can do it. But if she screws up and Jon gets even worse…” She took a threatening step toward Melisandre; her grey eyes cold as ice. “She won’t leave Winterfell alive.”

“That’s all well and good,” Robb interrupted with a hand on his sister’s shoulder to rein her in. His gaze was trained on Dany, who was now staring at the sleeping Jon with mingled expressions of love, fear, and frustration on her strained visage. “However, the future Queen’s got to have the final word. So? What say you, Dany? Want to give this red woman a chance? Sansa’s still trying to get Dr. Horwath on the phone, and he could still be backup just in case.”

*You never did tell me she touched you, Jon,* Dany’s mind screamed as the voices around her muted into nothingness. *I had only taken your word that you were a fast healer, so how stupid was I not to query more into how you two must have met in the first place. What else did she do to you that you never told me? Who’s the one not being trustworthy now?*

Pushing away the petty thoughts, she braced herself and turned back to Melisandre. Her voice was even and steady; hardly betraying the conflicting emotions inside. “Fine. You have my permission to heal him, but I will remain in the room to watch what you do.”

“That is fine with me, Your Grace,” Melisandre replied. “Nothing I do should be frightening to you. Besides, everything I do is judged by the Lord of Light. I am only his humble servant and nothing more.”

With that, she motioned for the curtains to be drawn closed, while ordering for the lights to be dimmed and candles brought into the room. When all was provided, including an old-fashioned brazier with its flickering flames, a bowl of warm water, and a wash cloth, she insisted that everyone sit as far from the bed as possible, so she could have enough space to work.

For the next several minutes, silence reigned in the room as everyone watched – including Sansa who had tiptoed in to sit beside Arya – with varying degrees of intrigue. Melisandre was methodical if nothing else; though Dany did have to grit her teeth as she watched her strip Jon down to his underwear as if he were a lover and not some sacrifice to her precious R’hllor. She didn’t help matters by caressing his injured arm with such tenderness, while muttering some unintelligible words beneath her breath, that it was all Dany could do not to rise off her seat, tell everyone the show’s over and drag Jon down to the urgent care center for proper treatment. The Lord of Light be damned.

However, as the priestess began to wash Jon’s body with the water – in which she had poured several drops of a green liquid from a vial hidden in the sleeve of her robe – she continued to mutter her prayers; the words faster and rising in tempo from rouge lips. She focused more intently on Jon’s injured arm, and as she said a particularly harsh word in that foreign tongue, the fire in the brazier sparked loudly at the same time, causing everyone in the room to jump in surprise.

Melisandre did not seem to notice what she had caused, for her features were taut with concentration;
a light sheen of sweat forming on her creased brow as the glow from her choker grew brighter and brighter. The once subtle smell of sage and sandalwood grew more pungent as she rubbed Jon’s arm with the wet cloth in hypnotizing sweeps. Up and down. Up and down. Up and –

Dany had to shake her head to keep alert, for there was something oddly soothing yet terrifying about the whole process. Maester Luwin was no better, for despite his curiosity, his displeasure was still evident in the low grunts emitted now and then beside her. To make matters worse, Dany was sure she had seen a dark shadow leap from the flames.

*I’m just tired that’s all,* she rationalized and rubbed her arms against the sudden chill in the air. *It was nothing. I was just imagining things…*

“It is done.”

Dany blinked and looked away from the fire. Melisandre was clearing away her ‘tools’, her features back to its bewitching serenity. All eyes promptly turned to Jon, perhaps assuming his arm would have returned to its normal size, the dark discoloration faded into its usual fair skin, and –

“Hey,” Arya huffed as she rose to her feet. “He doesn’t look any different! You lied!”

“Hold on now,” Robb stopped her by tugging on the scruff of her jacket, for she was just about ready to lunge for the priestess. All the same, he didn’t look happy either. “She’s got a point though. How’s he any better? I don’t see any difference.”

“It is less swollen,” came the reluctant comment from Maester Luwin who was currently bent over Jon and measuring said arm with a tape. “I measured it when I came in, and now…it’s about an inch less.”

“That’s it?” Sansa asked with a well-shaped brow raised in skepticism. “All that for an inch difference?”

“It will heal,” Melisandre reassured them with a smile. “The Lord of Light works in his own way and at his own pace. I merely summoned him to help speed up the process as best he could.”

Dany shuddered at the memory of the dark shadow she had seen earlier. Summoning spirits? Shadow demons? Wasn’t that something the Dothraki had feared the most? A lesson that had been drilled into her the time Drogo had made the mistake of invading that village where a witch had cursed them all and –

“He still looks normal to me,” Bran observed as he adjusted his glasses while studying his sleeping brother. “Maybe we should all just leave and let him get some rest.”

“Best idea I’ve heard so far,” Davos said with a clap of his hands. “And we best be heading out to Bear Island before the storm kicks in. We were just coming to tell you that, Your Grace, before the excitement happened.”

“If you want me to stay, I can always postpone the trip,” Jorah interjected with a bow.

“Nonsense,” Dany replied; a warm smile on her lips. “I insist you leave as quickly as possible. I know how much you’ve wanted to return home, and you cannot miss this opportunity. I look forward to your return with your dear cousin, Lyanna, if she agrees to the meeting of the Northern leaders.”

“It would be our honor,” Jorah said with a faint hue of red dusting his cheeks. He clasped her hands and kissed the back of them with reverence before saying his goodbyes to the rest of the Stark
family; thanking them for their warm hospitality.

“What do we do with her?” Grey Worm asked forcing them all to acknowledge Melisandre, who still stood silently beside the bed while Maester Luwin and Missandei made Jon comfortable.

“Your call, Dany,” Robb said with a shrug. “Personally, I’d keep her in one of our dun…eh…lower guest rooms until Jon’s fully healed. If he’s not any better in at least three days…”

He left the proposition dangling, and Dany didn’t need to have that explained. She gave a curt nod of understanding and locked gazes with the priestess. “It will be done. She will be kept for observation, and as the Lord of Winterfell has proclaimed, your death will be eminent should Jon show no signs of healing.”

“Of course,” Melisandre agreed with a bow. “I thank you for your leniency, my Lord and Queen.”

She did not object when Grey Worm grabbed her by the arm to lead her out of the room with the rest of the Starks trailing after them. Maester Luwin remained to leave some basic instructions on how to monitor Jon’s arm, though he insisted that Dany have something to help her get some rest. In his words, she looked positively peaked. With a weak laugh, she politely declined his offer of a cup of tea sprinkled with several grains of sweetsleep, though Missandei jokingly raised her hand to get some.

Eventually they were alone, and as Missandei left the bathroom - where she had prepared Dany’s evening bath - she observed her friend sitting bedside, already curled into a rather uncomfortable chair and nodding off. She hated to have to wake her, but Dany had insisted she have that bath tonight. As if sensing Missandei’s return, Dany jerked awake with a soft cry. For a moment, her gaze was disoriented until it met the smiling visage before her. Missandei was on her haunches.

“You dozed off,” she whispered as she reached for Dany’s hands. “Do you want me to give you a bath instead?”

Dany squeezed her friend’s hands in gratitude; her gaze drifting to the still sleeping man. “I…I’ll be okay. You should be getting some rest as well.”

“Don’t worry about me,” Missandei insisted. “Besides, I promised Monterys I’ll sing him to sleep later. He’s still worried he’s the reason his Uncle Jon is hurt. Rickon had to stay behind to keep his mind off things.”

Dany’s heart wrenched at the thought. “The poor baby. Tell him I’ll see him first thing in the morning, okay? And he’s not to worry about a single thing. His Uncle Jon will be just fine…he’ll see.”

Missandei smiled and kissed Dany goodnight. However, as she was about to leave the room, she was stopped by the barely audible question filled with such pure concern, Missandei was ready to swivel back into the room to keep her company for the rest of the night.

“He will be okay, won’t he?” Dany asked as she reached out to caress Jon’s forehead and cheek. “He won’t…he won’t be any different when he wakes up, will he? He’ll still be the same Jon I know and love, won’t he?”

Missandei held in her doubts, for she was no fan of red priests or priestesses, but for her friend, she would have to hope for the best.

“He will be okay, my Queen,” she said with admirable conviction. “After all, he is a Stark, and he won’t be defeated that easily.”
A Stark and a Targaryen, my dearest Missandei, Dany thought with a soft smile. *He has always been a dragon, and it is time to put that to the test.*

It was a pitiful fire all things considered, but Jon wasn’t about to complain about its size. He rubbed his hands together; the warmth barely seeping into gloved hands almost numb from the frigid conditions. Beside him, Ghost continued his melancholy howl; his majestic muzzle pointed toward the heavens as he sang songs of loneliness and longing.

“Seven hells, Ghost,” Jon muttered as he hunched even deeper within himself. “Keep it down, will you? You’re depressing the fuck out of me.”

His only response was another howl accentuated with a low whine. The beast trotted back to his master to lay at his feet; those blood-red eyes looking up at Jon with blatant accusation. Jon did his best to ignore it, but after five minutes of this—

“It’s better here!” he argued with a wave toward the empty stretch of chiseled ice stretching into an endless horizon. “I like it up here. I get to stay with you and…and…”

Ghost raised his paw to his forehead as if exasperated. Usually, such an act would have Jon laughing for it really did appear as if Ghost was doing the animal equivalent of a face palm. Unfortunately, he felt anything but humorous as the wind picked up and his measly fire eventually flickered out to leave them in semi-darkness. Ghost whined again as Jon looked up to the brightly lit heavens where seemingly a million sparkling diamonds blanketed the sky. It was beautiful here. Savage, but beautiful, and perhaps he would get to show her what it was really like at The Wall someday…

Ghost nudged his shin with his muzzle and whined again.

Jon sighed. “Right. Right. I get it. I should go back. Geez, Ghost. You really are a pain in the ass, you know that?” Yet he reached out to scratch behind his ears, before fighting back a laugh as his companion tried to lay his massive head upon Jon’s lap. Ghost closed his eyes in content and let out another whine.

“Yeah, I know,” Jon whispered as he buried his face into the soothing warmth of fur and closed his eyes. He could barely swallow the hard lump to form in his throat. “I wish she had met you too.”

He couldn’t tell exactly what had his lashes flying open, but when he did, it was to feeling as if he had been submerged beneath an icy lake and the simple concept of breathing involved him gulping desperately for air into his lungs. He didn’t feel cold per se, but he couldn’t resist shivering all the same as wide and frantic brown eyes darted around his surroundings as if trying to reconcile where he had been and what reality presented.

*She was here,* was his first absurd thought, and this time the shiver to go through him had nothing to do with the temperature.
He rubbed his arms; idly noticing he was wearing one of his old t-shirts and stared blindly at the flickering flames within the hearth before him. He was in his bedroom, which was good, but why couldn’t he shake the feeling that the red woman had been here? Or was it just a part of his dream that he really couldn’t remember? As he rubbed his chin in bewildered contemplation, the sudden sound of his bathroom door opening, had him stiffening in response and looking up quickly.

For some wild reason, he had fully expected Melisandre to step out of there, but at the sight of Dany still vigorously drying her hair with a towel, Jon felt something hard and undefinable slam into his chest. It was a ‘something’ that left him feeling just as breathless as the moment he had awakened. He watched as she did that familiar forward toss of her head – letting all the wet strands fall downward like silvery tendrils before wrapping it in two swift moves within the towel to form a turban. Jon had once tried to do that, and almost sent her into laughing fits at his failure to achieve the same effect. He must have finally made a sound, for she looked up with widened eyes in his direction, her low gasp almost bringing a reluctant smile to his lips.

Dear gods, she looked adorable.

“Ah…”

Her opened mouth snapped shut, and she shyly fidgeted with the belt of the bathrobe while shuffling from one foot to the other. Jon waited patiently, for though his traitorous body begged for him to pounce and take his fill of what she offered; a smaller voice warned him to control his raging libido. If memory served him right, the last time they had spoken, they were this close to shouting each other into –

“You’re finally awake,” came the quiet commentary which had him raising a brow in confusion.

“What do you mean ‘finally’? How long was I out? Last I remember the maester was trying to kill me by…ah!”

It was at this point, he even remembered exactly what had caused him to be stuck in bed in the first place. He glanced at his left arm…and then stared just a little bit longer. Something wasn’t right.

“She healed you,” Dany said, forcing Jon to look up with astonishment. “The red witch…I mean priestess,” she added as she walked toward the bed; still with that guarded wariness that implied she too hadn’t forgotten they hadn’t exactly left off on happier terms. However, if the sight of the empty bottles of water, a bookmarked novel, her cellphone with ear buds, and several discarded dessert wraps were any indication, someone had made camp at his bedside for goodness knows how long. Her face, flushed with embarrassment at the mess, was turned away as she began picking up the trash. She continued speaking all the same.

“You’ve been out for the past four days. Maybe it was a combination of all the milk of the poppy Maester Luwin gave you, or what Melisandre did, but either way…you were in and out of it for a while. Whatever she did to your arm, it worked, but I guess the real test should come when you move it around. To see if there’s any lingering after effects or…”

Jon was already doing so, though with some caution. He lifted his arm and braced himself for the familiar throb, but when he felt nothing but a light twinge from disuse, he flexed the appendage toward him slowly. Back and forth, back and forth…nothing. Not a single flicker of shooting pain that would have otherwise had him cursing or fighting back a groan of discomfort.

Amazing.

“Guess we won’t have to kill her anymore,” Dany said with a wry smile, which caused Jon to look
at her in disbelief.

“Kill her? Why?”

“We weren’t sure if she was actually telling the truth about being able to heal you. So, we put her in one of your…guest rooms to keep an eye on her. If you hadn’t healed in at least three days, we were going to get rid of her.”

“Ah…wait a minute…how did she even get here?”

Dany sighed and tossed away the garbage into a wastebasket. “She claimed she followed us. Apparently, she’s been keeping tabs on us…well you to be more exact…and felt she was needed here. She kept blabbing something about you being the ‘prince that was promised’, and as you can well imagine, we were all freaked out over it. Or perhaps you think I must have told her about your birthright? After all, I’m the great keeper of secrets, and she was probably working with me the whole time, right?”

This time, when their eyes met, the simmering emotions stirred with their unfinished argument rose to the surface. Jon let out a shuddering breath before pulling back the blanket to rise to his feet. They might as well get this over and done with.

“I wouldn’t advise you to…” Dany began, and Jon, who might have ignored whatever she was about to say, nearly stumbled to the floor as his weakened leg muscles protested. It was only four days, but he had to hold onto the bedpost to control himself. Unfortunately, if he had hoped to look ‘tough’ to his woman, his bladder had other plans.

“Bathroom?” Dany asked with a smirk that had Jon’s features flushed despite his attempt to scowl. “I’d help you get there, but you’ll probably smack my hand away.”

“I can walk, thank you very much.”

“Be my guest.” She turned back to her cleanup, leaving Jon to huff and grunt his way to a bathroom that seemed miles away.

She winced as he collided with the door, his colorful expletive forcing her to bite her lower lip to control the spontaneous burst of laughter which would have erupted. She made a show of wrapping the ear buds around the phone, still listening to his every move – as he hadn’t bothered to close said door – and itching to go in there to help. She longed to tell him of how she had made camp beside him these past few days, only getting up to use the bathroom or open the windows to let in some air despite the freezing temperatures. The snowstorm officially began the night before, and though it had involved a lot of wind and heavy hail-like snow, for the most part (at least according to the locals), it didn’t seem to be that much of big deal.

“Will probably pass on by tomorrow,” Robb had deduced. “But we can never be too sure. The weather up here can be unpredictable.”

They had understood her need to be with Jon. None had acted judgmental or upset with her refusals to join them downstairs, and her meals were always sent up to her. It was heartwarming whenever the siblings did come to visit, and though they’d make light jokes about how ‘restful’ he looked, there was no mistaking their concerns despite the obvious healed hand. She could almost imagine how excited they’d be to see him up and about again.

Something clattered, quite loudly, on the floor in the bathroom. Dany tensed, waiting for the incoming curse, but was only rewarded with a long-suffering sigh of such weariness, it was more
than enough for her to come to a decision.

F*ck his pissed off attitude. She was going in.

“What are you doing…?” he began as he watched her barge into the room to pick up the shaving kit that had slipped from his fingers.

“Dany, you don’t have to-”

With a stern frown, choosing not to speak for fear all the words stored within her would explode in a most unladylike manner, she turned on the faucet and let the water run until it became warm enough. She unzipped the black leather kit, pulling out his supplies and setting things up as he liked it. When the water was warm enough, she grabbed a face towel and another to wrap around his shoulders, beforemotioning for him to sit on the toilet seat, while she grabbed a wooden stool to sit before him.

“Dany, you really don’t-”

“Are you going to shut up and let me do this or not?”

Though her voice was brusque, and her gaze trained in his direction, it was almost impossible to meet those mocha eyes directly. She focused on the unruly curls upon his forehead, wondering if a haircut was in order as well. Maybe it was something in the way in which he was so close to her now; where his every breath – the steady rise and fall of a chest she had watched with near crippling anxiety these past few days – was the divine sign that he was still alive. He hadn’t woken up being some strange creature speaking in tongues or unable to recognize her. This was still the Jon she loved, and even if he wasn’t a hundred percent happy with her right now, she would cherish this precious moment of being able to breathe the same damn air he inhaled.

She bit her lower lip and lowered her gaze from the tempting sight of his full parted lips; her hand continuing to whisk the water into a fine lather to wash his beard. She cursed at the trembling of her hands, when some of the water slushed to the floor to wet their feet. She wanted, more than anything, to be pulled into his arms again. She wanted to claim those twin plump pieces of flesh; to savor and nip and lick them until they were swollen with her passion. She wanted to moan into his mouth, to taste and suckle on his tongue until –

“Seven hells, Dany,” came the low growl of undeniable need, caused by the unfortunate yet tantalizing view of her full breasts every damn time she moved forward. Either she hadn’t tied the robe’s sash tight enough or it was too big for her. “You’re not making this any easier for me,” he almost pleaded.

She looked up just enough to notice his helpless gulp; his Adam’s apple bobbing with suppressed desire as she imagined her tongue licking the skin there and –

Fuck!

“We can talk now if you want,” she said much too loudly as she wet his cheeks and jaw. “Get it all out if you must.”

“Like this?” he asked incredulously as he dutifully turned to the left and then right to let her lather him. “When my father…I mean Ned and Catelyn used to have their arguments, I don’t think they did it in the bathroom while he was shaving.”

“That’s them, and this is us. So, start talking, Jon Snow.”

“Fine.” He took a deep breath and tried not to shiver at the spine-tingling sensation of her fingers
against his flesh. He had to focus, and if this was some trick of hers to get him to lose his concentration…

I might not last through this at all.

“First off…just how rich are you? I know buying out the entire Stark Corporation and its holdings didn’t just come from the money those masters at Slavers Bay gave you, and I don’t think Drogo’s paying alimony so…how? Where? Is there something you’re not telling me?”

Dany sighed. “I’m not a pauper, Jon…or perhaps I should say ‘we’.”

“Huh?”

“We, the Targaryens,” she explained with a ghost of a smile. “Did you really think our ancestors would have no holdings anywhere especially at the Iron Bank?”

“I thought the stories said that the Targaryens were in debt—”

“Doubt it. At least some of them were astute enough to keep their savings at that godless hive of greed. However, those savings were locked away and held in Nestoris’s possession after the coup d’état that eliminated our family. No one was to know about it especially Viserys and I. However, thanks to a certain…source, I’d come to learn that if either of us showed any signs of being willing to take over the Iron Throne, those vaults were ours for the taking. My alleged ‘conquering’ of Slavers Bay was all Nestoris needed to see. He sang like a bird when we showed up at his doorstep to claim our inheritance.” She paused, before adding quietly. “Besides, it looks like Stannis Baratheon missed quite an opportunity at Dragonstone. He was literally sitting on a goldmine…or should I say priceless ore.”

“Priceless ore?”

“Dragonglass. It’s beautiful…words can’t adequately express how it looks. It’s something for you to experience in person.”

“Ah…I see.” That was one major concern eliminated, and he hated to admit it lifted just one bit of the burden off his shoulders. If she had been involved in other nefarious dealings without his knowledge, he wasn’t sure what he would have done. He worried his lower lip, then wished he hadn’t as the lather got into his mouth, before clearing his throat to continue his line of questioning.

“Did you know who I was from the beginning?”

“No, I did not.”

“But you must have chosen my uncle’s place for a reason. You knew he was a Stark, right?”

“I didn’t know the particulars at the time,” Dany admitted; as she racked her memory to remember the exact way the conversation went. “All I know is that Tyrion and Jorah had done the searching for the best place to hide me, and they chose that apartment complex. They didn’t tell me who oversaw it. Not that it would have made any difference.” She began to rinse out the beard with a wet cloth. “If you recall, you were never supposed to be a part of this. You shoved your curious nose into things and look what happened.”

Jon scoffed and got some soap into his mouth for that. Spitting it away, he shook his head lightly; eyes darkening with the memory. “So, Tyrion must have known about my Uncle Benjen from the beginning. He just never told you.”
“That’s right.”

“So that time at the wharf…behaving as if he had met me for the first time was probably just an act?”

“Perhaps,” Dany replied with a sigh. “As ashamed as I am to admit this, I do confess I wasn’t always up to speed with what Tyrion did behind the scenes back then, so perhaps he did know your Uncle Benjen and was aware that he would be an invaluable ally.”

“Hmm.”

It almost always came down to that goddamn dwarf, didn’t it? What else had he done behind the scenes without Dany’s knowledge? Those doubts that had festered within Jon were now growing into tiny buds of concern. Unfortunately, he lost his track of thinking when her massaging hands sent delightful waves of pleasure down to an already stiffening organ trapped within his pajamas bottoms.

Dear gods, help him.

This was so not the right time to sport a raging boner.

“And Varys,” he grated out with some effort as he forced his gaze to the ceiling and tried to conjure up the image of the bald man with the effeminate mannerisms. “Did you have him look into my background?”

Dany’s fingers faltered for a moment, and then she took a deep breath.

“Yes.”

Jon’s eyes widened, though a part of him felt he really shouldn’t have been that surprised at this revelation.

“If you were going to work with me, I had to know more about you,” Dany stated as she met his gaze. “Any good leader would tell you the same thing.”

Good point, but still –

“So, Varys dug up all the dirt on me? You knew about everything I had done before I even told you?”

“Not everything…especially not what Robb told me the other day.”

Jon raised a brow; his lips curling in slight derision. “Really? And what did my dear brother feed your head with? Stories of all the sufferings and torture under Catelyn? Of how it all messed up my mind or traumatized me etcetera etcetera?”

“You don’t have to sound that way, Jon-”

“Sound what way? Like I’m tired of people feeling sorry for me? I don’t need your goddamn pity-”

“You don’t have to sound that way, Jon-”

“Sound what way? Like I’m tired of people feeling sorry for me? I don’t need your goddamn pity-”

“And I’m not giving it!” she snapped back; her patience finally running its course. “If you thought for one second that I was going to sit here trying to work through your childhood traumas, as if I’m some shrink, then you’ve picked the wrong girl, Jon Snow. I am not your psychiatrist. I don’t have the magic words to make all the pain go away, and I’m not about to pretend as if you’re some special case that deserves all the coddling in the world. What you went through was more than unfortunate, and goodness knows if I had the power to go back in Time, I might have either whisked you away or beaten your stepmother to death. Sadly, it couldn’t be the former because my childhood was just as
shitty. I haven’t even begun to tell you half the crap I went through, but why should you care? All that matters is how hurt you are over my decision not to be more forthright about something that shouldn’t even be a big deal in the fucking first place!”

The ringing silence after her outburst was almost deafening, and Dany was horrified to find her vision blurring. Angry at her behavior, she wiped her face with the sleeve of her robe and took a deep shuddering breath to compose herself.

Gratefully, Jon remained silent; their uneven breathing the only sounds to shatter the illusion of peace. He remained quiet as she dried him, then raised the clipper to begin trimming his beard as he had taught her. She had to lean closer still to do so, and in that moment, Jon just might have seized those quivering pink lips in a kiss for her forgiveness. He really did hate to see her cry, especially knowing he was responsible for it. The words he longed to say remained lodged in his throat, almost constricting him until he felt he would choke on them. At her whispered command for him to turn his cheek, he did so and closed his eyes in misery.

Fuck. He couldn’t even have a proper decent fight without fucking things up, could he?

“Oh.”

“Sorry,” she whispered quickly; squinting to make sure he wasn’t bleeding. They both reached out at the same time to feel the tender area beneath his chin, when their fingers brushed against each other’s. It was almost ridiculous to feel a jolt of electricity at the contact considering how intimate their setting has been all this time, but it still didn’t stop their dual involuntary gasps of awareness.

The heat crept up her neck until she was a lovely shade of red, and as she made a desperate attempt to pull away, he hooked her finger with his to hold her prisoner.

Oh, dear gods.

It hurt too much to look at him now, and she stubbornly kept her gaze on that throbbing pulse at his powerful neck; unaware of the need to match her pulse with his. She would tell herself not to shiver as he leaned closer; his warm breath bathing her skin as he inhaled her scent and exhaled with a breathless sigh. She would tell herself not to whimper as his lips brushed against her flesh, sending a million prickly goosebumps to the surface. She would tell herself not to arch into that touch, lashes drifting closed, breathing becoming more uneven and slightly labored; shivering as the bristles of his freshly shaved cheek rubbed against her. She resisted the urge to squirm on the stool, to clamp her thighs together, to not submit to the forming heat and wetness between them; that a wild part of her was willing to finish the job if he would not help satiate the growing need…

Nononononono!

“I’m sorry,” she gasped with a firm push against his shoulders to shove him away. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, okay? I’m fucking sorry!”

“Dany-”

“You’re upset because you have trust issues, and I thought I knew all about you in these past few months, but we really don’t know each other, and I don’t…I never want you to think you can’t trust me, Jon. I know I should have been more forthright with you, and I promise to do my best from now on. And-”

“Geez, slow down!” He interrupted with a slap of his hand over her mouth.

He was smiling a little, and there was something rather odd about his face, until she realized it looked
‘off’ thanks to his moustache. They were yet to get to that part. And why in seven hells was she concerned about that, when it was all she could not to bite his palm.

“You promise to keep quiet and let me talk,” he said earning a feverish nod from her. When he was sure she wasn’t going to go into more hysterics, he released her with a shake of his head. “And here I thought I’d be the one having to apologize first.”

He met her puzzled gaze. “Arya gave me a tongue lashing on the way here, and as much as I kept telling myself that I was going to remain pissed at you…I’ve come to realize just how fucking hard that is. Hell, even Ghost wasn’t too pleased with me.”

“Ghost?”

Jon blushed at the incredulous expression on her face. “I usually dream of him,” he admitted sheepishly. “Actually, the dreams have been more frequent lately…at least from the moment I met you. It’s almost like he never left, and if I close my eyes, I can still feel and see him. You really would have loved him…and vice versa.”

Dany lowered the clippers to the floor and reached for his hands. She drew them onto her lap and squeezed them gently. “You never told me about your dreams.”

“I never thought you’d be interested.”

“What makes you think that? In case you haven’t noticed yet, I’m usually the one waking up to your random rambles or cries in the middle of the night, and whenever I ask what happened, you tell me it’s nothing or I forgot.”

“Ah…”

“Just like you probably forgot about your meeting with Melisandre, and how she was the one responsible for healing your wounds. I don’t believe you mentioned that to me, Jon.”

Jon cleared his throat; wincing as he felt the extra hard squeeze of his hands and the knowing expression in her eyes. “I guess I owe you an apology for that, but it wasn’t anything salacious. She crept up on me at Robert’s den and just…touched my stomach, and that was it. I was in such disbelief, I just didn’t think she had really healed me like some goddamn shaman.”

“Well, she did, and now she seems to think you’ll keep her around.”

“Why would I do that?”

Dany shrugged. “She’s still in the dun…guestroom-”

“You can say ‘dungeon’, Dany. We have them here at Winterfell.”

She ignored his smirk and rolled her eyes. “You have the final say-so over what happens to her.”

“Well…she could come in handy in our court someday,” Jon mused with a purse of his lips. “I mean, if the maesters and doctors don’t get any ailment remedied-”

“No, thanks,” Dany interjected with such vehemence, it set Jon back a bit. “One experience with someone who worships shadow demons is enough for me. I won’t have her in my court.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Dany couldn’t help the smile tugging at her lips, and he didn’t help matters by pretending to look
shocked as he leaned closer. “Is that a genuine smile on my fair lady’s face? Could it possibly be a sign of good fortunes ahead? I must be the luckiest man in the world to have you smile upon me – your lowly servant. I shall lack nothing else.”

“Oh, shut it,” she finally gave in with a chuckle; releasing his hands only to find herself suddenly tugged onto his lap and held on tight as if he was afraid to let go. He buried his face against her neck and whispered the words so quietly, she almost held her breath to hear him.

“I’m sorry, zheh jalan athirari anni. I am so, so sorry. I’ll try as well,” he continued in that same subdued tone of repentance. “Try not to keep secrets from each other…well, maybe not reveal every single secret, but…I wouldn’t mind sharing them with you and only you.”

“Jon-”

“I’m not perfect, Dany,” he confessed. “I get into mood swings, and I can be impossible to deal with sometimes, but I know I can be an even better men-”

“And King,” she murmured as she buried her face into his hair. “Shek ma shieraki anni. Together.”

“Yes, with you - my Queen - by my side,” he finished, and she was sure she could feel him blushing against her. If the feather-light kiss to her neck was any indication.

“In that case, my King, we’ve got a lot of secrets to reveal before dinner, but not sitting on this godforsaken toilet seat.”

“My ass does hurt from staying in this position for too long.”

“There you go,” she replied as she pulled back to eye him with a playful smirk. “Any recommendations as to where we can continue this conversation?”

Jon stared longingly into the bedroom, and then eyed their current position. “As much as I’d love to carry you to bed, my dearest, my legs are still not at a hundred percent. So perhaps-”

She silenced him then with a fevered kiss; her arms snaking their way around his broad shoulders until they caught him in an embrace he was not willing to be released from anytime soon.

So, yes this was almost always guaranteed to happen, but he hoped and prayed that this was only going to be a start to a whole new chapter of their lives. It wasn’t going to be easy for either of them to completely let go of years spent lurching around in the darkest recesses of their minds; wondering if Death wasn’t the only way to go. However, they had both stubbornly clung to Life, and despite the twists and turns along the way, it had brought them to this moment.

All they had to do was make the goddamn best of it.

He moaned into her mouth, his impatient hands now tugging the most offensive sash he had ever seen. With a wicked smile, she captured his lower lip between her teeth and acquiesced to his restless demand by straddling him completely and spreading her legs apart to give him all the room (and view) he could ever possibly need.

“All fucking praise to the old gods.”

Large, and quite steady, hands held her undulating hips in place. He stared hungrily at those tempting glistening pink folds he longed to savor; the heady musk to fill the air almost driving him insane. Gods, he was going to make her scream his name.
“Four days, you said?” he groaned like a man depraved.

“Four long days,” she agreed with a harsh intake of breath as he finally moved.

“Babe, we’ve got a lot of catching up to do.”
Well, I'm officially going to be a year older tomorrow (the 17th depending on when you read this), so an early b-day present for me to get this done on time *lol*

Enjoy, and thanks as always for the feedback! *bows gratefully*

“Why do you have that goofy smile on your face?”

She started in surprise at being caught daydreaming; a dark flush filling her embarrassed features. She composed herself quickly and drew her brows into a scowl.

“What’s it to you, Jon? Shouldn’t you be somewhere pouting?”

Her annoying half-sibling (bastard brother) sneered and hopped gracefully from one boulder to the next. He tore off a twig from a nearby underbrush, which he dipped into the trickling brook to sweep back and forth as if in search of an elusive fish.

When she realized he had no intention of making himself scarce anytime soon, she sighed and rolled her eyes to the heavens.

“If you must know,” she finally declared in a tone that clearly stated ‘after-this-please-leave’. “Beren Tallhart asked me to the homecoming dance, and I said yes.”

Jon made a gagging noise while pretending to be choking.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” she snapped.
“It means,” Jon replied with a light grunt as he just missed capturing a silvery trout. “Beren Tallhart is a fucking tool, and I don’t know why you’d be so happy to be dating him. You can do better, Sansa.”

In a swift move, she was on her feet; her beautiful visage now flushed with indignation.

“Shut up, Jon! You’re just jealous no one asked you to the dance!”

“I don’t care about the stupid dance,” he countered with a shrug of his shoulders. “All I’m saying is that he’s not worth it. That dude cheats on every girl he dates. Hell, he brags about it in the locker room all the-”

“Beren won’t cheat on me,” Sansa interrupted with a fold of her arms across her chest. “He cares about me and he said as much. Besides, I don’t need you giving me relationship advice. You’ve not had a single girlfriend, and you want to know why?”

Jon rose to his feet without turning around. It was as if he already knew what she was going to say from the hunch of his shoulders in that all too familiar position of self-preservation.

She knew she had to stop. She knew how hurtful it would be to him, but her mouth had other plans; knowing full well that a tiny part of her enjoyed taunting and making him suffer just as much as she did.

“Because you’re a bastard, Jon Snow,” she declared in smug victory. “And no decent girl, in her right mind, would ever want to be with you. You’ll live to be an old man with no one to ever love you, so you might as well just prepare to live on the goddamn Wall for the rest of your life!”

Ouch.

She stared at the blossoming drop of blood on her finger with distant fascination; perhaps wondering how it could be so thick and dark from just a little prick. Sticking it into her mouth, she allowed the coppery taste to fill her tongue as she laid down the needle and studied the delicate piece of lace – in the pattern of a dragon - she’d been working on.

The bodice-fitted long-sleeved gown and cape of fine grey wool gabardine trimmed with faux fur (as she wasn’t quite sure if its wearer would approve of using the real thing) was finished, but being the perfectionist, she was still dissatisfied with a few elements that would require an extra hem or stitch. The design and creation of the garments had begun the day Robb announced Jon’s intention to return home with Daenerys Targaryen; a woman many fashion designers secretly craved to dress. After all, the notion that the possible future queen of Westeros would choose their creations for her coronation or any other public event, was going to be one hell of a boost for their brand. So yes, a part of her had done this for that superficial reason, but for the most part, it was an excuse to create something new and different for a woman she had now come to reluctantly admire. No sensible woman would have ever wanted to tackle the chaos that was Westeros, and yet, here she was – barging into their continent like a vengeful inferno – determined to take back what was rightfully hers.

Her once bastard half-brother – now a prince or heir to the damn throne himself – was currently dating said vengeful inferno. That Daenerys Targaryen.
His girlfriend.

The irony of it all was almost too cruelly comical. Ten years ago, she had scoffed and mocked him over his fate to never find love, and now he had returned home with a woman who was clearly as smitten as he was. Ignoring the fact that they were related, and the subject of incest was queasy enough, Sansa knew she would have to concede to the reality that she had finally lost this silent battle of wills between them.

He was right all along.

Beren Tallhart was a weasel; a two-timing, cheating, lying son-of-a-bitch, who had the balls to make out with Jeanette Dover on the night of the dance! Insisting he had to use the restroom, he left Sansa waiting in the dance hall for over an hour, where she had spent most of the time ignoring the pitying looks that came her way from everyone else who must have known. She had handsewn her shimmering yellow organza gown, which everyone claimed was to die for. She had washed her thick mass of auburn hair and spent a lot of time getting the curls just right for him. Her make-up was enough to give her a sense of innocence with a tinge of the stunning woman she would become. In fact, Mom had exclaimed at how gorgeous she looked, and all for what? To discover her dear ‘boyfriend’ almost balls deep in that slut on the football field’s bleachers.

Humiliated wasn’t a strong enough word for how she felt.

She couldn’t escape fast enough. Unfortunately, since Beren had driven her there, there was no way she could demand he take her home, and she was too embarrassed to call Robb to pick her up. So, braving the chilly evening, she had slinked all the way to the castle with her tail between her legs; red-eyed, puffy-faced, and miserable. The last person she wanted to see was Arya, who would have mocked her mercilessly, or Jon, who would have gone ‘I told you so’. That was even worse.

However, when she woke up the next day to see a simple note stuck beneath her bedroom door with the words: **You were too good for him anyway**, written in his familiar scrawl of a handwriting, she burst into tears again. She was unaware of how much she needed that validation from someone…**anyone** to boost her shattered self-esteem.

She would make it up to Jon by leaving a couple of her favorite lemon cakes by his dinner plate that night; never admitting to peeking at him as he relished the dessert with gusto. By some upspoken rule neither sibling would bring up the topic again, even if the rest of her love life was anything but a fairytale.

The boys (or men) she managed to even show an inkling of interest in were almost always pompous, arrogant, or downright unable to keep their dicks in their pants. When she showed no signs of wanting to have sex with them on a second date (or even the first), they chose to move on. Some bored her to death; incapable of holding a conversation that didn’t involve sporting events or some inane movie she had no interest in. The longest relationship she ended up being in was for only seven months. Six months of absolute bliss, where she was sure she had eventually found the man of her dreams, until he showed his true colors.

The first time he hit her, she blamed herself for it. The second time, she took the blame again and had to wear long sleeves for almost a month. The third time, she returned to Winterfell with a split lip and a black eye, which was more than enough for an enraged Robb. When word got to her that he had left the North for an unknown destination, she would later learn that Robb and Jon had paid him a late-night visit for a ‘conversation’.

Sansa had a good idea of just how that conversation went. After all, the Starks weren’t particularly known to be chatty with their mouths.
She picked up the needle again to continue working when another muted roar from below filtered through the thick granite walls and into her private sanctuary. So far, she had done her best to ignore the festivities, especially considering how the storm had forced her to cancel a dinner event she had put so much thought and energy into.

However, as another roar went up, soon followed by the chanting of what sounded like ‘Fight! Fight! Fight!’, Sansa set aside the clothing to see what the fuss was about.

She had to go down the narrow winding stone steps to the next landing to get a good view. Spotting Jeyne, standing amongst a smattering of castle servants, Sansa moved to stand beside her. Jeyne was clapping and hooting in earnest at what was taking place; her usually sweet features aglow with excitement. Below them, in just one of the many courtyards within the castle, a raucous crowd of about a hundred or so smallfolk and castle habitants, had formed a rough circle around the ‘combatants’ who were braced for a fight of some sort.

“Place your bets!” Rickon was yelling as he darted around the circle collecting money from those willing to part with it. Bran, surprisingly, was doing the same thing at the other side of the yard. His best friend, an oversized giant of a man-child, who went by the name of Hodor, was making the loudest noise; stomping his feet and screaming ‘Hodor! Hodor! Hodor!’ at the top of his lungs. No one tried to shut him up as they were already so used to his antics. He was simple-minded, but he had the sweetest and kindest disposition of anyone around Winterfell.

Robb was sitting on a makeshift throne, which was nothing more than one of the chairs dragged in from the Great Hall and placed upon a slab of hard granite. He was flanked, to his left, by Lord Rodrik Cassel who was looking quite pleased and didn’t have that familiar dour expression on his visage, while Lord Wyman Manderly – of all people – was roaring in glee on Robb’s right. His generous frame nearly toppled off the stool he was sitting on, and Sansa wondered when the wealthy merchant had arrived. It must have been within the hour because he was still dressed in outdoor clothing.

“Oh hi, Sansa!” Jeyne greeted when she finally noticed the silent redhead beside her. “ Didn’t even hear you come. Isn’t this exciting? Seeing the future queen of Westeros about to fight?”

Sansa raised a brow, trying not to show her amazement. “Really? Daenerys Targaryen is going to fight? Who?”

“Why, Arya, of course!” Jeyne replied with a laugh. “It was over breakfast, and she kept pestering everyone…well Dany mostly…to engage her in a sparring session. So, Dany, being polite and all, didn’t want to get into it, but Arya then stood on the table and went “If I beat four soldiers then you have to spar with me!” and then everyone went “whoa!” and then Dany was caught and couldn’t back out because everyone was now into it especially Lord Manderly, who arrived just at the tail end of Arya’s speech and wagered one thousand gold dragons to the winner! There was no way Dany could back out now.”

Sansa was still too stunned at this information as she leaned over the stone railing to get a good look at the fighters. Arya was recognizable with her crew cut, while twirling her weapon; a slender and rather elegant sword Jon had given her as a birthday gift several years ago. She had named it ‘Needle’; something Sansa was sure had to do with mocking her penchant for being a seamstress. The future queen of Westeros, on the other hand, was currently being ‘coached’ by an enthusiastic boyfriend and a chirpy white-haired kid sitting upon his shoulders. Sansa couldn’t make out exactly what was being said, but the body language was more than enough to tell the tale.

A princess who fights…while her prince and son send her off to battle. It’s like something from the pages of those fantasy stories I used to love reading as a child.
There was something about the silver-haired woman, who was currently holding up her ponytails in a bun atop her head, that drew you to her. It was an inexplicable magnetic pull to focus one’s attention on her no matter how many others were in the room. There was a smile on her face as she listened to Jon, before bursting into laughter at something he said while attempting to swat him away playfully. His own laughter mingled with hers, causing Sansa’s heart to skip a beat at the wonderful sound.

Seeing Jon smile, let alone really laugh, was a rare event at any given time. Considering the kind of childhood he’d had, where her role hadn’t been all too favorable, it was any wonder he could find anything remotely humorous. Yet, here he was…those usual handsome brooding features alight with a glow she never thought she’d see.

*He’s in love, and she’s the reason for it,* Sansa thought with a pang within her chest. *This beautiful, supposedly aloof Targaryen exiled princess - your flesh and blood - would end up being the one to make you happiest.*

She ought to be happy for him – for **them**. She ought to be clapping her hands and screaming for her – like Jeyne and the rest of the smallfolk. Yet, all she could do was remain watchful, wondering if that part of her that had sought to find some flaw in Daenerys would rise to the surface again. She had hoped to expose her as a phony; her choice to eavesdrop on the heartfelt conversation between Robb and Dany being the excuse she needed. She had listened long enough, ignoring the pricks of painful memories that came rushing back as Robb recounted all that Jon went through. She had not come to feel sorry for her now cousin. No, she had listened with the hopes of catching Dany giving into temptation and falling into the arms of her older brother. If that had happened, she would have taken delight in reporting Dany’s transgressions to Jon; watching him crumple in dismay or become furious with jealousy or – 

**Oh, grow up, Sansa Stark! You should be over this by now!**

She placed a hand against her chest to still the voice of reason. She knew that thought was childish and petulant, for no matter how many times she tried to find something to fault Dany for, all she had observed in the past week was nothing but a woman determined to love her cousin with all she had. From choosing to remain by his bedside while he recuperated; barely eating much in the process, to never leaving his side once he made his appearance to the rest of the household. They almost always held hands when walking together, or sitting side-by-side, or talking in soft whispers as if no one else in the world mattered. They could be selfish with their affections in that way, but Sansa couldn’t really blame them, and she realized – not for the first time – that all she felt could be boiled down to one word.

*Envy.*

Not so much at Dany – who could fault her choices? – but for knowing that she was unlikely to ever experience anything so frustratingly wonderful as she and Jon’s relationship or even Robb and Jeyne’s. Now **those** two could be quite infuriatingly saccharine with their displays of affection.

“Who are you rooting for?” Jeyne asked to interrupt her rampant thoughts. “My money’s on Arya, buuuuut, I’m secretly rooting for Dany.”

**Who was she rooting for?**

Sansa looked down again. Dany was receiving good luck kisses from her boys before Jon yelled something in a strange language Sansa could not comprehend. She would later learn he had cheered her on in Dothraki; a language he was still learning (as well as Valyrian) under his girl’s tutelage. *Fascinating.* Add that to the list of never-ending surprises this new and improved Jon was
The crowd’s cheers grew louder as the referee – Jory Cassel, who was the head of the castle’s guards – clapped his hands and announced for the challengers to step into the ‘ring’. Thanks to the storm, the courtyard – though somewhat protected by the protruding parapets - still had about three to four inches fall overnight. However, much of the snow had been shoveled away, leaving a rather damp and slightly dangerous ground to tread on. Fortunately, both women were secure in boots, so if they did slip and fall, it could only be blamed on their opponent’s skill.

“What’s Dany fighting with?” Sansa asked with a frown. “If Arya’s got Needle, then…”

Her query was answered when a plain wooden stick – could have been the handle of a broom for all Sansa knew – was thrust in her grasp by Missandei. Sansa would have derided her choice of weapon when Dany began to twirl it slowly like a baton as if about to lead a high school band parade. There was an enigmatic smile on the princess’s face as the staff was spun around deft fingers – still slowly as she began to walk toward the center of the ring.

Arya’s name was announced, and though the crowd cheered, her baby sister’s attention was focused on the twirling stick in her opponent’s hand…which was switched to the left and then to the right, and then back again, now moving so much faster that some in the crowd gasped at the sight. The staff was now a blur as Dany spun it over her head before coming to an abrupt stop by holding it before her in a defensive position. This time, when she was introduced, her little trick had earned her a few more admirers for the roar was just as enthusiastic for the visitor.

Smart move, Sansa thought with a reluctant grin. Dany clearly knew she was in ‘enemy’ territory, so not to be outdone, Arya did her best not to show how impressed she was as she too began to twirl Needle in a similar dance.

“Best be careful I don’t cut through your stick, Princess,” she said loud and clear. “Needle bites and stings, and I’m not just going to stick you with it’s pointy end.” This she added with a brief but shared look at Jon, who merely smirked and shrugged. He didn’t seem too concerned with what was about to happen. He must be that confident in his woman’s abilities.

“Fighters ready?” Cassel bellowed.

The women fell into their stances; grey and violet clashing in readiness. Sansa had never been a fan of fights or unnecessary bloodshed, but for some inexplicable reason, she felt the silvery thread of a thrill racing down her spine. Maybe it was the notion of two females going at it in a sport that most men craved. That two women, one more Tom boyish than the other, were capable of being just as ferocious as their male counterparts – it was almost inspiring.

“Begin!” came the command which sent the women rushing toward each other in a burst of speed that took most of the spectator’s breaths away.

Sansa, unaware of her death grip on the railing (while ignoring Jeyne’s cry of ‘Go! Go! Go!’ beside her), focused all her attention on the blur of figures moving around the ring in a wild yet disciplined motion. Sansa was sure Arya would have hacked the staff to pieces with her sword, but she was more than surprised to see that Dany was having the upper hand. The Targaryen was able to parry away any incoming attacks, moving deftly away from Arya’s precise thrusts and blocking them at an angle that prevented Needle’s blade from doing much damage.

There was something also unorthodox about Dany’s movements. Sansa had seen a few sword fights
and fencing matches, where movements followed a distinct pattern. Arya was doing that perfectly; her skill level nothing to sniff at, yet it was difficult to know where Dany was coming from. She seemed to be everywhere and nowhere at once, for when it seemed that Arya would have her at a disadvantage, the princess would use her body as an extension of her weapon; weaving away and striking back twice as hard until Arya – her stubborn, strong-as-all-hell, baby sister, actually tottered on her heels and stumbled to the ground in a graceless heap.

**Oooh!**

Dany might have struck out her staff to claim victory, but Arya had no plans to lose that easy. She rolled to the side, Needle still in hand, and pushed herself off the ground in a reverse flip of sorts. This move had the crowd cheering in delight, and gaining encouragement from that, she charged again; her sword swinging so fast, one could barely make see it. By the time they finally pulled apart, Dany’s staff now had its scars. Needle had done a good job chopping away bits of it until it was now about as long as a shortsword.

“Oooh, she’s got Dany in a corner now,” Jeyne remarked with concern; though the excitement was still in her eyes.

The crowd was beginning to chant their favorite’s names now; and it seemed to be split down the middle. Robb, having to show no bias, could only cheer for both girls, while Lord Manderly stood up to clearly make his choice heard.

“Finish it, Arya Stark of Winterfell!”

“For Winterfell!” Arya bellowed in response and lunged…into nothingness.

One minute Dany had been standing before her; barely a foot away – a sitting duck all things considered. However, if Arya was fast, then Dany was just a step quicker. She had anticipated Arya’s attack and with a swift move to her right, she struck out with her shortened staff, surprising Arya with the sudden blow to her lower back to send her toppling to the ground face first.

For a moment, there was a stunned and unsure silence for everyone expected Arya to bounce back to her feet, but when she gave nothing but a low groan, the Dany fans erupted in cheers of victory. Dany – sweaty and flushed from her exertions - bowed and smiled at the crowd, but showing a good sense of sportsmanship, she held out a hand to Arya and helped her to her feet. Arya, though slightly disgruntled at losing, did flush with pride as Dany forced her arm up to have everyone cheering them both for giving a great show. Sansa watched as Monterys ran up to Dany, where he was swept into her arms and showered with kisses, much to his giggling delight. With Jon, they merely exchanged a brief but heated glance that might as well have announced that they were probably not going to be seen for the rest of the night once this was all over.

“All right pipe down all you drunken bastards!” Robb hollered, causing the crowd to laugh or taunt Robb at not serving them any damn drinks in the first place. Ignoring them, the head of the castle rose to his feet and beamed at the still panting women before him.

“Congratulations, you two. You fought gallantly and bravely and-”

“Just give us the goddamn money,” Arya interrupted with a snort, sending everyone roaring with laughter.

Lord Manderly, ever the showman, rose to his feet to begin a speech about his generosity, when Arya dove for the velvet purse dangling from his waist with a cheeky grin on her visage.
“Gooddamn sneaky thief!” the lord of White Harbor bellowed indignantly. Ordering his personal guards to chase after the already disappearing girl, he cleared his throat and bowed politely to Dany.

“Apolgies, Your Grace, but I will give that thousand dragons to you when I get them.” He looked up with a grin; his snow-white beard so lush and well groomed, it shone beneath the pale light emanating from the stone walls. “All the same, it is a pleasure to finally see you in person! I would have welcomed you at the airport, but I was away on a business trip. Welcome to the Great North and let me be the first to declare that House Manderly stands with House Stark as subjects to your future reign.”

The crowd roared in approval as Dany blushed and bowed her head in response to the open declaration of fealty. Sansa was more than aware she had not simply come to Winterfell for a pleasurable vacation with Jon. There was real work to do behind the scenes, and she had seen that first hand with all the phone calls and emails her brother had been involved in the last month. If House Manderly was already on board, and if its lord was able to convince a few others of his kind to fall in line, things might work out in the end. However, this was the North, and from the few meetings she had sat in while her father was alive, it was almost always impossible to predict how the rest of the houses would react. Lord Manderly was only one man. There were a whole other band of misfits to try to convince.

“Guess I bet on the wrong person,” Jeyne pouted beside her. “I’ve lost five silver coins.”

“And that’s why I never gamble,” Sansa said with a smile as she kissed her future sister-in-law’s cheek. “It is a pointless enterprise, my dear.”

After a robust typical Northern dinner, Sansa was officially spent. She not only had to oversee the feeding of the main guests – and this included the sudden arrival of Cley Cerywn, and his sister, Jonelle – but the staff as well as the smallfolk from winter town, who were boarding at the castle. Secretly, she wished they’d all return to their homes, as the storm hadn’t really been as bad as they had thought. However, knowing that most of these folks wouldn’t pass up a chance for a free hot meal and warm beds, Sansa knew she’d have to continue the tradition of making Winterfell an abode for all who needed its solace.

As if that excitement wasn’t enough, between dealing with Lord Manderly’s loud voice – where he insisted on regaling them with as many stories of his ‘conquests’ in the business world – and having House Cerwyn also pledge their fealty to House Targaryen, her older brother had decided to drop a bombshell after several cups of wine.

“Jeyne and I are getting married!”

As expected, the sudden slightly drunken announcement, had caused everyone to gawk at Robb’s grinning and flushed visage with wariness, but when Jeyne looked bashful and tentatively displayed the shimmering rock on her finger, Lord Manderly broke the silence with a bang of his fist on the table and a loud toast of celebration.

“This is a glorious day indeed! It’s been a long time since Winterfell had a wedding! To the bride and groom!”

“To the bride and groom!”
No one remembers who started singing or who started using the table for a drum, but the next thing Sansa knew, folks were dancing along the Great Hall; already starting the wedding festivities before the date was even announced. Though Robb, ever spontaneous, declared it would be ‘pretty soon’ and naturally ‘at the godswood’. They were still firm believers of the old gods no matter their mother’s penchant for the faith of the Seven.

In this weather? Sansa had thought with an inner groan. As beautiful as the godswood could be at any time of the year, standing outside in the snow and listening to wedding vows was not appealing in the slightest.

“Surely, you’ll make my wedding dress, won’t you?” Jeyne had asked shyly. “When I called Mom to tell her the good news, she wanted me to wear her old dress, and I was like…no way, Mom. I mean, I know it’s vintage and all, but it’s sooooooo dowdy. So yeah…pretty please, Sansa? I’d love to wear one of your lovely designs.”

How could she say “no” to that?

She sighed and rubbed her temples; grateful for the silence that had finally descended upon the castle. It was about three in the morning, and though she was exhausted and longed to sleep, she found herself whipping out her sketchpad and pencil to begin drawing a suitable style for someone like Jeyne. Nothing too flashy…simple yet elegant and –

“You still awake?” came the sudden query as her door creaked open.

“Haven’t you ever heard of knocking, Arya?” she replied without looking up from her pad.

Her sister scoffed and let herself into the room. She was holding up what appeared to be a jacket, which she tossed onto Sansa’s worktable. “Can you help me with the rip on the side? I’ve been trying to get it sewn the past hour, and I just keep messing things up.”

“You’re missing the magic word.”

“…urgh…please?”

Sansa finally looked up; a small smile tugging at her lips. Arya was in her pjs; looking more boyish than ever before. She idly wondered if her breasts would remain that flat for the rest of her life, but her baby sister didn’t seem to mind. After all, she had even noticed Arya wrapping it up to make her chest even flatter. Hell, she wouldn’t be surprised if Arya suddenly declared that she was into women. She was yet to see her sister bring home any boys –

“If you’re done staring,” Arya huffed and scratched at an old scab on her elbow. “What are you drawing anyway?”

“Jeyne’s wedding gown.”

“Oh.” She leaned forward to take a closer look. “Looks horrible.”

“Thanks,” Sansa sneered and flipped to another page to try something else. “You can go to bed now. I’ll get your stupid jacket done tomorrow.”

“Hmph!”

She assumed that would be the end of their conversation, for despite being sisters, they could have been strangers for all the commonalities they had. They hardly liked the same things and couldn’t seem to agree on much. In fact, it was as if she was talking to the female form of Jon.
“You did pretty good with the fighting today,” Sansa finally said after another awkward minute of silence. She was back to sketching; this time something high-necked. “You could have beaten her.”

Arya scoffed and shuffled from one foot to the other. She tried to look upset but was secretly pleased at the praise. “She would have still beaten me.”

“Really?”

“She was holding back,” Arya complained. “I could tell.”

“She fights…weird.”

“Yeah,” came the awed response. “It was a mix of the Dothraki and Dornish style of fighting. I’ve seen some videos online about it, and she told me herself. She’s awesome, isn’t she?”

Sansa merely shrugged; despite that reluctant seed of admiration growing within.

“We’re going to spar again in the morning,” Arya declared. “And this time, she’s going to teach me the Dornish Dance. Can you believe the Oberyn Martell was her teacher? Phew! I can’t wait!”

Sansa managed a smile. She wished a part of her wouldn’t feel as envious about this, for it would seem Arya found more pleasure being in the presence of Dany than with her own sister. However, hadn’t she come to terms with their differences? So why should it bother her who Arya chose to spend her time with?

“Well, have fun,” Sansa offered with a nod. “If I have time, I’ll come watch her kick your ass.”

Arya snickered and playfully struck at Sansa’s shoulder; about as much as a hug as she was going to get. “Thanks for the help with the jacket and try to get some sleep. You’re like a walking ghost around here. G’night!”

She was gone before Sansa could think up some witty comeback; not that it would have stung anyway. Arya almost always did have to get the last word whenever they argued. Still, she was right. She was exhausted, and if she was lucky, she could grab a couple of hours of sleep before starting the day getting the castle in order.

_Sigh_. Being the lady of Winterfell was damn hard work.

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Her council meeting was just a little larger, Sansa observed the next morning.

Jorah and Davos were back, but with more guests, which included the snarky, bold, and current head of House Mormont, Lyanna, who at only twelve, was already making grown men shake in their boots. The Houses Condon, Poole, Cassel, Reed, and Hornwood were also in attendance, and with Lord Manderly and Cley Cerwyn already seated, the Great Hall was becoming a scene from one of her father’s usual meetings. As far as she knew, members of House Umber and Karstark would be arriving later that evening. The roads were now being cleared and visibility much better than expected.

Thankfully, most of the smallfolk had left the castle, leaving more rooms available for the incoming
honored guests. Sansa, with the help of Jeyne, had been kept on their toes for the better part of the
day; having to organize things and see that all were accommodated and fed accordingly. Never had
she had a better appreciation of what her mother must have gone through when they had guests in
town.

“Don’t they all look so grand?” Jeyne whispered as she tiptoed up to Sansa who had been watching
the proceedings from behind a curtain.

Sansa wasn’t sure if ‘grand’ was the word she would have used, but there was something quite regal
about the whole affair. It wasn’t even as if they were in robes or furs or anything that elaborate; yet
even in simple outfits like sweaters, scarfs and jackets, the five people seated at the High Table were
clearly the most important in the room.

Robb, of course, sat in the middle; looking every bit the part of Lord of Winterfell as he listened to
Kyle Condon speak. Every now and then, he’d take a sip of his coffee and study the notes before
him with a pensive expression on his visage. His dark auburn hair and beard made him appear to be
a ghost of their grandfather – from their mother’s side – but when he grinned at something; the Ned
Stark in him shone through.

To his left sat the future Queen of Westeros; having been given the high honor naturally. How she
managed to look both sweet and intimidating at the same time was a talent in Sansa’s opinion.
Today, her hair was done in a combination of soft waves and braids, which cascaded down to
shoulders encloosed in a cream cashmere sweater accentuated with a red scarf wrapped around her
neck. She was listening just as intensely to the speaker; her notes and laptop opened before her
despite Missandei sitting just behind her typing furiously on her laptop. Behind them; almost hidden
in the shadows were Grey Worm and Jorah – her perpetual and loyal bodyguards.

While Rodrik Cassel sat beside her; keeping his notes as well, what made this all even more surreal
was the sight of Jon Snow – the once bastard of Winterfell – sitting at the High Table mere inches
from the ancient stone seat held by Stark patriarchs throughout history. Once she had caught him
sitting on it as a boy – when luckily their parents were out on vacation – and she had watched him
pretend to be ‘king’ by waving his hand about, having a stern expression on his face, and giving the
most ridiculous commands to his invisible subjects. Perhaps she might have told on him then, but
there had been something quite sad yet poignant about seeing Jon in that position. At eight, he had
‘played’ the role of King…at almost twenty-four, he was about to become a real King of an entire
realm.

And damn if he doesn’t look the part already.

Whether it was the beard, or the way he had his hair combed back in that familiar ponytail their
father favored, or the intense concentration on his face as he listened to Condon speak, or the way
he’d tip his head to the left to listen to something Davos would whisper in his ear…everything
pointed to a man ready to lead. This was no longer a boy. That boy had died somewhere in King’s
Landing a long time ago.

However, a part of her feared for his soon-to-be role. It feared for the lofty obstacles that would come
not just his way, but his possible bride’s way. Things were not going to be easy, especially if it was
finally revealed that they were aunt and nephew. Perhaps in the old days, many might not have
considered it a big deal since they were of the infamous Targaryen bloodline where it was somewhat
necessary to marry within the family; but these were modern times where such relationships might
draw scorn and derision from a majority of the public. What happened then? Would they choose to
continue ruling and suffer the backlash? Or will they choose to go their separate ways or abdicate the
throne altogether?
“Thank you, Lord Condon,” Robb announced, once Kyle was finished. “We appreciate your support and fealty. And now…we open the floor to Lady Lyanna Mormont of House Mormont.”

Lyanna, all four feet two inches of her, rose to her feet and stepped to the middle of the hall. Her long black hair was pushed away from her face with two tight braids; those intelligent dark eyes flashing with a fire the adults would have been foolish to ignore.

“House Mormont will pledge no fealty today until we hear more from this Queen who wishes to rule over us,” she declared in a voice that was as loud and crisp as chips of ice cascading in the silence. Although her declaration caused a few murmurs, they silenced when she cleared her throat. “House Mormont has always been in allegiance with House Stark and has never broken faith. It does not intend to do so now. However, House Targaryen must reveal its true intentions to the North, and I believe my fellow lords will agree to the same.”

“Then we must wait until more of them arrive,” Lord Manderly bellowed with a sage nod. “The Lady is correct. Although we stand with House Stark and House Targaryen, more of us are needed to make this truly official.”

“Hear! Hear!”

“All right, my Lords and Lady!” Robb interrupted with a pound of his fist on the table. “It is agreed that this preliminary meeting will be adjourned until the others arrive. I believe we are expecting the Karstarks and Umbers this evening…” He paused and read a note passed to him from Rodrik. “Ah, even better news, the Houses Bolton, Glover, Marsh, Mallister, Lightfoot, Overton, Ryswell, and Slate will also be here.”

The others cheered at this news, though Manderly and Mormont didn’t look too pleased at the mention of some of the houses listed. Lyanna declared her irritation with a scoff. “I find it hard to believe the Boltons and Glovers will show up with no ulterior motive. They must be regarded carefully.”

“As they will, my Lady,” Robb replied with a smile. “We hope that this turns out to be a civilized meeting.”

“Fat load of a chance that’s happening,” someone in the back sneered to loud laughter in response.

“My Lords and Lady,” Dany cut through the hilarity: her voice as clear and firm as they had ever head. She had risen to her feet, and though there was a polite smile on her visage, it was clear there was still tension stored up within that petite figure. “I thank you for giving me an audience today. I have listened to your concerns, and I have no doubt there will be more laid out tomorrow. However, my motives and goal remain the same. I did not come here to conquer you all like my ancestors did, but to work with you, to draw strength from you, and to help make Westeros a more peaceful and unified nation.”

“Amen to that!” Cley replied with a stomp of his foot.

This move was repeated by the others until it felt like a rumbling thunderstorm went through the room. This time, Dany’s smile was a little more genuine, and Sansa could only watch as both brothers looked up and gave matching grins of pride and admiration, to their would-be monarch.

Better be careful, Jeyne, Sansa thought with a chuckle as she turned away to head back upstairs. Your future husband might already be having his doubts.
If she was surprised to find Dany standing in the middle of her workroom; staring at the gown still hanging on the mannequin with an expression of wonder on her visage, Sansa did a good job hiding it.

“Oh, my apologies,” Dany began apologizing profusely when the door banging shut behind Sansa finally snapped her out of her daydream. “I got lost…I mean I was trying to find the library to return this book, but then I spied this door ajar and peeked in and-”

She stopped rambling; a blush on her features that made her look years younger, and a far cry from the stoic and composed female in the Great Hall earlier.

“You have an amazing workshop,” Dany finally blurted out with a wave of her hand. “It’s just-”

“Years of accumulation,” Sansa finished with a smile as she sat behind the large white table where she did her sketches and measurements. “This used to be an old storage room, but when I told Dad I wanted it for my ‘sewing-room’, he obliged. From a tiny space, it expanded as I got older. I needed more room for this table and more mannequins and wardrobes and material space…and larger windows…and the list is endless, but hey, we girls are never satisfied, right?”

They laughed at that; both silently amazed at finding one thing in common at least.

“I was going to surprise you with that,” Sansa motioned toward the gown Dany had been admiring, “But since you’ve ruined it…”

Dany’s wide-eyed expression and gasp of delight more than made up for the hours spent working on the outfit. She didn’t help matters by reaching out to grasp both of Sansa’s hands to squeeze them tightly. With the way she was acting, one would assume she had never received such fancy clothing before! Sansa wanted to scoff at her behavior but was secretly delighted at the genuine response of delight.

“That’s mine?!” Dany all but squealed before releasing Sansa to go back to the gown. “I don’t believe it. It must have taken you months to get it done…and the stitching…the details…lace dragons for fuck’s sake.”

“Language, Your Grace,” Sansa teased as she rose to her feet to show off a little. She unhooked the cape, which had twin silver dragon clasps to hold it place. She revealed the herringbone-like stitching around the neckline and sleeves, and for the next few minutes, she took delight in explaining the designing process to a rapturous Dany.

“Want to test wear it? It will help to make sure it actually fits,” Sansa said with a smile.

“Would I? You don’t need to ask twice!”

“Whoa! What are you doing?”

Dany, who had begun stripping off her sweater, blinked behind the clothing. “Taking off my clothes. What’s wrong?”

“I have a changing room,” Sansa said with a loud laugh. “Geez, Dany. What if someone walked in?”
“It’s only boobs and an ass. Everyone has them,” Dany taunted as she obediently lowered the sweater.

“Well, I doubt any servant wants to see the future Queen’s boobs and ass at this time. So, in you go.” She shooed Dany toward a narrow wooden door hidden in an alcove of sorts. “I’ll pass the clothes to you, all right?”

Almost ten agonizing minutes later, where Sansa spent the time trying not to bite her nails while wondering if Dany would hate how it fit, or not be so enamored with it after all or –

“I’m ready,” came the quiet voice from behind, causing her to turn around so fast, she nearly lost her footing.

It Was. Perfect.

She had wondered if the dark greys would wash out her coloring, but it turned out to be the exact opposite. The gown hugged her in all the right places; though her expert eye could tell she might have to loosen around the hips a little, but otherwise…it was just as she had imagined it would be.

“It’s beautiful,” Dany was saying as she twirled before the mirror. “Wow, Sansa…I don’t know how to thank you for this.”

“Well, you can thank me by standing still so I can do this,” came the flustered reply as she fastened the cape around Dany’s shoulders. This forced her to be as close to the Targaryen as she had ever been, and for some inane reason, the sudden urge to hug this smaller woman was overwhelming. She was more alarmed to find something hard now wedged in her throat and made worse with the tears forming in her eyes.

Goddamnit. Why am I crying? Over a stupid dress? It doesn’t make any sense and…oh…

The hug came anyway, and it wasn’t even from her.

Dany’s arms – small as she was – were still strong enough to enclose Sansa in one of the warmest and most heartfelt embraces she’d received in a long time. At first, a part of her wanted to balk and detach herself from the intimate contact, but the inner girl crumbled to pieces and accepted the touch; her arms wrapping around Dany’s shoulders until that sweet scent of rose and jasmine seemed to sink into her very pores. And gosh, was her hair soft and thick. Jon must probably use it as a blanket sometimes –

“I love it,” Dany murmured against her chest. “And I’ll wear it proudly, Sansa. Thank you.”

Sansa sniffled; her blush refusing to fade as she pulled away and tried to compose herself. “Yeah well…I still need to work on a few things, so stand still on that podium thingy for me, okay?”

Dany gave a polite curtesy and hopped onto said podium, though she still couldn’t stop looking at herself in the mirror as she turned this way and that.

“Hmm…dear gods, I love the way it’s functional yet festive. I have a very good mind of making you my official dressmaker,” Dany teased as Sansa grabbed her tools and took up position behind Dany. “What do you say to that?”

Sansa laughed and shook her head. “You couldn’t pay me enough to leave Winterfell, Your Grace, but hey…if you promise to keep taking care of that stupid brother of mine…maybe I’ll reconsider the offer.”
She fully expected to get a laugh out of this, but when Dany fell silent, Sansa looked up with bemusement. Dany was still smiling, but she was toying with the clasp of the cape; looking for all the world like a blushing bride on her wedding day. However, despite the wistful expression; there was still a tinge of sadness or longing…or both.

“I’m sorry,” Sansa began. “I hope I didn’t say anything-”

“Oh no, no, no,” Dany interrupted with a wave of her hand. “It’s not you. I was just…I was just thinking about your ‘stupid’ brother that’s all.” She chuckled and subconsciously rubbed her hands. Although there was a ring there, Sansa knew it was just a decorative accessory, but she was astute enough to guess at what might be bothering Dany. Another cue was the way she had glanced at the pile of white material she had placed on her work table earlier; all possible wedding gown options for Jeyne.

Ah…regret or envy? Which is it, Dany? Are you still waiting for Jon to propose? Or did you deny him the pleasure?

Yeah, he does need some sense knocked into him occasionally,” Sansa agreed with a smile hidden behind Dany’s derriere as she began to cut into the material. “It’s why I’m glad he chose you to do that for him when necessary, so…thanks.”

I couldn’t be all I should have been for him, so please continue to shower him with the love he deserves.

Dany’s barely audible gasp warmed Sansa’s heart, and if the soft snuffle to accompany it was any indication, she had a feeling she’d be creating yet another wedding dress very soon.

It was almost always the same when the Umbers came to Winterfell.

Between them and the Karstarks, Sansa was amazed the Great Hall was still standing. Greatjon Umber – a monster of a man; easily seven feet tall, with a face as shaggy and wild as the hairy giant emblazoned on their banners – had openly taken to Dany at first glance. Not afraid to speak his mind, he had all but gladly told the boisterous room just how ‘welcome’ she’d be in his private quarters.

“Show you how it’s really done in the North, Your Grace, eh?!”

Though most had laughed, Jon hadn’t really found it amusing as evidenced with the thunderous scowl on his features despite Greatjon teasing and telling him it was only in jest.

“Easy now, White Wolf. Wouldn’t want to have me balls cut off by the future King, eh? But then again, who would have thought the lucky bastard of Winterfell would end up screwing the future Queen of Westeros? The world’s gone mad I tell ya!”

By midnight though, Greatjon was sobbing and singing drunkenly on Jon’s lap about bonny lasses and lost loves. For a big bear of a man, his voice was surprisingly good.

The Karstarks, however, were not as enthused. They were polite and courteous enough, but it was clear all its members still hadn’t forgiven Jon over the murder of their son, Eddard. Not that Jon gave a shit. He had lost Ghost because of them, and that was unforgiveable. Still, he knew he’d have to
keep his temper in check and behave himself; something that took a lot of effort considering how often Harrion Karstark kept making japes at any opportunity he got.

“Fucked his way up to the big leagues,” the oldest Karstark heir had observed loudly with scorn. “Thinks that’s the only way to make us forget he’s a goddamn bastard.”

If it wasn’t for Robb holding back Jon, Sansa was sure they’d have had another ‘incident’; something they didn’t need the night before the big meeting.

Fortunately, the castle was now quiet again, and as Sansa trudged wearily to her room for much-needed sleep, she stopped at the sight of the lone figure staring at a portrait in the grand hallway.

Ah…

She knew she ought to turn the other way and leave him be, but she came to realize she’d not really had a chance to speak to him privately since their arrival over a week ago. Things have been so busy (and weird), their conversations had been reduced to mere greetings or pleasantries.

“Just finished?” Jon asked without turning around.

“Yeah…but I’ve got to be up in a couple of hours to get ready for breakfast,” she complained. “I swear it seems all I do is worry about food eighty-percent of the day. Feeding Northerners is a fucking chore.”

Jon chuckled. “Guess you have a better appreciation of what your mom went through. Maybe that’s why she was so bitchy half of the time.”

She prepared to refute that; an autopilot reaction to any insult leveled at her mother. However, she kept her peace as she studied his profile. He wasn’t smiling any longer, and as she turned to the portrait, she felt her heart clench at what he must be thinking.

How painfully ironic. He grew up wondering who his mother was…and she was here all this time. Her ghost walked these halls and shed a tear over the terrible things we did to our son. I wish I could take it all back, Aunt Lyanna. I wish I could have been a better sister to him.

“Don’t blame yourself for it,” came the quiet response which had Sansa blinking in surprise. Had she said those thoughts out loud? “You were only doing what Catelyn asked you to.”

“But I should have known better,” Sansa muttered with a lowered head as she tugged on the hem of her sweater. “Robb, Arya, Bran, Rickon…they weren’t as horrible as I was to you.”

“Yeah you sucked most of the time, but I could see you didn’t always have your heart in it,” Jon replied with a wan smile. “Besides, if I really hated your guts, you wouldn’t be standing here today.”

He smirked at her incredulous expression, before reaching out to tug her hair playfully. “Geez. I was just kidding. Smile a little.”

“Says Mr. Brooder.”

“Dany told me you laughed today, and I found that hard to believe.”

“I did…what?” She blushed in embarrassment. “She told you that?”

“She was driving me nuts talking about some dress you made her, and how I was going to be blown away, and how I better start appreciating how awesome a dressmaker you are, and I really, really
struggled not to roll my eyes every fucking time.”

“Shut the fuck up!” Sansa replied with a helpless burst of laughter at the mock pained expression on Jon’s face. She tried to shove him aside, but he ducked from her attack with a grin.

“I don’t know how she stands you,” she added with a huff.

“I don’t know either,” Jon said with an earnest quiet that had her smile fading. His head was lowered now; his features red with an adorable expression of bashfulness she would not have thought possible. “I remember when you said that no girl would ever want to be with someone like me-”

“I didn’t really mean that Jon,” she began, but he silenced her with a shake of his head.

“Maybe you did, maybe you didn’t, but I really thought hard about it and figured you did have a point. No matter how good I was or how I would try to make the best of my lot, I’d always have that stigma of being a bastard attached to my name for the rest of my life. Who would want to be with someone like that?”

“Someone who saw past your name and saw what was in here,” Sansa replied as she nudged his chest with a finger. “And I doubt she’s sticking around just because you make her happy in the bedroom.”

Jon went an even brighter shade of red. “I’d rather not talk about my bedroom habits, if you don’t mind.”

“Dear gods, do you two not get exhausted? Especially considering you were out for like four days?”

Jon might have mumbled something about ‘making up for lost time’, before quickly changing the subject.

“So? What’s the verdict?”

“Huh?”

“Dany?” Jon asked with an almost shy smile. “Do you like her? I mean if you two spent a couple of hours in each other’s presence without coming to blows-”

“Good grief, Jon. I’m not that bitchy.” She rolled her eyes. No way in hell was she going to tell of how they had gone from seamstress and client to just two gals sitting amongst piles of organza, cotton, and silk while chatting over a bottle of red wine. For the first time in her life, Sansa had shared her relationship woes with someone who wasn’t likely to be judgmental. Dany had listened patiently; only chirping in to relate with her own disastrous past relationships. Both did come to the agreement that most men were scum, and they had laughed themselves silly over penis sizes and some of the lame things men tended to do in the bedroom.

Yeah, there was no way she could tell Jon any of that.

“She’s…well…nice. Different.”

“Different?”

“You know what I mean. Not like us…Northerners.”

“Well duh, Sansa. She’s lived in Essos for most of her fucking life.”

“I know that, Genius! I meant, she thinks ‘differently’. She’s more…open, I guess is the word I’m
Jon chuckled. “Yeah, trust me, I know exactly what you mean. You come to realize how closed off we really are up here when there’s a whole other world to explore out there. I’ve seen and experienced things I never thought I would, and its all because of her. She’s made me really see, Sansa. Do you know what I mean?”

She nodded; her chest tightening with an unspoken emotion. “I can only imagine,” she finally said in a quiet voice. “Well, at least I’ll get my first taste of Essos when we drop off Arya at her school next month.”

“Wow…that soon, eh?”

For a while, they discussed their baby sister though skirting away from the dawning realization that they were going to miss her terribly when she was gone. As they chuckled over the latest sparring match between her and Dany, Sansa suddenly moved closer to tug on the sleeve of his left arm.

“What the hell are you doing now?”

“I just remembered,” she began. “Any weird after effects with your arm?”

“It’s not grown another one if that’s what you’re concerned about. I’m fine. Just still got the scar from the blade, but otherwise, it’s good as new.”

Sansa nodded; though her features were still taut with concern. “And the red woman?”

Jon sighed. “Well, we had to send her out of the castle. Dany kept going on about shadow demons and not trusting her around this place, and I figured what the hell? Let her go live in that abandoned crofter’s cottage on the outskirts of town. She won’t cause us any trouble there, will she?”

“I hope not.”

“You don’t believe in all that black magic stuff, do you?”

Sansa kept silent, and Jon gave a sound of exasperation. “Seven hells, not you too.”

“I’m just saying, Jon. You didn’t see what happened that night. What she was saying and how she was acting…it wasn’t normal.”

“I agree there’s nothing normal about my arm healing this way, but so far, I’m fine. I don’t have weird dreams or randomly float or speak in tongues.”

“And what was all that about being the ‘prince that was promised’? Does she know about Rhaeger being your father?”

Jon placed a finger against her lips; his eyes dark and voice low. “Might want to keep it down about that, Sansa. These walls have ears, and we’ve got a lot of fucking ears in the castle right now. Besides, even if she knows, I doubt she’ll go blabbing about it. She would have done so by now, right?”

She nodded in understanding, and he pulled away with a heavy sigh. For a while, they studied their barely smiling Aunt Lyanna in her ballgown and wondered if –

“Are you ready for tomorrow?” Sansa finally asked. “Or rather do you think you’ll both be ready for tomorrow?”
Jon snorted and curled his lips in derision. “If tonight was any preview…it’s going to be a long fucking day. I’ve already heard the disgruntlement from some people on why I must be seated at the High Table. I’m a bastard after all.”

“You’re not-”

“Yeah, but they don’t know that, and quite frankly, it’s not important.” Jon shrugged and then turned to Sansa with determination on his features. “It’s Dany’s show tomorrow and it will be her job to convince those assholes that she’s worthy of being their leader. I’ll jump in when needed, but mark my words, if some folks cross the line, I don’t give a fuck whose alliances I break up, I’m bashing some heads.”

“…then I expect it to be a very enthralling meeting,” Sansa replied with an inner groan. Things could get ugly fast. “At least try to keep the bloodshed to a minimum. Purchasing cleaning supplies for this place costs a small fortune.”

“Don’t worry, dear sis,” he said with a wicked grin punctuated with a tender kiss to her forehead. “If push comes to shove, we can always take it outside. Now go get some sleep. You look beat.”

She turned to leave, when she was stopped by an “oh, and Sansa?”

“What now?” she asked with a raised brow.

“Thanks.”

She turned around in surprise, wondering what he was getting at. “Thanks for what?”

“Hanging out with Dany,” came the quiet reply. “She might not say it out loud but spending time with you really helped ease off the tension she was feeling all morning. She’s got a lot on her mind, and Missandei and I can only do so much. You were the third voice she needed, so thanks. I really appreciate it.”

“…stop being weird,” was all she could mutter as she felt the rush of heat flow through her until her chest became too tight and breathing a little difficult. Damn him (and her) for making her so emotional over the most ridiculous things.

Spinning on her heels, she all but ran upstairs; eventually climbing into bed as the hour hand struck two o’clock. She closed her eyes in grateful weariness, hoping for a blissful and uneventful night. Unfortunately, all she could see were the bothersome mish-mashed images of Aunt Lyanna crying, her parents engulfed in flames, Dany surrounded by thorns, a furious Jon dripping in blood with Ghost in his arms, while a woman in red laughed through it all.

It’s okay. Everything is going to be okay. This is Winterfell, she’d think as she fell into fitful slumber. And it will continue to stand no matter the odds.
Thanks so very much to those who took the time to leave a comment for the last chapter. I really appreciate the feedback. :D So! A couple of things, this chapter is technically two in one, so it's long; hence you have to read carefully, digest, and let it marinate before the pitchforks come out. *lol*

Also, this story will definitely end at 35; as in five more chapters to go.

Until then, hope you enjoy the ride, and thanks again for all the support! *bows gratefully*
Slavers Bay are true, and how you were able to bring them all to some form of compromise…I should be taking lessons from you!"

She appreciated his kind words of encouragement, but those were mere ‘words’ that really meant nothing in the grand scheme of things. Yes, it was one thing to deal with the Masters, but they were from Essos; a place that was more free-thinking and willing to compromise despite their troubling traditions. Westeros was a whole other juggernaut. This was a continent staunch in traditions that were as inflexible as the mounts at Dragonstone. In this icy North, especially, getting them to believe she meant nothing but the best was akin to convincing them that The Wall was likely to melt by the end of the year.

Impossible.

Yet, she had to try. Failure was not an option. Without Tyrion at her side, she would have to draw on all the diplomatic skills he had drilled into her from the moment they met.

Control your temper, he’d say if he was here. Keep your emotions in check. Yes, you will have to deal with a bunch of assholes over time, Your Grace, but you must remember who you are and what you represent.

Ah, how she missed his presence. It would have been nice for him to join them eventually, but according to his last phone call, he still had unfinished business in King’s Landing.

“Besides,” he added with a chuckle. “I doubt some of those Northerners would be so cordial to a Lannister popping up at this time. I’d like to give them some time to ease into the knowledge that I’ll be a part of your council whether they like it or not.”

A sudden loud noise forced her to look up quickly. Missandei, who had just burst breathlessly into the antechamber, had dropped her dossier and tablet to the floor in her haste. Jon and Robb were on their haunches, helping to pick them up despite her friend’s insistence that she was able to do so on her own.

We’re all nervous, Dany mused with a small smile at the flustered Naathi. Not surprising. I doubt many of us got enough sleep last night.

Jon certainly hadn’t, despite his many reassurances that ‘everything was going to be okay’. She must have dozed off at some point during her study, for she awakened with a start to find herself alone in bed; her study partner nowhere in sight. She was tempted to go search for him, but was perceptive enough to realize that he would need his space to think and expend some of the nervous energy stored within him. He did return almost an hour later, and despite her attempt to pretend as if she was still in repose, his muttered ‘I love you, babe, now get some sleep’ while snuggling against her, was all she needed to finally get some rest.

She paced within the small space; her hands clasped tight before her. Liquid courage would have been the best solution to anyone’s situation at this point. However, instead of the fiery rush of an alcoholic beverage, her liquid courage had come in the form of Jon’s deep and languid kisses as they got dressed for the day. To sup and quench her never-ending thirst on his tongue and lips was something she wasn’t aware she needed until both realized they would run late if they didn’t stop making each other so hot and bothered.

She blushed as he noticed her staring, and she forced her attention away from his knowing smirk, wishing he wouldn’t do such things to get her flustered at the most importune time. He didn’t help matters by moving to stand beside her as Rodrik Cassel’s booming voice filtered through and the guards prepared to open the doors. It was all pomp and grand staging, but it was a way to remind the
Northerners of what used to be, and even if they weren’t wearing crowns or fancy costumes from the past, the Starks were still considered the leaders of a proud region where traditions were upheld.

Jon’s hand – familiar, warm and slightly calloused - found hers and held on tight. She squeezed back in kind as the Great Hall suddenly yawned before them like the cavernous jaws of a waiting beast eager to shred them to pieces. Fortunately, these beasts came in the form of the mostly rugged and weathered faces of Northerners, clad in layered clothing with some draped in heavy furs as befit their titles. The mingled scents of wet animal hair, aged wine, sweat, and smoke permeated the air despite the opened shutters, as all rose to their feet to acknowledge Robb as the ‘Lord of Winterfell’ in a raucous chant. Dany struggled not to feel overwhelmed at the sight and sounds. The Hall had been at least a quarter-filled yesterday, but today…it seemed as if everyone in the region had crammed into the once vast space until there was barely any standing room.

*They have come to see, to judge, to test this foreigner who claims to want to rule,* whispered a tiny voice within. *But I must remain firm in my convictions and never forget the blood that runs through my veins...our veins. We are the last dragons, and we will take back what is ours.*

Guarded, watchful, curious eyes followed their every move. Faces she knew – the Mormonts led by Lyanna who looked cute in ponytails, to the Manderlys, Cassels, Condons, Cerwyns, and Hornwoods – gave her silent encouragement. And there were the strangers; a man of pallid skin and pale eyes with an expression that was neither curious nor hostile. She would later learn he was Roose Bolton – current head of House Bolton and in allegiance to no one. The Karstarks made no attempt to hide their distrust, while a new set of faces led by another giant of a man with shocking red hair and a thick full beard to match, watched her with acute interest; his features pleasant despite the aura of danger around him. He was Tormund Giantsbane – a representative of the infamous Wildlings from beyond the Wall. From the stories she had heard so far, Dany was more than intrigued to know more about these people who lived by their own rules and answered to absolutely no one. To see them in attendance was a minor victory.

Dany was sure Jon would have released her by now, but he made no attempt to do so. She stole another glance at him; marveling – and not for the first time – at how splendid he looked. She hesitated to use the word ‘regal’ considering he was just in a black turtleneck sweater and jeans, but there was no mistaking the determination in that rigid jawline or the barely visible smile on his lips as he nodded at those who did hail him in greeting. She was sure she heard one or two snarky ‘there goes the bastard’, but otherwise, most didn’t seem to consider him as such. He was simply ‘Jon Snow’ come back to Winterfell; a true Northerner to be treated as such.

It wasn’t until they reached the dais, did he politely step aside to help her up first with a tip of his head in a bow. It was such an unexpected sweet and romantic action, that a few whistles and cheers – led by Tormund – had Jon turning a dark shade of red in embarrassment. Dany’s features were just as flushed, and it didn’t help that their mini-cheering section close to the High Table made up of the Starks, Jeyne, Monterys, and Grey Wind, were just as amused at Jon’s antics.

“Don’t forget to give her the ol’ smackaroo when yer done, Jon!” Tormund bellowed from the end of the hall. “I’ll pay good money to watch that one!”

How Jon made it to his seat, while wishing the ground would open to swallow him whole, was a miracle. He suffered the good-natured laughter with a shake of his head and a mock glare at the redhead who looked unapologetic. However, if the glares he received from several other lords were any indication, it appeared the brash Wildling was not considered a favorite.

There is still an imaginary wall between them, Dany thought with a pang of sadness. She wondered if they’d ever come a day when the two sides would really get along. Right now, mere ‘tolerance’
seemed to be the modus operandi to keep the peace.

“All right, my lords, ladies, and guests,” Rodrik announced loudly with a bang of a gavel on the table to get everyone’s undivided attention. “We’ll have a roll call of all the houses present and their representatives, and then we begin.”

Missandei passed over the tablet and dossier, and Dany wished for the umpteenth time that the seating arrangement was different. Not that she minded being next to Robb, but having Jon beside her would have been an added boost. All the same, she relished the warm smile he tossed her way as the proceedings got under way.

At the end of the roll call, twenty noble houses, two masterly houses, the mountain clans - represented by House Wull, the Crannongmen represented by House Reed, and the Wildlings were all in attendance. Robb rose to give the opening remarks, where he clearly yet forcefully made his case for the North to join Dany’s fight to reclaim Westeros.

He spoke for about thirty minutes, interrupted every now and then by affirmative grunts of approval or some grumbles of discontent. When those grumbles would get too loud, Robb would raise his voice, or Grey Wind would growl in disapproval at the rudeness shown to his master. Once done, he sat down to agreeable applause, though it was clear that some houses were already muttering amongst themselves.

“I call bullshit,” came the sudden declaration from Harrion Karstark as all almost seven feet of him rose to tower over the seated audience. He pointed a gloved hand at Dany; a sneer on his grizzly face. “What makes her so different from the Lannisters or that greedy fat pig, Baratheon, huh? All these Southerners come up here thinking they can control us! We are the North! We don’t need them to survive. We’ve managed just fine all these years without bowing to any Southern kings, and we’re not about to start now.”

This received a few stomping boots and pounded fists on the table.

“I say those brother-sister fuckers with their shiny gold lions can go hack themselves to pieces for all I care,” he continued with sneering laughter accompanying this. “And if they dare come up here, we’ll be ready for them!”

“Ready for them?” Lyanna Mormont’s voice rang out like a bell forcing the murmurs to fade. She had risen to her feet, and though Harrion easily towered her, she did not back down. “In case you’ve forgotten, my lord, we might occupy a large chunk of Westeros, but I doubt any of us are prepared to face the onslaught of the Lannisters should they decide to attack. We will need the army of Daenerys Targaryen should it come to a battle.”

“The lady is right,” Lord Manderly chirped in. “I mean I would rather avoid a battle, but if it comes to that, the more bodies the better. I also don’t know about you folks, but I take great pride in my business and do look forward to opening more trading opportunities with the South. Think of all the revenue we could gather for the North especially when we are struck with bitter winters! We could use as many incoming goods and services from our neighbors.”

“Hear! Hear!” Many mumbled.

“This isn’t just about filling your goddamn pockets, Lord Lampr…I mean Manderly,” Greatjon bellowed as he too rose to his feet. “Personally, I’m in the same line of thinking as the blasted Karstarks. Baratheon came here spewing the same bullshit, but we could smell his lies from a mile away. Now, I’m sure this young lady here has got some good plans, but I sincerely hope one of them is finding a way to give us Tywin Lannister’s head on a fucking stick!”
“Hear! Hear!” This time the foot stomping and fist pounding was almost thunderous.

“That asshole is responsible for a lot of misery around Westeros,” Lord Galbert Glover stated as he rose to his feet with a haunted expression. “I was there when he sent his goons to wipe out an entire town just north of the Riverlands. It was a fucking genocide, my friends, where no one was left to tell the tale. He managed to keep it under wraps, and I have been too ashamed to admit such atrocities to anyone. It makes me wonder how many more towns and villages he’s destroyed since he came into power, and how many fucking lives he’s taken. What stops him from marching into the North to take over?”

“Let him try!” Tormund snarled as he withdrew a wicked-looking axe from his waist. “I personally look forward to meeting him on the battlefield. Though, from the look of things, you whiny lot have always ignored us freefolk for decades. A good part of me wants to leave you all to suffer the consequences, but I made a vow to that man over there.”

He pointed his axe at Jon, who was looking back with not much of an expression on his visage.

“I promised that kid that I would die with him on the battlefield someday if he ever needed me to. You don’t need to know the particulars of why I made that promise, but mark my words…and the word of all the freefolk, we stand by Jon Snow and his future Queen’s quest to conquer Westeros!”

Dany glanced at Jon in time to see him nod in gratitude to Tormund as the cheers from the audience grew louder. She wondered just what he had done to warrant such loyalty from the large man, for all Jon had told her of the Wildlings was their basic history.

“That’s all well and good,” Lord Manderly huffed, “but we’ve yet to hear from the lady herself. Let’s give her a chance to make her case before deciding on what we ought to do, eh?” He smiled and nodded in encouragement at Dany, who felt the butterflies that had been building all this time nearly consume her.

She took a shuddering breath as polite applause sputtered about; her slightly trembling hands reaching for her notes before she felt the stronger and steadier one placed upon them.

“Relax,” Robb whispered with a wink. “Just think of them as a bunch of cardboard cutouts…only noisier, and you’ll be fine.”

Resisting the overwhelming urge to burst into laughter at that mental image, Dany returned his smile and rose to her feet. She glanced at her ‘cheering’ section; from Sansa and Bran’s barely-there smiles, to Arya, Rickon, Jeyne, and Monterys clapping as hard as they could. Behind her, Missandei, Jorah, and Grey Worm were just as supportive without saying a word. Davos beamed with fatherly pride, and as for Jon –

His eyes simply said it all.

It was a monumental effort to turn away from him, but she did so to face the ‘cutouts’ who were all seated again. If she had felt weight of their gazes earlier, they were simply now bearing down on her with every breath she took seemingly loud enough for them to hear. She closed her eyes for the briefest of seconds and calling upon all the strength she could ever need, she lifted her lashes and began to speak.

“My lords and ladies, I am honored and humbled at your decision to leave your homes and lands to give me an audience. I cannot claim to truly understand what it means to be a Northerner, neither can I claim to truly understand all the unfavorable things that have happened to you in the past. Contrary to popular belief, I was born in Dragonstone, but forced to flee a realm I would have loved to be a
part of, due to an unfortunate series of events. I might have been raised across the Narrow Sea, my lords and lady, but the fire of Westeros flows through my veins.

“Westeros was here long before my ancestors conquered it. The North was here long before the First Men sought to claim it. You have your rules and traditions, true, and change can be a difficult pill to swallow, but I do not come to you promising the impossible. I do not come to you with the false hopes of creating a world where they’ll never be strife, but I can make a vow to help in reestablishing a North that you wish to see and leave for your future generations. I have listened to your concerns and they are no different from those I have heard in King’s Landing, Dragonstone, or Slavers Bay. You want to be released from the iron grip the current government holds upon you. You want good education, health services, good jobs and wages, and most important…peace and stability. Something you have not had under the Lannister rule, for despite your choice to be isolated, these men of greed and power have hovered at your door and need only one little excuse to knock it down and take control.

“My plan is to return Westeros to the way it once was under my ancestors’ rule; where the true role of The Syndicate ensured that each kingdom had autonomy to make their own decisions without fear of a tyrant being in control. We will reinstitute the Grand Council and make it a permanent thing; where every kingdom has a representative…a voice…that will speak on behalf of their people. That is a luxury you do not have now, and we must change it. But to do that, I need your help. I cannot do this alone, and having your support at the Grand Council Tywin Lannister plans to put together, will be a warning cry to him and his blind supporters, that we are ready to fight to take back what’s ours!”

“Hear! Hear!”

The stomping feet and pounding fists was the most melodious sound to her in that moment, and for the first time all morning, she felt the burden being eased off her shoulders. She prepared to continue her speech in earnest, when the quiet but firm voice cut through the noise like a blade.

“A beautiful speech to be sure,” Roose Bolton began with a small smile on his long features. Dany felt a sudden chill despite the heat in the room. “However, we must all remember how your so-called ancestors eventually abused the power of The Syndicate. Isn’t there something about a Targaryen madness that runs in the family?” His expression was sly, and there was an unmistakable glance given to both Dany and Jon. “All that incest must taint one’s judgment in time, and who knows? You’ll get power hungry and forget all the pretty words you’ve just spouted. We can’t risk that, can we?”

The grumblings began again, and Dany could feel the mild burst of confidence she had felt just moments earlier, threaten to evaporate. She forced herself to focus; a dull banging sound filling her head until she realized it was Robb with the gavel forcing the audience to be silent.

“Well?” Bolton queried with a raised brow. “Do you have nothing to say about that, Your Grace?”

“There is nothing to say,” came the deceptively calm words from Jon, whose impassive gaze was trained on Roose. “You base your observations on old wives’ tales, my Lord Bolton. I thought you were over your wet nurse’s grip by now.”

This garnered some laughs and snickers, though the only indication that Jon’s jape had affected Roose were the spots of color on his cheeks. Otherwise, his features remained mildly amused.

“Old wives’ tales or not, Snow, we have a right to know if our future ruler is prone to bouts of insanity. Nothing is worse than realizing we might have another Aerys on our hands.”
The grumbles got louder in earnest, but Dany was able to find her voice this time.

“I am not my father,” she declared loudly; forcing a hush in the hall. “I know…I know he did some terrible things,” she continued in a more even tone with her hands still clenched so tight, she was afraid of drawing blood soon. “And on behalf of House Targaryen, I ask your forgiveness for the crimes he committed against you and your families. I also ask you not to judge a daughter by the sins of her father. With all that has happened, we tend to forget that when the first Syndicate was formed, Westeros was a peaceful realm for centuries, with the North working in tandem with the South to maintain that peace. We can get back to that again, my lady and lords. I know we can. However, I realize that these are mere words and only actions will speak louder. So, I beg you to put your trust in me as I do my best to represent your interests at the Grand Council. I…We will make sure your voices are not drowned by the Lannisters or their cohorts.”

She stopped to gather herself; now aware of how impassioned she had sounded, while hoping she didn’t come across as being too shrill and desperate. However, at the loud scraping of a bench, she forced her gaze up to notice Lyanna Mormont taking center stage again.

“The North remembers, Your Grace,” she stated firmly; her intelligent eyes scanning the room as she spoke, “but we also know that winter is coming, and we must be ready at all times for it. We, of House Mormont, have heard your plea, and we have made up our minds to wave our banners with House Stark for House Targaryen in the upcoming Grand Council. We will work side-by-side to make sure the North holds its place in the creation of a stronger and more peaceful Westeros.”

She finally cracked a smile at Dany, who would have gladly run up to swing Lyanna around in glee, though she noticed that the smile was also directed at the proud man standing in the shadows behind her. Mouthing a grateful “thank you” to Jorah for doing most of the ‘leg-work’, a loud overexaggerated cough forced her attention back to the floor. Lord Manderly was now on his feet with his chest puffed out proudly.

“We, of House Manderly, know a good thing when we see it. And so, we also pledge our banners to House Targaryen! For the North and for Westeros!”

“Hear! Hear!”

One after the other, the lords of each house swore their fealty; each rising until the entire hall appeared to be on their feet. She wasn’t surprised to find the Bolton camp not moving a muscle, but was genuinely pleased to see the Karstarks reluctantly rise to their feet with Harrion gruffly doing the pledge as if he had nails in his teeth.

*I will take what I can get.*

“Not bad,” Robb praised with a grin of satisfaction as the meeting was officially adjourned and the festivities began in earnest. The servants were already streaming out of the kitchens with alcoholic beverages and steaming trays of food to appease their hungry guests. “Not bad at all, Your Grace.”

“And no heads had to get bashed,” Jon said with a chuckle as he stood and stretched his stiff muscles. “Geez, this is all turning out to be…argh!”

“Come here you!” Tormund was saying for he had rushed up to the dais to grab Jon in a fireman’s lift over his shoulder. “Let’s go drink ourselves silly, my boy! And don’t worry, Your Grace,” he added with a playful wink to Dany. “I’ll make sure I return him to you in one piece. P.S: Hope you’re not too disappointed with his tiny pecker though.”

“Fuck you, Tormund!” Jon protested despite the laughter the tease had elicited. “Put me down!”
“Not yet, Jonno! Let’s go celebrate the freefolk way, eh?!”

“The freefolk way?” Dany asked as she watched the big man disappear into the crowd with her man.

“Drinking like a fish and breaking shit,” Robb explained as he pulled Jeyne into his arms to twirl her around when the first strings from a local band began to play a popular tune. “So, go on, Dany, this is the time to let loose. All the hard work’s done, and you can really have fun now. Live it up!”

She might have asked how she was expected to ‘live it up’ when Greatjon answered the unspoken query for her. With a comical attempt at being a gentleman, he bowed with a flourish and invited her to the dancefloor, where he proceeded to spin her around and around until she was just about dizzy and ready to vomit.

All the same –

*We did it, Jon,* she would think as she finally caught sight of him surrounded by the freefolk, chugging down a large mug of wine with their chanting encouragement. *We really did it, my dearest. One major hurdle down…and we’re almost at the finish line.*

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Monterys was disappointed about it. However, Arya had done a good job explaining why his Aunt Dany and Uncle Jon needed to go on this little trip *alone,* and he had kept his peace; even trying to help Jon lift the lone carryall bag as best he could.

“All finished,” Jon said with a grin as he stooped to his haunches before the boy. “Thanks for all your help, buddy.”

“You’re welcome,” came the shy reply.

Jon chuckled and adjusted the lordling’s wool hat upon his head. “Now you promise to be good while we’re away? No riding Grey Wind like a horse without Uncle Robb’s permission?”

“Uh huh.”

“And no more stealing of Aunt Sansa’s special lemon cakes when no one is looking, right?”

“Ummm…”

“Mooonty?”

“Okaaaaaaaaay, I promise.”

“Pinky promise?”

They held out their fingers in the age-old sign; both grinning like fools before Jon pulled him into his arms for another warm hug. “You take care of everyone until we get back, okay?”

“Okay,” came the muffled reply against his shoulder, which for inexplicable reasons, had Jon feeling a bit emotional. He closed his eyes and inhaled the sweet scent of innocence in a boy he had gradually come to see as ‘his’ in some weird way. He wasn’t sure his real father would appreciate the
depth of his feelings, but that was okay. If they could continue their relationship whenever he could visit, Jon was content with that.

He released Monterys with a hard kiss to his forehead before rising to his feet and gently urging him toward Dany, who was giving some last-minute instructions to Missandei and Grey Worm. He paused for a minute to admire his woman; drinking in the delightful outline of her hips and ass enclosed in the tightest pair of jeans she probably owned. Though the top half was covered in a heavy blue plaid-like jacket, her choice to keep her hair in those girlish ponytails intensified that combo of innocence and vixen that sometimes made thinking a little bit difficult.

“You lucky bastard,” Robb growled beside him. “I really am still trying to figure out what the hell she saw in you.”

“Says the soon-to-be married man,” Jon replied with a smirk. “Keep your goddamn eyes off her.”

His brother laughed and playfully jabbed his side, which ended up with both men trying to roughhouse each other.

“Good grief,” Sansa groaned as she rolled her eyes to the heavens at their antics. “I thought you two were grown-ups, but apparently, I forgot we were still dealing with children.”

“Boys will be boys,” Dany added with a chuckle, though she was already recording them with her phone. “All right, everyone…last words and what not.”

“We’re only going to be gone for a couple of days,” Jon protested. “You make it sound like we’re leaving forever.”

“I’ll say something,” Arya said as she dashed into Jon’s view to take up the screen. “Have a lot of fun and bring back a souvenir, okay?”

“I don’t try to climb it,” Bran advised with a small smile. “As tempting as it might be—”

“I’d love to climb it someday,” Rickon mused with a wistful expression on his visage. “Robb? Do you think we can—?”

“Not in this lifetime,” Robb interrupted before his baby brother could finish. He grinned at the camera and cleared his throat. “Well, on behalf of Jeyne and I,” Said Jeyne blushed and waved in response. “We want to wish you both a great mini-vacation and please try not to melt the fucking Wall with your shenanigans.”

Dany turned a bright red as Jon sent a fistful of snow into his brother’s face for his cheeky remark. This, naturally, caused a chain reaction and in no time at all, everyone was flinging snow into someone’s face. Hell, even the normally stoic Grey Worm got dragged into it when Davos pelted him right in the forehead. Dany was able to duck an incoming attack from Monterys and was doing her best to record and not laugh too hard at the same time, when she collided into Sansa.

“Aren’t you joining in?” she asked breathlessly as she shook out the snowflakes from her hair.

“No way,” the redhead replied with a small smile from her hiding place behind a granite column. “Last time I engaged in a snowball fight, I ended up in bed for days with a cold. So, I’m fine right where I am. All the same, you two really should get going. It’s a long drive to your destination.”

Dany nodded in understanding and would have left but stopped long enough to give the taller woman a warm hug in farewell. “Thanks again for everything.”
Sansa failed at hiding the flush of colors on her cheeks. “I didn’t do anything, but...you two enjoy yourselves, okay? You deserve it. Oh, and this time…don’t say ‘no’” she added with a knowing smirk that had Dany’s entire being flood with heat just as she chose that moment to take note of the man in question.

Jon was just about covered in snow and was currently begging his siblings to go easy on him as he attempted to run back to the truck. Screaming out Dany’s name, she got the message and dashed into the vehicle; just in time too, for Arya’s massive snowball missed her by that much. The loud thunk against the door had Jon wincing as he started the engine.

“If there’s a fucking dent on it, she’s paying,” he grumbled.

“It’s her truck, isn’t it?”

“It was mine first,” Jon argued before pulling away with final goodbye waves dished out to their family.

Dany continued to record as they became smaller and smaller in the background; trying not to get too emotional at the sight of everyone coming to see them off like so. However, after three long days of hosting the Northern dignitaries, she and Jon needed the time off. His suggestion they visit The Wall had been a welcome excuse to get away from it all. Not that they hadn’t managed to find moments of reprieve after the big meeting.

Later that night, when most of the castle was passed out in exhaustion or just plain drunkenness, Jon had finally taken her to the breathtaking godswood where she was sure she fell in love with him all over again…well until he fell onto his hands and knees and began puking the wine he’d been guzzling all evening. She would end up washing his face and mouth with the clear waters from the pool, before sitting beneath the weirwood tree with his aching head on her lap.

“Dear gods, I’m so sorry, Dany,” he had moaned pitifully. “I didn’t mean to hurl all over you like that. It’s all fucking Tormund’s fault.”

“I understand, baby,” she replied with a tender kiss to his forehead. “The freefolk can be quite persuasive.”

“You don’t know the half of it,” came the low groan as he shifted positions, so he could be speaking to her stomach. “God, you smell so good.”

“You mean not like beer and piss, right?”

He gave the thumbs up sign and would have prepared to doze off at the soothing sensation of her fingers running through his hair, when she queried him quietly.

“So just why does a man like Tormund Giantsbane owe you his life?”

“Ghost,” Jon murmured sleepily. “It was Ghost who saved his life. We – me, Robb, and a couple of other buddies – had gone past The Wall for a hunting trip. As luck would have it, we stumbled upon Tormund’s people engaged in a brawl with a neighboring village. This was at a local bar by the way. We didn’t want to get into it, so we figured we’d just take our asses out of the fray, when someone accused us of being sympathizers to the Tormund crew, and dragged us into it. Well, long story short, things got pretty bloody and dead bodies were piling up, and Tormund – as big and strong as he is – found himself on the brink of it as well. Ghost tore into the group of guys going at him and saved his life, and that was it. Tormund’s always got to make things dramatic, so he did the whole ‘I swear my life to you’ schtick. I didn’t even take it seriously, until he showed up a week later at
Winterfell to tell father about it.”

“He seems like a good guy.”

“He is…they all are, most of the freefolk at least,” Jon explained. “People just tend to have the wrong preconceived notions about them, and I confess I grew up believing they were heathens as well until I was taught otherwise. They’re the most loyal people you can ever hope to have on your team, and I’m glad they joined our cause…oh, did I forget to mention how magnificent you were today? I’m so proud of you, Daenerys Targaryen.”

She blushed and lowered her head to his; his low chuckle and warm breath bathing her flushed features. “Shut up, Jon Sow,” she muttered bashfully against his forehead. “I couldn’t have done it without you.”

Grey Wind had nudged them awake the next morning; the great beast probably wondering why the ‘weird’ humans would want to fall asleep outdoors with little to no protection. All the same, Dany had to admit it was one of the better night’s sleep she’d gotten since she arrived here, for despite the cold weather, there was a simmering warmth within the godswood that soothed the soul.

She couldn’t wait to see it in its full glory during summer.

She was jolted awake from her current doze as the truck bounced over another uneven piece of land. She blinked and stifled a yawn, staring out the window at the rather uninspiring sight of more sentinels and pines to make up the never-ending Wolfswood.

“I thought you said it was only a two-hour drive, Jon,” she complained as she reached for the bag of snacks to rummage through it. “Feels like we’ve been driving for days.”

“If you’re subtly trying to say I’m a slow driver,” Jon began before having a dry beef jerky stuck into his mouth to silence him.

“You’re doing great, sweetie,” Dany praised, ignoring the glare her patronizing tone received. Gratefully, distraction would come in the form of a pack of wolves darting between the trees as if in competition with the truck to see who was faster. Dany began recording again; not wanting to miss such a glorious sight. Sure, their constant howling on some nights could be hard to deal with but seeing them in their natural habitat was nothing short of amazing. They would eventually lose sight of the beasts when the woods abruptly ended, and the majestic towering mountains came into view.

“Whoa…” came the breathless commentary from Dany which had Jon grinning in smug pride. This was the reaction he had been looking for, and if he could stop to record or take a picture of her in this moment, it would have been perfect. However, he sincerely hoped the views ahead would be even more impressive for there was simply nothing better than standing at the top of the world.

“Is that it?!” came the excited cry as Jon’s arm was gripped tightly and shaken. Dany was pointing ahead; the distant yet distinctive column of towering ice peeking behind some mountain.

“Yes, it is,” Jon replied with a laugh. “Just try not to rip out my arm okay, babe? I know you’re excited about it and all-”
“It’s loooooooooong! It goes on for fucking ever, Jon! Holy fuck!”

Jon just about burst a spleen in mirth at her spontaneous and uncontrolled cursing. Oh, dear gods. This was going to be fun.

Her childlike wonder was infectious and a reminder of the first time he had visited this place with his family all those years ago. It was one thing to see it on T.V. or in books, but to actually stand before it? There were simply not enough words in the dictionary to describe its’ grandeur.

Since it wasn’t the height of the tourist season, the parking lot was not as busy as it tended to be. Jon was able to find a good spot, but before he could pull to a complete stop, Dany was already jumping out of the car with her mouth and eyes open in silent awe.

This is the future Queen of Westeros? Jon mused with a chuckle as he unpacked their luggage. If only Tywin and the other lords could see her now. He was sure they’d second guess their decision to leave Westeros in the hands of a woman still able to channel her inner child.

“Hurry up, babe!” she yelled; already dashing toward the entrance where a few other tourists were lining up to get their tickets and be checked-in.

“A little help would be nice!”

Still, he couldn’t fault her excitement, and before long, they were being ushered down a narrow pathway flanked by two heavy ropes adjacent to their destination. Though the wall was technically still about five miles or so away, it felt so close you could touch it. The air around here was much crisper and cleaner than in Winterfell, and there was a sensation of being close to the ends of the earth with the endless sea of white and frost blue of their surroundings. The wall itself, though giving the illusion of being all white, did give off shades of grey and cobalt especially when the sunlight bounced off it at certain intervals. One could see the effects of Time via the melting of the ice to form miniature rivulets or chunks of them flying off and descending – almost too slowly – to the earth in a loud crash. If any of these put any doubts in the tourists’ mind, no one gave that away. Those were minor and natural occurrences that had no bearing on the grand splendor of this man-made architectural feat.

It was easy to make out the ancient castles and holdfasts built along the wall; most looking like charred dollhouses from this distance. The infamous Castle Black was not visible from this location unfortunately, as it was about a hundred or so miles away. If you squinted and arched your head back far enough you could even make out the buildings at the top of the wall, including the tiny ant-like people walking upon it.

Dany trembled with eagerness and gripped Jon’s free hand within hers. “Holy shit. I still can’t believe I’m going to be up there. Gods, it’s so fucking high.”

“You’re not scared of heights, are you?”

Dany spared him a look. “You really think I’d come all the way here if I was afraid of heights? Our ancestors flew on dragons, Jon. Being in high places is in our blood.”

No argument there, Jon thought with a smirk as he was tugged again and now made to pose for a selfie at the main gate. They also sought the help of a lovely beaming couple from the Summer
Islands, who took candid shots of the duo with the favor returned in kind. In no time, Jon and Dany were exchanging phone numbers and being invited to the couple’s home should they ever decide to visit the Islands. They hadn’t seemed too fazed at realizing they were speaking to the Daenerys Targaryen; a refreshing experience for Dany.

A tour guide soon appeared; a lovely petite blonde with a familiar twang that betrayed her Wildling heritage. She began explaining the history of The Wall, while handing out brochures to the visitors. Dany skimmed hers quickly, while Jon barely looked at his. His focus was on Dany; soaking in her every expression and behavior with an all too familiar tightening in his chest. He knew what it was, and it still amazed him at how much stronger the emotion became the more time he spent with her. Usually most folks believed that in time the feeling would fade away; that the initial burst of intense affection for someone would run its course and then mere fondness would remain. Yet, here he was, feeling like a flustered virgin meeting the girl of his fantasies for the first time; only there wasn’t a gun being pointed at his head.

When they were finally ushered into the elevator taking them to the summit, he dropped the carryall bag between his legs, and wrapped his arms around her waist to pull her close. He didn’t care that there were others trapped in the small space with them, or that the tour guide was doing her best to continue her speech as the loud groan of the elevator’s engines were cranked to life.

Her adorable blush as she reciprocated the gesture before sliding her hands into the back pockets of his jeans and rest her forehead against his, had him sighing in silent gratitude and content. She whispered those three wonderful words against his lips and caught his full lower one between her teeth; sending delightful shivers down his spine while the flood of heat had his nether regions engorged with a desire she could feel. Her low gasp and smirk was punctuated with the wicked press of her hips against his until he could barely stand it. His low moan was buried against her neck, but if he had hoped to continue their foreplay, it was ‘ruined’ at her low cry of delight and the fervent tapping of his shoulder.

“We’re almost there,” she whispered breathlessly, and with great reluctance, he was forced to look out the shutters and into what had her so enamored. And why not? It was akin to flying or floating… or both, and as the earth disappeared beneath them with the wall itself just an arm’s length away – if they could stick their hands out the windows that is – Dany was rightfully rendered speechless with her new surroundings.

“We are now seven hundred feet above sea-level,” the tour guide stated as the summit finally came into view. “Welcome to the top of the world, ladies and gentlemen, and enjoy your stay on The Wall.”

The doors opened and the first thing to hit them was the sudden gust of icy wind that almost took her breath away. “Fuck, it’s cold!”

“No shit, babe,” Jon replied with a laugh. “Come on, let’s go find where we’re staying.”

Another tour guide awaited the tourists as they stepped onto a platform for further instructions. Dany, who was unaware of how tight she was holding onto Jon for dear life, tried not to look on either side as they began to walk down the ice road – for how else was it to be described? – that was about as wide as a typical King’s Landing alley. It was solid footing, and her initial trepidations of landing on her ass was appeased when the intimate rustic cabins came into view. Whoever had the brilliant idea of turning The Wall into a tourist attraction had spared no expense in making the experience an unforgettable one. Not only were there private lodgings, but there were restaurants, shops, and viewing stations where one was guaranteed to get the best shots of the lands beyond The Wall.

“Trust me,” Jon would later say with a laugh when Dany queried. “Not everyone was a big fan of
the idea to turn this into a beehive for capitalism, but the one they used to call the ‘King-Beyond-The-Wall’, Mance Rayder? He’s dead by the way. He could be quite convincing, and with the help of Lord Manderly – and father, tadaa! Here’s the final product. More revenue for the fledging Night’s Watch and its maintenance. A win-win for all sides.”

They would soon come to their destination; the warm inviting glows of a fire beckoning the freezing couple.

“Ah, here we are, Cabin 703, my Queen.”

“Ooh…cozy. I love it already!”

“Hold on…”

“What are you doin…Jon!” she squealed in flustered delight as he lifted her with a light grunt into his arms; his features breaking into a grin as he kicked the door open. “You’re going to break the door before we even get started.”

“Ooh, breaking of furniture already, my love?” he teased as he stepped into their home for the next twenty-four hours. “Isn’t it a bit too earlier to let loose that freaky side of you, Miss Targaryen? I mean I know I’ve been doing a good job holding back all this time but…mmmm…”

She wouldn’t let him finish.

He didn’t mind in the slightest.

The sudden crush of her lips on his; her demanding tongue seeking and finding his until all that mattered was the heady rush of their fevered kiss – as he struggled to kick the door closed lest they give the other visitors a good show – caused him to forget whatever else he might have rambled.

“Seven hells, Dany,” came the breathless pant when they finally pulled apart for air. “Aren’t we…?”

She dove for him again; her hands knocking off his hat and sinking into the silky tresses she loved so much to tug impatiently at the simple black rubber band holding it together. He was able to lower her to her feet, but just long enough for him to seek the zipper of her jacket. When his fumbling fingers found it difficult to do the deed, she released his swollen lips and pulled back to give him room. Both cursing and giggling at the many layers they had to get rid of –

“This is the only time I can say I really miss Pentos where we wore next to nothing all day,” Jon complained.

…until they finally caught their breaths to bask in their nude forms; heated forehead to forehead, curly black to silver tendrils, deepest browns to blazing amethyst, broad and scarred shoulders to slender ones, heaving chest to tender bosoms perked with anticipation, toned and scarred torso to suitably rounded ones, taut and angled hips to full and curvy ones he gripped tight until his engorged manhood teased the waiting heat between her legs.

She whispered her love for him in the musical language of their ancestors; moaning as she buried her face against his strong neck, her lips pursing against the throbbing vein of his jugular to count his heart beats. She inhaled his scent like an addict getting her high, her tongue darting out to lick the salt of his flesh before her teeth grazed upon it and bit hard enough for him to wince and groan in dual sensations of pain and pleasure. He returned the favor; his teeth leaving his mark on the tender region above her right shoulder. She trembled in his embrace as her hands roamed down his back until her fingernails dug into the soft flesh of his buttocks to force him closer still.
“Dear gods,” came the low growl of impatient resignation. He was hungry for this woman.

She gasped as he dipped his head lower, his lips and tongue trailing a wet path down her chest until they found her breasts. He held onto her hips and suckled on a protruding nipple, her low sounds of pleasure heightening his desire to drive her to the brink of no return. He captured the other between his fingers and tugged gently, rolling, and pinching as he laved and bathed the other with his tongue and teeth. Her toes curled as she clung to his shoulders, whimpering as her insides grew as hot as the fires in the small hearth they had barely noticed in their quest to get naked. She could feel the warm trickle of her desire already racing down her leg, and though a part of her was bashful at being so wet already, she blamed it all on the man currently wracking havoc on her senses. He was beginning to lavish his attention on the other breast, but now aware of the heady musk emanating from her, his free hand slid off her hip to find the guilty source.

“Oh Jon,” she sighed at the tingling sensation of his fingers against the tiny hairs of her womanhood. “Please…”

He ignored her pleas as he tugged a swollen nipple between his teeth and brushed his fingers against the quivering folds, now so damp with need, wet droplets baptized his skin in response.

Goddamn it…why did she have to be so fucking sexy?

With a low primal growl, he raised her leg upon his shoulder and reluctantly released the beautiful mounds he had just worshipped to focus his attention on an even more important one. He licked his lips and teased her ever so slightly by running his teeth upon her pelvis; smiling as she bucked her hips in response and sank her shaking hands into his hair.

“Gods, you’re beautiful,” he moaned as he inhaled her intoxicating musk; the scent casting aside all his attempts to ‘punish’ her as he got his first taste. His tongue lapped at the pink folds, flickering back and forth until they settled on the tiny hardened nub of her clit. Her sharp cry and tightening of her leg around his shoulder was all the reward he needed. He captured the bundle of nerve endings and suckled hard; his beard rough against the sensitive region until she soaked it and quenched his thirst. She trembled and nearly lost her footing, a choked sob escaping the lips she had been biting hard as she gave up and nearly collapsed upon him. Still he continued without mercy despite the first hard flood of her orgasm to run through her. His tongue swept past the outer muscles and burrowed deeper, a finger replacing where his lips had been earlier as he stroked her clit in tandem with his deep kisses.

“Ohgodohgodohgodohgod,” she begged and arched again as another groundswell of explosive heat raced through her. She was sure she would have nothing left to give, but when he still refused to let her go, she was all but sobbing in resigned satiation. “Please…I can’t…I can’t…oh fuck!”

The third wave was the strongest and longest; sending her arching so hard, she nearly threw him off. He lifted his gaze to study her in this moment; marveling at the taut relief of her beautiful toned body; the heaving torso, the clenching muscles, with those nipples that praised the heavens like pink rocks. She was a renaissance painting come to life, and the gods couldn’t have created a better masterpiece. Her skin was cloaked in a sheen of sweat, and as she finally came back to earth from whatever extraterrestrial plane he had taken her to, he released her with a hard smack on her wondrous mound.

Hmm…perhaps next time he could aim to make her come five times within the space of –

“Whoa!”

“Fuck you, Jon Snow,” she panted harshly as she pushed him away with her foot, sending him toppling back to the carpeted floor. She tried to look upset, but failed miserably, no thanks to that goddamn smug smirk on his face. God, she hated-loved him so damn much.
“I’m going to make you pay for that.”

“Oh, is it…ah fuuuck,” he groaned as she slid down his body in that damned way that made him want to toss her to her back and bury himself within her until she begged for mercy. He fought back a pitiful whimper as she worshipped his body with her lips, tongue, and teeth just as he had. He was embarrassed to admit that his nipples were quite sensitive, and it was something she exploited to the fullest when given the opportunity. His cock was already a raging hardened staff between them, and he winced as more of his pre-cum coat their torsos as she teased and taunted the hardened dark nubs on his chest. Her hands were not still either, sliding down his abs until they found his cock to –

“Holy shit, Dany…don’t…aaah…”

She squeezed his balls gently while tracing the outline of his penis with the other hand. She seemed to want to memorize every throbbing vein, caressing and flicking at the swollen and wet head until she just about begged for relief. Ignoring his pleas, she slid lower still, her tongue tracing the outline of the direwolves tattoo just above his pelvic region, knowing full well he was almost at his breaking point for his hips were beginning to arch off the floor in silent desperation.

She lifted her gaze then to meet his; the smolder within those mocha depths almost making her lose her resolve to make him suffer as she had. She smirked and licked at the bulbous tip; his sharp hiss at the contact like music to her ears. Not breaking his gaze, she licked again, watching as he captured his lower lip between his teeth to control himself. With an exaggerated sigh of pleasure, she dipped her head to the base of his cock and allowed her tongue to travel its length; once, twice, three times until his torso muscles clenched with anticipation. He was on his elbows now; seemingly fascinated with the simple act of receiving a blowjob from his woman. Once she had sucked him off with a cube of ice in her mouth, and he had thought he reached the gates of Nirvana. However, considering they were about to make love on the largest chunk of ice ever known to Man –

“Oh fuuuuuck!” he whimpered and fell back to the floor; his elbows no longer having the strength to hold him up as she went all in; taking as much of him as she could into her mouth until he felt the back of her throat. She barely paused to take a breath, allowing him to use her mouth as he pleased. She slurped noisily and with a hunger that was maddening; the heady taste of his seed making her wet all over again. Fuck if her thighs weren’t drenched at this point. She wanted his lips on her again, and finally pausing to take a break, she shifted positions, so he could have full access to her dripping heat.

*Oh, dear gods, yes!*

Not one to complain at such an offering, Jon obliged willingly; his lips and tongue diving back into her until both could barely concentrate on what they were doing. They were both driving each other to the brink of madness, and it was Dany who finally had to stop as she felt him ready to explode in her mouth.

“No, no, no,” he began begging as she switched positions again; his features flushed with desire and glistening with her juices. “Don’t stop now…ah fuck!”

She had impaled herself on him before he was fully prepared, and whatever other complaint he might have had was lost in the delicious sensation of her lips over his. They tasted each other within the frenzied kiss, their hips moving in undisciplined jerks until they reestablished their rhythm and sought to reach the highest plateau of their coupling. She captured his cheeks and deepened the kiss, her wince of pain getting lost within his mouth at the hard squeeze of her buttocks tempered with the soothing caresses in-between. She quivered as his finger teased the entrance to her ass hole, not sure if she could withstand him trying to take her there tonight. She was probably going to explode into tiny pieces and never be reconstructed again.
Not that he was helping matters now.

He flipped them over with a hook of his leg around hers to force her onto her back. Not breaking stride, he lifted her leg and thrust at a deeper angle; her eyes widening at the sharp but pleasurable ache it elicited until all she could feel was him-him-him-him-and nothing but him.

She came sometime during this, but like before, Jon was simply not satisfied with leaving her gasping for air. He growled and sank his teeth into her right breast; not hard enough to break the skin, but just enough to send the message that he wasn’t going to let up until she was nothing but liquified heat beneath him.

His thrusts became more intense and deeper still, every muscle in his body taut with his exertions. She sobbed helplessly and clenched his shoulders with all she had; digging her fingers into his flesh until she felt she could mix her blood with his literally. They were now one body in motion; neither knowing where one began and the other ended, and when she felt the second wave approach, she was sure she was going to die after this experience. Nothing was ever allowed to feel this powerful between a man and a woman, but with this man –

*Oh, Jon! Blood of my blood!*

…the orgasmic surge was an endless loop that wouldn’t let go. Her body was no longer hers; for she was sure she had merged with him and surrendered herself to this insanity that raged between them. A Targaryen curse, they say? If only they knew.

*My soul is yours for all eternity.*

She wept without shame as he stiffened and cursed brokenly against her, and when he finally exploded, his choked sob would be buried within the thick tresses of her moonlit hair. He shuddered and trembled for what seemed like an eternity; unable to comprehend or articulate the swirl of emotions raging within him. Neither would realize they were still silently weeping in each other’s arms until the tremulous aftershocks faded into blissful satiation.

She would be the first to brush away the damp tendrils of hair from his face, place a tender kiss to his sweat-flushed forehead, and whisper a trembling “I love you, Jon Snow”, which would have him squeezing his eyes shut and breaking down in tears all over again.

Sometimes words were pitiful replacements for the true depths of one’s feelings, and for the first time in his life, Jon Snow now knew that what he felt for Daenerys Targaryen went beyond Man’s definition of ‘love’.

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It was carefully planned; from the moment he opened the box to this moment, sitting on top of the world and watching a gorgeous sunset over the mass expanse of land that made up The Forbidden Forest. The carpet of green was a breathtaking contrast to the pure white landscape, and from this vantage point, one couldn’t help marveling at the savage beauty of Nature. It truly did make you realize how insignificant humans were compared to the power of the Earth’s riches. You felt more contemplative, appreciate, and in awe of Life itself.

Thanks to the clever designs of the cabins, all had intimate though shielded verandas with the option to open the thick sliding glass doors to get the full effect. However, the key was not to look down or you’d be reminded that you were mere inches from falling seven-hundred feet to an icy death. That
possible danger aside, it was a romantic setting, and forgoing tuxedos and slinky evening wear, being stuck in their layered sweaters, jackets, and scarves would just have to do.

“Why do you have that look in your eyes?” she finally asked as she popped the last bit of braised lemon-pepper salmon into her mouth. Her eyes glowed with mischief; its unique shade flickering with gold thanks to the floating tea candles in the middle of the table. “You’ve spent dinner staring at me most of the time. You wasted a damn good salmon, Jon Snow.”

He said nothing, content to keep staring until she rolled her eyes in mock exasperation. With a chuckle, she held up her phone with the picture of them posed before the sunset and the caption “Feeling on top of the world #thewallrules #withmybaby #thoughtsfreezinglikehell #lovealways”.

“Maybe I should go ahead and post this on Illustrogram now…hmm?”

He was digging into the pocket of his jacket with a frown of concentration, and though she didn’t want to get her hopes up - but was definitely sure he was about to do what she thought he was going to do - she was now finding it a little difficult to breathe. She felt she was mentally prepared for it, yet she was also close to shrieking that he put it away. However, remembering Sansa’s warning, and how jealous she had felt at Robb’s announcement that night, she held her breath as he finally withdrew the small black velvet box.

With the beautiful amber and indigo rays of dying sunlight behind him, Jon was bathed in a sea of color. The shadows flickered upon his handsome features, but it was easy to see he was quite nervous. She lowered the phone to the table and began toying with the napkin, before tossing it aside while wondering what she could do with her hands. Her heart was a pounding snare drum in her chest, and she had to remind herself that all that was required was a simple three-letter word. There would be no reason to make it any more complicated. She was ready. She knew she was.

“I fucked it up the first time,” Jon was saying as he cleared his throat. Gods, he sounded like he was drunk, but then again, one could make the argument that being in her presence alone was akin to being doused in the richest of wines. “And I…uh…I didn’t want to do it earlier…you know after we…uh…well, I guess what I’m trying to say is…” He cleared his throat again and stared around him for a moment. What was he looking for now?

“…well shit,” he muttered as he ran trembling fingers through his already unruly mass of hair. “You can always bend the knee later,” she teased and mentally kicked herself for how thick her voice sounded and the way her vision was already blurring, and he hadn’t even officially asked the question and why the fuck was she even about to cry anyway?!

“All right…well…here goes.” Jon cleared his throat again and Dany was this close to telling him to cut it out, when he leaned closer to open the box. “Daenerys Stormborn Targaryen? Will you marry me?”

She stared at the ring in stunned silence; realizing it wasn’t some newly crafted rock at all he must have picked from a store on impulse. This had an antique feel to it, though its band of silver, with a unique filigree design of twisting gold dragons and rose branches, still shone softly beneath the light. The blazing sapphire stone told the tale of its previous owner and the tragic love story behind it. It was beautiful in its simplicity, and it would take another moment for Dany to realize she was now openly weeping.

“…come on, Dany,” Jon was all but begging in quiet desperation. “Don’t make me do this all over again. I don’t know how else I can say how much I want to spend the rest of my life with you-”
“YES!”

She slapped her hands over her mouth at how loud she was; so loud Jon had to sit back as if physically struck and even their neighbors looked over to see what all the commotion was about. Dany’s features turned crimson, and she was never more grateful for the darkening shadows as she covered her face in utter humiliation.

Dear gods, couldn’t she even do something that simple right?

A low rumble was heard and as she peeked shyly between her fingers to see the cause of it. It was Jon having to cover his mouth with a cupped hand while trying not to have a conniption fit from laughing so hard. He nearly dropped the box, but recovered in time to save it from getting lost.

“Seven hells, Dany,” he laughed. “I know I asked for an answer, but the entire North didn’t have to hear it. Not that I’m complaining. Hell, if I could scream it to the world that you’re going to be my wife, I’d do it,” he added with a smile so full of open admiration and love, she was reduced to fidgeting with her hands or wanting to cover her face again.

He settled her dilemma by reaching across the table for her shaking hand, and as he slid the ring upon it, he began the tale of its significance as she had guessed.

“Mom kept it,” he said as he caressed her hand and raised it to his lips. “Apparently, Rhaeger had it specially made for her. She had a thing for blue roses, or blue in general, hence the sapphire. And of course, the dragon and rose motifs represent their union as Targaryen and Stark.”

“It’s beautiful, Jon. It really is.”

“Yeah…and if there was any doubt about their feelings for one another, Mom shattered those illusions. They were really crazy for each other, Dany, probably as much as we feel for each other right now, and though I wish they had a happier ending, a part of me realizes we probably wouldn’t be sitting here tonight if that had happened.”

He would reveal more of what he had learned in Lyanna’s diary as they lay in bed later that night, causing Dany to earn a whole other level of respect for that doomed couple. Rhaeger, despite his flaws, had made plans to settle down with Lyanna once the war was over. He even purchased a home for his new family close to where Summerhall had once stood, and where Jon might have been raised in far different circumstances than his life at Winterfell.

Hating herself for being grateful for the current outcome, she caressed Jon’s head and raised her left hand to stare at the ring for what must be the one-millionth time, perhaps hoping it wasn’t just a figment of her imagination.

“I hope I’m a good wife…” She wanted to add ‘and mother’, but balked at that. “…to you.”

“Same here,” Jon whispered as he placed a tender kiss upon her stomach. “Not only a good husband, but a great dad. I want to be there for our kids, Dany, every step of the goddamn way.”

“…yes…”

He noticed her hesitancy. “What is it?”

Dany swallowed the lump in her throat; regretting having to do this now. “I thought I once told you I wasn’t going to be able to have kids.”
“Well yeah, but I chose to ignore it.”

“What?”

“Was this an actual medical opinion?” Jon queried with a raised brow. “I mean we haven’t actually seen a doctor to get his or her thoughts on it, have we? What makes you think you can’t have kids? Did Drogo do something else to you that I don’t know about?”

“It wasn’t Drogo,” Dany confessed as she lowered her gaze. “It was…well…one of the villages that Drogo raided. We met a witch who put a curse on me, and since I lost our baby, I’ve been unable to get pregnant, and I’ve slept with other men, Jon.”

“You don’t have to remind me,” came the wry reply. “So, all of this is based on some witch, yes?”

“Don’t sound so skeptical. You’ve seen what they can do. Look at the red woman for instance.”

He sat up to scoot closer until he held her cheeks between his hands and rest his forehead against hers. “Dany?”

“…yes?”

“I want you to listen to me, and listen well, okay?”

“Okay…”

“I don’t give a rat’s ass what some witch said to you years ago, do you understand?”

“Yes, but-”

“Those other men were probably shooting blanks, and you weren’t even trying to get pregnant with them, were you?”

“Well no, but-”

“Then this particular topic is over. No more talk of witches or evil women or barren wombs.” He placed a hand against her stomach and smiled; a simple action so full of conviction and belief, it brought tears to her eyes. “We are going to work hard on bringing another Targaryen into this world, and together, we’re going to raise him or her the right way. We are going to give him or her the kind of life we never had. Promise?”

She couldn’t trust herself to speak, and she settled for nodding and accepting his hard kiss on her forehead, eyelid, cheek, corner of her mouth until he began worrying her neck.

“Oooh no,” she groaned as he began lowering her back to the pillows. “I won’t be able to join the hike tomorrow, Jon. We’ve gone twice already since dinner.”

“So? One more time wouldn’t hurt, would it?”

She laughed as he tickled her and nearly sent them toppling off the bed; where writhing bodies and giggles of delight would soon be replaced by the wet sounds of an all too familiar union that brought them the greatest of joys.
His deep repose would be interrupted by the sensation of something wet and cold against his face. He might have assumed it was Dany wanting another round of it, when the familiar smell of the Wolfswood and damp fur filled his senses. He lifted his lashes to notice the staring blood red eyes of his most loyal of companions.

“What’s wrong, boy?” Jon croaked in hazy weariness.

His direwolf only gave a mournful howl before turning on his heels to fade into the wall. Too exhausted to try to figure out what Ghost was trying to say, Jon would have closed his eyes to return to sleep, when he suddenly felt it.

They weren’t alone.

*Oh gods! Dany!*

His body swung into motion before his mind could fully gather itself, but it was too little too late. He felt the cold rag thrust between his mouth and tied roughly behind his neck, while two other sets of hands held onto his legs and arms as he was bound with ropes so coarse and tight they dug and chaffed his flesh.

He was shoved to his knees and forced to look up and into the familiar pallid features of a man he had tried to forget since their brief exchange at the meeting.

*Son-of-a-bitch!*

“Sorry to have to break up your little honeymoon, Jon Snow,” came the quiet greeting from Roose Bolton with a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. “But by order of the crown regent, Cersei Lannister, you are both to appear at King’s Landing immediately. You, and your precious little Queen, are under arrest for the conspiracy and murder of Lord Tywin Lannister.”
Chapter Notes

Is this the part where I go - and 'nowyitbeginz' or what? *lol*
Seriously though, much thanks for all the feedback/comments! *bows gratefully*
Enjoy!

King’s Landing:

There were no parades thrown in his honor; no rows of red cloaks saluting along Shadowblack Lane, no assembly of the most powerful lords in all of Westeros applauding his great feats, or even mild entertainment in the form of semi-naked girls with heaving bosoms and rotating hips for his carnal pleasure.

Alas, he was met with varying degrees of curiosity, scorn, and bemusement as he weaved his way through winding staircases and cavernous corridors that still reeked of its original inhabitants’ conquests despite attempts by the current occupants to dispel its mythical aura. Not for the first time, he cursed his fate to be born in this form, where his stunted legs soon began to throb in agony with every step. All the same, he kept his features composed; ignoring the whispers that trailed after him like restless ghosts, or the snickers of derision that cloaked him despite his fine clothing and well-coiffed appearance. Memories of the last time he was here came flooding back as he struggled to keep up with the guards escorting him. Not very many pleasant ones for they had eventually forced him to flee to Meereen, but there had been brief moments of joy. Mostly found between the breasts of a whore or buried deep between the sopping warmth of her thighs. Unfortunately, his raunchy thoughts would have to be put on hold, for with the loud groaning of the great oak-and-bronze doors opened before him, Tyrion Lannister was finally forced to face the dreadful demons of his nightmares.

Ah, the joyful family reunion. Where are the trumpeters when you need them?

Aside from Varys’s wet smile of welcome, he was met with grim, glum, or polite expressions on the visages of his father’s small council. All were seated around a large gilded and weirwood-carved table, as Tyrion noted they had forgone using the horrendous Iron Throne for now. The bladed and jagged monstrosity remained looming over them in silent judgment; the many ghosts of Targaryen...
rulers past screaming from the shadows at the injustice done to their bloody and fiery legacy.

Forged with a thousand swords of his enemies, Aegon the Conqueror must have been a sadist to want to sit on something that deadly. “A king is never to sit easy”, he had proclaimed, something Tyrion could agree with. It was a message he had tried to instill in Daenerys from the moment she made her desires known to him. It was all well and good to want to reclaim her ancestors’ legacy but getting there and sitting on it…that was a whole other matter. Literally, and figuratively, being a ruler was a painful task. Blood would be shed, whether it be sitting on the throne and getting stabbed by the blades or seeing them flow through the streets and fields of the realm she hoped to oversee. However, he had sworn to be at her side through it all come what may, though he winced as he looked up at the throne again. He had almost forgotten how high that thing was, and for a moment entertained the idea of Daenerys sitting there –

*Or she might discard it altogether.*

With some of the changes she had already done to Dragonstone, he wouldn’t be surprised if the Red Keep underwent a complete make-

“He returns like the prodigal son,” came the cold greeting from the stunning blond woman, whose eyes of brilliant emerald shone with unabashed hatred. Her voice was a cruel lash to his tumultuous thoughts. “I thought you would still be sucking at the teat of your newest whore, Daenerys Targaryen.”

“It’s a pleasure to see you again, Cersei,” Tyrion replied with a bow of feigned politeness. “It’s been too long, dear sister.”

She scoffed and turned away with a roll of her eyes; not before reaching for the glass of rich Arbor wine and nearly downing its contents in one gulp. With the flush on those cheeks, Tyrion guessed she must have been going at it for a while now. Her love for alcohol aside, Time had been kind to his sister, who still looked model-thin and preferred her expensive hand-spun gowns of silk and gold. After the loss of three children to mysterious illnesses, it was a wonder she hadn’t locked herself away in a tower to drink herself to death. One had to give her credit for putting on a brave face despite the horrors that seemed to follow her like a witch’s curse.

Her twin (and lover) remained standing behind their father, looking splendid and every bit the role of Prince Charming in his Kingsguard uniform. Unlike his sister, however, his handsome features were more open and filled with amusement. His full lips curved in a small smile as he acknowledged his deformed brother, but he made no comment as he was wont to do. Jamie Lannister had never been one for great speeches anyway. He was more content to let his actions speak for themselves, and goodness knows he still had his hands full being the current Lord Commander of the new City Watch.

The rest of the small council comprised of sleepy-eyed Grand Maester Pycelle, whose bald head and snowy beard gave one the illusion of a man ready to meet the gods at any minute. However, Tyrion knew better, for behind the dull gaze was a man who had served the Iron Throne for over forty years and had more knowledge of what went on behind the scenes than he let on. He could be a formidable foe if challenged, and Tyrion had a feeling he might be needing the old man’s help before long.

There was a new face in the mix, and Tyrion had to wrack through the dusty folders of his mind to figure out who he was. When the bald man, with the small chin, nodded his head in acknowledgement, it hit him all at once. He was Lord Harys Swyft, who once headed one of his father’s businesses in Lannisport. It wasn’t hard to figure out what position he now had in the council, for if anyone had dared question the whereabouts of Petyr “Littlefinger” Baelish, Tyrion
would have been glad to show them the dark waters of the Bay. If they were lucky, the fishes might have already made quick work of the previous master of coin’s remains. He did have to give Grenn and his cohorts credit for getting rid of the sly conman so quickly. His purpose was served once Robert Baratheon was dead. Keeping him alive was a risk they could not afford.

Rounding up the motley crew was none other than his dear father – Tywin Lannister; the self-ordained and unrepentant ruler of the Seven Kingdoms. Though if one was keeping count, he was the ruler of three kingdoms at best, but what did it matter? If he remained in control of the Red Keep, Tywin was free to wield his influence wherever he deemed fit. Unfortunately, those plans would have to be put on hold thanks to the appearance of a certain Targaryen princess.

Tyrion, who had managed to control the waves of nausea swirling in the pit of his stomach, felt the meager breakfast he had eaten threaten to rise to the surface as he met the calculating green eyes trained on him. Dour-faced as he was, there was no denying the power Tywin exuded in this moment – in any moment. His bald head glistened beneath the flickering fires dotted along the Hall, and his bushy golden whiskers absorbed the sun’s rays until they looked just as gilded as the ceremonial crimson cape draped across his powerful shoulders. It was clipped to his tailor-made black suit with a heavy golden roaring lion crest, as if to remind everyone of just who was in charge now.

He remained silent as he watched his son lumber onto an empty seat, with some effort, and help himself to a cup of wine. However, if Tyrion had hoped to break the endless chasm of ice between them, he knew he was already failing woefully.

No smiles or warm hugs or cheers for this son, dear Father? Of course not. I wasn’t meant to be after all.

Still, he had to be brave. He had to ignore years of humiliation, abuse, and suffering beneath the tyranny of his father’s ‘love’ and begin the long path to reclaiming the throne for its rightful ruler. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath; allowing the warm sweetness of the beverage to coat his tongue and throat. This was the kind of courage he needed, and as he conjured up the image of the beautiful silver-haired ‘usurper’ to mind, Tyrion Lannister began his mission in earnest.

But that was then, and this is now; and the now reeked of piss, shit, and despair.

He told himself he had done it for the realm; that getting rid of their main obstacle was now bound to make things so much easier for their cause.

Ah, but that would make me the biggest liar in the world, he mused with a bitter chuckle. The biggest liar and the most thoughtless fool.

Or had it truly been a thoughtless act? Wasn’t this something he had envisioned from the moment his father had made it known that he was an eyesore and a stain to the Lannister legacy? Hadn’t he had vivid fevered dreams of driving the blade of a sword – possibly made of the infamous Valyrian steel – over and over into his father’s chest until he was soaked in his blood? Hadn’t he wished he could toss his father onto the monstrous throne and impale him upon it while laughing and screaming all the obscenities he could muster to his mutilated face and body?

Oh yes, he had dreamed and had killed Tywin Lannister a thousand different ways. However,
dreams and reality could be cruel mistresses; for the final deed had left him feeling even more disgruntled and dissatisfied.

What had he hoped for? That Tywin would beg for his life? That his father would crawl on his hands and knees seeking forgiveness? That he would finally admit to being wrong for accusing Tyrion of being the cause of his beloved Joanna’s death? Or that he would willfully submit the Throne to Daenerys in a blood-soaked declaration?

_Dream on._

He sighed and rubbed his mouth with a trembling hand wishing he could have some form of nourishment in a keg or two. It was a painful gesture for one, his hands were still as swollen and thick as sausages (broken joints no doubt), and his split upper lip and shattered jaw were reminders of the thorough thrashing he had received thanks to his dear sister’s orders.

_And it is just the beginning_, he rued with a shake of his head. If he knew Cersei as well as he thought he did, she would take great pleasure torturing him until he begged for death.

He had lost count of how long he was kept down here, for the last time he had seen daylight—or any proper light at all—was the night he walked into his father’s chambers with the golden pistol—a fine gift from Lord Mace Tyrell—on which he had attached a silencer to finish what he started. He could still remember the change of expressions on Tywin’s face; from irritation at being bothered to an almost comical look of disbelief at the sight of the barrel pointed squarely at his person.

“A gun, huh?” came the low remark filled with scorn. “That’s the best you could come up with? You do know I can have you—”

The first bullet had gone right through his throat, and Tyrion had watched dispassionately as the lion of the Westerlands clawed at his neck as if hoping to drag out the bullet that way. Instead, he was left making loud gurgling noises; his once sharp and intelligent features contorted into a gargoyles-like mask of pain. The second bullet would be buried in his forehead; forming an almost neat hole until the torrent of blood gushed out to coat the elegant oak desk when he slumped upon it.

Tyrion studied the immobile figure for several long minutes with gun still outstretched in hands that were still surprisingly steady. When he was sure Tywin wouldn’t jump up to surprise him, he sighed and dropped the gun to the floor. He padded toward the mini-bar and helped himself to a strong mix of sweet wine and rum. After downing two cups of this, he grabbed an extra bottle of the most expensive whiskey in his father’s collection and sat himself on a chair opposite the desk.

“To you…and to the realm,” he toasted as he held up the bottle to the hunched body. “We could have worked well together, you son-of-a-bitch, but I guess not. Besides, you brought this upon your cause….and we would have parted ways with a manageable truce.”

He drank thirstily from the bottle; the hot warmth of the beverage working its magic with its potency. With a loud belch, he dug into his jacket to whip out his cellphone; his lips curling in a rueful smile at the last message he had received from a very excited Daenerys yesterday.

“Meeting went well all things considered,” she had typed. “We have a majority of the North on our side. Documents signed and everything. We did it! Wish you had been here though, but I can’t wait to see you again. I have missed hearing your ‘words of wisdom’ LOL. Oh, and Jon says hello to you too.”

_Congratulations, my Queen. With Jon Snow at your side, it looks like you’ll be changing Westeros_
He was proud of her. He really was. She was a good student, a wonderful student, the best student! A vain part of him would love to take total credit for the suave politician she had become, but he knew better. She might listen to him and take his advice from time to time, but if he had come to know anything about the Targaryens, they eventually did whatever the fuck they wanted. He chuckled at the memories of the few times she had gone against his advice and wishes; choosing to do things her way with about a fifty-fifty success rate. When she was in the right, she never really crowed or mocked him for his flawed decisions – oh, she could get angry, but she never belittled him - and whenever she was in the wrong, she did have the humility enough to apologize and recognize his foresight.

_Wonder what she’ll think of what I’ve done now?_  

He could almost see the look of horror on her features, then probably dismay…and then disappointment. _That would be the worst_, he thought. Seeing that expression on those ethereal features would make him feel even more of a failure. They had all worked so hard to get to this point, and what had he done? Given in to the darkest desires of his heart so effortlessly.

_And what would he think? Would he still consider me a traitor?_

Tyrion could almost laugh at the notion of the bastard of Winterfell considering him a turncoat. Sure, he could see the reasoning behind it, after all the Lannisters didn’t exactly have pristine reputations when it came to their relationship with the North, let alone the Starks. Jon Snow, for all his quest to not get too involved with the twists and turns of politics, was turning out to be the most political of them all! The irony was almost too much to bear. It was akin to watching Dany grow into her role as future Queen. For Jon, the transformation from easy-going lucky to astute, wary, yet benevolent leader was something to be applauded. This was a man who had managed to ‘tame’ the Khal Drogo and acquire a goddamn khalasar for himself. There was also no doubt he had helped in acquiring the Northern votes on Dany’s behalf, and if there were any questions about his true allegiances, one only had to look at the way those two interacted especially when they thought no one was watching.

_But I do watch. Everyday. And what I see fills me with both hope and fear. He has proven himself to be worthy of ruling beside you, Dany, but where will that eventually leave me? What role will I have when he becomes the ear and heart you only listen to? Will I be discarded as well?_

He helped himself to another long draught from the bottle until the world begin to swim before his eyes. He cursed his melancholic thoughts and wondered how long it would be before a guard came rushing up here to check on them. No one had stopped him on the way here, which was one of the advantages of being regarded as ‘insignificant’. No one would have assumed he’d be packing a loaded weapon within his oversized leather-jacket, or question why he’d want to see his father after a rather contentious dinner.

Hah! Now _that_ was where the final straw was broken and what made up Tyrion’s mind.

He had assumed things would go better than he thought with Tywin’s agreement to meeting with Daenerys after her trip to Winterfell. It had been a tricky situation to bring up, but his father had been astute enough to know the usurper wasn’t going to the North for a joyride.

“I will wait until she thinks she’s able to acquire the Northern votes,” he said over dinner that night. “So, you can rest easy that I will not do anything to deter her quest…for now. Besides, it would be a great opportunity to have a face-to-face discussion. She is quite intriguing.”

It was a minor victory, but he would take anything he could get. Cersei, however, hadn’t been as
patient. She raved and ranted about her father’s unwillingness to take charge of the regions Dany already had beneath her belt: Dorne, Dragonstone and its neighboring islands. It wasn’t until Tywin silenced her with a sharp reprimand did she keep her peace. Unfortunately, the rest of the week proved to be an uncomfortable one for Tyrion at the castle. Varys and his brother, Jaime, were just about the only people that made things a bit more tolerable.

“It was foolish of you to return,” Jaime had said with a brief glance of despair in his direction when they could get a moment alone. “You know how father and Cersei think of you.”

“Ah, but I can face anything with you on my side,” Tyrion had joked despite the truth within his words. Jaime had, and unless things got really bad, would remain the only saving grace for his allegiance to the Lannisters. Despite some of his flawed choices (the major one being his choice to still bed his twin sister), Jaime did have a good heart buried beneath the layers of vanity and cockiness. It was that brother he would hope to cling to when all went to hell…eventually.

As for the Spider, his role was to keep him abreast of the secret meetings Tywin hosted for incoming lords, from mostly the riverlands, where House Tully seemed to be the main catch.

“They will be a solid addition to Tywin’s quest,” Varys had confided in him. “Considering their allegiance to the Starks thanks to the marriage between Ned and Catelyn. However, the current lord, Edmure, is quite easily persuaded. Just put enough wine and sweet-faced girls in his presence and he’s willing to sell the entire region to the highest bidder.”

Tyrion made a mental note to have Jon speak to his brother, Robb, about setting his dear uncle straight. Once the Tullys were in their corner, it was only a matter of time before The Vale fell in line.

“The Tyrells seem to be firmly on your father’s side, but you must remember that they are likely to switch if given the right incentive.”

“How do you mean?”

“Have you forgotten that old bat, Olenna, used to live beneath the watchful eyes of Benjen Stark?”

“Ah…”

“Though Mace is still the figurehead, his daughter, Margaery is actually the one in control of the estate. According to my birds, she has always been intrigued with the bastard from the North, so what stops him from wooing her into our team? He can make himself even more useful that way.”

Tyrion added that to his mental checklist as well.

“And the Iron Islands? Any hope there?”

“The Ironborns are no fans of the North or the rest of Westeros,” Varys replied with a sigh. “But Asha Greyjoy, who now oversees the region, should be willing to give the future queen an audience. Word has it, she swings both ways and is likely to find Dany worthy of keeping her bed warm at night.”

“I doubt Daenerys, or Jon, would appreciate such an offer,” Tyrion scoffed.

“Ah, but there’s more. It would seem that our dear Queen already has a friendship of sorts with one Theon Greyjoy, her younger brother.”

Tyrion blinked in surprise. He was sure he was aware of most of the people Dany had associated
with over the years, but he couldn’t remember her mentioning a meeting with a Greyjoy. Cursing beneath his breath at such a wasted opportunity, he added that to his list of endless tasks to complete.

Between Varys’s whispers and Jaime’s brief moments of levity to help alleviate the tension, getting an audience with his father was almost impossible. It seemed as if Tywin was going out of his way to pretend as if Tyrion didn’t exist (nothing new), but the embarrassment at meeting shocked expressions whenever he barged into yet another secret meeting, was enough to let him know that his purpose here was done. Unfortunately, his crew in Winterfell would be stuck there for another week or so, thanks to a snowstorm, so any hopes of expediting the process was null and void.

When he wasn’t busy trying to keep up with his father’s antics, he took the time to peruse his favorite brothels or strip joints. With Littlefinger no longer around to control his various underground enterprises, Grenn had taken charge and was more than pleased to see Tyrion in person. After all, any friend of Jon Snow, was a friend to him. He made sure the imp had the best girls, though Tyrion was more interested in one particular fawn-like creature called Shae. She was all he could ever need in a woman and then some. Though, in jest, he did warn her not to fall in love with him, “I am prone to leaving my women salivating after me, so you’ve been warned.” She had laughed at that, a lovely tinkling sound that reminded him of better days as a youth. However, he still had to be careful with her. The walls did have ears and eyes.

Night time games aside, the days were spent walking down the streets of King’s Landing. He knew the terrible reputation this place had, and all the terrible history associated with it, but there was still no denying the vibrancy and rich culture it exuded from every trash-ridden street corner or derelict building. It wasn’t so much the setting, but the people that made this place what it was. It was the native Westerosi working hard behind a pizza counter or sweating it out in the pits of the Street of Steel. It was an exotic Asshai’i priestess standing beneath the Great Sept of Baelor, preaching to an enamored audience about the wonders of her Lord R’hllor. It was the animated Pentoshi selling his shiny metallic wares and shimmering silks to passersby, the ebony-hued tourists from the Summer Isles with their pearly-white teeth and welcoming smiles. It was the Braavosi, the Volantenes, the Myrish, and those from as far as the Shadowlands, wandering along ancient streets now accentuated with the modern world. While ancient relics remained standing, blocks of steel, concrete, and glass now dotted the skylines. Boasting also one of the busiest airports and ports in the world, King’s Landing was the place where dreams were supposed to come true. It might not have the wealth as some places in Essos, but this was considered the birthplace of a new world. Aegon the Conqueror had made it special, and despite its turbulent history, that aura of hopes and dreams, still permeated the very air they breathed.

All it needs is a little more loving care, Tyrion thought wistfully as he smiled at a group of children playing hopscotch in front of their homes. They only want a life of peace, stability and happiness. And our current government fails them daily.

He sighed and looked toward the Red Keep with hands clasped tightly behind him.

And she – along with him – will make the necessary changes to bring those dreams to fruition. So, my dear, King’s Landing, give us a little more time. Your patience will be rewarded. I promise you that.

Those feelings of goodwill remained with him until dinner that night. So far, he had managed to bite his tongue and hold his true feelings about Tywin’s distant treatment of him so far. He had assumed he’d be ignored or made to eat another solitary dinner in his chambers, when he was given the call to join them in the Queen’s Ballroom.

“Ah, you finally made it,” Tywin greeted from his seat on the dais. His smile was anything but warm
as he acknowledged the dwarf marching down the middle of the hall, before motioning for Tyrion to take a seat of honor beside Jaime. Once Tyrion was settled in, he raised his glass again. “A toast to the return of the prodigal son. He who thinks he can conquer Westeros with the usurper’s daughter at the helm, eh?”

Tyrion could feel his ears burning as the laughter surged and swelled around him. He ignored the smirk of satisfaction on Cersei’s visage -for she was sitting at her father’s right side – and downed his wine with a forced smile. He couldn’t remember eating much despite the tantalizing dishes of quails drowned in butter, almond crusted trout, stewed rabbits, and blueberry tarts. What he did remember was the biting comments and jests from the other lords; most from smaller houses that weren’t worth mentioning.

Tyrion managed it well, though by the fifth or sixth consumption of wine, his tongue was loosened, and he gave back as good as he got. He especially targeted the representative from House Mudd, a fat slob with thick lips that reminded Tyrion of two worms attempting to mate while he spoke. When Mudd japed about Tyrion’s capacity to comprehend ‘complex’ matters related to running a country, he staggered to his feet and snapped back with an eloquent “fuck off, you cocksucking ass kisser! What? Father dearest hasn’t given you a chance to do that yet? Don’t worry, I can assure you his cock is much bigger and more satisfying than the ones you’ve had shoved up your ass, or mouth, so far. So, cheers!”

The silence to greet his loud declaration was deafening, well except from the strings of some classical music still playing over unseen speakers.

“I do believe you are done for tonight, Tyrion,” Tywin eventually said in a voice so cold, it could freeze steam. “The guards will escort you to your chambers.”

“I do know my way around here, dear father,” Tyrion sneered. “I don’t need the special treatment.”

“The only treatment you’ll be receiving is my decision to no longer entertain your foreign queen,” Tywin hissed beneath his breath. His nostrils flared with his barely contained fury; his whiskers bristling as if electrocuted. “Consider my invitation rescinded. She can fend for herself when the Great Council is convened…or better yet, I would suggest she return to Essos before an unfortunate incident occurs.”

“You wouldn’t-”

“You question my authority?” Tywin intoned with contempt. “You forget your place, Tyrion. I suggest you leave King’s Landing as quickly as possible. Besides, I would hate to see your new favorite whore be turned into another example of why you should not wade in the depths of waters that could drown you. Never forget…Tysha.”

With a loud snap of his fingers to his guards, Tyrion could feel the bubbling coil of fury and disappointment within the pit of his stomach. His vision blurred with a dull shade of red; his head pounding with the mixture of alcohol and his turbulent emotions. He shrugged off the guards that reached for him and hopped off the dais, doing his best to keep his head high despite a snarky remark from another guest which set off another gale of laughter. He didn’t need to see the smug look of satisfaction on his sister’s face, for he could picture it quite well.

The guards would walk him to his room, where he would spend the next hour pacing and wringing his hands in agitation.

Tysha – dear darling and sweet Tysha - the woman he had once loved as a youth and married in a fit of passion, only to learn that his father had forced Jaime to lie about her being a prostitute before
having his guards rape her before his very eyes. The worst part of that traumatic experience was
having to watch silver coin after silver coin being discarded around his beautiful bride’s body until
his father made him take her last…with a gold cold. That was all she was worth after all.

Tysha…Shae…no. No more. He couldn’t put her through that as well. He would rather die than
have his newest fawn be subject to such cruelty.

*Please forgive me, my Queen*, he would think as he slipped through one of the many secret doors the
Red Keep boasted of. *I did my best, but I have reached the point of no return.*

He would not give himself an opportunity to rethink his decision, for all he could see and hear was
Tywin’s cold features and the words that had seared and shattered his heart into pieces. He had come
so far to make so little progress, only to have it snatched away from him.

Someone had to pay for that.

He pushed open the false wall with an effort, hoping the low grating sound wouldn’t alert anyone.
However, a cautious peek down the torch-lit hallway, revealed that he was relatively safe. Thanking
Varys for having the foresight to show him these hidden routes, Tyrion was able to slip into the room –
surprisingly not guarded - where the Targaryens had once displayed priceless artifacts from
conquests all over Westeros and beyond. Unfortunately, most of those artifacts were gathering dust
below ground, and in its place, Tywin had converted it to his personal showcase of honors. Tyrion
didn’t waste time admiring the few shiny ornaments and cloths on display. There was only one thing
he needed, and it sat silent and deadly within a glass case in a corner of the room. It was a beautiful
weapon; a handcrafted golden pistol with an etching of a roaring lion on its barrel. How fitting.

Grabbing a thick wool cloak (probably a gift from the Freys of the Twins), he wrapped it around his
hand and smashed through the glass. Shaking his head at such pitiful security – for he had fully
expected alarms to go off – Tyrion grabbed the weapon and its accessories and hid them within his
jacket.

He could hear his heavy and rapid breathing as he trotted out of the room, while hoping he wouldn’t
be spotted. Again, he might have been an invisible shadow for all the attention paid to him. Once
back in the safety of his room, he helped himself to another long draught from a bottle of sweet wine
and began assembling the weapon. He couldn’t remember the last time he had shot someone, but it
was probably like riding a bicycle. Once you’ve gotten the hang of it, it should come naturally next
time.

And so, it had.

It would be the pounding on the door that jerked him out of the deep sleep he had fallen into. For a
moment, he blinked dumbly at his surroundings; wondering where the fuck he was until the smell hit
him. Not so much the stench of wine and rum on his breath, but the body still slumped over the desk
now attracting a few intrigued flies. The first streaks of sunlight were beginning to pour through the
windows, and they seemed to bathe Tywin’s body in a soft glow as if to say a final farewell to their
golden lion.

It might have been a good time to make himself scarce and leave the scene of the crime, find the next
boat to take him to Dragonstone, or better yet hop into someone’s private jet to send him off to
Winterfell. However, his muddled senses failed him, and the dual poundings on the door, and within
his head, had him final barking out a “shut the fuck up!” which had knocker all but smashing the
door in.

It was his dear brother Jamie, who with one quick look at the situation; turned a sickly shade of
cream cheese.

“Ty... Tyrion... what... what have you done?” was all he could manage to squeak out before their sister came barreling in like a hurricane.

Her deafening shriek was enough to wake the dead.

What would happen next would be a mash of confusion and chaos culminating in him being beaten, handcuffed, and eventually tossed into the dungeons in the bowels of the castle. He was unable to move for several days due to the ferocity and overzealousness of his torturers. By his guess, he might have several broken ribs, his busted face, and his back stripped from the lashes he had received.

Varys came to visit once or twice, bringing him news of what was happening above ground. The last time The Spider came – dressed as a beggar – he stated that Tywin’s body was still being kept in the Great Hall for display.

“She’s already beginning to spread the propaganda that the usurpers were responsible for his death. She’s hoping to turn public opinion against them. I still can’t believe you chose that route, my Lord. Poison would have been far easier.”

“Slower. Besides, there was no guarantee he wouldn’t have prepared for such an event,” Tyrion replied through swollen lips. He tried to smile, but it felt even more grotesque to him. Several loose teeth were enough to tell the story. “Have you contacted the North? Dany? Jon?”

Varys nodded. “Though it seems our future King and Queen are already on their honeymoon. They left for the Wall yesterday, and I worry about that.”

Tyrion worried about that too. He felt it was extremely necessary for the whole team to be together, but he couldn’t quite place a finger on what could be making him so uneasy. With Jon and Dany being away from Winterfell, and with probably no bodyguards if they were that determined to be alone, what stopped anyone from attacking them? Sure, they were both great fighters, but they still couldn’t take any chances.

His worst fears would be confirmed when he was awakened the next day by the now familiar loud groan of the solid iron and wood doors being opened. A flood of light, in the form of torches, filled the room as a towering monster of a guard led his ‘grieving’ sister into his filthy haven.

Tyrion winced as he tried to sit up. He was naked except for the pair of soiled black boxer shorts they had been nice enough to let him keep. “To what do I owe the pleasure?” he asked as he licked his chapped lips and tried to smile. “It’s been a while, dear sist-”

The hard slap had his head almost slamming into the stone wall. Blood, thick and coppery, filled his mouth as he shook his head to clear out the ringing before spitting out a wad to the floor.

“How dare you?” came the venomous words, though if one was to listen carefully, you could almost hear the tremor in her voice. “How dare you speak to me as if nothing happened, you... you... hateful bastard!”

She struck him again, and would have gone for a third time, when he reached up to grip her wrist. The monster guard took a threatening step forward but must have seen something in Tyrion’s eyes to have falter.

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“Unless you want her pretty little wrist broken, I suggest you don’t take another step,” Tyrion said with an attempt to smile again. “And I wouldn’t recommend hitting me again, Cersei. Your goons have had their fun with me so far. I can only take so much.”
“Let me go,” she clipped though clenched teeth.

“If you promise not to get too frisky with those hands.”

“You’re lucky I haven’t asked them to have your head on a spike!” she spat. “You disgust me.”

“Ditto the sentiments,” Tyrion replied, now suddenly weary of the verbal battle. He released her wrist and slumped back against the wall. “So now what? Behead me? Show me off to the people of King’s Landing and let them know that I was the one responsible for taking our dear father’s life?”

She had paced away, rubbing her wrists, but at his words, she swirled around; her long golden hair shimmering beneath the fires to match the blazing one in her green eyes. “You murdered him!” she cried out; her beautiful features stretching into a mask of horror. “You murdered our father in cold blood! What kind of a monster, are you?”

“The kind who is probably doing the damn world a favor,” Tyrion replied calmly. “And come now, dear Sister. You and I both know I was never going to be winning any child of the year awards when it came to father. I’ve begun to lost count of how many times you and he have tried to have me killed.”

“We didn’t try hard enough,” she hissed.

“Lucky me,” Tyrion replied with a weak chuckle. “But then again, I’ve always had to learn how to survive in this fucked up family dynamic. If I couldn’t be as wonderful as you and Jaime, I’d have to set my own path.”

“And you felt it best to associate yourself with the usurper,” came the sneering words of derision. “Not one of your finest moments, Tyrion. Though seeing father actually praise your guerilla tactics was nauseating.”

Tyrion hated feeling a sense of pride at that. It hadn’t all been his idea, as it had involved several meetings with Dany’s small council and Jon Snow’s input. Still, it was something their team had put together, and to think that Tywin had at least appreciated that if nothing else –

It wouldn’t have killed you to say it to my face, he mused with mild regret.

“…matter,” Cersei was saying as she paced toward the doorway only to spin around to him again. Her maroon and gold-laced gown swept the floor as she moved. “Plans are already set in motion to teach you, and your pathetic little queen, a lesson.”

Tyrion’s brows furrowed. “What are you talking about?”

“You didn’t honestly believe that the entire North would easily go to your precious Targaryen, did you?” Cersei scoffed with a haughty expression on her visage. “While father continued to waste his time with the riverlands, I worked on setting up an alliance in the North, and at this moment…” She eyed her watch. “Your foreign whore of a queen and her northern fool of a boyfriend are settling nicely in their new homes several feet beneath you.”

Tyrion felt the world tilt on its axis. His gut feeling had been right after all. This was the scenario he had most dreaded. His hope was that the message would have reached Jon and Dany about his incarceration, and they would have left The Wall immediately. However, he had failed to take into consideration what Cersei was capable of especially with Tywin no longer in the picture.

“What do you plan to do to them?” he asked tightly.
Cersei tried to look disinterested. “Keep them here for as long as I like. Torture them or kill them, whichever mood strikes me first. Amazing how quickly public opinion can change when you shove the right fib into their gullible brains – just one of the many lessons father taught me. You see, no one knows they’ve even been captured, and thanks to my ally’s quick thinking, he sent off an email to the Winterfell residents from a smitten ‘Jon Snow’. He, and his girlfriend, will be spending a lot more time on The Wall with specific instructions for them not to be bothered. As for Winterfell itself…”

“What the hell are you planning to do?!”

“I did give him permission to do as he pleased,” Cersei continued as if he hadn’t spoken. “But Roose Bolton can be a loose cannon. Who knows what he plans to do? For all I know, he’s burned that unnecessary thing to the ground. Good riddance I say.”

“You bitch! You won’t get away with this!”

“Ah, ah, ah,” she said with a wag of her finger. Her features glowed with malicious intent. “I wouldn’t resort to name-calling just yet, dear brother. You see, two can play that game, and in fact, I think I ought to thank you for taking out father since I’ll now become regent and protector of the realm. With those two usurpers in my possession, and Winterfell gone, the rest of their pitiful followers will be scrambling for a new voice of reason. I do hope you live long enough to see my coronation. I plan for it to be a glorious occasion.”

In desperation, Tyrion lunged for her, but this time, the monster guard was ready for him. With a swift kick to his already injured ribs, Tyrion was sent flying into a corner of the dungeon where he huddled into a ball and struggled to catch his breath.

“Fuck.”

“Live just a little longer, Tyrion,” Cersei taunted as she swept out of the room in a flourish of fire and gold. “The fun is just beginning.”

Winterfell:

Arya swept the stone up and down the sword as Lord Rodrik had taught her. She had fallen in love with Needle the moment Jon presented it on her tenth birthday. Catelyn hadn’t been too thrilled about, especially when she started practicing with it around the castle until Ned was forced to have Rodrik teach her the basics, so she didn’t accidentally stab herself. However, as good a teacher as Rodrik was, Arya had always felt there was more to something as deadly yet elegant as Needle. She would eventually stumble across a series of online lessons by a supposed famous swordsman from Braavos called Syrio Forel. She did have to pay some money to get the in-depth classes, but from watching those videos diligently, and even having a virtual lecture with the vivacious master, she became even more versatile with the weapon.

Still didn’t compare to Dany’s ‘dance’ with the wooden staff though.

How awesome had she been during their spar?

Arya’s motions slowed as her mind drifted to every moment spent in ‘battle’ with the Targaryen princess. Her cheeks blossomed with color as she recalled her feeble attempt to mimic Dany’s moves while practicing along the curtain walls. She had grabbed a broomstick to do so, knocking herself
several times in her quest to spin it over her head and around her body like Dany had.

*Almost like dancing,* she thought as she remembered how light Dany had looked on her feet. I bet she’d look just as graceful wearing some fancy ball gown and fighting at the same time.

“Gosh, she’s so pretty,” she sighed and then turned crimson at her wandering thoughts. She whispered beneath her breath that she was only concerned about her fighting skills and nothing else. She wouldn’t think of how much she wished she could run her fingers through that soft mass of silver hair, or how warm she had felt when Dany held her hand at one time or what her lips would taste li –

“Argh! Stop thinking weird shit like that about Jon’s girlfriend!” she cried out suddenly; startling several dogs below her perch, who barked and whined in protest at being wakened.

Whispering a quick apology to them, she continued to sharpen her sword; determined to no longer ponder on why a certain woman brought out these odd feelings she had once assumed was a one-time thing. Granted kissing and making out with Brenda Mallister had been an exciting and somewhat weird experience (tasting another female’s cunt would do that to you), she was glad she was still able to feel attracted to hot men especially those buff football players. So yeah, her overall dating record sucked – she either scared off guys with her tenacity and sense of adventure or they automatically assumed she was a lesbian. Pfft. At least lesbians knew what the fuck they were doing in the bedroom.

She lifted her sword to study it beneath the pale moonlight. It seemed to glow softly, and about to imagine it contained magical powers, she stiffened as a sudden howl in the distance caused the hairs at the back of her neck to rise.

*Ghost?*

She blinked and rose to her feet; chiding herself for even thinking it could be Jon’s direwolf. Ghost was long dead, but there had always been a distinct sound to his howls. Jon had teased that it was actually Ghost having the best wolf voice out there, but tonight, there was nothing cheerful or funny about that sound. The howl broke through the silence again, and this time, it was followed by Grey Wind’s reply, and since he was closer to the castle, it was easy to detect his sound.

Something’s wrong, Arya thought as she blended into the shadows and walked along the parapets. She peered between them and down to the courtyards. The guards on duty were there, only one was fast asleep and the other was playing a game on his cell phone. Cursing beneath her breath, she leapt over the short distance between the Broken Tower and the First Keep. Looking down, she could see the Unsullied – those seven stoic warriors from Essos. She had tried engaging in conversation with them, but aside from Grey Worm’s polite answers, they had shown no real interest in teaching Arya their skills. They too, must have noticed something, for they were whispering amongst themselves and looking toward the inner courtyard.

*I need to wake up Robb,* she thought desperately as she leapt down to the courtyard with a light grunt.

The dogs were beginning to bark and as the kennel master shuffled out of his hovel to wonder what all the fuss was about, they were all startled into shocked silence at the sudden loud explosion from the Bell Tower.

“What the fuck…?!” he began, but Arya was already racing toward the scene accompanied by Grey Worm and Stalwart Shield.
They would have reached their destination, when another explosion went off, this time from the Broken Tower where Arya had just been. Her innards went cold at the thought that she might have been caught in the blast, but as the choking smells of smoke and ash began to fill the air, she knew she’d have to take care of her family first.

The emergency alarm was now going off; it’s loud mournful sound almost shocking to the senses as it had not been turned on in probably centuries. The once quiet courtyards were now filled with panicked smallfolk and unorganized guards. Not many of them had been fully prepared for a scenario like this; where they were being ambushed by unseen attackers.

“Everyone into the crypt!” a familiar voice rang out, and Arya had never been gladder to see her older brother. “Sansa! Jeyne! Take everyone down there now!”

Sansa, who was still shrugging into a dressing gown, nodded without saying her word; though her features were strained with fear. She was ushering a crying Monterys and the rest of the terrified staff toward the secret hallways leading down to deepest levels of the Stark crypts. Bran and Rickon, though ashen looked ready to join in the fray.

“No,” Robb denied them before they could even ask. “Follow Sansa and stay with her.” He kissed them both on their foreheads, staring deep into their eyes. “Take care of everyone until I return, okay?”

Both boys, trying their best to put on brave faces, nodded at the instructions and helped their older sister with the task at hand.

“You join them too, Missandei,” Robb was instructing as he shrugged into his jacket just as another explosion rocked the very foundations of the castle. “Fuck! What the hell is going on?!”

“Perhaps it is best if I join the fight,” Missandei began, but Davos, who looked just as disheveled yet ready for a potential melee was already shaking his head.

“It’s best to go with the others into the crypt. I know ye want to defend the castle on behalf of the Queen, but remember she’s got a wee one there with the Velaryon lordling. If something should happen to the both of ye, she’ll never forgive us.”

Missandei looked like she was ready to argue, but at the stern look of encouragement from the man she loved, she bit her lower lip and nodded in reluctant agreement. In Valyrian, she would order Grey Worm to return to her before giving him a hard kiss of farewell and darting into the shadows.

Robb checked his shotgun to make sure it was loaded as Rodrik Cassel and several other guards dashed in to report breathlessly. “Several trucks…look like fucking tankers are lined up around the castle and winter town. Someone says they noticed the Bolton sigil on them. I’ll bet it’s that son-of-a-bitch, Roose.”

Robb’s lips tightened. “Figures. I’ve already alerted the other Houses and Tormund Giantsbane. He’s still got a couple of his crew lurking around town. We should be getting some back up soon. In the meantime, let’s try to get as many of those sons-of-bitches as we can before they blow this entire place to shit.”

He was about to lead the way outside, when he finally noticed the silent girl trailing him like a shadow.

“What the fuck Arya?” he all but bellowed in frustration. “Get down to the crypt with everyone else!”
“Like hell I will,” she snapped back. “I know how to shoot a gun too,” For she had run into their weapons room to grab one for herself. If Needle wasn’t enough, then she was going to be pumping bullets into any unfortunate Bolton she met. “Besides, I’m an even better hunter than you, so I’m going.”

“If you get killed, Jon’s never going to forgive me,” Robb hissed; though at the mention of his brother’s name, a pained expression filled his visage.

“They’re all right,” Arya said out loud as if reading his thoughts. “They’ve got to be. This is Jon Snow and Daenerys Targaryen we’re talking about. They won’t go down without a fight. You texted them, right?”

“Jon said his phone would be turned off, and I still sent a message anyway.”

“Aye,” Jorah chimed in as he made his presence known. “I sent a message to the Queen as well. No response.”

Robb’s jaw worked silently. Something wasn’t right about all this, but then again -

“AAARGH!”

Another explosion had them crying out as they staggered and almost lost their footing. This one was much closer, and the halls were now filling with such thick black smoke, it was nearly impossible to breathe.

“We need to get out of here,” Jorah was saying between coughs.

“Follow me!” Robb ordered as he began to lead them toward another secret path to the godswood. At least they might have a chance to surprise their attackers that way.

Arya followed quickly, though there were several times when she was sure she missed him in the thick fog filtering into the rooms. She tried to cover her nose and mouth, but they seeped in anyway, causing her to hack loudly in an attempt to breathe. Something large and furry sped past her, and for a moment, she fought back a scream of horror until she realized it was only Grey Wind dashing after his master.

As the rush of adrenaline pumped through her veins, she wondered what it would feel like to have her first human kill. Jon had revealed that it felt akin to their hunts in the forest “only this time it’s not got four legs or eyes glaring at you as the life seeps out of them”. She wondered if Jon had felt any regret at all the lives he had taken so far, but she doubted it. There might be a little remorse, but if those fuckers deserved it, then-

“Yaaagh!” came the loud yell accompanied by the sharp rapport of the shotgun going off ahead of her.

They had just burst into the clearing before the godswood, but apparently a few Bolton goons had gotten in the way. It was hard to make out who was who in the smoke, but as their crew dispersed to confront their attackers, Arya darted into the fray and was quick to select her first target.

*Number one!*

He noticed her a second too late, for she fired a direct shot to his neck sending him toppling to the ground. Not waiting to admire her first kill, she ducked amongst the trees she knew so well, while
silently begging the gods to forgive them for desecrating such a scared area with so much bloodshed. But this was for the survival of Winterfell, and she’d be damned if the Boltons would try to destroy her family’s legacy.

This…is…for…. Winterfell!

As she whipped out Needle to slice through another Bolton’s neck, she hid among the bushes to catch her breath. She was soaked with blood and despite the chill, sweating profusely as she blinked them away from her eyes. She could still hear the carnage around her; the screams of dying men or women, and the disturbing juxtaposition of red blood upon white snow.

She was hurting in several places but didn’t dare check to see if she had actually been shot or just suffering the results of several hand-to-hand combats she was involved in. She would realize she was now shaking, not from the cold, but from the after effects of all she had done so far. How many people had she killed? And why did it feel so barbaric yet good to her at the same time? She wondered what her father and mother would say if they could see her now.

What would Jon say?

She gulped in a huge breath and pulled herself to her feet. This was no time to sit around musing over what could and what couldn’t be. She had lost sight of Robb and Grey Wind a while ago, and as she struggled to make out the bodies in the smoky mist, she was glad to see the sigils of alliance houses; the Umbers, Cerwyns, and the Wildings finally in the mix.

Robb, Sansa, Bran, Rickon, Jon…everything is going to be all right. Everyone…just hang in there.

Yet as she turned toward the place she had called home for eighteen years, a hard lump formed in her throat as she took in the burning towers. Most of the Great Keep was in flames; all its history and stories fluttering away into the night sky. She would not think of all the happy memories spent within those halls; of running into her father’s arms or being given a rare kiss of approval by her mother or giving chase to her brothers – especially Jon – while they played Hide and Seek. No…not her Winterfell. This grand place could not see its end like this. It just couldn’t!

She staggered toward the heart tree with its carved ancient face; its fearsome features seeming to cry out in blood at the sight of the slaughter around it. She clung to it as waves of nausea began to hit her, and as she closed her eyes, she silently prayed for the well being of her family, especially for the last living Targaryens, who could be their only hope.
...quite an emotional roller coaster this one (I'm mentally drained already, and it's not even officially 'started'). So...enjoy!

Daenerys:

She spread her legs and gave a soundless scream.

Vocal cords strained with the effort, her head thrown back as her abdomen remained gripped in the tremors of a pain so intense, it felt like she was being stabbed with the blades of a thousand arakh. Blood, murky and thick, flowed freely. Around her, the world was in flames, the once grand and beautiful Summerhall castle caught in angry roars of fires almost kissing the heavens. She would miss this place, especially the moments spent wandering the exquisite gardens where she could rub her swollen stomach and speak to her unborn child in tender whispers laced with fervent prayers for his well being. Those were the happiest of times when she could escape the cold and cruel eyes of the man she had married.

Rhaego, she thought wildly, this is my Rhaego! My stallion to mount the world to be reborn!

Yet, as a pair of pale disembodied arms appeared before her in the darkness, a soothing voice simply encouraged her to “push, my Queen. You are almost there.”

No...no more...I can’t, she wailed in desperate resignation. She was in too much agony. I can’t do it!

But you must, this voice continued in earnest; a voice that was now becoming more familiar. She saw the flash of a crimson ruby amongst the flames, soon to fully reveal the once disembodied arms that were now attached to the slender figure of a woman she dreaded.

Stay away from me! Stay away!
She shook her head back and forth in terror, wanting to get away from the stark and wild beauty of the ageless prophetess.

*But you must finish it, my Queen,* Melisandre demanded, red eyes flashing with a madness that sent a chill down Dany’s spine. *He is the prince that was promised! You must finish it, my Queen Rhaella!*

*Rhaella? No! No! My name is Daenerys Stormborn!*

The sudden slice of white hot pain to rip through her caused her to scream to the smoke-filled skies. It mixed with the cacophony of the roaring flames, and in the chaos, she almost missed the lustful cry of her baby’s introduction to the world.

*He is beautiful,* Melisandre praised as she pulled out the bloody squirming thing in her hands. Dany, now drenched with sweat, looked on with dual emotions of panic and pride. It was her Rhaego, wasn’t it? Her Rhaego had returned to her again, and this time everything was going to be all right. *He* would love her again and no longer look at her with such distrust and hate.

*What will you name him, my Queen?*

Dany knew. She already knew his name, but when she opened her mouth –

*Rhaeger. His name is Rhaeger Targaryen.*

…her breath was stolen as a flood of icy water was doused on her from an unseen source.

Her lashes flew open, her breath coming out in short, shallow gulps as she struggled to gather air into her deprived lungs. She blinked and shook her head to get rid of the wet strands of hair blocking her view. Not that there was much to see except the aged cobbled stone floor, with crevasses that allowed the flow of water to drain into a putrid hole several feet away.

Large feet enclosed within sensible black shoes soon came into view, and Dany didn’t need to look past the sweeping gray gown to know who her visitor was. After all, this was a ritual they’ve already performed several times before.

“You must wake up,” came the flat order from above. “It is time for your meal.”

The woman stepped aside and motioned for a second to come into the dungeon. This one was smaller and more skittish, though she dragged up a wooden stool to sit before the prisoner. Trying to smile at Dany in encouragement, she balanced the tray upon her lap and uncovered the lone plastic bowl. The smell alone was enough to have Dany dry heaving in revulsion. She had no idea what the congealing mass of gravy-like substance was being fed to her, but she was not about to have that thing going down her throat anytime soon. She turned her face away and barely winced at the sudden hard slap to her left cheek.

“You will eat,” the older one commanded. “Go on. Feed her!”

The skittish septa – for that was what they were – held out a trembling hand with the spoon toward Dany’s mouth. Stubbornly, Dany kept her mouth shut and lowered her head to the ground. She would turn her face whenever the spoon came close, and when it seemed like the older nun would hit her again, she finally opened her mouth to accept…only to spit it right back out. The feeding septa gave a small cry of surprise as the meal splattered upon her skirts and the tray. She looked to the older one for help, but when she was met with a glare of disapproval, she bit her lower lip and tried again.

“You must eat something,” she urged in a mousey voice. “You can’t starve yourself forever.”
“Get me out of these chains first,” Dany replied; wincing inwardly at how raw her throat ached at even speaking. “Can you do that for me?”

The younger septa looked as if she was going to apologize for Dany’s predicament, when the older one stepped between them and stooped to her haunches.

“Your chains will not be removed,” came the icy words. Her features were broad and flat, her eyes dark beads of rigidity. The gray habit didn’t help to soften her appearance but gave her the typical hardnosed role of overseeing those devoted to the High Septon. “At least not until you think long and hard about the reason you are here."

She rose to her feet and snapped her fingers. “Clear the tray, Septa Iris. We shall return when her head is cleared.”

“Yes, Septa Morgana.”

Iris couldn’t leave fast enough, almost tripping over the stool in her haste. However, just when Dany thought she could finally have some peace and quiet, the ‘Septa Superior’ turned at the doorway to study Dany in solemn silence.

“You are a fool,” she finally stated in a voice that one could almost consider kind if they strained hard enough. “If you plan to rule Westeros, dying here should not be an option. Eat. Gather your strength and live to see another day. Especially for the little one you carry.”

And with those cryptic words, she left with a loud clunk of the heavy iron and wood door behind her. Dany stared long and hard at the only path to freedom until her vision blurred. The tears came, fast and silent, as she lowered her head again while biting her lower lip. The combined emotions of weakened elation, sadness, and loneliness caused her chest to tighten with every hitched breath.

She knew it.

Or at least dared to hope that the ‘signs’ she had noticed in the past few weeks alluded to a dream she once thought impossible. Perhaps it was why her most recent dream (nightmare) involved seeing the birth of her dead brother through her mother’s eyes. She shivered at the memory and drew her legs to her chest as if seeking comfort.

She had kept her expectations at a realistic level. She wouldn’t think of how tighter her clothes had become especially around the hips and chest area. Missandei had joked about it probably being all the heavy Northern food they were forced to consume, and for a while she had forced herself to believe that was the case. She wouldn’t tell her friend of how many times she had stood before the mirror – turning this way and that – just to make sure she wasn’t really seeing things. Thanks to her birth control habits, her moon blood cycles had always been erratic, so not experiencing any after Jon made her stop taking them was nothing to be worried about.

However, the real tell-tale sign was the increased tenderness in her breasts. She had always been proud of her well-endowed bosom, and all the men she’d been with so far (Jon included) appreciated it just as much. It was easy to get aroused with just the right touch, but the arousal level had kicked up a notch since their arrival to Winterfell. Again, she had tried blaming it on the new surroundings (how silly!), or how intense Jon had become with his lovemaking, but damn if she hadn’t had several orgasms with just the way he fondled them during their time on The Wall. And hadn’t he murmured sleepily about how much fuller her breasts felt after one of their passionate consummations? Not that she had been paying much attention with the way he made love to her later that-

Oh, dear gods. JonJonJon! Ineedyousomuchrightnow.
Her sobs got louder, and there was no way she could wipe her face or clear the snot dripping into her mouth, thanks to being chained to the wall behind her. This wasn’t the way she had hoped to truly discover she was with child. Cynical as the world had made her, she was still able to have saccharine fantasies of announcing it to Jon in a most special way. She’d imagined finding out at their little home in King’s Landing, baking a large bun (with pink and blue frosting), leaving it in the oven, and putting little hints around the house for him to figure out what she meant until he opened the oven to see…well…the news! Bun in the oven…get it?

“Oh gods, Daenerys Stormborn,” she half-laughed and sobbed at the now ridiculous daydream. “Get a grip!”

A grip on what exactly? On the reality of her incarceration within the bowels of the Red Keep, where she might be left to rot for the rest of her life? The irony of the entire situation did not fail to amuse her in a bitter way. Her goal had been to return to the Red Keep taking the Iron Throne not wallowing in its pits.

*If you plan to rule Westeros, you must be strong. Dying here is not an option.*

Septa Morgana’s words floated within her mind, and though she hated to admit that the stern-faced woman had a point, Dany sniffled and counted slowly to ten to gather herself. She had to think and retrace the steps that got her here in the first place.

*We were at the Wall on Thursday…*

Ah, that wonderful, magical night where she had just about declared – loudly – her inherent desire to be with him for the rest of her life. To do it on top of the world, literally, as well as solidifying their bond so many times over-until she had passed out in exhaustion in his arms – was something she would never forget for as long as she lived. Unfortunately, Nature had called in the wee hours of the morning, and she was reluctantly forced to disentangle herself from his protective embrace to tiptoe into the bathroom.

Looking back now, there were so many damn warning signs she had missed. Perhaps if she wasn’t so exhausted and slightly delirious at the reminder of his love (the ring) on her finger, she might have paid more attention to the sudden loud thump coming from the bedroom, or what might have been a scuffle…but it was hard to tell. Despite the sturdy log walls, the wind did tend to play tricks on the ears especially being in such high elevations. Hadn’t she teased Jon that it sometimes sounded like a woman wailing? However, as she finally finished and began washing her hands at the sink, making sure she took off the ring to preserve its antique beauty, the door was suddenly kicked in and a large gloved hand slapped over her mouth to stop her scream. She would at least have the foresight to push her ring to the floor, where it rolled and lodged itself somewhere between the sink and the toilet.

She struggled to release herself; widened amethyst eyes trying to see who he was via the mirror before them. She kicked out with her legs to push against the sink hard enough to have her attacker almost losing his footing and grip. However, a sudden sharp prick to her upper arm had her staring in disbelief at the syringe jutting out of her flesh. She would look up to see the now familiar pallid features of Roose Bolton; the man who had openly questioned her authority at the meeting. Ah, she should have known he would do something like this, but whatever else she might have wanted to think was slowly being dulled as the drug began to take effect.

The last thing she’d remember was being gagged and bound like a trussed chicken. She would come to in fits and bits; at one time sure she was being driven in a truck, and another being taken into a plane. Either way, whenever she showed signs of being fully alert, her arm would be pricked again to send her into deeper sleep. Sincerely hoping she was being pumped full of small doses of sweetsleep and nothing more, Dany would finally regain full consciousness in this dungeon, having
lost all track of time.

How long has she been down here? Days? Weeks? The gods forbid…*months*?!

She looked down at herself, taking in the soaked filthy sack-like sheath of a dress someone had forced her to wear. She had been nude in the log cabin, so it was likely Roose Bolton had the decency to put her in clothing, though she was sure this wasn’t a part of her wardrobe.

She changed positions, being careful not to tug at her already throbbing arms. Thankfully, the chains were long enough to give her some leeway to sit, stand, or kneel, but only by so much. With a light grunt, she stretched out her legs to take stock of her physical appearance. Apart from the chill of being drenched now settling in to make her teeth chatter, she could see no noticeable bruises or cuts on her body. There the red dots on her arms – two on either side – to show the number or times Roose had pricked her, and of course the rawness of her wrists from the wrought iron shackles. There were trickles of dried blood around it, evidence of her attempts to lunge against the Septa or force her wrists out of them with slow twists and turns whenever possible. Her knees and legs were caked with grime despite the ‘wash’ from the Septa, and the soles of her feet had angry red streaks upon it; signs of her lunges to free herself. She was surprised she hadn’t ripped out the flesh or broken a toenail in the process, for those first few hours or days had been spent giving her captors hell.

Pity none of that mattered now.

*Especially for my little one…our little one, Jon.*

She could feel the tears threaten to fall again, and she had to mentally kick herself for becoming too emotional. She had no idea where he was or if he was even still alive. To think of his death was too much to bear. He couldn’t be dead. He just *couldn’t*. However, if all the stories she had heard about Tywin Lannister were true, then it was most likely Jon was being kept as a prisoner as well.

She stared longingly at the abused wall before her - where more empty chains and shackles sat silently in readiness for more prisoners - and imagined he was in the very next dungeon. Perhaps he was staring at the wall just like she was and hoping to get out of this alive. She wondered if this was the same dungeon he had been kept in when he returned to King’s Landing. Was he already familiar with living in such pitiful conditions or had they taken him to the lowest of them all? How she wished she could hear a sound…*any* sound from here, but it was either her section was bereft of fellow captives, or the walls were just that thick.

And Tyrion. Dear gods, what about Tyrion? Was he still in the castle? Did he even know they were captured? Did *anyone* know they were in King’s Landing? And what about those at Winterfell? Her existing family (oh, darling Monterys! How frightened he must be now) and her newly adopted Stark family? Were they all safe? Had Roose Bolton taken his retaliation even further?

No…no, I must think positively. They’ll be fine. They are strong and able to defend themselves. They’ll have to come look for us eventually, she deduced as she closed her eyes and began to pray to gods she never really believed in. Someone will put two and two together and come looking for us. They must! So please, Jon…please hang in there, my sun-and-stars. We will get out of this together…alive.

*This I promise you.*
No one is sure who uploaded the original video to Maesterbook. However, within twenty-four hours, the grainy images of a burning castle, the Stark banners fluttering into the flames, and rows of mutilated bodies, went viral. The hash tag #thefallofwinterfell would eventually flood social media causing the seeds of panic and unspoken terror to sprout in the hearts of the Westerosi.

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**Jaime:**

He stared blindly at the gold canopy above him, unable to fully appreciate the intricate details of prancing gold lions dancing across the maroon damask. It made no sense to him, but then again nothing recently seemed to be making much sense. The last week had been absolute chaos, beginning with the sudden death of their father at the hands of their own brother (dear gods, what madness!), and culminating with his sister coronating herself as Queen Regent and Protector of the Realm. The High Septon had looked positively perplexed at Cersei’s impatient decision to do so without gaining any approval from a majority of a Grand Council. It was her carefully-worded threat to expose his lecherous fetish for young boys or blowing up the Great Sept - whichever came first - that had the fat slob all but running to the Red Keep to perform the honors.

And the event itself? Nothing could have been more somber and depressing. The only people in attendance were those lords who had sworn their allegiance to their father – and it would be safe to assume that many of them were now re-thinking their positions – and a smattering of Westerosi yanked off the street with the promise of a few coppers to pretend as if they gave a shit. A lone T.V. crew was there to record the events for posterity – one of the few that portrayed their family in a positive light – but by the next day, it had already made international headlines.

Queen Cersei Lannister – Ruler of Westeros.

**Seven hells.**

She stirred beside him with a low moan, forcing him to acknowledge her presence. Beneath the sheets, she was delightfully nude; her unblemished skin golden beneath the fires blazing from the hearth. Her hair was a flaxen spread around her face and body, and staring at those breathtaking features in repose, you could almost forget the hardened turn it could take when awake.

Dear gods, he loved her.

Not in the simple ways of brothers and sisters, but in the ways that many had frowned upon (and still do). It was a forbidden relationship that had brought them nothing but misery and suffering. Of course, those things tended to fade to the background when lost in her kisses or buried deep in the heat between those legs. He could stop thinking of his role as Lord Commander, Kingslayer, and father of three dead children, whenever his lips suckled on those still perky nipples or when he swallowed the juices from her cunt. He was happiest in those moments when he could pretend that they were the only ones left in the world and none of their obligations mattered to him.

Unfortunately, where he had excelled as a warrior and military man, his sister’s desire to be seen in the same light had not gone as planned. She had complained so many times in the past of how unfair it was, of how he got such special treatment for having a Dick between his legs and how no one ever
took her seriously – not even their father.

“Once upon a time no one could even tell us apart,” she would whisper in his ear while raking her long nails into his back as if to punish him. “But the moment I sprouted these things on my chest, I was no longer worthy to follow in your footsteps. I had to remember my place as the babymaker to continue our family’s legacy. Well fuck you and everyone else who sees me as nothing but indispensable. I will prove that I am not one to be ignored. I will rise to power, in some way, Jaime. And with you by my side, we will be unstoppable.”

Ten years later, and here they were. She had accomplished her goal, and where did that leave him? Her obedient and humble lacky? Content to remain seated beside her as she ruled in ways that would make their father roll in his grave? How had she had managed to get Roose Bolton in her favor? To have him kidnap the most dangerous couple in Westeros, probably, and have Winterfell destroyed within a week was almost admirable. If it didn’t fill him with a silent dread.

She is changing.

So yes, she had always been rather passionate about things, but that passion had now reached a level that was almost borderline insane. Forget the idea of making Roose Bolton a knight and promising him that horrendous castle, Harrenhal, and its lands as a gift, there was the insidious idea to launch a sudden all-out attack at Dragonstone and the ‘rest of the North’.

“Or perhaps we should see to Dorne first,” she had hummed as she paced around their father’s war table. “I’ve never liked the Martells especially that slut Ellaria. Personally, I’d want her head on a spike.”

Jaime had to shake his head as if to clear out the noise and ringing within his mind. “I’m sorry,” he finally croaked out. “Could you repeat that again?”

“Repeat what?” came the impatient reply. “Killing Ellaria or…?”

“Taking over Dragonstone.”

“Yes. Did I stutter?”

“How do you propose we do that?”

Cersei rolled her eyes and took another sip of her wine. “Really, Jaime. You forget that we control most of the military in Westeros. We have access to the best ships, aircrafts, and our ground troops are second to none. You’re the fucking Lord Commander for a reason. Put that title to use for once.”

“…you want us to start a war?”

She slammed the cup on the table; her eyes flashing with hate. “I didn’t start this. That deformed idiot in the dungeon caused all this! If he hadn’t killed father, we wouldn’t be in this mess! We must send a strong message to our allies, Jaime.”

Her brother’s jaw worked for a moment, and through clenched teeth, he asked, “We might have the ground troops, but there is no way we can go attacking Dragonstone-”

“Why not?”

“It’s an impenetrable fortress!”

“Not from the air it isn’t,” she replied with a cold grin. “Bomb the shit out of them until they get the
message. Oh, and while we’re at it, let’s send another message to that bastard from the North. Robert Baratheon went after only one, but if we strike at his other apartment complexes, I think he’ll have no other choice but to reconsider his decision to remain with the dragon slut.”

When she heard nothing from him, she spun away from the mini-bar to eye him with a raised brow. “Is something wrong?”

“We don’t have to do this,” he began carefully as if testing the weight of the words on his tongue. “Father was hoping to avoid another meaningless war—”

“Hah!” Her laughter was loud, harsh, and mocking; so much so Jaime could feel the heat rising as he struggled not to give in to the sudden urge to choke the life out of her.

“Father? Peace? Oh gods, that was a good one,” she snorted out between giggles. “Perhaps I should show you all the notes our dear father kept hidden away. He might have wanted to negotiate with the dragon lady, before our dear brother fucked things up, but there was no way blood wasn’t going to be shed eventually. Father might not have been quick about things, but he was thorough, and I’m only following his playbook. Now, be a good boy and make me proud…” she crooned as she sashayed toward him, those beautiful green eyes now darkening with lust. She trailed her blood red fingernails down his chest until they found and cupped his already throbbing erection. “Hmmm… someone’s turned on. I knew all this talk of war would get you going.”

“Cersei…” he half-pleaded and complained, only to sigh in resignation as she fell to her knees, unzipped his pants, and wrapped his cock with her talented lips.

I love you, he thought with a heaviness in his heart as he studied her sleeping features. But I am afraid of what you are becoming.

It was with this troubling thought that he slipped out of bed, dressed quietly, and made his way to the dungeons. He was a man of war, yes, and there was no denying he got a sick thrill from vanquishing his enemies on the battlefield. However, there was this other side of him; a side he sometimes dared not show in the presence of his father or sister. It was this side that longed for quiet, leisurely hours on a boat somewhere far from the Red Keep. It was this side that enjoyed playing with his baby brother and could spend hours watching the ‘ugly baby’ giggle and chortle at his jokes. It was this side of him that had admired Rhaeger Targaryen, almost wishing he was the big brother he never had. And though the prince was known for being solemn and thoughtful, he was not averse to Jaime occasionally showing up at his apartment, to hang out. Hearing about his death had hurt deeper than he thought, but he had to pretend to not care, especially considering it was thanks to his father and Robert Baratheon’s plans to eliminate the entire family.

And don’t forget my role in that too, he thought with a sigh as the guard opened the door to his destination.

The stench to hit him was nauseating, and as he held up the torch to see better, he winced inwardly at the sight of his brother.

He won’t make it, Jaime thought as he stooped to his haunches and helped Tyrion sit up. How much longer can you hang on, dear brother?

“Good to see you, Jaime,” Tyrion croaked through lips that were cracked and bleeding. He looked much leaner, and some of the wounds inflicted from the lashes and beatings were ripe with pus despite the dressings applied to them by Maester Pycelle. His right eye was almost shut and adorned with a colorful array of purple, yellow, and greenish bruises. He didn’t flinch as Jaime brushed away a lock of his hair from his forehead.
“You look like shit,” he greeted kindly, earning a twisted smile from his brother. He had to look away as he noticed the tears welling up in Tyrion’s eyes. He had to grit his teeth and force himself not to get too emotional as well.

“Maester Pycelle says you’ve not been eating much.”

“Not got much of an appetite in this place,” Tyrion replied. “The food is terrible. You should speak to your cooks about—”

“It’s all right for you to jape, Tyrion,” Jaime hissed in frustration as he whirled back to face him. “But right now, as you sit here and contemplate dying, the rest of Westeros is just about ready to go to shit!”

“Ah…”

“Ah? Is that all you can say? You started a goddamn fucking war!”

Tyrion nodded with a heavy sigh. “Indeed, I did, and with you to lead the troops no less. I’m sure this is going to be right up your alley. You were always keen on battle.”

“On battles that made sense,” Jaime sneered, only to stiffen as Tyrion burst into hacking laughter. He was eventually forced to raise the tin cup of water to his lips for fear he’d cough up a lung. “What the fuck is so funny?”

“Battles that make sense,” Tyrion replied when he could finally catch his breath. “That’s amusing, dear brother. No wars or battles have ever made sense, remember? Father said it best. Wars are nothing more than men with tiny dicks wanting to prove that they are far superior. In this case, we’ve got a sister who refuses to see reason and wishes to rule with an iron fist…no pun intended.”

“…it’s worse than that,” Jaime whispered. “She’s not only got Daenerys and Jon Snow here, she’s going after the North to finish what Bolton started, she wants to invade Dragonstone, and for all I know, she might tell me to go into Dorne first thing in the morning!” He paced to the other end of the dungeon; his features strained. “And as if that’s not bad enough, she wants me to blow up more of Jon Snow’s properties in King’s Landing. Can you believe that?”

“I can,” Tyrion replied quietly. “I have unleashed the beast that’s been dormant within her all these years, and I might end up paying for it with my life… and the lives of so many others.”

The brothers stared at each other for a long minute before Jaime spoke again. “Do you want me to send you to Essos?”

A small pained smile came upon Tyrion’s battered visage. “No…that won’t be necessary. You did that once before to save my life, but I returned…armed with what I felt would be the change Westeros needed. I was…” His breath caught as the happier memories spent with the last Targaryen filled his mind. How he would miss her. “I did what I thought was best,” he whispered thickly. “And my only wish is that I can get to see her face one last time.”

“Are you in love with her as well?” Jaime asked incredulously.

Tyrion chuckle wearily. “I think everyone gets to fall in love with Daenerys Targaryen in some form or another. Alas, whatever amorous feelings I might have will remain locked somewhere deep within my heart.” He paused long enough to pin a hard look at his brother. “They are still alive and well, yes?”

“As far as I know.”
“Good. If she is smart enough, she’ll want to keep them that way. And the others?”

Jaime shrugged. “Who knows? Last I heard, Winterfell has fallen. A video of its destruction and carnage is floating around the internet as we speak. Cersei’s using that to its fullest as you can well imagine.”

Tyrion did his best to mask his shock. With Winterfell gone – if true – their only hope was for Varys to try to convince the other regions to fall in line as soon as possible.

“I should leave,” Jaime interrupted his thoughts, and not for the first time, Tyrion wondered just why his brother put up with such pain and suffering. His mental distress was palpable.

“Do you really love her that much?” he finally asked sadly. “So much that you’re willing to turn a blind eye to the chaos and destruction she’s about to wrack upon so many innocent lives?”

Jaime’s eyes widened at the accusation; a look of sheer horror filling his beautiful green eyes until it faded away just as quickly. He clenched his teeth and seemed to straighten himself. “I think I’m done here. You should try to get some rest. I’ll have Maester Frenken bring something stronger to heal your wounds.”

Once in the warm haven of the bedroom, Jaime cursed his decision to visit his brother, as he stripped out of his clothes. He would not dwell on Tyrion’s words of wisdom and warning. He would not think of all the innocent blood to be spilled in the coming days. All that mattered was the woman he loved, and his quest to save her from herself someday.

_I love you_, he would think with bitter desperation as he pulled back the sheets to expose her body to his gaze, and as he spun her onto her stomach, roughly spread her legs apart to bury himself deep into her already wet heat, he closed his eyes and stripped his mind of everything else.

_They all brought this upon themselves._

---

_Sam:

He received the text at 11:47pm and would have probably ignored it when a hard nudge from Gilly forced his lashes open.

“It’s been buzzing for the past hour,” she complained as she held up his phone. The icy blue glow from the device illuminated their bodies beneath the blanket. “See? You’ve got six messages.”

“Aaaah seven hells,” Sam grumbled. He lumbered within the sheets to get into better position, rubbing his eyes as Gilly turned on the bedside lamp. She leaned closer to read the messages as well; her breasts nice and heavy against his meaty arm.

“Who’s V?” Gilly asked, but Sam was already snapped completely awake at the sight of the lone initial. There were two messages from The Spider and considering the one and only time he had met the eunuch…this was probably fucking important. He didn’t even bother hiding the message from his curious girlfriend.
Message #1: Begin to counter attack QC’s propaganda. Use any means necessary.

Message #2: #thefallofwinterfell - Seen viral video? Will call at 2.

“Fucking shit,” Sam grunted as he scrambled out of bed, while ignoring Gilly’s calls of concern. He shrugged into a dressing robe and dashed to his desktop. He had, most definitely, seen the dreadful video about Winterfell, but his sharp eye had noticed something odd about it.

“Bad editing,” was the conclusion made by him and his fellow mates on The Blind Alley forum. Smart video editors had pointed out some inconsistencies.

“Whoever made that thing needs to be shot. Even my seven-year-old nephew can make better vids,” one of his most vocal moderators had complained. “I’ll bet Winterfell is still standing. Who’s with me to go up there to check it out for themselves?”

Sam had thought they were kidding, but it turned out that there were a couple of folks who lived in the North and were ready to take the trip. In fact, one member even claimed to live in winter town. According to his last message, they were indeed under attack, and his family was trying to leave to save themselves.

_Cowards_, Sam thought as he began typing furiously. He hoped to goodness Jon and Dany hadn’t been caught in the fray. Even if the video editing was shit, if the guy from winter town was right — and then there was Varys’s cryptic message - things were not looking too good up there right now. There was going to be no point calling either of those two. Besides, Sam was sure someone other than Varys would have called to keep him in the loop.

He wasn’t surprised to find his inbox flooded with messages from concerned fans, for many knew their Queen had gone to Winterfell to woo the North. He could not afford to ignore them for he had to reassure and get them mobilized. If Queen Cersei had plans to take down one region after the other, then it was up to Dany and Jon’s online army to at least make their voices heard—

“Or take it to the fucking streets;” he said out loud with a determined expression on his ruddy features.

At the chime of his phone, he all but dove for the device, thinking it was Varys calling early, only to do double take at the name showing up.

_Holy…_

“Gendry?! What’s up?” he all but squealed in delight. It felt as if he hadn’t heard from his friend in _years._

“Hi, Sam,” came the warm greeting. “Good to hear from you again.”

“No, shit. How’s Braavos?”

“Hot as fuck,” Gendry replied with a laugh, but he became serious quickly. “Dude, I saw the video about Winterfell. Is that true or is someone fucking around?”

Sam sighed. “I wish I could tell you that it’s fake, because it looks real enough, and we’ve got some firsthand account from folks who live there about the raid.”

“Does Jon know…shit, I’m sure he already knows by now—”

“He was there…I mean he _is_ there,” Sam corrected himself quickly. “He and Daenerys.”
There was a heavy pause that spoke volumes; neither man wanting to admit what dark and troubling thoughts they were thinking. Gendry eventually broke the silence.

“Well, I’m on my way back.”

“Huh?” Sam blinked in confusion.

“Yeah,” Gendry replied in a tone that was clearly intended for Sam not to try to talk him out of it. “In fact, I’m at the airport. When I saw the video, I figured Jon would want to get things straightened out. I told him I wasn’t going to return to Westeros anytime soon, but damn…he probably needs all the help he can get right now, yeah?”

Sam could have kissed him, and he hated having to get choked up at this moment. If only Jon could hear and see him now. “Yeah…” he finally said with a nod of his head. “I’m sure he’ll shit his pants when he sees you again.”

“Oh, and The Hound is coming too. Bastard won’t leave me alone for one second. He thinks he’s my fucking bodyguard.”

Sam heard someone in the background grumble something about ‘not being any fucking cunt’s bodyguard’, which had him laughing.

“Well hurry on over here, my man,” Sam said with a grin. “Can’t wait to see you again. So, you going straight to Winterfell?”

“Not passing ‘Go’ or stopping to collect 200 gold dragons. I’ll call you when I get there.”

As he hung up, Sam felt a sudden burst of extra motivation. He set up his video cameras and opened various chat rooms to engage in discussions with fellow #jonerys (a combination of Jon and Dany’s name) fans all over Westeros. There would be plans to infiltrate the internet with positive stories about the couple making the hashtag trend for a long time on various social media platforms. There would be organized protests all over the country, with the biggest planned in King’s Landing. They would look into booking some of the most outspoken celebrities to help with their cause; lots of phone calls and text messages to get to that was for sure.

An hour later, he absently thanked Gilly for the cup of hot chocolate and slice of cheesecake she set beside him, and knowing full well his work habits, she settled into the living room couch to watch a silent movie.

It was almost one in the morning, when he finally received a text from someone he least expected. At first, he assumed it was a prank, but as he opened the message, his eyes widened at what was before him.

“I knew it,” he cried out with a slam of his fist on the desk. “I fucking knew it!”

“What is it?” Gilly asked wearily, for she had dozed off. “What’s wrong? Sam?”

“Oh, ho ho! Don’t you worry, baby,” he said with a grim smile as he swung back to his desktop to begin typing furiously again. “Our dear Queen Cersei’s gonna regret the day she took that throne. Nobody fucks with the Targaryens. No one!”
Jon:

He stood in the shadow of charred ruins, staring at what was once the beautiful castle called Summerhall. Ghost darted in and out of the crumbling columns ahead of him, and though Jon was tempted to call him back, his fascination at his surroundings was enough to keep him distracted.

He could hear sweet, soothing music – a guitar if his guess was correct, and the closer he got to the castle; the more beautiful and enchanting it became. Maybe it was the rich baritone that accompanied the melancholy strings, or the realization that he had heard that voice somewhere before. It wasn’t until he was standing within what must have once been the Great Hall, did he finally see the person responsible for it.

Fath…Rhaeger.

His lithe figure was highlighted within a golden ray of light slashing through what was once a window. He was poised elegantly on the remnants of the dais, strumming a guitar with his eyes closed in concentration. His long silver hair seemed to shimmer with every kiss of the sun, and as his skilled fingers continued to caress the instrument with a lover’s touch, Jon could feel his chest tighten and the tears welling up.

Goddamn it. Why?

Ghost, who would have usually howled his distrust of strangers or shied away, trotted confidently to the Targaryen prince and sat on his haunches as if enthralled by the song as well. Rhaeger played for a minute longer, before lifting his lashes as if awakened from peaceful repose.

He can’t see us…he can’t see…he can’t…

Hey, boy, came the warm greeting that shook Jon to his core. That damn traitor of a pet actually closed his eyes, with pleasure, as Rhaeger began scratching between his ears. He got so comfortable he just about lay flat on the ground. Jon wasn’t sure if he ought to be pissed or happy that his biological father was able to bond with his most loyal companion. But then again, this probably wasn’t the first time those two had met. Hadn’t he once dreamt of Ghost holding onto to Rhaegar’s crown?

It is beautiful here, Rhaeger was saying without looking up. Don’t you think, Aegon?

Jon’s breath caught, and for a moment he looked behind him to be sure no one else was in the hall with them. When he found himself staring into brilliant lilac eyes, Jon flushed with embarrassment and suddenly felt as if he were a child.

My name is Jon Snow, he wanted to say, but his lips would not do its job. His tongue felt heavy and clumsy within his mouth, but his silence didn’t seem to bother Rhaeger. The prince stopped petting Ghost and focused on his guitar again.

To be a king requires making the most difficult of decisions, came the quiet words. You might be a good man at heart, but to save many…you must sometimes sacrifice a few. That was a lesson Maester Cressen drilled in me as a child, and I loathed to think of being in that position someday especially with the father I had. Not exactly the greatest of influences.

He strummed a tune and paused again. This time he looked up and beyond Jon, those lilac eyes lost in thought.
I just wanted to make King’s Landing a better place as mother wished. To rule with a kindness that was lacking around us. Yet I grew up crushed by the reputation of a cruel and hard-fisted father who hated me and despised my mother. And so, I wrote a dirge in his honor, and had a Kingslayer perform the encore.

Jon blinked in confusion. Was Rhaegar admitting that he had set up his own father’s death?

If the small knowing smile on the prince’s features were any indication, he had heard Jon’s silent query and that was all the answer he would get.

Your mother would have loved it here. Perhaps I should have considered rebuilding our new home around this area.

Suddenly, Jon felt a well of fury well within him. When he recalled the circumstances surrounding their forbidden relationship, he wanted to lunge for the other man and probably punch him into admission of his fuck-ups and all the lives ruined because of his stubborn stupidity. Did he not miss Ellia Martell? Or his dead children? Did he feel no regret at all?

I am only human, Aegon, came the quiet words accentuated with a sad smile. I know I made mistakes, but loving your mother was never one of them. All the same, I have paid for my sins with my death. You, my son, are the one good thing to come out of all of this, and you now have a role to fulfill. Where I failed, you will succeed. You are the prince that was promised, and your song is of ice and fire.

He barely saw Rhaegar move, but he did feel the warmth of a hand pressed against his forehead, the sweet smell of wild roses, and the sensation of being pushed so hard, he tripped over his feet and began to fall, fall, fall – Ouch!

He landed in an unsightly heap into clumps of snow, the sharp contrast of the heat of Summerhall and now the chill of the North, causing his teeth to chatter. He knew where he was even before turning around to see the now familiar campsite with its welcoming fire and perpetual campers. He would do his best not to ogle at the imposing Wall in the distance, a hard lump forming in his throat as he remembered the last happy memory spent there until his world was swept beneath his feet (and not in the good way). Perhaps this time he was here to stay, and these series of dreams or visions, were just a sign that in the real world, he was mere steps away from sipping hot coffee with his Uncle Benjen and Ned Stark while waiting for more members of their family to join them.

Unfortunately, as he and Ghost approached, Jon saw that something was different this time around. He could recognize his Uncle Benjen yes, and there was no mistaking the stoic and noble Ned Stark, but they had a third person with them. This third person seemed quite comfortable in their presence, and Jon wasn’t sure, but whoever it was said something to have all three men chuckling or laughing in amusement.

Who...who are you?

He took another step but was suddenly blasted with a blizzard as the fierce Northern winds nearly knocked him off his feet. He gritted his teeth and forced himself to move forward, holding up his arm before his face to squint through the curtain of snow. He could barely make out the trio now, but that third voice –

I’ve heard him before. I know who he is...I know...
Ghost gave a low howl of protest at not being able to move as well, and as if to confirm Jon’s increasing fear of what he now knew to be true, a similar howl greeted them across the divide. A brief interlude in the snow storm would illuminate the ghostly figure of Grey Wind, and even before the third man finally lowered his fur-trimmed hood to reveal his features, that recognizable shock of red hair was enough to have Jon falling to the earth and screaming his grief into the snow.

Robb. His dearest brother, Robb. Why? Why?! Why the fuck were the gods so cruel?!

He came to with a harsh sob, his parched and sore throat working to control the primal scream he might have given in his harsh reality. He tugged fruitlessly at the shackles and chains keeping him in place, straining against them until his already raw wrists let loose fresh blood. It trickled down his arms and dripped soundlessly to the aged stones beneath his bare feet, but he felt no physical pain. His heart was a shredded waste of despair, the dark thoughts of his lost brother and what must have happened at Winterfell almost sending him into a spiral of madness.

So, what did happen at Winterfell while he was locked away in here for goodness knew long? Had Roose Bolton attacked without warning? Was everyone else safe? If he had only seen Robb at the campfire, it meant that the rest of the siblings were still alive and well, didn’t it?

Please…let that be true at least. I pray to the old gods and the new. Please. Hear my plea. Let them all be safe and sound, I beg of you.

And what of Dany? The moon of his life and future bride?

He moaned in misery and hung his head. His features were damp with sweat from his exertions and damp ringlets of his hair clung to his flushed skin. From the moment he had awakened in his new ‘home’, it was all he had thought about. Dany. Dany. Dany. His beautiful Dany. Where was she? How was she? Where had they taken her? Was she even still alive?

Oh, dear gods…please…

Another unrepentant wave of nausea coursed through him and he dry-heaved at the notion of her possible death, or even the thought of whatever torture they must have put her through – if she had indeed been captured. The last thing he remembered was being knocked unconscious by Bolton’s henchmen, and whenever he showed signs of alertness, he was injected with a sedative of sorts to keep him down.

I must know how she is…I need to see her!

But how? He lifted his head to stare at the heavy iron-and-wood door with desperate longing. He wished there was some way he could blast through these chains, break down the doors, and search the rest of the godforsaken dungeon for her. It was a foolish pipe-dream, but hadn’t every child once imagined they could be super heroes?

If only I could fly.

He studied his dismal surroundings for the umpteenth time. If there was one good thing about this place, it was one, not the tiny hovel they had locked him in the first time he visited the Red Keep, and two, apparently dressing him in prison uniform was not an option this time around. Instead of the scratchy gray thing he had worn last time, he was clad in only a pair of cut off khaki pants that sat low on his hips and exposed his ankles. There were no visible bruises (yet) except for his wrists and his bleeding feet, no thanks to dragging them across the ground whenever he strained against his chains. The blood had caked between his toes, making it feel as if he was wading in syrup.
Restless, he strained against his bonds again, gasping for breath as he wondered how long he could keep up with this until they loosened from the wall. He had to laugh at himself at that thought, for he was sure previous prisoners might have had the same idea. This room had at least ten more chains – five on either side – all empty now, but still telling untold stories of all the men (or women) who must have spent endless hours in this hell until their final hours.

*And with Tywin Lannister dead, who knows what Cersei is capable of?* Jon thought with a bitter smile. He had heard stories about the woman before, and if this was a taste of things to come –

*How merciful would she be to the usurper who wants to claim the Throne?*

For all Jon knew, Dany was already dead, and the panic and fear he had held at bay so far sprang to the surface all over again. He began rattling and pulling against the chains, his intent to attract the guards…hell *anyone* at all, to come silence him. Perhaps then he could hope to get some answers.

But no one came.

He must have gone at it for an hour at least, punishing his already stripped wrists and feet, torturing his vocal cords, until a deep exhaustion had him collapsing against the wall, closing his eyes, and sagging into unconsciousness.

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Her name was all he needed to begin his search, her scent already so ingrained in his mind, he didn’t need a map to show him the way. His muzzle sniffed the grime-filled floor of human waste and despair, but he bypassed all of that as he began trotting to his destination. Walls and doors could not keep him away, for his new body – this ethereal realm he had become a part of – allowed him to journey to different worlds and ages easily. He enjoyed such trips, for they reminded him of The Before – when his kind ruled the North and bowed to no one – not even those who supposedly defied Death.

Her scent was sweet amongst the cloak of desolation in this place, and as he climbed up winding stone steps and past guards that did not see him, her smell grew stronger.

No…*their* smell. Two of them in one.

He grew excited at the thought and walked a little faster. The door leading to her prison was locked of course, but he slipped through the boundaries as if strolling through air. Ah, there she was. The one who had his master captive in spirit and soul. He had always wanted to see and touch her in some way, but it had required his master finally shattering that last link between them to get to this point. He could feel his master’s joy surge through him, and he conveyed that happiness by quietly moving closer to the immobile figure.

*She’s not breathing…she’s not…!*

He silenced his master’s concerns by nuzzling her leg gently. At first, she gave nothing but a groan, her head still lowered to her chest. He nuzzled harder, and this time, she jerked at her chains and gave a small cry. She blinked rapidly, a flash of fear filling those stunning amethyst eyes before fizzling into confusion. She looked around and then at herself.

*She cannot see me. You must make her see me!*
He paced back and forth before her but was dismayed to see her still look bemused. He could smell the fear, yes. She knew she wasn’t alone, but she was not sure of what she was sensing.

“…Jo…Jon?” she breathed, and his chest swelled with an emotion that could not be described in mere words. He padded closer to her and nuzzled her arm gently…then waited. The smell was stronger now…the one inside of her. The one that smelled like his master and her mixed together.

“Jon…are you here with me?” she asked in a voice so small and terrified, he wished – more than anything he could give her a suitable response. “I feel you…I think I feel you…or something like…”

She held out her hands, fighting back a wince at the pain in her arms. She slowly reached out into the darkness; her eyes squinting…searching for something just within her reach. He moved within the direction of those hands and settled his large head upon her lap, while emitting a low whine. Her low gasp of surprise was all the encouragement he needed.

_Take your time and close your ‘human’ eyes to see me_, he urged.

She must have heard _something_ for she did just that. Her lashes drifted closed and without opening them, she slowly, carefully, and tenderly sunk her fingers into the thick fur above his ear. He blinked and studied her, noting the shimmering tears dotting her lashes as her chest began to rise and fall a little faster. Her pounding heartbeat was thunderous to him, but he could feel her joy; an almost intoxicating emotion he wanted to partake in. He licked at her hand and then nuzzled her stomach with a low mewling sound which had her bursting into tearful laughter.

“Oh, dear gods! It is _you_! Ghost! I can _feel_ you! I can actually feel you! Tell him, Ghost,” she sobbed happily as she buried her face into his fur and held on tight. “Tell your master I am all right…we are all right. We’ll make it out of here alive. The blood of the dragon flows through us and we will not be defeated so easily.”

She would place a hard kiss to his head just as the prison doors were rattled with the sounds of the bolts being opened. He growled at the intrusion and was reluctant to leave, but he could sense his master weakening as well. After all, this was all new to him and maintaining this state, especially in his condition, was not safe. With a final gentle nuzzle of his mistress’s stomach, he dissolved into nothingness causing Jon to awaken with a loud gasp.

He was drenched in sweat; his breathing harsh and rapid in the dim-lit cell. He sagged against the wall, unaware of the tears sliding down his cheeks until its salty taste coated his lips and tongue. He raised his knees to his chest, buried his face against them, and sobbed in unbridled joy.

He was going to be a _father_.

He who had once dreaded the notion of continuing the legacy of being a ‘bastard’, and had almost considered joining the Night’s Watch, was now going to be responsible for a new life he had helped create. He, Jon Snow aka Aegon Targaryen, was going to be a goddamn father.

_The gods are good…yet cruel._

For the bitter irony of knowing the good news via Ghost (an experience he’d try to decipher later) to the painful awareness that he could not hold her in his arms, kiss her to death, or twirl her around in elation – was akin to being stabbed in the heart. This should have been a news shared in the intimacy of their home not through thick walls of dungeons with the promise of possible death looming over them.

So lost was he in his tumultuous thoughts, he failed to hear the low grating sound of stone against
stone, until the sudden flare of light had him shrinking against the wall in surprise and slight fear. For a moment, confusion flared through him as he took note of where the disturbance had come from. It wasn’t the main door, but rather a narrow opening at the other end of the room, just barely wide enough to let the hunched smelly figure in a filthy maroon wool robe, squeeze through. Whoever he was, he clearly knew his way around these parts, and as he finally turned completely, Jon winced at the pox-ridden features and grotesque teeth that smiled at him.

“It’s good to see you again, my lord,” came the greeting that was another surprise. The polished voice to come out of that face was not what he had expected, but as the beggar lowered the robe to reveal the tufts of fake brown hair, he dug into his mouth to remove the false teeth with a sigh of relief. “Ah, that’s much better, isn’t it?”

“Varys.”

The Spider bowed. “At your service, although not exactly the settings I would have hoped we’d meet each other again.”

“Have you come to release me?” For as glad as he was to see a familiar face – so to speak – there was still a great danger in the eunuch being here.

“If only I could, my lord,” Varys replied with a sad smile. “Unfortunately, doing that is likely to create even more chaos and confusion. Westeros as we know it is about to go to hell.”

Jon closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “Winterfell…?”

Varys shrugged his shoulders and bowed his head again with a sorrowful expression.

“My brother is dead, isn’t he?”

“They still search for him, so there is hope.”

“Don’t try to sugarcoat reality for me,” Jon snapped impatiently. He lifted his lashes and pinned an intense stare at the older man. “Be honest, Varys. How dire are things?”

Varys took a deep breath and began to speak. He told of Tywin’s death and Tyrion’s role in it, taking note of the dark expression to fill Jon’s features as he said this. He spoke of Cersei’s ascent to power, her use of propaganda especially with the viral video of Winterfell in ruins, including a determination to control Westeros with a show of military strength. He spoke of her plans to invade the rest of the North, Dragonstone, and Dorne to weaken their allies gathered so far. He also spoke of Cersei’s plans to destroy the rest of his apartment complexes in King’s Landing as a warning shot to Jon for ‘choosing-the-wrong-side’. Jon could feel the bubbling fury welling within him as he clenched his fists at such a callous decision. He couldn’t dare imagine having to lose more innocent lives, not at his expense at least.

To be a king requires making the most difficult of decisions, Rhaegar had warned him. You might be a good man at heart, but to save many…you must sometimes sacrifice a few.

Oh, there were going to be sacrifices all right, and it would start with him killing that slimy snake, Roose Bolton, with his bare hands. The gods grant a way to get him out of this godforsaken cell first!

“We still have the Unsullied stationed around the complexes, right?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Good. And Dragonstone?”
“Under the command of Stalwart Shield.”

He paused and bit his lower lip. What would Dany do if she was here? What would Tyrion say? It was he who had gotten them in this mess, but this was no time to sit around blaming anyone. He studied the disfigured features before him for a long minute, reluctantly admiring that Varys wasn’t flinching from his scrutiny.

He’s the Spider. He knows ways of getting things done. So...

“If you were in my position,” he asked carefully. “What would you suggest I do?”

Varys raised a brow, a small smile hovering around his lips as he bowed his head again. “It is true that the Lannisters have quite an army and are in control of most of the military resources in Westeros. However, Cersei has failed to calculate just how powerful an army we also have in our possession. You already have quite formidable allies, my lord. It is up to you to make the final decision in how and when we use them. Right now, your friend, Samwell Tarly, is doing his part by mobilizing his special online army, so why waste time? We must set things in motion as well, and with your permission, I can contact a few others who I’m sure would be willing to join our cause.”

“Like who?”

“How does having Highgarden, The Vale, Riverrun, and The Iron Islands on our side, my lord?”

Jon was impressed. “How were you able to get their support?”

“With some help of course,” Varys replied. “Even being shackled in a dungeon cannot diminish my lord Tyrion’s influence beyond these walls.”

“So, he’s still alive?”

For a moment, something akin to sadness flashed in Varys’s eyes. “Yes, my lord. He is as stubborn to reach the gates of Hell as anyone I’ve ever seen.”

Jon tried to control the queasiness to fill him. He was now so used to seeing Tyrion around them, it would be hard to picture the Imp no longer being a part of their team, no matter how much Jon had doubted his allegiance to Dany.

“However,” Varys continued in quiet earnest. “Our words only mean so much, and it would be a boost to our existing allies, and new ones, to hear from our future monarchs.”

Jon frowned. “How in seven hells do you propose we do that, Varys? In case you haven’t noticed yet, we are in chains and stuck in dungeons far beneath the fucking Red Keep.”

“An astute observation, my lord, but your friend, Sam, is ever resourceful and has provided a means of getting your message out there. Once everyone knows you’re not actually dead, you can imagine how relieved and eager our allies will become to see you both in your rightful seats.”

He watched as Varys dug into his robe to extract what looked like a rectangular black box that could fit into his palm. He fiddled with an unseen button which turned on the device.

“This allows me to record videos, my lord,” Varys explained with a smile. “All you have to do is look directly into this little white dot and begin speaking. Quite a neat little equipment to have in one’s possession. I can record audio and visuals without drawing attention to myself.”

Jon had to wonder just how many private conversations Varys must have recorded already, but he
had to give it up to Sam to come up with something this clever. Gods, he missed his friend. Unfortunately, he was now tongue-tied at the idea of delivering any such message to anyone. Dany was the expert at this, after all her speech on the night of the City Watch massacre had been magnificent. How could he hope to deliver the same gravitas and emotional support these people desperately needed? Dear gods, never had he needed her presence more than ever.

“It’s going to be okay, my lord,” came the surprising words of encouragement from the eunuch. “You don’t have to do it at this very moment. I will give you some time to think of something to say, and I’ll return before the guards turn down the lights for the day.”

Jon tried not to make his relief too evident, and he chose to change the subject.

“…and my queen?” he asked aloud, wanting to know what Varys would say despite his secret knowledge of her wellbeing. If Varys was to lie now, how was Jon to believe all he spouted so far?

“Unfortunately, her dungeon has no easy access, so I’m unable to see for myself,” Varys replied with regret. “However, my birds tell me she is still alive and well. Like Tyrion, she refuses to let these walls keep her down, my lord. She is a dragon through and through. Ah, if only her brother, Rhaegar, could see her now.”

Jon failed to notice the sly glint to come to Varys’s eyes as he said those words, for his head was bowed again in deep thought.

_The blood of the dragon flows through us, and we will not be defeated easily_, came the gossamer reminder that sent a shiver of awareness down his spine. Dany’s words of encouragement should be enough to snap him out of his despondency. Hell, the tattoo on his abdomen should be a firm reminder of his other heritage; the blood of the wolf which also ran through his veins.

His biological father might have given him words of encouragement to take on his new role, but it was the lessons he had learned from the Starks; lessons of endurance, humility, strength, and calm that ought to guide him from now on. With Robb gone, Winterfell in possible ruins, his adopted King’s Landing home and the people he had come to love in possible danger, but most important of them all, his future wife and mother of his child in the line of fire, this was no time to sit around to mope. Varys was right. Right now, thanks to some shitty video, everyone was of the assumption he and Dany were dead. This was the time to set right a sinking ship and provide the hope so many needed in this time of darkness. He had no idea if he was really this so called ‘prince that was promised’, but this was the start of his journey as would-be King. So many lives now depended on his decisions whether he liked it or not.

“Do it,” he finally commanded in a low voice that held no room for compromise. He lifted his head; his eyes dark flints of determination, such that even the eunuch had to tremble in awe. “Assemble our allies across Westeros, and ready them for possible combat. Let Magister Illyrio know that it’s time he lives up to his promise to me, and finally, send the word to my khalasar of the Great Grass Sea. Their Khal and Khaleesi will need them to fulfill their sworn oath.”

And taking a deep breath, he squared his shoulders, and prepared for one of the biggest challenges of his life.

“Go ahead and turn on that camera. I’ve got a few things to say to Westeros.”
As I prepared the outline of this chapter in my mind, it started out as simple straightforward premise. However, as it almost always does, things ‘grew’, and rather than short-change you, the reader, by rushing through scenarios, I decided to break things up into two chapters, so you get the full impact/emotional journey (I hope).

So, without further ado, sit back and enjoy the ride. Because goodness knows I experienced an emotional rollercoaster while writing it.

P.S: Please also keep in mind that each scene is not necessarily in chronological order (at least for this chapter).

To all those who see this, or hear my voice, I am Jon Snow, considered a bastard of the North, but now humbled and grateful to be alongside your rightful Queen and Protector of the Realm, Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen. To all those who see this, or hear my voice, take heart and be of courage.

By now, most of you have seen a video depicting my beloved home, Winterfell, as nothing more than ruins. They would make you believe it is a region already on the brink of defeat, but I am here to dispel those lies. For those who believe your Queen and I were caught in the cowardly ambush, there is no truth to that. We were kidnapped by Cersei’s henchmen led by Roose Bolton, the Lord of the Dreadfort, and are now her prisoners deep within the bowels of the Red Keep.

I know we are being kept alive for a reason, perhaps to be used as bargaining chips for surrender, but we will not yield, my friends. Cersei’s cowardly acts of strength, which involves the senseless murders of innocent lives, cannot and should not stand!
Pyke (The Iron Isles):

Theon Greyjoy considered himself a decent human being; a *good-looking* decent human being.

Sure, there were times he had let his more ‘passionate’ nature take control hence leading him to do things against his better judgment. Take for instance, his mini-rebellion in his teenage years, where he stole one of his father’s ships with the help of a gang of ragamuffins, or the time when he hired a bunch of whores for an orgy at the castle, only to incur the wrath of his father (again) who had suddenly returned from a trip to catch him right in the middle of a fuck session.

So, what if he broke a few rules now and then? He was only human, wasn’t he? He should be allowed to make his mistakes without the threat of having his cock and balls chopped off, shouldn’t he? Impetuous behaviors aside, he still considered himself ten times – no, a *million* times better than his now late father (who eventually lost the battle to liver cirrhosis) and come to think of it, better than three-quarters of the entire contingent of the Iron Islands.

*Bunch of fucking blowhards.*

And pray, who would be the current leader of said contingent of blowhards? None other than his dear sister, Asha, the *queen* of the islands. It was a role *he* was supposed to have as the only living son left, but apparently, dear ol’ Dad had other ideas. Perhaps Balon Greyjoy still hadn’t gotten over his son’s reckless antics including his sudden decision to skip college and go sailing around the world. It still didn’t give his sister the right to act like she was the goddamn overlord of him or something. Seven hells!

*The insufferable bitch!*

Just thinking of their argument earlier was enough to get his blood boiling all over again, and as he jammed his foot into a leather boot, he ran through their heated conversation for the umpteenth time.

“I’m sorry,” Asha had said as she stabbed an apple with a wicked-looking dagger and brought it to her mouth to take a large bite. She was draped casually over the Seastone chair – their ancient throne in the shape of a kraken - with a leather-clad leg swinging back and forth over the armrest. “You need *my* Iron fleet for what again?”

Theon ignored the snickers from the other feasting sea captains, in the Great Hall, and took a step closer to the androgynous female with the close-cropped jet hair and intelligent dark eyes filled with amusement. Gods, he hated that snotty expression.

“Didn’t you receive the message from Lord Varys?” he asked incredulously. “Or watch the video he sent? Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen needs our help! We have the naval firepower they require to take over the fucking Lannisters at-”

“And why should we be concerned about them?” Asha drawled with a roll of her eyes. “We are the Ironborn, and we have no allegiance to anyone. Especially not to the despicable North, who betrayed us.”

“Are you seriously going to preach that same bullshit Dad used to recite every goddamn night?” Theon snarled.
“Preach?” Asha’s lips curled in derision. “I’ll preach it until it sinks into your thick skull, dear brother. I don’t give a shit about the Lannisters or anything that happens to King’s Landing. We will take care of matters should they dare come to our shores. Besides…what’s your investment in wanting to help that bitch out? Did you fuck her during your world tour or what?”

Theon had the grace to blush as the snickers and laughter got louder. He held his ground and stared Asha down. “Yeah, I met her when I was in Meereen, and if it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t be standing here right now.”

“Oh, dear gods,” Asha groaned dramatically. “Did she think she was doing us a favor?”

Ignoring the jape, Theon continued stubbornly. “I was arrested-”

“For doing something stupid no doubt.”

“Yes, it was stupid,” Theon countered with his features in flames. “I wasn’t aware of their laws regarding their brothels, and its owner felt I was trying to gyp them or something. Either way, I had the option of having my hand chopped off, being hanged, or spending the rest of my fucking life in one of their prisons. I was there for almost a month, tortured, and on the brink of dying, when she set me free. She didn’t have to do it. She didn’t know who the fuck I was, but she helped me anyway.”

“Touching story,” Asha drawled. “But if you told her your name, or someone did, don’t you think she’d want you free just for you to repay the favor someday? You can’t imagine she wouldn’t have an idea of who a ‘Greyjoy’ was, for fuck’s sake.”

“I don’t give a fuck if she was doing it for a reason, because you want to know something? She was the only one who actually treated me like a human being and not just a fucking name!”

It wasn’t until he stopped talking did he realize his voice had risen and the near-silence at his outburst had him looking around the hall. He tried to catch every cynical gaze within sea-beaten faces; hardened from years of cresting turbulent waves and toiling the brittle land around this most harsh and unforgiving region of Westeros. He knew most of these men thought little of him and saved all their worship and adoration for Asha, and why not?

She had grown up looking dorky and unattractive, but rapidly made up for those awkward years, by becoming the charismatic and resilient leader anyone would be willing to follow. While he had spent most of the time running away from his responsibilities, Asha had stayed behind to maintain and keep the islands united as best she could. He could see why she would not want to help with his preposterous request. He had been away for over five years, choosing to let go of any modern devices to reconnect with the Sea and ‘find-his-inner-self’ a.k.a pout at not being called back to take the throne. So, with no phone calls, no emails, and only one or two letters sent via snail mail…he was lucky she hadn’t kicked his ass the moment he sauntered through those castle doors yelling “I’m baaack” like a loon.

However, his ‘grand’ return was a week ago, and since then, catching up to all the shit that’s been happening was overwhelming. What was most shocking was seeing Dany (and this Jon Snow) dominate the news. The woman he met in Meereen had been courteous and friendly; though willing to exhibit her passionate side if inebriated. So enthralled was he by her presence, he didn’t dare make any overt sexual move on her. There was something about her demeanor that screamed ‘royalty’, and since she had only given her name as Dany Stormborn, he hadn’t been able to put two and two together. She left Meereen just as quickly as they had met, despite them exchanging phone numbers and promising to keep in touch. He wondered if she had tried to call him several times, forgetting to mention he had no phone with him in the first place. He did stop by an internet café at Braavos to send her some humorous texts, but that was about it.
And now she needs my help, and I can’t do anything about it.

“I don’t care,” he finally blurted out loud enough for those at the back of the hall to hear. “If I have to go at it alone, I will. I don’t need any of you. If there was anything father taught me, it was loyalty to those who deserve it, and Daenerys deserves all my loyalty. She saved me from the brink of Death, and if it means going to King’s Landing by myself, I’m doing it.”

He had stormed out of the hall with as much dignity as he could muster, ignoring the smattering of laughter and taunting that accompanied him, while refusing to think of the inscrutable expression on his sister’s face.

So here he was, at three in the fucking morning trudging through the blinding rain and punishing winds toward Sea Bitch docked patiently at Lordsport. It was the one true thing he could be grateful to his father for; a beauty of a cruiser fitted and ready for war at any given time. So yes, it wasn’t as huge as his sister’s Black Wind – a formidable battleship (and one ought not forget she had the entire Iron Fleet in her back pocket), but Sea Bitch was his baby, and after being apart for so long, it was good to see her again.

What is dead may never die indeed.

His main crew: Urzen, Maron Botley or Fishwhiskers, Stygg, Gevin Harlaw, and Cadwyle awaited him on deck, with Urzen giving a half mock-salute in greeting as Theon stopped before him.

“All loaded up and ready to go, Cap’n!” he announced; having to shout as another clap of thunder ripped through the pitch sky. Damn the sea was an angry mistress tonight. It was any wonder no one had been tossed overboard despite being anchored as securely as possible.

“How many men on board?” Theon asked as he marched toward the bow.

“Could only manage to find about fifty sons-of-bitches eager to die,” Urzen replied with a shrug. “Think you can come up with a good battle plan to attack over a hundred Lannister ships coming our way, eh, Cap’n?”

Theon scowled at the sarcasm-laced question. He knew how foolhardy this was, but if he could at least take out a few ships, that was better than doing nothing at all. And if he indeed lost his life, it would have been for something. Funny, how it would take the words of that scruffy bearded bastard from the North to get him motivated like this.

Jon Snow, eh?

The last time he had seen him, they were still kids, and it was during a one-time visit to Winterfell with an uncle for some dumb meeting with Ned Stark. He hadn’t interacted with Jon at all and it was Robb who had at least attempted to engage him in conversation. He doubted any of them would remember him now, but to think that the silent sullen kid would end up being the ‘voice’ needed to unlock this side of him –

Or become the fucking King of Westeros…seven hells.

It was almost as if the Universe was trying to tell him something.

“Oooo!” came the sudden yell from below. It was Cadwyle, and he looked positive giddy with delight for some reason. “We got company!”

He was pointing out to the sea, and Theon, fearing that the Lannisters might have already begun to make their move, dashed to the bridge to grab a pair of high-powered binoculars. He peered through
it, heart pounding rapidly in his chest; wondering if these were already going to be his final hours. He suddenly wished he hadn’t argued with Asha before leaving, for despite their differences, he did care for her and wanted nothing but the best for –

_Huh?_

He blinked and stared harder at the familiar intimidating vessel outline heading toward him. Was it his imagination or was that actually –?

“Incoming call, Cap’n,” Urzen said with a grin as he pointed at one of many flashing monitors before him. Sure enough, staring at him through one small square screen was none other than Captain Asha Greyjoy. She had a petulant expression on her visage, but there might have been a hint of a smile lurking just beneath the surface.

“A…Asha?”

“You didn’t really think I’ll let you leave to have all the fun, did you?” she replied with a huff. “And before you get all mushy, I’m not really doing this for you. I just really hate Cersei and want her to eat my dust. So…yeah…lead the way, brother. Black Wind and over five hundred battleships are right behind you. Just try not to fuck things up, okay?”

This time, the smile was evident, and Theon had to swallow the hard lump to form in his throat.

_Goddamn the insufferable bitch._

He gave a curt nod and took a deep breath. This was the moment he had always dreamed of. He had watched his father and uncles do this in the past and had always pretended to be the brave captain willing to take his men into the jaws of Death. He vowed to thank his sister for the opportunity – if they made it out alive, but until then…

“All hands-on deck!” he bellowed into the intercom. “Prepare to make way! Onward to King’s Landing!”

…they had a war to win.

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_We are tired of those who rise to power and choose to forget the likes of us, you, the smallfolk who are the backbone of our society. Westeros did not become a great nation just because of the person sitting on an iron chair. It became great because you believed in its potential for greatness! You toiled away, like our ancestors, on this land given to us by the gods. Your blood, your sweat, your tears, have been shed for the realm, so why lie still and continue to let a few take away those rights you have earned and deserve?_
Illyrio Mopatis believed himself to be a man of honor. Hence, once he received the video message from his good friend, Varys, he was off to the Bay of Pentos where Captain Groleo was at the ready with a hundred and fifteen war ships to make the trip to King’s Landing. Call it a hunch, or perhaps it was the mysterious call he had received from Khal Drogo two weeks earlier – either way, Illyrio had prepared himself for a moment like this, and was never gladder to be useful to the cause of the future monarchs of Westeros.

As he stood on the docks and listened to the crew - comprised of not just Pentoshi sailors, but some Lyseni, Myrish, Tyroshi, and Bravoosi - shout orders to each other while loading up ammunition deadly enough to take down a small country, Illyrio wondered if matters would really come to that.

War.

The Free Cities, who usually had no interest in what happened across the Narrow Sea (and did tend to consider Westeros too rigid for their tastes), still had to worry about the lasting impact a war would cause especially when it came to trading. There would be no point sending their wares and services to a realm in decline, hence, hoping for a positive outcome in this conflict was at least something they could get behind.

To get Daenerys Targaryen on the throne, they would whisper amongst themselves in taverns, brothels, or gilded manses. We must get her upon the throne.

Selfish capitalist reasons aside, Illyrio had a personal stake in this as well. Sure, he once flirted with the idea of becoming master of coin for Viserys if he should take the throne, but having come to know the real Daenerys, including the man she had come to love, Jon Snow – all thoughts of reclaiming that title seemed inconsequential. He had genuinely come to like the handsome young man with the raven hair and clever brown eyes, and though Jon might have ‘joked’ about someday needing Illyrio’s help in the future, watching that heartfelt video, and seeing the deplorable state Jon was currently in, was more than enough to get Illyrio on the phone with all the seasoned captains he knew.

How dare that Cersei treat the Khal and Khaleesi in such a dishonorable manner?! Unforgiveable!

He would prove his loyalty and see that Jon Snow and his queen got to that throne if it was the last thing he did. “My lord!” came the sudden cry from behind.

Illyrio turned away from the sea with mild irritation on his features. It was one of his servants, a beautiful young lad with skin like warm chocolate. “What is it, Areya?” he barked impatiently.

The boy pointed behind him with a big smile. “We heard the horns. The Dothraki are finally here.”

He needn’t have pointed, for Illyrio was more than capable of seeing the snake-like caravan of black cars winding its way down the narrow city streets. It really was an awe-inspiring sight, such that even the seasoned sailors had to stop what they were doing to watch. There were so many cars, it was impossible to count just how many they were in all. By now, most of the Pentoshi were aware of the unspoken rule of clearing the streets whenever the Dothraki appeared, for most had shut themselves in their homes and now watched wide-eyed, or terrified, from rooftops and windows.

As the first row of cars made their way to the dock, Illyrio marched down the promenade toward them, a ready smile on his visage as the doors began opening to let out the warriors. It seemed odd not to see them in their modern suits, but considering what they were about to do, it made sense that they would choose to wear their traditional leather vests and sandsilk trousers. With their copper-toned and well-built bodies accentuated with shiny black braided hair and moustaches, they made a startling contrast to the brighter hues of the locals. Ignoring the stares, they began to line up in
disciplined fashion to await instructions from their leader.

Khal Drogo, who must have easily stood a foot taller than this tallest of fighters, looked resplendent in his rich leather trousers and gold accessories. His powerful torso, wearing its scars from battles past, was also adorned with ceremonial war paint signifying his leadership. His small smile, as he shook Illyrio’s hand, was accompanied by the familiar jingles of the many tiny bells attached to his waist-length hair.

“You have my ships ready?” Drogo asked with pleasantries over.

“As you can see, my lord,” Illyrio replied with a grin and a bow. “And you will be going with them? I thought you said only Jon’s khalsar would be making the trip.”

Drogo shrugged and looked over his shoulder. Jhogo, who was Jon’s official bloodrider and current leader of the khalsar, gave a curt nod in greeting.

“I will follow with them,” Drogo explained with a grim smile. “Five thousand strong. We will fight for Snow the Andal. Any one who is enemy to them is enemy to me. Dan Ares will sit on this chair of Iron. This I promise to her.”

He turned to face his men, many of whom were still making their way to the docks, for the cars still miles away had to let off their cargo after all. All the same, Drogo’s eyes flashed with the fire of a man who lusted for the taste of blood again. It had been a long time since he had a good raid, and he hoped that the Westerosi weaklings would at least put up a fight once they got on land. He couldn’t tell the fat Pentoshi man about his strange dream all those weeks ago, where it was revealed to him to cross the poison waters. One was never to take such dreams lightly, and he had called up Mopatis the next day to organize this journey. It hadn’t taken a lot of convincing to get the khalsar eager to join him. Just showing them the video of Jon speaking, and seeing their expressions of fury and determination, was more than enough.

“Qoy qoyi!” he bellowed in a voice that would need no amplification. He withdrew the arakh attached to his waist and held it above his head. “Hash yeri m’anhoon, ma jinne m’ayyeyaan?!”

The thunderous roar to accompany his question, for they all too raised their arakhs as one, was enough to send chills down Illyrio’s spine. Hearing the tales of Dothraki raids was one thing, but actually seeing the prelude to their blood lust was another.

They truly were a terrifying horde, and the gods help those who stood in their path.

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Evil hearts, greedy souls, and corrupt minds made me lose loved ones. I have held the chopped remains of my beloved uncle, seen the charred bodies of tenants I laughed and cried with, and have now learned that my dearest brother’s life was lost in his quest to save our home, Winterfell. But my woes are little compared to what some of you have experienced. Some of you have lost loved ones as well, had their homes taken away, have no food or water, no adequate healthcare, poor education… and why? Why do you have to suffer so much?
The smallfolk would agree that the storm was one of the worst they had seen in over a decade. The elders muttered amongst themselves about the coming of the End of Days, while others compared it to the night the last Targaryens left their shores. Whatever the case may be, those brave enough to step outdoors would marvel at how flashes of lightning seemed to bring the massive towering dragon sculptures to life. Their malicious glares were illuminated ghoulishly, and some would swear that smoke and fire escaped their flared nostrils and cavernous mouths. In fact, it felt as if the very castle was alive, and with every wailing gust of wind from the turbulent seas, or the deafening clap of thunder, the holdfast of the ‘dragons’ was living up to its reputation as a formidable fortress.

In the sept, the faithful smallfolk bowed their heads in prayers; hoping for the storm to pass swiftly, while others in the know, prayed for the safety of their soldiers preparing for some war they knew was bound to come.

Many had seen the fleet of ships docked around the island as if forming a barrier, and though a few had the banners of House Targaryen flying proudly, the rest were mostly made up of House Velaryon’s seahorse sigil, the red crabs of House Celtigar, the leaping swordfish of House Bar Emmon, and the seven golden stars of House Sunglass.

A hundred ships at most, not enough if the Lannisters were to send their entire fleet, Monford Velaryon thought as he prowled the bridge of his beloved ship – Pride of Driftmark – while listening to battle plans being laid out by his first lieutenant. He was just about to refute a suggestion, when the sudden sound of the alarms blaring had him dashing toward the helm.

“What’s wrong?” he barked as he stared at the flashing monitors.

“Incoming aerial fighters noted, sir,” the petty officer replied. “Two headed from the northeast, two more from the southwest.”

“Friendlies?”

“No, sir. Lannister jets.”

Monford growled beneath his breath. Only four? They take us lightly.

“Take ‘em down,” he commanded as he punched the button to alert his comrades.

However, as the ships sprang to life and soldiers dashed to their stations to turn their gun barrels and turrets to the heavens, Mother Nature (or perhaps the gods themselves) had other plans. The story of what happened would eventually become legend, but as some imaginative soldiers would regale later, they swore that a sudden clam of thunder and a particularly bright flash of lightning – “so bright, it felt like the world was bathed in white” – caused the dragons around the castle to send out jets of fire that consumed their enemies planes.

It was ridiculous of course. No one believed that dragons would come to life and set such high-powered and incredibly fast weapons of wars on fire, but there it was. One moment, the soldiers on board the ships had been staring at the tiny metal birds in the skies, and the next…boom! There were four balls of fire and the obliterated remains descending into the swirling ocean never to be seen again.

Some soldiers had dared to yell and shout in celebration, but Lord Monford, and those who still held the tales of Old Valyria and its magic to heart, could only watch on with awe and fear in their hearts.
The dragons have indeed been reborn, Monford would think as he glanced at the castle looming large and silent behind them.

And within the walls of the fortress, three shimmering dragon eggs – still basking beneath the warmth of soothing candles - would seem to tremble a little as if agreement.

I say, ‘no more’, my fellow Westerosi. No more of a government that does not listen. No more of a government who chooses to feed us lies until the truth is blurred and words no longer have meaning. No more of their senseless violence to take away more innocent lives. We will fight back with all we’ve got, and it starts with you making the decision to seek that change you need. Go out to the streets without fear!

Speak up with the voices you have been blessed with! And to those who are already in seats of power, those who feel pressured to follow Cersei’s iron rule for fear of what threats she dangles before you, I beg you to take courage and not give up hope. As long as your queen and I still breathe, as long as there are those who still believe in freedom and justice, you are on the right side of history. Take charge of your regions and stand up to tyranny and fight for those who put their faith and trust in you!

Sunspear (Dorne):

Prince Doran signed the last of the documents and with a curt nod, allowed his secretary to take them away.

No longer having much to do in the way of royal duties, he sighed and carefully wheeled himself to veranda, where a bowl of the juiciest fresh fruits and fine Dornish wine sat waiting. The gardens were exquisite this evening, and as he helped himself to some grapes, he closed his eyes and pretended that all was really as it seemed.

Perhaps if he opened them he would see his dear sister, Elia, smiling warmly at him. She would have a lovely blush on her beautiful features as she gushed in delight at the thought of being betrothed to the wonderful Rhaeger Targaryen. She would look glorious in her native Dornish wedding gown, giving dreamy looks to the tall, handsome young man who had, at least, put up a show of acceptance during the ceremony.

Doran lifted his lashes and shook his head, knowing that the curse burning on the tip of his tongue was fruitless. It wasn’t as if the Targaryen prince was still alive. He had paid his dues by losing his life during Robert Baratheon’s coup d’état; a valiant but wasted effort all around. He had joined the fray a little too late, and Doran was sure he’d never forget the expression of deep sorrow and despair
on the younger man’s face at the knowledge of what had happened to his bride and children.

*Even if he loved another,* Doran thought with a sad smile. *Losing one’s children in so horrible a manner…I wouldn’t have wished that on anyone.*

Especially not his sister. Elia deserved better. Yes, she was cursed to have poor health for most of her life, but she was the sweetest, kindest, and most witty young woman he had ever known. She always tried to look on the bright side of things, even when Rhaeger would disappear for months at a time, on some ‘business trip’ when rumors claimed he was seeing the Stark woman.

Still Elia tolerated all the pitying whispers that came her way with a smile. All she had wanted was to raise her children the best she could, while naively believing that Rhaeger still loved her in some little way.

Unfortunately, Fate had other plans.

*Revenge* was the word that had danced around the Martell household after Elia and her children’s deaths, and it wasn’t so much directed at Rhaeger, who had tried to atone for his sins by joining the fight. All their fury and vengeance would be reserved for the Lannister traitors, and it had taken Doran a long time to finally arrive at this moment. His hotheaded brother, Oberyn, had other plans back then; to simply barge into King’s Landing and slaughter them all.

*Patience is the key, my dear Oberyn,* Doran had cajoled. *Our time will come, and when it does, our revenge will be sweet and fulfilling.*

The death of Tywin had been a surprise for sure, but everything else seemed to be happening just as he had predicted.

*Patience indeed.*

He barely turned as he sensed his visitors arrive, though he did manage a smile as Ellaria leaned close to place a warm kiss on his forehead. He tried hard not to ogle at the expanse of her breasts exposed within the daring gown she wore. However, having come to know the sultry woman for all these years, he ought to be used to her risqué clothing choices by now.

“Ah, a beautiful day,” Oberyn hailed as he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “Just the kind of day to go to the beach and take a swim in the ocean, eh, brother?”

Doran chuckled and lifted his glass of wine in a mock toast. However, as the couple and their oldest children lost their smiles and took on features of silent intent, Doran nodded slowly in understanding. He lowered the glass and clasped his hands before his chest, and with a lingering look of longing at the swaying palm trees with the sweet smell of wild roses filling his senses, he knew the time had come.

“Shall we begin?”

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*I know Cersei will retaliate. I know more innocent lives will be lost. This was not what your true Queen and I wanted. This was not the way we planned for a peaceful transfer of power. We had*
hoped to do it the old way, with the approval of a Grand Council to institute the kind of leadership Westeros deserved.

Should anything happen to your queen and I, our only hope is for you to continue the fight toward that goal. To never give up or falter. We are so much stronger together, Westeros. And so, on behalf of Queen Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, and myself, we wish you good fortunes in the wars to come.

Winterfell:

She was motionless on what was left of the balcony looking out to the main courtyard; her serene features giving nothing away. Luckily, the Great Keep had been spared from the bombings, but they had lost most of the Bell Tower, the Hunter’s Gate, and the South Gate. With such extensive damage, including the loss of many family heirlooms - either destroyed or stolen in the midst of the chaos - rebuilding Winterfell was going to be a painstaking process.

Between her fingers, the sapphire and gold antique ring was turned over and over, as her gaze drifted across the muted shadows of people wading around like zombies. Most were still shell-shocked over what had happened, but they went about as they were supposed to. True Northerners did not dare allow such things to weigh them down. If they could withstand the harshest of winters, they could deal with anything, and the gods knew they had done their best to protect the castle and each other as best they could.

Along the curtain walls and upon the highest standing turret, the Stark banners waved defiantly; those grey wolves on stained white, a reminder of those who had lost their lives in such meaningless violence.

How many days has it been since the battle was unofficially over? Two? Three? A lifetime ago? She had no idea, for time had now lost all meaning. From the moment Missandei had come running back to them - as they hid in the lowest depths of the crypt - stating that ‘they had won!’, Sansa could still remember hugging Monterys and her brothers tightly in jubilation.

They had won! They had killed all those Bolton and Frey traitors! They could try to return to normal lives -!

But oh, the cost of achieving normalcy, if such a thing was ever possible again.

Leading them all out of the crypt, a naïve part of her had assumed that the grounds would be filled with cheering soldiers and victory dances. However, reality was like a hard slap to the face she was still reeling from.

Blood on snow.

Never had she seen so much spilled in one place. They had not been raised in times of war, so the blood-soaked ground, stained walls, and dead bodies was a shock to the senses. Some were lucky to have old fashioned arrows sticking out of their eyes or chests, but most had been blown to
smithereens with entrails and mushy brain matter already attracting dark clouds of flies. The stench of death was another nauseating problem, and as she covered her nose and leaped over the bodies gingerly, all she could think about was her brother and sister, Robb and Arya. Were they all right? Were they still alive? And what about Jon and Dany? Had anyone been able to contact them at The Wall? It was impossible to make phone calls in the crypt as evident with the smallfolk who had the foresight to bring the devices with them. Missandei had hers, and she was currently recording everything, explaining to Sansa that she planned to send it to Jon and Dany to inform them of what had happened.

So many lives lost, and the countless injured that still needed to be treated. Where was one to begin setting things right?

“Lady Sansa!” came the cry which had her turning around with widened eyes.

“Lord Cerwyn!”

She hugged the older man tightly, not caring if she was exhibiting a side of her she was not known for. Just seeing a familiar face was more than enough, and she didn’t care that he was covered in blood or looked worse for wear. It was only when she finally pulled away, did she finally recognize the expression of haunted misery on his features.

Even before he could open his mouth to say the words, she knew.

Even before he led her to the inner courtyard, where several of the surviving soldiers, including Maester Luwin, Jorah, Davos, and Grey Worm, had formed a rough circle around the covered bodies on the ground…she knew.

The Lord of Winterfell and his loyal companion were no more.

She couldn’t remember crying then, not even when she pulled back the cloth to see the faces for verification. Yes. It was, indeed, Robb Stark; her oldest brother and fierce protector, now lying in feigned repose with his torso riddled with bullet wounds. Grey Wind, with dried blood on his once fearsome jaws, had suffered a similar attack. Whoever shot him, had nearly taken his majestic head off. Still, it was evident the last direwolf had put up a fight, perhaps while trying to protect his master.

“We will burn their bodies and bury their ashes in the crypt below,” she heard herself saying; marveling at how steady her voice was. She would not look at the pitying expressions on their faces. She would not allow the anguish on her living brothers’ faces, or listen to Monterys’s soft sniffles or-

*I need to breathe!*

She couldn’t remember excusing herself from the room, or walking fast, fast, faster until she broke into a run and didn’t stop until she got to the godswood and slumped against the heart tree in exhaustion. When the tears came, they were silent and bitter, for it brought a harsh reminder of that old tale she once heard about the Stark family being cursed. She had considered it ridiculous, but how was one to explain all of this? First Father being killed in some random accident, then Mom succumbing to cancer, and now…her oldest brother gone, and who knew if Jon and Dany were even still alive? For all she knew the Boltons might have discovered their destination and killed them in their sleep!

*Oh, dear gods, please help us helpushelpushelpus*

So deep in her sorrow, as she slowly rocked back and forth, she might have missed the sound of her
name until it was whispered a little louder.

She gasped in shock and spun around with her heart in her throat. If she was about to be attacked by an enemy, she had nothing to defend herself with. She had not been much into learning how to fight, and the most she could do was throw her cell phone in his direction. However, as she looked past the pile of bodies that were yet to be carried away, she noticed the heaving movement beneath them.

“…elp, please,” came the whisper again. “San…sa…”

“Ar…Arya? Arya!” She sprang to her feet and dashed toward the heap, not caring if she stained her clothes with blood as she began dragging them off her sister.

“Keep talking to me!” she commanded as she grunted and strained with the effort. Dear gods, the smell was awful! “I’m here, Arya! I’m going to get you out!”

She would vaguely realize Grey Worm and Jorah had found her and would help to push aside some of the bodies until she was discovered. Arya was so caked with blood, it was hard to know if it was all hers or from the others. However, when she raised a trembling hand up to give a thumbs up sign, Sansa sobbed in joy and engulfed her in a near crushing embrace.

“Ouch,” Arya complained as she hugged back weakly. “You’re squeezing my wounds.”

Her wounds, when she was later examined by Maester Luwin and Doctor Horwath, would turn out to be a gunshot to the left ribs (just missing her lungs by this much), including several cuts and bruises around the arms and legs. Her right jaw was swollen thanks to getting into a fist fight, but she was still alive and able to eat – though gingerly. However, when she learned of Robb’s death, she refused to eat or speak to anyone for an entire day, and Sansa was sure Arya felt she was partly to blame for not being there to protect him.

You couldn’t have done anything, she thought as she caressed the ring, while watching a truck beep its way into the outer courtyards with a large supply of stone bricks. Neither of us would have been able to do anything. None of us were prepared for something like this. How would we have known? You fought bravely, Arya, and did the best you could. I wish I could be as strong as you sometimes.

Fortunately, good news had come from Lord Barbrey Dustin, arriving the next day with word of their victory in taking out the rest of the Bolton and Frey armies based in Moat Cailin. Lord Manderly’s fighter jets had taken out the old castle and everything in its path. Dreadfort was also in shambles, but then again, the coward – Roose – had abandoned it; knowing full well it was bound to be infiltrated. However, if Roose and his cohorts had any grand ideas to attack again, the rest of the Northern army would be ready for them. In addition, her relatives from the riverlands, led by her Uncle Edmure and her young cousin, Robert Arryn (though represented by Lord Nestor Royce) agreed to pledge their banners in protecting the North. They were, of course, all in shock about Robb’s death, but it was almost overshadowed when they got to watch Jon’s video from the Red Keep.

The distressing news of Jon and Dany’s disappearance had come from some of Tormund’s men returning from the Wall after a thorough search was conducted. It seemed odd that no one had seen the kidnapping take place, and Tormund guessed that Bolton might have paid off some guards to keep them silent. Jon’s truck was nowhere to be found, and the cabin itself had been cleaned out, leaving one with the impression that the couple might have left without telling anyone. Fortunately, the Wildling team discovered the engagement ring and took it as evidence that they were still alive… probably.

With their fates up in the air, Sansa had done her best to remain positive, choosing to spend her time
feeding the smallfolk, attending to the injured, and overseeing those working hard to rebuild the castle. She was appalled to find herself being called upon often to deal with visiting lords or to make a decision regarding one thing or another. By some unspoken rule, they now seemed to consider her in charge of things. However, if they were to go with tradition, Bran was the rightful successor to becoming the next Lord of Winterfell. Unfortunately, her brother had shown no signs of wanting the role and had said as much over dinner one night.

“You’ll be much better at it than I am,” he had argued in that quiet voice of his. “All I can do is advice, but you…you watched father and Robb and you’ve learned how to be diplomatic when it comes to such matters. They’d trust you more than they’d ever trust me.”

It was unfair, Sansa would think as she stood in the middle of her sewing room, staring at the beginnings of a wedding dress Jeyne would no longer wear. And poor Jeyne. Naturally, she had taken Robb’s death the hardest, and like Arya, had chosen to remain cooped up in their bedroom; barely eating or drinking and causing more worry for her servants. She was now on suicide watch – having been caught sobbing loudly in the bathroom with a slit wrist two nights ago - and short of marching in there to tell her to snap out of it, Sansa knew she had no right to demand such a thing. She would give Jeyne the room to grieve, but in the interim, she had more pressing matters to worry about.

Finding a way to rescue Jon and Dany for one thing.

“...bloody hell,” she would hear Davos ranting as she tucked the ring into the pocket of her jeans and made her way into Great Hall, where a meeting was apparently taking place. “Why me? I don’t know the first bloody thing about running a fucking war.”

“If memory serves me correctly, you were once captain for Stannis Baratheon, weren’t you?” Jorah insisted.

“Of only a couple of ships, and I was more of a smuggler than anything,” Davos rebutted; his whiskered features red with agitation. “What you’re asking me to do is to…to…I can’t.”

“Can’t what?” Sansa asked, forcing the men to turn around at the sound of her voice.

Jorah did the honors. “My lady. We have decided that it’s best we find a way to organize the different armies coming to assist us in this conflict. Unfortunately, without Lord Tyrion here, we need someone who has a good experience dealing with such matters. If we can find a way to communicate with everyone effectively-”

“We could go down to White Harbor,” Wendel Manderly, the oldest son to Wyman, offered with a firm nod. “We’ve got all the equipment and monitoring devices you could need at our military station.”

“No,” her uncle, Edmure Tully, declared. “We have better equipment in our military barracks. And it would be best if you came there-”

“Actually, the Eyrie boasts of the most efficient equipment,” Nestor Royce began, and in no time, everyone was trying to talk over each other’s heads until Sansa felt a headache coming on.

Taking a deep breath, she raised her voice loud enough to silence them. “My lords! There’ll be no need to go anywhere.” She lifted a brow as if in derision. “Did you really think a castle like Winterfell wouldn’t be outfitted with something like that? My lord Cassel?”

Rodrik, who was now limping around with a crutch thanks to almost losing a leg during the battle,
gave a curt nod of understanding and cleared his throat. “It has not been used in a while, but hopefully, most of the equipment still work. If you’ll all follow me.”

Sansa had only been there once, and only because she had been searching for her father and had sworn she saw him going into the bowels of the Great Keep. She had marveled at all the large monitors and T.V screens mounted along the walls, but that was about as much as she could see until Ned noticed her presence and shooed her away with a warning never to return down there again.

Even now, as they made their way down damp winding steps illuminated by weak light bulbs, there was that feeling of adventure coursing through her veins. She waited patiently as Rodrik and Maester Luwin struggled to remember the exact combination required to open the electronic security device next to the heavily bolted iron and wood door. They eventually figured it out and stepped back as the door ground its way open to reveal Winterfell’s modern ‘war room’.

“Huh,” Wendel observed with a reluctant nod of appreciation, as they all wandered in with varying expressions of amazement. “You Starks are good for something after all.”

Ignoring the jape, Sansa studied the room with pride. It was terribly dusty and once pristine monitors and control panels, now had cobwebs so thick, it was hard to cut through them at first. There was the fear that the equipment might not function from lack of use. However, as Rodrik turned on the main switch at the back of the room, the machines hummed back to life, causing the men to give low murmurs of relief. In the middle of the room was a long steel table with about twenty chairs around it. There were folders with rather archaic, but some beneficial information within, and as Bran went about observing each document and device in awe, it was easy to feel his excitement. He might not be a diplomat, but he seemed eager to sink his teeth into this side of things.

“Will this work for you then?” Sansa asked as she looked to Davos, just as Grey Worm and the rest of his Unsullied situated themselves at the control panels to get things rolling.

Davos looked like he was about to protest again when his cell phone chimed. It was Varys.

“You’re on speaker,” Davos warned as everyone stopped what they were doing to listen.

“Good. I was hoping to speak to you all at the same time,” Varys replied; his usual flowery manner of speaking now curt and to the point. “As it stands, the Lannisters are heading toward you with more fighter jets. They also plan to attack Highgarden and the Eyrie from above before sending ground troops to complete the job. They might also try sending their ships into Saltspear via Blazewater Bay; a rather sneaky route. So, you must organize yourselves quickly and find a way to stop them. Choose a commander and send instructions to your waiting armies as soon as possible. Do you have someone capable of doing this?”

They all looked to Davos, who with a muttered curse beneath his breath, shook his head in weary resignation. “Fine. I’ll be the bloody commander. Just don’t blame me if things go haywire. Now come on, get these monitors going and get me connected to all our allies. The sooner we get this fucking thing started, the better.”

With a small smile, Sansa excused herself; amused that some of the men were already doing their best to clean up the place without seeking help from the servants. She returned above ground, her destination Arya’s room to give her the update. However, as she stepped on the landing, a sudden yell and then someone dashing out of the bedroom, forced her to a stop.

“You crazy bitch!” the young man yelled. “I was only trying to give you lunch-”

“I thought I told you to never come in here again!” Arya screamed back. “Stay away!”
“If it wasn’t for your sister’s orders, trust me, I wouldn’t be here!”

Sansa coughed, causing the young man to look in her direction. His dark features flushed with embarrassment, and not for the first time, she couldn’t help seeing hints of a younger Robert Baratheon in that face. However, he had said his name was Gendry Waters; a friend of Jon’s, and he – along with his mostly silent giant of friend – The Hound – proved to be just what Winterfell needed. With his skills as a blacksmith, Gendry was able to help the construction workers set up the steel bearings needed to repair some of the shattered towers. It was brutal work, and despite the cold, it wasn’t odd to see Gendry still drenched with sweat. Apparently, her little sister had noticed as well for she had caught Arya staring out her window one day; her gaze trailing after the strong handsome lad from King’s Landing.

Hmm…

“How’s everything all right?” Sansa queried with a smile. “She’s not giving you a hard time, is she?”

“She’s…” Gendry checked himself and shook his head. “Doesn’t matter. I’m not here to be her babysitter. She can choke on it for all I care!” he added in a louder voice for Arya’s benefit.

His reply was something being thrown out of the room, which would turn out to be one of Arya’s karate trophies. It shattered against the wall accompanied by a ‘Go fuck yourself!’ which did it for Gendry.

“I’m gone, my lady. Sorry, I tried.”

Sansa did her best to stifle a chuckle. “Thanks for all your help anyway, Gendry. I appreciate it.”

He gave an awkward bow and shuffled away with the scent of smoke and hot steel trailing after him. Sansa gave a polite knock on the door and poked her head in.

“You’re not going to throw your bed at me, are you?”

Arya, all bandaged up and pouty, sat cross-legged on her bed with arms folded on her chest. “Is that idiot gone?”

“Gendry. His name is Gendry.”

“I know what his fucking name is,” Arya replied with a roll of her eyes. “He’s gone, right?”

Sansa closed the door behind her with a nod. “Yes…he’s gone. And now, you can eat. You’ve grown thinner. I thought I was the one being accused of starving myself.”

“You’re still like a twig,” Arya replied with a sigh as she allowed Sansa to place the tray of food before her. She grabbed a buttered roll and took a careful bite. “And I don’t want you to send him here again. He’s…weird.”

But even as she said that, Sansa would have been blind not to notice the blush on her cheeks or the brightness in those grey eyes; eyes which had been ‘dead’ since she learned of her brother’s death. Even watching Jon’s video had done little to bring her back completely, but there had been hope, and it was evident she clung to it, for she spied Arya’s phone with the video on pause. She wondered how many times her sister must have watched that thing. As for her, just seeing it once was more than enough. Watching Jon in that decrepit state was too painful, and knowing that each day they spent here was a step closer to his possible death…

“He won’t die,” Arya suddenly said, making Sansa wonder if she had spoken out loud. She looked
up from the nervous tugging of her sweater, biting her lower lip hard as she watched the fierce determination on that bruised face. “He’ll come back. They’ll both come back. You’ll see.

“We’ll just have to keep fighting as he told us to,” Arya added as she reached out to pet her sister’s hand gently. “Now help me with this spoon, already. I’m about to drop it and pour soup all over myself.”

Fighting against the tears threatening to fall, and more than grateful for Arya’s act of kindness, Sansa did as she was told. They made light conversation about the state of the castle and how everyone else was adjusting. With Bran now busy in the war room, and Rickon content to bury his grief by helping the construction workers, everyone was doing their best to move on. They both agreed at how odd it felt to not have Robb running things and having to listen to him nag about no one ever doing what he says, and how they’d miss his hugs, kisses, and lame jokes. They didn’t need to articulate how much he’d be missed; for it was clear another piece of their hearts had been chipped away.

Though Arya felt bad for Jeyne, she was more concerned about Monterys who hadn’t smiled or said a word since they left the crypt. They figured that the trauma of seeing so much brutality, while missing his beloved ‘uncle Jon’ and ‘aunt Dany’, was probably too overwhelming for the poor kid. All he seemed to do was cling to either Missandei or Septa Oleanna for comfort; a coping mechanism that broke Arya’s heart. Once she was strong enough to walk, she made a vow to do all she could to return him back to normal…well as normal as possible.

Once they were done, Sansa put away the tray, while Arya reached for her phone to continue playing the video. Sansa closed her eyes and listened to Jon’s voice, the tears she had tried to hold at bay threatening to fall again. To her amazement, she could hear Arya repeating his words beneath her breath, and turning around, she opened her eyes and felt her heart stir at the sight of the silent tears falling down Arya’s cheeks even as she scrubbed them away angrily and continued to whisper along with Jon.

*Oh, Arya…*

Before she could stop herself, she moved toward the bed, sat on it, and motioned for Arya to make room. Without saying a word, the sisters snuggled against each other and watched their now only oldest brother speak to them intimately despite being miles away in hostile territory.

“…he’ll make a good King, won’t he?” Sansa finally whispered as the video faded to black.

“No,” Arya replied sniffling, but with an unmistakable smile of pride on her features. “He will make a great King.”
Translations:

*Hash yeri m’anhoon, ma jinne m’ayyeyaan?!*

(Are you with me, now and always?!)
Not ashamed to admit I might have shed a little tear when I finished this - or at least wrote up a particular section - so...enjoy!
And as always, your constant support and encouragement is most appreciated. *bows gratefully*

The fire lent an air of coziness, its low crackling sound almost soothing in comparison to the heavy rains and winds raging outdoors. She tucked her feet beneath her and stared into the flickering flames, content to remain lost in her thoughts while sipping on the best hot chocolate this side of Westeros. Unfortunately, the perfect companion to make this picturesque setting complete was still stuck in King’s Landing dealing with ‘tenant affairs’ as he put it. She missed him terribly despite just spending the past hour chatting with him over the phone. He looked and sounded exhausted, though he tried to deny it. With a soft sigh, she sincerely hoped he’d be done soon and visit Dragonstone for a much-needed break before they headed off to Winter-

“Legend says you were born on a night like this,” came the low drawl to jerk her out of her daydream. She had just about forgotten Tyrion sitting beside her, not that his brooding silence had helped. She had come to collect some forgotten documents from the Chamber with the Painted Table, when she noticed him sitting by the hearth with his constant companion – a bottle of liquor. She might have slinked away without being noticed, but at his quiet invitation, she figured she might as well keep him company lest he drink himself into a stupor and miss the boat taking him to King’s Landing tomorrow.

Or maybe he was having second thoughts about the whole thing. Not that she could blame him.

“I wish I could remember it,” she replied as she listened to another crash of the waves and the rumbling thunder in the distance. “I’m sure Viserys must have. He liked to complain about how Mother spent hours in labor with me.”

“Your mother was a brave woman.”

“So, I hear.”
With those words, she closed off that line of conversation, not really wishing to listen to the pitiful stories of her sickly mother and how she had tried her best to be the perfect wife to a husband who didn’t care. She would rather focus on the positive ones; the tales of the woman who was loved and adored by the smallfolk for her good deeds.

After another few minutes of contemplative silence, she stole a glance at his profile and marveled, not for the first time, at how such a man had been cursed to be born into a family so loathed by many. She wasn’t naïve enough to believe that Tyrion couldn’t be manipulative and vindictive, if he so chose. After all, his decision to work with her was only a sign of his willingness to bring down a family that had treated him unfairly all his life. There was no reason to believe going back to see them was going to prove fruitful, but he was brave enough to risk it all. His desire to seek for the alternative of peace instead of a bloody outcome was admirable.

“**You will be successful,**” Dany said aloud with a warm smile of reassurance.

He looked up then, his haunted but piercing gaze studying her with an intensity that would have made any other woman blush. It was the expression he had when she made him her Hand; her most trusted advisor above all others. One of the greatest honors of his troubled life. She couldn’t be sure, but there might have been tears forming in his eyes before he looked away and turned his attention back to the hearth.

“**You are too kind to me, your Grace,**” he finally said in a rough voice. “Sometimes I wonder if you trust me too much.”

“I know you won’t betray me,” she replied with a sip of her chocolate. “Because if you do, I’ll have you killed immediately. That was our agreement, remember?”

He nodded with a rueful smile. “**How can I possibly forget? My life is yours, and I maintain my vow to do all I can to put you on that throne.**”

“**Hmm. So, do me a favor, my lord, and live long enough for me to get there,**” she warned with a playful smirk. “**Don’t do anything to get yourself killed. However, if your family tries anything to harm you, I will send my army to the Red Keep. They’ll rue the day they fucked with Daenerys Stormborn. You can tell them that if you wish.**”

He laughed at that, a joyful sound she appreciated as it finally broke the heavy cloud which had hovered over them all evening.

*I’d do anything to hear that laugh again.*

That was the last time she saw him, wasn’t it? No, it was the next morning…standing on the docks and watching Prince Doran’s boat sail into the thick gray mist, with a most precious cargo onboard. Though she had put on a brave front, she still harbored concerns and had sent messages to the Unsullied, currently stationed at King’s Landing, to be on guard. Try as hard as she might, she still couldn’t shake off the dread that things could go terribly wrong. Which was why receiving that text message, on their way to Winterfell, had been a minor but welcome victory.

Pity it was now shattered thanks to his inability to control whatever deep-rooted feelings of hate he had for his father.

*Ah, Tyrion, my dear Tyrion. Whatever shall I do with you once we get out of this mess?*

Absently, she caressed her still flat stomach, knowing she wouldn’t begin to show until about the third month. It still didn’t deter her from having quiet conversations with it, for whatever little
pleasure she could derive from her current state, it was spent telling her baby of all her adventures so far.

All the same, she hoped Tyrion was still alive despite the troubling stories she was hearing from her only source of information; Septa Iris. The shy woman wasn’t exactly a fountain of information and could only give her tidbits from what she had heard from around the castle kitchens. So far, her Hand was still alive, which was good. Jon was still alive, which was very good (and made her silly heart skip a beat at just thinking about him), Winterfell was destroyed (a revelation that left her in a state of shock the entire day), and there was apparently talk of a war starting (not that much of a surprise all things considered).

“All the same, she hoped Tyrion was still alive despite the troubling stories she was hearing from her only source of information; Septa Iris. The shy woman wasn’t exactly a fountain of information and could only give her tidbits from what she had heard from around the castle kitchens. So far, her Hand was still alive, which was good. Jon was still alive, which was very good (and made her silly heart skip a beat at just thinking about him), Winterfell was destroyed (a revelation that left her in a state of shock the entire day), and there was apparently talk of a war starting (not that much of a surprise all things considered)."

“Been seeing a lot of soldiers walking around the city more and more,” Iris had confided the night before. “Everyone looks so grim, my lady. I seen a lot of ships at the harbor too. Like thousands of them.”

Dany doubted there were actually ‘thousands’, because she had studied just how well-equipped the overall Lannister arsenal was. Unless they had acquired more ships from their allies in the Stormlands, Dany doubted they had that much naval power to boast of.

Still more than I have, she thought with a frown. If only I had the opportunity to begin wooing the Iron Islands to our side. Shit! Theon might have helped if I could reach him.

And it wasn’t for lack of trying. She had made attempts to call a few times, but always got the annoying message of his inbox being too full. The other option was to go there in person, a plan Tyrion had suggested once they were done with Winterfell.

“Perhaps a quick pitstop at Pyke before returning to King’s Landing. It couldn’t hurt, could it?”

No, it couldn’t. Except as she sat rotting away in this miserable dungeon, she had no idea what was going on with her armies and family. If Septa Iris was correct, and Winterfell was really gone (oh dear gods…was it possible that everyone was really dead?) How devastated would Jon be if he heard the news? What if he got so depressed he gave up the will to keep fighting for their survival?

No, no he can’t give up now, not when he knows about our little one, she thought fiercely as she clutched a fistful of her filthy sheath.

If she knew Jon as well as she thought she did, there was no way he would lay down and accept defeat that easily. Sadly, there was no way for her to know this for sure. Cersei might have broken his spirit by torturing him to the brink of death. Since that night she ‘dreamed’ of Ghost, there had been no more visits. There were times she felt she was not alone, but otherwise, Jon’s spiritual emissary did not return, and she feared she might have imagined the whole thing in the first place. Perhaps Jon really didn’t know she was with child, and if something happened to him before they ever got a chance to speak to each other again –

Ah!

She stiffened at the sudden loud rattle of the door’s locks being opened, and subconsciously pressed herself closer to the wall and raised her knees to her chest; a protective gesture to her stomach in case it was any overzealous guard wanting to use her as a punching bag. Luckily, she had only had the septas as guests so far, but as the two shadows and the impatient female voice wafted through the door, Dany knew she was about to confront a face she had seen a thousand times over in her nightmares.
Cersei Lannister swept in like a maroon peacock adorned in gold. The light from the torch, held by a large officer in the Kingsguard uniform, cast her striking features with intimidating shadows. Her long blond hair was done in a well-coiffed bouffant with intricate braids forming a crown around it. Her face was a mask of disdain, and if her eyes could spit out fire, Dany was sure she’d have been scorched by now.

“You’re much smaller than I expected,” Cersei clipped condescendingly.

“Perhaps if I was on my feet, that perception would change,” Dany replied before she could tell her mouth to control itself. As much as she hated the other woman, she had to remember that her temper was just as violent, and she could hurt her and the baby at a moment’s notice.

Cersei’s lips curled in derision. “You still have a mouth on you. I was more than content to let you remain in here for at least a month before breaking you apart. Seems these past two weeks haven’t quite done the trick yet.”

Two weeks, Dany thought in silent panic. I’ve been in here for two weeks? Dear gods.

Cersei was now pacing the dungeon with deliberate steps. “Your insolence notwithstanding, I am here – believe it or not – in good faith. Despite your treachery by sending that imp to kill my father, an unforgiveable crime in itself, I am willing to let bygones be bygones if you swear fealty to the throne and run back to Essos with your little dragon tail between your legs.”

She came to a stop before Dany again, jeweled hands clasped tightly before her abdomen. “I know you hate the thought of killing a lot of innocent lives, and this is your chance to prove to Westeros that you mean to keep that promise. If you bend the knee, I promise to pull back all my banners stationed around the country and stop any more unnecessary bloodshed.”

At Dany’s defiant silence, her red lips curved into a pitying smile. “I do hate to have to bring this up as well, but Winterfell has already fallen with Robb Stark’s head being delivered to me as we speak. Oh? Does that upset you, my dear? Not to worry. I made sure all the other bodies were burned so nothing remained but their ashes buried in the snow.”

Dany fought hard against the tears that threatened to fall, her chest heaving with the depth of her sorrow at the thought of all those she loved now killed by this heartless bitch. She shirked away from Cersei’s cold touch, for the older woman had stooped to her haunches to caress her face.

“Look at you,” Cersei continued in that quiet voice that made Dany’s skin crawl in revulsion. “So young, yet so willing to put your life on the line for a bunch of people who don’t really care about you. In case you’ve forgotten your family’s terrible history, Westeros hated the Targaryens. I’m merely doing you a favor by sparing you the grief of knowing-”

“Liar,” Dany spat through clenched teeth. Her eyes burned, and she was powerless to stop the tears that now trickled down her face. “You are nothing but a liar, Cersei Lannister, and you’ll have to drag me kicking and screaming back to Essos before I give up my rightful throne.”

Cersei’s jaw clenched, and Dany, now too far gone in her grief and anger, continued speaking.

“I won’t stop fighting, and no matter how many of my family and loved ones you kill, my allies won’t stop fighting. You’re scared. That’s it, isn’t it? You’re here to seek my fealty because you know you’ll fail. You are running out of options and…ow!”
The tug of her hair had come so sudden and unexpected, Dany felt the sharp pain at the base of her neck as Cersei pulled her closer until their noses almost brushed.

“You little bitch,” came the icy words from the Queen Regent. Her green eyes flashed with fury and she tugged harder on Dany’s hair until she was sure the roots were about to be yanked out from her scalp. “You really think I’m afraid of you? You should be begging me not to have that boyfriend of yours brought in here and beheaded right before your eyes!”

She turned to the guard and barked sharply. “Your dagger! Now!”

Dany’s eyes widened in fear; the immediate thought of Cersei stabbing her stomach almost making her want to scream for forgiveness. The chains rattled and held her back as she tried to struggle, but Cersei was back on her feet, her death grip on Dany’s hair still intact. The pain was excruciating, but she would be damned if she cried out. However, the glint of the weapon, now in the other woman’s grasp, had her praying fervently for the gods intervention.

Please, oh please, whatever happens please don’t harm my baby. I beg of you!

“Aaaah, what was that story about the Dothraki being proud of their hair or some such foolishness?” Cersei drawled as she admired the knife beneath the flare of the torch. She motioned for the guard to bring it closer and Dany watched in growing horror as Cersei dragged the steel blade through the flames back and forth slowly. “That having long hair meant you were never defeated or something of the sort? Is that why you’ve kept yours that way? As a sign of being a winner? Ah, who gives a fuck about those barbarians anyway? You should have stayed with them if you knew what was good for you. Now be still, my dear, and try not to fight too hard or this could really hurt.”

And as the Dany felt her hair being tugged again and the dagger slowly making its descent toward her face, she squeezed her eyes shut and prayed that it would at least be a quick death.

Jaime would not have considered himself a drinking man, but damn if he hadn’t just drained an entire bottle of whisky in the privacy of his office – and it wasn’t yet noon.

Surprised at his ability to walk in a straight line, he marched down the now familiar hallways until he arrived at his destination. Bypassing the unsmiling guards, he was just in time to hear his sister finish her phone call with a blistering “we’ll see about that, you bitch!” before slamming down the receiver.

“Bad day already?” Jaime teased, despite the lack of a smile on his features as he closed the door behind him. He was rewarded with a snarl and glare, before she paced to the beautiful gothic window overlooking the Bay; a glass of wine now in hand. She drained its contents and squared her shoulders as if trying to get rid of the distasteful conversation she just had.

“How soon can we attack Highgarden?” she asked tightly.

“I take it that was Margery Tyrell on the phone,” Jaime began, but Cersei was already whirling on him; her eyes flints of anger.

“I asked how soon we can attack Highgarden! I didn’t ask you to come here for your pathetic witty commentary!”

Jaime’s jaw clenched at the patronizing tone and he did his best to keep his voice even. “Keep your
voice down, Cersei. I realize you’re getting frustrated—"

“Frustrated? Frustrated?!” She flung the glass against the wall, where it shattered into a thousand crystal pieces. “Do you have any idea how I’ve been treated all morning? That…rat-faced fuck at the Iron Bank, Nestoris, had the gall to call me saying he could no longer fund our war efforts! Can you believe that?! How the fuck are we supposed to win a war without money?!”

Jaime might have made a smart-assed remark at that, but he kept his mouth shut. Besides, he doubted she would have listened to him anyway. She was already pacing the room again, her features taut with growing agitation.

“…that slut, Margery fucking Tyrell thinks she can just break faith with us! Her pathetic father had pledged to the Lannisters, and now she thinks she can just turn her back on us in our time of need! I want that palace raided, their vaults plundered, and then everything and everyone destroyed, Jaime!”

“And how do you propose we do that?” he finally snapped; his own frustration and impatience now seeping into his voice. She must have noticed it because she stopped her irritating walk to pin him with a bemused look.

“You are the goddamn Lord Commander of the Lannister army,” she replied incredulously. “What the hell do you think you are?!”

“A man being pushed to the brink of madness, that’s what!” He took a step closer to her; his handsome features now contorted with barely suppressed anger. “You’ve forced me to spread our army thin, and in case you haven’t been paying attention, our list of allies keeps dwindling every fucking day! Your plans to attack the White Castle apartments backfired with my City Watch officers getting slain in the process. We were stopped at Dragonstone, where I lost four of my best fighter pilots, and as we speak the fucking Iron Fleet and a slew of battle cruisers from Pentos – with the goddamn Dothraki on them – have us surrounded at all the major ports and are taking down our ships without breaking a sweat! We’ve lost most of the support of the riverlands, and their ground troops are already making headway into the Westerlands – our home – in case you weren’t keeping track! The Northern army have taken over Moat Cailin, our stronghold, and are now marching to Harrenhal with most of The Reach’s army as backup! I can only do so fucking much with what little we have left, Cersei! Now please wake the fuck up and concede defeat before it’s too late!”

He should have expected the slap, but it was still a jolt all the same.

“Concede defeat?” she repeated in a quiet voice as if speaking to a child. “I don’t even know who you are anymore.”

She walked to what had once been their father’s chair and sat upon it; her gaze still trained on her brother.

“If father could see you now,” she continued with an expression of pity that raked through him like hot coals. “He would be so very disappointed. Are you the same warrior son he kept bragging about? Or have all your late-night visits with our dear brother made you go soft in the head? Oh, don’t look too surprised. Did you really think I wouldn’t hear about your little pow-wows with Tyrion? You really haven’t been paying attention, have you?”

She leaned forward to press the intercom on the desk. “Bring in Maester Qyburn please.”

Jaime’s eyes widened in confusion. “Qyburn? What the fuck is he doing here?”

“He works for us now,” Cersei replied as the door was opened and the once disgraced and banished
maester of the Citadel shuffled in with a polite smile on his wizened visage. Tall and slightly stooped with age, his brown eyes still looked warm and intelligent, giving one the illusion of a fatherly figure instead of the psychotic tendencies which lurked beneath the surface.


“I got rid of him,” Cersei replied, with a flippant wave of her hand, as she accepted the manila envelope from Qyburn. “He was beginning to whine about my methods, just like you, and I got tired of it. I do believe his head might be on a spike out there somewhere.” She examined the content of the envelope with a bitter smile slowly forming on her lips. “Ah. Figured as much.”

She waved the paper in Jaime’s direction with a smug look of satisfaction. “Do you know what this is? Go on. Read it.”

She flung it to his face, where he barely caught it before it landed on the floor. It was a one page neatly-typed memo showcasing the now infamous video of a certain, supposed prisoner, speaking directly to the people of Westeros.

“Did you know about this?” Cersei asked.

“No…of course not!”

“Of course not,” she mimicked with a roll of her eyes. “Which is why you’re more suited on the battlefield, though with the way you’ve been acting, you’re making me have second thoughts, my darling. As you can see, someone has been helping our little Northern usurper, and short of sending all the prison personnel to the firing squad, I have no other choice but to make him see reason.”

“And how do you propose to do that?” Jaime asked warily.

“Qyburn here is good at setting up…well, let’s just say he’s capable of doing things to break one’s spirit. You see, he was responsible for helping to edit that video of Winterfell Roose Bolton intercepted and sent to us. And for a while - until this idiot began preaching his sermon like a holier-than-thou-savior - we almost had Westeros in our grasp. It’s time to change the narrative.”

She rose to her feet and paced to the window again. “I hear that the people of King’s Landing plan to have some sort of protest tomorrow, is that correct, Qyburn?”

“According to my sources, yes, Your Grace,” the old man replied with a bow of his head.

“In that case, I do believe it would be time for all of them to take a good look at their would-be future King and Queen, don’t you think?”

Jaime felt something cold claw up to his chest to grip his heart tightly.

Who are you? Where is the sister I know and love? What monster have you truly become?

Cersei, as if hearing his unspoken questions, turned to face him again with a beautiful smile on her visage. “Don’t look so alarmed, my dearest. I am only trying to become the benevolent queen Westeros expects me to be. But first, I must present an offer to our Northern fool. If he refuses, as his foolish dragon slut did, then I’ll have no other choice. Until then, my darling, go out there and try to win me a few battles, hmm? Because if you return to me with more pathetic excuses, I’ll be forced to do something that might cause me great pain.”

She moved toward him to caress his face, before placing a soft kiss on his parted lips. “I would hate to see your gorgeous head on a spike, my love,” she whispered into his ear. “Just think of all the flies
feasting on your flesh. Brrrr."

And with that insidious threat, she swept out of the room with her new minion in tow, leaving her brother to dark thoughts that simply refused to go away.

If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself.

That was the way the quote went, wasn’t it? Short of leading the armies herself, she had to trust that Jaime would get out of his goddamn self-pity funk and realize what was truly at stake.

Concede defeat? Hah!

Their father was probably rolling around in his grave at the very idea. So, what if their allies were all frightened chickens unwilling to support their cause? No one said ruling was meant to be a democracy. Look at history, for fuck’s sake. Some of the greatest dynasties had autocratic or authoritarian governments, and that was exactly what Westeros needed. If she allowed it to become like the Free Cities, with their lax rules and penchant for civil unrest every other fucking week, Westeros would become a shadow of its former self.

It was something she had tried to explain to a certain Targaryen prince, all those years ago – a prince she was meant to marry, and a man she had secretly loved with all her heart. In college, they had shared a few classes, but he really did shine in their Sociology class. Listening to him speak or make an argument against their professor’s lecture, was like watching a silver-haired god in the flesh. How tall and beautiful had he been? And that voice? Swoon a million times over.

She had done her best to get his attention, almost giddy at the idea that he would eventually have to marry her to keep faith between their families and all that traditional bullshit. However, try as hard as she might to engage him in lengthy conversation, partner up with him for some projects, or dare to steal a kiss during a late-night study session, Rhaeger Targaryen’s interest in her was nothing more than a mere formality.

She decided she ‘hated’ him when he ended up marrying that brown-skinned bitch, Elia Martell, who looked like she would keel over with just a puff of breath. Her loathing for him was ten-fold when she heard the rumors about his illicit affair with Lyanna Stark – that horse-faced slut who couldn’t hold a candle to Cersei (in the looks department at least). She knew that affair had incurred Robert Baratheon’s wrath, and despite not having an inkling of interest in the boisterous, loud oaf, her resentment was complete when she found herself walking down the aisle to become the next ‘Mrs. Baratheon.’

Later that night, once Robert was passed out drunk, she would invite Jaime into their bedroom, where they fucked beside her new husband for as hard and as long as they could. Jaime, being the mischievous asshole, had even gone as far as dripping his seed on Robert’s moustache.

The pompous ass deserved it.

So yes, Life had given her a whole bunch of lemons, and she was going to make the best goddamn lemonade possible.

She had waited so long for this moment, and no one, not even that slut-who looked so much like her brother – could deter her. Especially not this Northern bastard she was about to meet.
Dear gods. The things I do for you, Westeros. I better have a fucking ticker-tape parade in my honor when this is all over.

Struggling not to hit him the moment she walked into the dungeon with Qyburn and a bodyguard in tow, Cersei did her best to keep her features neutral as she studied the stoic sitting figure staring back at her.

*Odd...why do I feel like I've met him before?*

She tried to wrack her memories to see if she had indeed had an encounter with this Jon Snow in person, but nothing was forthcoming. There was no way one could forget such handsome features, despite the unkempt beard that made him look slightly crazed, or the layer of filth upon him. It was clear his time in here had made him lose some weight, but there was no denying the strength in that sinewy frame. Hell, all those scars he had accumulated were clear indications that he was either a very poor fighter or was brazen enough to accept the wounds and live to tell the tale.

All that, however, paled in comparison to those eyes; those damn dark eyes that kept reminding her of someone she couldn’t put her finger on. It wasn’t Ned Stark that was for sure. Ned, from their brief meetings in the past, had always had this melancholic aura about him; as if all was destined to be doom and gloom. That shit could get old quite fast. His bastard son could have that disposition as well, but there was something else in that gaze; something that spoke of a fire and determination not to give in no matter what threat she would present.

“I will have to give it to you,” she finally said to break the silence. “That speech of yours…” She rolled her eyes to the heavens and pretended to sigh in pleasure. “…so inspiring. I was moved. I really was.”

Jon remained silent; a blatant gesture of defiance that made her more irritated. Still, she kept her cool and began pacing the room, grimacing as a curious rat poked its head out of a hole before scampering back into the darkness.

“Jon Snow, is it? A bastard from the North,” she continued with a brief shrug. “You’ve come a long way from being nothing more than a nuisance. To think you could be one step away from sitting on the Iron Throne... talk about an upgrade, eh?” She chuckled. “If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you were playing with your little dragon slut there. Worm your way into her heart, and then when the moment’s right... you strike. If you weren’t already on my shit list, I could put you on my small council.

“But you’re a Stark, you’ll argue, and all Starks are noble and wise and full of total and complete bullshit.” She paused and spun around to face him; the shadows making her features appear menacing. “Ned Stark tried to spin that story when my father and Robert Baratheon ran things. Your father suddenly felt ‘guilty’ about being a part of the coup d'état and figured he could make things right by going against the very people he collaborated with. But it doesn’t work that way, my dear. The Lannisters never fail to pay their debts. You’ll be wise to remember that.”

Jon might have made a sound, or maybe he was just shifting positions, but his silence was still unnerving. No matter, she would make him sing like a canary soon enough. She would take great pleasure watching that defiant glare fade away just like his damn girlfriend’s.

“Believe it or not, I am actually a good person,” she said with a smile that was meant to be warm. “All those stories you’ve heard about me are mere... falsehoods. So yes, I try to run things a little heavy-handed, but you’ll learn. You’ll come to see that being a leader is not easy at all. Ask your brother, Robb... oops.”
She gave a mock gasp and raised her hand to her mouth, her eyes widening as if just realizing something. “How insensitive of me. I’m so terribly sorry for your loss.” She placed a hand on her chest and tried to look contrite. “I do blame Roose for that one. I didn’t ask him to take down Winterfell. All I wanted was you and your foreign whore, but…guess that’s what makes him a Bolton. They have always been so impatient with things. Such a shame.”

She stopped talking long enough to lean closer as if noticing something on his face. Suddenly, she clapped her hands together. “Are you thirsty? You look like you haven’t had something to drink in a while. So, I’ve brought a little something to help. Qyburn, if you please?”

The maester smiled and dug into the large brown bag he had draped across his shoulders. He withdrew a small flask, which Cersei opened and inhaled with a low moan of delight. “Ah, the finest Dornish wine we could find. Here, have a sip, huh? Let’s talk like adults and try to come to a compromise. I’m sure you’ll find that we have more in common than you realize. Like you, I’d really hate to spill more blood on the streets, so why don’t you do the right thing for all of Westeros and concede while you still have your dignity intact.”

She held up the flask to him and was rewarded with a gaze cold enough to freeze steam. Not to be deterred, she smiled and took a sip, then a longer draught before belching rudely in his face.

“Fair enough. You won’t drink, neither will you speak, but I’m sure this will get you opening that mouth of yours. Qyburn! The pictures, please.”

The maester was all too happy to oblige. He dug into his bag again, and this time, he pulled out some photographs.

“I would have asked Qyburn to record the process on his phone,” Cersei began amiably as she tossed the photos toward Jon. “But he felt this would have more of an impact. Besides, hearing her screams all over again would give me more of a headache. That girlfriend of yours does have a lung on her, doesn’t she? I bet she was a screamer in bed, yes?”

She could feel her heart blossom with an inexplicable emotion as she noticed the reaction to this new development. She studied the conflicting expressions on his face; from disbelief, to horror, to flashes of despair, and perhaps anger mixed within.

Beautiful. Dear gods, you are indeed a beautiful man, Jon Snow.

A sick(er) part of her suddenly felt the urge to have him properly chained to the wall, where she could yank down his pants and suck him off as he begged for mercy. She would take great pleasure making him come in her mouth, with the humiliation complete by forcing him to fuck her with Qyburn and the guard watching. Or maybe Jaime. That would teach her brother to keep defying her.

“I’m sorry,” she said aloud with a grin. “Are you shocked? Or you don’t believe me?”

Jon’s breathing had quickened; the quick rise and fall of his chest, the clenched fists and the tightened jaw evident of his current emotional state. She was getting more turned on by the minute. Maybe that fantasy of hers was bound to happen sooner than she thought.

“Oh, and here’s one more thing…Qyburn, my dear, please show him.”

As the long silver braid, tinged with blood, was flung into Jon’s face, his sudden primal roar of anguish was more than enough to have her cackling in glee. This was just too perfect. She reached for his jaw and squeezed hard, forcing his lowered head back up to look into those reddened eyes now filled with uncontrollable tears.
“It hurts, doesn’t it?” she said gently as she caressed his full lips while licking hers with barely controlled hunger. “To see the mutilated body of the one you love. Perhaps you have an idea of how it felt to have to bury my children or my father...oh, but then again, didn’t the Dothraki deliver your butchered Uncle’s remain to your doorstep. Poor thing. You’ve seen so much horror in your life. Why add more to it?”

Unable to resist, and not caring that he was likely to bite her in retaliation, she ran her tongue over his lips, smirking as he hissed and tried to jerk away.

“You might have rallied your troops, but I’ve taken away the one you truly love, and King’s Landing is likely to go up in flames if you choose to make the wrong decision. The ball is in your court, Jon Snow. Just say the word...pledge your fealty to me, and the bloodshed will stop.”

She raised a brow at the low growl she received. “You still don’t believe me? Qyburn? Could you please tell my dear would-be-King what lies beneath us at this very moment?”

“Of course, your Grace.” Qyburn coughed and bowed to Jon; the pleasure evident in his voice at the opportunity to speak. “King Aerys was well known for his penchant for fire. He probably considered that Targaryen motto was meant to be literal. All the same, throughout his reign, he made the members of the Alchemists’ Guild manufacture over a million explosives placed all around King’s Landing. Many of them are right beneath the Red Keep, for his plan was that if he was ever to find himself cornered or at the brink of defeat in a war, he would rather take down the entire city than concede.”

Cersei looked positively delighted at this. “Can you believe that, Jon? Over a million explosives just begging to be set free. Honestly, when I do get blown up, it wouldn’t matter because nothing of King’s Landing will remain. Not even the thousands now out there on the streets chanting your name and wishing to see you. Think of all their pitiful lives, Jon Snow. Can you really live with yourself knowing you were responsible for their deaths? No. I didn’t think so.”

She rose to her feet then and paced away, but not before draining the last of the wine and tossing the flask aside. “So, you have only two options, as I see it. You bend the knee to me now and tell your allies to recall their banners, and you walk away free to Winterfell to rebuild or whatever the fuck you want to do. Hell, I’ll even make you the new Warden of the North if you so desire. Or, you can refuse, like your pitiful girlfriend did, and watch King’s Landing go up in flames. Perhaps I’ll make you watch from a boat at sea, so their charred bodies and deathly screams will continue to haunt you until you decide to kill yourself. Your choice.

“I’ll give you twenty-four hours to think about it, but you have to hurry...I mean the sooner the better, because those crowds out there are beginning to drive me nuts.”

She clapped her hands and motioned to Qyburn. “Let’s go. We’ll leave him with the photos and remnants of his whore for him to contemplate and...hmm.... what was that?”

She spun back to Jon who had muttered something. His head was still lowered to the ground, though on closer inspection, it appeared he was staring intensely at Dany’s braid draped almost lovingly across his lap.

“You will have to speak up, Jon Snow. What was that you said?”

“...I will pledge fealty,” came the hoarse words that caused Cersei’s heartbeat to quicken and her pulse to race.

“And you will call back your banners?” she asked breathlessly.
“…yes…”

Cersei could barely contain her joy. Ah, if only father could see her now. He would be so proud of her.

“That is the best thing you could have possibly done, Jon,” she said with tears in her eyes. “You have no idea how relieved I am to hear that! However, I’ll need to have you declare this to everyone. I mean, I know I can take your word for it here and assume you’ll be a good little Stark and not break your promise, butuuuuut, it would be so much better with witnesses, don’t you think? So, why don’t you come join me in the Great Hall later this evening? Hmm? And then, you can repeat the words for the cameras and all those allies of yours to hear. Sound like a plan?”

When Jon remained silent, she stomped a foot impatiently. “Hello? Earth to Jon Snow. Can you please give me an answer? I’ve got a lot of shit to do today. Are we in accord?”

“…yes.”

“Now, was that so hard to say? Seven hells. The things I have to go through for you people. Let’s go, Qyburn. We’ve got a lot of planning to do. It’s going to be a great day after all.”

She swept out of the dungeon, fighting the urge to break into a song or at least hum in jubilation. Wouldn’t Jaime be surprised to find out how easy things had gone after all? She would show him… no…she would show all of them, that she was not to be fucked with. Queen Cersei was now the true ruler of Westeros; all the pretenders would be crushed beneath her heel.

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Luck was on their side.

It was perfect weather all around – not too cold and not too hot - and as Sam stood in the wings of the stage, listening to the latest speaker – a rather famous movie star who tried to model himself after Rhaeger Targaryen – rally the crowd into a frenzied chant of “We want Jon Snow! We want Dany!”, he still couldn’t believe just how many people had turned out for the rally. The drive to the Dragon Pit alone – which was now mostly used for outdoor concerts – was close to impossible. They would eventually have to get to that location on foot, where fans had already gathered since late last night in readiness for the day. Sam knew King’s Landing was heavily populated, but damn if every street corner, window, or balcony, wasn’t heaving with bodies.

Banners of all shapes and sizes, some with pictures of Jon and Dany – especially the famous Illustrogram black and white photo blown up to poster size – with sayings like – ‘GIVE US OUR REAL KING AND QUEEN’ – ‘FIRE AND BLOOD FOREVER’ – ‘WE WANT HOUSE TARGARYEN’ – ‘CERSEI MUST GO’ – ‘DEATH TO THE LANNISTERS’ – ‘NO MORE WARS!’ - ‘WE WANT OUR FREEDOM!’ dotted the air as they marched toward the Red Keep. Men, women, and children of all ages, made their voices heard. People of all creeds, races, and beliefs, had gathered for this pivotal cause they believed in. This was their chance to re-write history, and everyone wanted to be a part of it. Not even the sight of the armed City Watch, Kingsguard, or Red Cloaks, could keep them down. Not even when a small riot broke out in the Street of Steel, and many were beaten or arrested, was enough to deter their spirit. These folks had listened to Jon Snow and they were moved to finally act. They were done with apathy. It was time to fight back indeed.
“I could cry,” Gilly said beside him as she reached for Sam’s hand to squeeze it gently. “You did this, Sam. I’m so proud of you.”

Sam blushed and kissed her forehead. “I hardly did anything. It was all Jon’s doing. And Dany. They’ve made the people believe in them, and now…” He looked toward the looming red castle. “It’s all up to Cersei to make the right decision.”

As Jaime attached the ceremonial sword to his waist, he pondered on what Cersei’s cryptic text message meant.

**Great Hall at seven. Come in Kingsguard uni. Wonderful news, my love.**

He wished he could echo the sentiment, for the news on the battlefields were anything but wonderful. At this very moment, the Dothraki were finally on land. To his chagrin, he had assumed they’d all come barging straight to King’s Landing, but someone must have told them about their allegiance with Storm’s End, for most made a detour to take control of the region, while the rest sailed to Dragonstone. The Iron Fleet were just as brilliant enough to spread their armies around. They were now in control of Lannisterport and Casterly Rock, with more ships sent to White Harbor to support the existing Northern troops. If that wasn’t bad enough, the Dornish – who already had control of the South – seemed to be the ones making headway to King’s Landing.

So, while he was here, fixing his hair and trying to look good for his insane sibling, there was a war still being raged just miles from shore, and almost a million angry citizens wanting a piece of them for dinner.

*Wonderful news?*

It had better be damn good.

He chose to enter the Great Hall from upstairs, not wanting to draw attention to himself by using the main doors. From the balcony, where most of the lower-class nobles and wives of the upper-class nobility hovered and tittered like lovesick fools at the sight of him, he stood in the shadows and watched in disbelief at the organized chaos below.

The hall was packed to capacity, and Jaime was sure he had never seen so many cameras or reporters in his life. The entire Press pool, it seemed, was in attendance. All the major broadcast stations and newspaper publications around Westeros and even beyond. Their few allies led by Roose Bolton, who tried to look resplendent in his ceremonial garb, sat amongst the place-of-honor. There was an incredibly large sword attached to his waist, and if Jaime was right, that could only be Ice- the sword of Valyrian steel which had belonged to the Stark family for centuries. If Roose had taken that as a memento of his ‘victory’ over Winterfell, then he was an even sicker fuck than previously imagined.

Below an endless array of Lannister banners draped from the ceiling, and their soldiers in gold cloaks formed a rather intimidating barricade by keeping the people in check while leaving a clear path in the middle of the Hall for any other grand entrance. And though one couldn’t consider the hall itself to be the cheeriest of places – what with its rather depressing hues of crimson and sand – tonight, it looked as if Cersei had ordered every old-fashioned brazier in King’s Landing to line the walls. There were so many lit fires, the cooling system must have been working overtime to keep this place bearable to breathe. Still, it did make for a rather dramatic setting, if you excused the low murmurings
and general look of confusion on the faces of the people gathered. Like Jaime, none of them were sure of why they had been summoned.

Their curiosities would be appeased with the sudden blare of a horn from the entrance, and the loud announcement of “The Queen Regent, Cersei Lannister has arrived!” echoing around the chamber.

Dutifully, they rose to their feet (for those who were sitting) and watched as Cersei, looking exquisite in a gown made of shimmering black and gold samite, drifted in as if walking on air. Her hair shone like spun gold beneath the lights, the simple silver crown with their Lannister lion engraved upon it, sparkled brightly and seemed to accentuate her emerald eyes filled with a manic light that concerned Jaime. Her red lips were curved in a smile that bordered on smug instead of warmth, and though she received polite bows or courtesies as she walked past, there was never any real sense of appreciation of their current queen.

Not that she gave a damn.

Once she climbed the steps and sat upon the throne, being careful not to scratch herself (again) on the jutting blades, she took a deep breath and nodded; a sign for them to be seated. When she was sure the cameras were trained on her and she had everyone’s undivided attention, she began to speak.

“My lord and ladies,” she said in a clear voice that rang throughout the Hall. “I thank you for coming to this most special of occasions. As you might have noticed, we are at war. Not by choice, if I must remind you, but because of usurpers who dared to cross our shores to take control of a seat long abandoned and abused by her ancestors. My father fought hard to restore the dignity of this throne, and all he wanted was a Westeros that was strong and able to survive no matter what the rest of the world threw at us. Unfortunately, that dream died when he was mercilessly killed by one of the usurpers minions, my very own brother. Bring him out!”

The collective gasps to accompany this unexpected announcement was loud enough to bring a cold smile to her face. Jaime watched, with his heart somewhere in his throat, as the doors were thrown open and two guards dragged what was left of his brother behind them as if he were nothing but a sack of potatoes.

The murmurs grew louder, with some of the snotty ones covering their noses or eyes at the sight of Tyrion Lannister. Jaime watched, with his heart somewhere in his throat, as the doors were thrown open and two guards dragged what was left of his brother behind them as if he were nothing but a sack of potatoes.

The murmurs grew louder, with some of the snotty ones covering their noses or eyes at the sight of Tyrion Lannister. Jaime bit hard on his lower lip and struggled to control himself. He could feel Cersei’s eyes in his direction, and he’d be damned if he gave away his distress. Tyrion, for his part, looked at least a little better than the last time they met. He was dressed in a pair of tattered khaki trousers and a soiled beige shirt, and his wounds – though still bad enough to make his already grotesque features more disfigured – were healing. His hands and legs were still bound in chains, and as he was dumped unceremoniously at the foot of the throne, he struggled to his feet and managed to crack a smile as flashbulbs went off from greedy cameras.

“Good to see you all,” he greeted with a raise of his hands.

“Silence, traitor!” Cersei snapped angrily; not sure why Tyrion was finding anything funny in the first place. “You will be silent until I’ve decided what to do with you,” she added in a lower voice for his benefit.

She turned to the audience again. “Here is an example of what happens to traitors of the realm. He will not go unpunished. However, I am a benevolent Queen, and do not wish to see unnecessary bloodshed. It is why I have come to an agreement with one of the usurpers to see that Westeros is left in peace. He has agreed fealty to the throne and will bend the knee before all of you as proof!”

This, of course, had the murmurs rising again, and as Cersei puffed out her chest in victory, not
before tossing a quick look of smug satisfaction at Jaime, she rose to her feet and held out her hands.

“Bring in Jon Snow of Winterfell!”

She’s dead.

He barely heard the angry voice telling him to ‘get the fuck up!’ neither did he feel the impatient blow to his already aching ribs as he was dragged to his feet.

She’s dead. Dany…our child…my love…

“Let go of the damn hair, you freak!” someone said as they attempted to pull the braid he had been clutching like a lifeline since Cersei left centuries ago.

That motion galvanized his dulled senses and like a caged beast, he snarled at his attacker; headbutting the asshole and bursting his nose in the process. The guard went down crying and grabbing onto his bleeding face, while the second guard had a look of fear on his features for a moment before snapping out of it to beat Jon across the shoulders with his staff. Still furious, Jon lunged for him and might have sunk his teeth into the bastard’s jugular, when more guards dashed into the dungeon to pin him to the ground.

“Son-of-a-bitch has gone mad,” one of them grunted as they knelt on his back, legs, and did all they could to keep him in place.

Mad, huh?

Of course, he was insane. What else was there to live for? He had tried to tell himself that the pictures were fake, that the mutilated body in those photos could not possibly belong to the woman he loved. However, there were the little things that told him otherwise. The tattoo of the dragons on the body’s lower back – that he had kissed and licked so many times over – the birthmarks on her inner right thigh and left elbow and, of course, the hair. It could be so easy to assume that it was a wig Cersei had found to mess with his mind, but after touching and worshipping Dany’s hair for so long, he could tell it was the real thing with his eyes closed.

Dear gods, it hurt.

He had thought learning of Robb’s death was enough to cripple his mind, but it had made him strong enough to record that video. Now it was that same fucking video that had caused this horrific chain of events. Dany had lost her life and the fact that her stomach had been sliced open, went to show that Cersei might have guessed she was pregnant. His son…or daughter…or both for all he knew, were now nothing more than entrails and congealed blood on a filthy dungeon floor.

Dear gods, it hurt like hell.

He didn’t resist when the hair was finally beaten out of his hand, and he was yanked back to his feet like a rag doll. He didn’t protest when he was dragged out by his chains; none of the guards caring if he scratched his feet or stumbled after them. He kept his gaze to the ground, only seeing those bloody photographs spinning mercilessly in his mind. Had she called out his name as they sliced into her? Had she tried to protect their baby as best she could when she was being torn apart? Or did she bear it all in silence like the dragon she was? Choosing to remain defiant until the very end?
He sobbed out her name beneath his breath; unable to appreciate that he was breathing some semblance of fresh air after being cooped underground for so long. He couldn’t appreciate some of the pitying looks that came his way, or some of the words of encouragement from servants or guards that were on his side.

It wasn’t until the loud grind of the doors leading into the Great Hall were opened, did he finally raise his head to see where he was.

“Keep moving, asshole,” the burly guard growled when Jon took a hesitant step backward. The man yanked the chain so hard, Jon lost his footing and fell to his knees. He might have heard some snickering, but as struggled to his feet and blinked away the sweat and blood trickling into his eyes, he got his first look at the ancient throne responsible for all his heartache.

Seven hells, it really was as ugly as the images he’d seen. And why was it so damn high-

“Keep moving!”

He was shoved again, and this time, he managed to hold his ground; now aware of the audience staring at him as he began shuffling down the aisle. He sneered at the expressions of pity or shame on some faces, for several couldn’t even look at him. However, when he spied Tyrion, his smirk became a genuine smile of affection and relief; reciprocated by the dwarf who had tears in his eyes.

Neither man would be able to speak of the gamut of emotions to run through them, but Tyrion must have seen something in Jon’s eyes for his heart sank like a stone at the painful notion that this was it…it was only two of them left. The woman they had both loved and fought for, was no longer with them.

“Welcome, Jon Snow,” Cersei greeted with a haughty expression on her features. “I’m glad you could join us this evening, and I’m sure you’ll want to get over the festivities quickly as we all do. As you can see…the world is watching.”

As if to emphasize that point, all the cameras and lights – which had already being trained on him – seemed to blaze a little brighter. Jon had to squint and hold up an arm to his face to see past them. What he did and could see, however, was the very man he had murdered a thousand different ways in his dreams. Roose fucking Bolton, still looking as pallid yet cocky as ever, was standing close to the dais with something quite familiar attached to his waist.

*Ice!* That bastard’s got *Ice* with him!

Talk about the ultimate insult.

Unable to control his rage, Jon lunged for the former lord of the Dreadfort, but was sent to his knees again with another hard blow across his lower back. He fought back a wince at the pain to race through him, feeling it was nothing in comparison to his shattered heart.

“Well, I guess we can end the formalities then, since you’re so eager to get started,” Cersei declared with a smirk. “So, Jon Snow is bastard, but a Stark, and as you know, the Starks have always been known to keep their word. So here we are, Jon. Before the world and to all your allies, please repeat the words you said to me earlier. Let them know that you’ve decided to pledge your fealty to me. Call your banners and let us end this senseless war. Help me restore Westeros to its former glory. Just say the word…and peace will be restored.”

*Just say the word, huh? Just pledge my fealty to House Lannister and a million lives would be saved, right?*
He stared hard and long at the floor, realizing he was kneeling on a faded mosaic motif of a red dragon head. Someone must have tried painting over it, but they didn’t quite do a good job of it.

_The dragons. You were never once ashamed of your ancestors, were you? No matter what anyone said about them, you always reminded me of the blood that flowed through your veins. We are the dragons, and whether I like it or not, this is the house our ancestors built, Dany._

He swallowed the hard lump about to form in his throat, as drops of his blood fell to the ground, and soon covered up an eye of the dragon.

_She took you away from me, Dany. All those dreams you had of restoring our family’s name and now…what do we have left? How can I hope to continue without you by my side? What should I do? Just give in and turn away? Everyone’s watching and waiting. After everything I said to them… should I go against my word? What kind of a person would that make me? What would you have done if you were still alive?_

“You are wasting everyone’s time, Jon Snow,” Cersei’s voice sliced through the pregnant silence.

“Perhaps you need an incentive to get your final decision, and I know just the person to do so.”

Jon looked up with bemusement. He might have said something, when the next words out of her mouth had him frozen in shock.

“Bring in the foreign whore!”

Cersei couldn’t have received a more dramatic response to this announcement if she tried.

The gasps, small cries, and unquestionable murmur from the crowd – both indoors and outdoors (for large jumbotrons had been set up on the streets, while others watched on their electronic devices or televisions) – was near deafening. The anticipation grew to a fevered pitch as the doors to the Great Hall opened again, and the world was finally allowed to see what remained of the great Targaryen Dynasty.

And see they did, for Daenerys Stormborn was as naked as the day she was born.

Not flanked by any guards, and still shackled with chains on her wrists and ankles, she began to walk slowly into the hall; her bright amethyst gaze trained on one person only. They had not bothered to wash the filth and caked blood off her body, but it made no difference to the way she still carried herself. It was the walk of one who knew her rightful place, of one lifted by the ghosts of her royal lineage whose whispers of ‘welcome home’ seemed to flitter around the grand hall.

Her trademark beautiful waist-length hair of silver was now nothing more than bloody tufts on her head; evidence of Cersei’s shoddy job of taking it all off. Yet despite this ‘walk of shame’, despite the wide-eyed expressions of awe, shock, or sadness that accompanied her every move, despite the heads that bowed in politeness or embarrassment at her state of undress, she might have been walking on air for all the attention paid to them.

All that mattered was the beautiful, haggard young man stumbling to his feet with those familiar brown eyes wide with disbelief and inexpressible joy. Her vision shimmered as she tried to walk a little faster – well as fast as the chains would let her before she could fall – and even when she did stumble, she was surprised to have one of the Lannister guards steady her.
“Dany…” Jon croaked as his own tears broke free and he took two staggering steps toward her with arms outstretched as far as he could get them to. “Dany, I…aaah!”

He was knocked down again and this time, the guard placed a heavy boot-clad foot on his back to keep him in place.

“Let him up,” Cersei declared with a bored expression on her visage. “This romantic moment should not have been ruined. It’s good for television, right?”

Not that the cameras were paying much attention to her anymore. They were all trained on the Targaryen princess who had finally reached the dais, but would be prevented from reaching out to Jon, who had been forced onto his knees, but now held in place by two more guards.

Only their eyes did the talking, and in it, all the words they could not say out loud burned feverishly between them.

When she could finally tear away from him, she turned to Tyrion, who could only fall to his knees and bow his head in supplication at all the pain and suffering he had caused. With a warm smile, she shuffled toward him, and much to Cersei’s chagrin, sank her fingers into his hair and whispered in Valyrian, “I forgive you, my dear friend.”

Cersei had had enough.

“This is your so-called Queen!” she bellowed. “This usurper with nothing to her name?! We all forget how the Targaryens treated us. Have we all forgotten how King Aerys treated us? Do we want to return to those days again?”

Silence greeted this query, and perhaps Cersei would have continued her rant, when Dany turned to face the audience and cameras with a grim expression of determination on her striking features. It might have just been an illusion, but as she held out her hands, many would swear that the fires in the braziers seemed to blaze just a little brighter until she was literally bathed in their fiery glow. She took a deep breath and began speaking in the language of her forbearers.

“Listen to me, Westeros, and to all those who believe in freedom! I am Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, the First of Her Name, Queen of the Andals, the Rhoynar and the First Men, Queen of Meereen, Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, Protector of the Realm, Lady Regnant of the Seven Kingdoms, and the Breaker of Chains! The woman who stands behind me claims to be benevolent, but I dare her to keep her word and to have a Grand Council where the decision is made as to who deserves to be on the throne! If she cannot agree to it, then she is nothing more than an arm of her tyrannical father, who will give you nothing but pain and suffering throughout her regime. We cannot let that happen any longer! Do not give up hope! No matter what happens to me, or the man I love, we will not falter! Are you with us?!”

There seemed to be a deafening silence after her words, and Cersei might have burst out laughing, when the sounds began to drift in through the large gothic windows. It was usually difficult to hear what happened in the streets, way below the Red Keep, but there was no mistaking the loud chants now drifting into the Great Hall.

*Break the chains! Break the chains! Break the chains!*

The people of King’s Landing had heard loud and clear, and thanks to modern technology, her Valyrian was translated for those who were not able to understand. The sound of a million voices raised in unison was enough to send chills down their spines.
The audience in the Great Hall looked at each other and began to murmur loudly amongst themselves, while Jon and Dany shared a look that brought a pretty blush to her features. He was proud of her, and that was more than enough for –

“Shut them up!” Cersei screeched when she realized she was losing their attention. She climbed down the steps of the throne, ignoring the low ripping sound as one of the blades sliced through her gown. Jaime, who sensed that something bad was about to happen, dashed down the stairs to intervene before it was too late.

“You stupid fools!” she raged as she marched toward Jon. “Do you think I was joking about what I said in the dungeon? Do you really think I won’t blow this entire city to smithereens?!”

“What are you talking about?” Jaime, who had finally made it to her side, blinked at her in confusion. “Blow what up?”

“The entire city,” Tyrion said quietly. “Isn’t that right, Lord Varys?”

Jon and Dany, who hadn’t even noticed the eunuch, for he had blended effortlessly into the crowd, stepped forward and bowed. Slipping his hands into the sleeves of his lavender and gold robe, he spoke softly but clearly. “As Lord Tyrion says, King Aerys was quite fastidious in his desire to control King’s Landing. If he was to lose any battle or future wars, rather than concede defeat—”

“We all die,” Cersei finished smugly; a sentence that caused most of the audience to begin protesting, while some tried to make their escape as quickly as possible even as the guards tried to hold them back.

“Congratulations, Jon Snow,” Cersei sneered. “Thanks to your indecision, King’s Landing is about to go up in flames. With a snap of my finger, the alchemists are ready to turn the switch on. So, get ready to—”

“You know me as Jon Snow of Winterfell!” Jon suddenly bellowed forcing the fleeing crowd to stop in their tracks. “But to only a few, I am Aegon Targaryen, and the only living son of Rhaeger Targaryen and Lyanna Stark!”

He paused and tried to catch his breath, ignoring the incredulous looks that came his way and only concentrating on the widened amethyst eyes he was falling in love with all over again. He knew she was shocked at his willingness to make this public now, but after all he had experienced these past few days, letting the world know about his true parentage was trivial. If they were all going to die soon, it was better he let go of this burden once and for all.

“I was born in Dorne,” Jon continued; not shouting but keeping his voice loud enough for everyone to hear. “Born at the height of the coup d’état when my mother was forced to flee the city for her safety. Rhaeger knew she was pregnant, but never made it to my birth. I never got to know him, but I did get to know a man, my father Ned Stark, who took the role of ‘villain’ and chose to raise me as a bastard in my mother’s home. Winterfell. A home you tried to take away from me! You claim to have defeated us, but Winterfell still stands. Your false lies and stories have already been exposed, and our allies grow stronger by the day, yet you sit on your throne and pretend as if you are in control. Look around you, Cersei. You are not loved, and you’ll never be loved or respected. You seek an empty chair for an empty role just to fill the emptiness within your heart. That is no way to live, and in a way, I almost feel sorry for you.”

“He lies!” Cersei shrieked; her eyes glinting with a madness that was frightening. “He kneels there and feeds you with lies! Rhaeger Targaryen’s son?! Those dungeons have really made you insane…!”
“It is true!” came the sudden voice from the entrance which had everyone turning in that direction quickly. “I have the documents and proof right here. Hell, I was there when the sniveling little baby was brought into my office. I can definitely tell you the looks have improved over the years.”

Oberyn Martell, looking quite handsome in his traditional Dornish garb of yellow and maroon silks, grinned as he waved his arms in a flourish before giving a mock bow to his captive audience.

“So, yes, he is telling the truth. He is Prince Aegon Targaryen, and I am willing to testify at a Grand Council if need be,” the prince added. He sauntered down the hall, flanked by a sultry Ellaria, three of their daughters, and an army of Dornish soldiers who easily forced the Lannister troops to lower their swords and shields in surrender. One would come to learn they had also taken control of the soldiers on the streets; a sight that was cheered on by the crowds.

Oberyn stopped before the dais, tutting in disapproval at the state of Dany’s undress. He swung the gold cape from his shoulders and draped it around hers, before raising her hand to his lips to place a kiss upon it. “My Queen, apologies for having to meet you in such a manner. But trust me when I say, it will be rectified shortly. As for you-”

He snapped his fingers and two of his guards were quick to take down the ones keeping Jon prisoner.

“…you need a major wash and that beard…it’s got to go, young man.”

Jon blushed with embarrassment at being called out like that, but then caught something from the corner of his eye. With a muttered curse beneath his breath, he grabbed one of the guards’ dagger and despite feeling a little faint - all the excitement had just about sapped the little energy he had - he flung the weapon with all the strength he had left toward the figure about to slip into the shadows.

Roose Bolton gave a small cry of pain as the blade buried itself into his lower back, and as he struggled to remove it, more of the Dornish guards descended on him to finish the job.

Not exactly the beatdown he had envisioned, but Jon was too fatigued to argue with the outcome.

“Who was that?” Ellaria asked while trying not to cry at the state of Dany’s hair. She was running her fingers through what was left of it while contemplating new styles she could work with.

“Roose Bolton,” Jon replied with a scowl. “He kidnapped us and destroyed Winterfell…had my brother killed. By the way, I want that sword he’s got with him. He fucking took Ice. I can’t believe-”

“Jon Snow? Are you really the son of Rhaegar Targaryen?”

“What do you plan to do now that you have revealed your parentage?”

“How do you know he’s really the son of Rhaegar, Prince Oberyn?”

“Could the documents have been forged?”

“Dany? Does this mean that you have been sleeping with your own nephew?”

“How will your supporters deal with your incestuous relationship?”

“Dany? Did you know about this? Will you break up with him now?”
“Cersei? Will you concede the throne now that you’ve been overthrown?”

The Press, like ravenous beasts, had clamored around the dais – almost pushing the major parties further toward the throne with their eager questions. So many microphones, camera flashes, and electronic devices were being shoved in their faces until they could barely take it anymore. Especially the woman who had once thought she had it all.

“LiesliesliesliesLIES!” Cersei raged as she pushed some away with manic desperation. Her eyes were wide as saucers in a face now haggard and pale with distress. She raised a jeweled hand above her head. “I’ll burn you all to the ground! Every one of you! I will not give up the crown to these pretenders! This throne is mine! Mine! **MINE!** You will all burn in hell with me!”

And as she prepared to snap her fingers, everyone watched in silent disbelief as her features seemed to slacken for some odd reason. One would assume she had suffered a stroke, but as that raised arm slowly lowered, and a trickle of blood flowed out the corner of her mouth, it was clear that the man now pressed against her, in a rather intimate embrace, was responsible for it.

“…Jai…me?” Cersei croaked into the head of gold lowered before her. She would barely hear his soft sobs or be willing to accept that she too had begun to weep silently.

How could she have lost…*everything* so quickly?

“I’m sorry,” was all she would hear repeatedly from the man she loved, “I’m so, so, sorry.”

Trembling fingers sank into his hair as the strength left her legs. She slumped to the floor, dragging him with her, and just as she felt her head about to droop with its sudden heaviness, she felt the knobby calloused hands beneath her chin forcing it up again. This time she found herself staring into a pair of mismatched eyes in a face she still considered ugly and grotesque. How could this person be her brother? And yet…why did she feel so lonely and full of regret?

“I know it will mean little to you as well,” Tyrion said with tears in his eyes. “But all I ever wanted was for us to live in peace, Cersei. Nothing more. I wish things could have been different.”

“Huh…” She spat out a wad of blood and curled her lips into a semblance of the first real genuine smile Tyrion must have ever seen in his life. “Go fuck yourself, Tyrion. You win…this time…”

Those would be her last words, and for the others who had watched this sudden development with expressions of disbelief, this was beyond anything they could have imagined. The silence in the hall was deafening, even the Press looked shell-shocked. What could anyone say? They had just witnessed an assassination, and for those who still had memories of the *coup d’état*, it just might have been *déjà vu* all over again.

Jaime would eventually pull out the sword, but he might have been a zombie for all the reaction to what was happening around him. With care, he lowered his sister’s body to the floor and taking off his gold cape, draped it over her body and away from the glares of the cameras and curious onlookers.

“I had to do the same thing to your father a long time ago,” he began in a flat voice; his striking green eyes now devoid of its usual brilliance. “He was just the same…ready to send King’s Landing up in flames, and I only did what I felt was right at the time. To save many, I had to get rid of the problem from its root, and that problem was your father. Your brother knew it, and if it makes you feel any better, he gave me his blessing to carry out the task should it ever come to that point.”
He paused for a moment, though his gaze was still trained on the immobile figure; his expression inscrutable.

“She is dead now. I have done my last duty as Lord Commander and eliminated the problem. I will call off our banners, and I doubt you’ll have any more objections to your taking of the throne now. Your Grace.”

He fell to a knee with his sword pointed to the ground in the style of old; a noble gesture that had Dany floundering for a moment. Was Jaime officially surrendering to her? And if so…was he supposed to be punished for being a part of Cersei’s madness? Or could she get herself to still hate him for killing a man she had barely known? Besides, if what he said about his reason for doing so was correct, shouldn’t he be considered a hero instead of choosing to live his life as a villain?

You truly are a complicated man, Jaime Lannister.

She looked to Jon, who seemed able to read her thoughts as he gave a light nod in silent agreement. She turned to Tyrion, who with a nod as well, carefully stepped up to his brother.

“What do you wish to do, Jaime? I’m sure our new Queen will be more than glad to accept whatever you desire.”

Jaime smiled ruefully and lifted his head. “Honestly? Probably go sailing off into the sunset and never seeing any of your godforsaken faces again, but-”

“I will need a Lord Commander for my armies…all my armies,” Dany interrupted as she clutched the cloak tight around her and held his bemused gaze. “It’s not going to be an easy task, and though I’m sure you might have reservations working for me, you are more than welcome to the position.”

Jaime looked like he was about to make a smartassed remark, but at the hard kick to his shin by Tyrion, he cleared his throat and bowed his head again. “As you wish, your Grace. May I at least request some time to bury my sister?”

Dany gave her permission with a curt nod.

Everyone watched in respectful silence as Jaime lifted the body off the floor and began the longest walk of his life out of the Great Hall. He ignored some glares that came his way, choosing to focus instead on how much lighter Cersei felt in his arms.

The time for tears would come much later, but for now, he could only hope that her spirit was much happier than it had ever been while on earth.

The tone might have been somber in the Great Hall, but the streets told a different story.

No one is sure who yelled the loudest “CERSEI IS DEAD!” but the screams and shouts of jubilation was one never seen in King’s Landing in probably centuries. Strangers danced or made out with each other, new friends were made, restaurants and bars offered free food and drinks to those who cared, cars blasted their horns, and someone with a private plane even flew around with a banner that read “LONG LIVE KING JON AND QUEEN DANY!” while another had the less eloquent “DING! DONG! THE BITCH IS DEAD!”
As for said ‘King’ Jon and ‘Queen’ Dany, both were now sitting on the steps beneath the Iron Throne, patiently allowing the guards and blacksmiths to break their chains.

They ignored the hustle and bustle around them, including servants who were hard at work scrubbing away Cersei’s blood, the guests now recording or taking pictures of them despite being urged not to do so, while the Dornish guards did their best to kick out the pestering media still needing their burning questions answered.

None of that mattered…for now.

With shy smiles, akin to teenagers in love for the first time, their foreheads met in gentle collusion; molten brown staring blissfully into sparkling amethyst as if hoping to memorize every tiny fleck within them for as long as they possibly could, or until their hearts beat as one…or two…

…for when his trembling hands finally slipped beneath the cape to caress her stomach, where she held it prisoner with hers as the tears came again, the young monarchs now knew they were truly free.
The Targaryens

Chapter Notes

And so we come to the end of a journey, and what a journey it’s been. My life changed in so many ways while writing this, and I won’t bother retelling that story again. This was a show/book that I ‘hated’ because it was so popular, and now, somehow these characters have become a part of me.

To all of you who started with me from Day One, you brave soldiers who stuck through it all, were patient, and supported me every step of the way, I thank you for the depths of my heart. To those who joined the party late, haha! I’m glad you gave this a shot and prodded me on as well.

And so for the last time, my dear readers, sit back and enjoy! *bows gratefully*

THE REBIRTH OF A DYNASTY

By Kevan Crawley

The Westeros Times Editor

KING’S LANDING – It was exactly twenty-four years ago, when King’s Landing – and indeed all of Westeros – was thrown into chaos when then ruler of The Syndicate, King Aerys II, was assassinated during the coup d’état. The Targaryens, who had always been rulers of the realm from the days of Aegon the Conqueror, now found themselves nearly extinct, thanks to a chain of events that led to its inevitable destruction.

King Aerys was not loved by the people as evidenced by his dictatorship and ruthlessness when it came to opposition. The unemployment rate was heading into the double-digits, and with the abolishment of many beneficial social and welfare programs, the citizens of Westeros found themselves spiraling into an abyss of despair.
Many assumed that his more popular son – Rhaeger – would be willing to overthrow his father and claim the crown; a claim corroborated by witnesses who assert that Rhaeger had secretly planned to send his father into exile. As fate would have it, the rebels – led by Robert Baratheon and Tywin Lannister – had other plans.

It would take nearly a year of bloody battles and countless lives lost, for the Red Keep to finally fall into the hands of the usurpers. However, if Westeros was overjoyed at the change in power, and hoped for a more democratic rule, they were in for a rude awakening.

Robert Baratheon, showed no interest in being a leader, and chose to give the reins to Tywin Lannister, who proceeded to turn the Iron Throne into his personal playground. The harrowing stories of genocides, where entire towns or villages were destroyed around Westeros under his orders, just recently came to light. We would also learn he was responsible for the brutal murders of Elia Martell and her children – Aegon and Rhaenys; heirs to the throne.

That should have been the end of the Targaryen Dynasty as we knew it. However, little did Westeros know that two of Aerys’s children had survived and would spend most of their lives across the Narrow Sea securing allies.

Twenty-four years later, one of those children - the last living Targaryen, Daenerys Stormborn - has returned to our shores to reclaim what is rightfully hers. However, with the latest bombshell to hit us during the astonishing events of last night, it will appear there has always been a Targaryen living amongst us. This revelation is sure to have a most necessary Grand Council convening for the first time in over fifty years.…

THE MERIWETHER TALK SHOW:

**Meriwether:** Good evening, and thanks for joining us for this very special edition of the show. We’ve got a lot to get to, so let me bring in my panel for this evening. First, we have renowned historian and professor of Historical Studies at the Citadel – Maester Yandel, whose famous book *The World of Ice and Fire* was an international bestseller for many years. I also have, Lady Brienne of Tarth – a leading figure in the Women’s Empowerment movement and bestselling author of *Hidden Strength – Stories of Powerful Women in History*. Finally, Sir Humfrey Wagstaff – leading researcher for Grandview University and bestselling author of *The Power of Corruption*. Thank you all for coming tonight. And we’ll get started immediately with you, Maester Yandel…just…please explain to me what happened last night at the Red Keep? I know we all laugh at my flabbergasted expression, but I am curious as to where things stand now…where do we go from here? Where does Westeros even begin to recover from something so…shocking?

**Yandel:** Thank you for having me on the show, Baron. Yes, indeed, it was an astonishing series of events we witnessed, but then again, we did witness history being re-written right before our eyes. Many of us still remember hearing about King Aerys’s assassination, and ironically enough, by the very same man who took out Cersei Lannister – the Kingslayer – Jaime Lannister, who seems doomed to perform this most unpleasant task. What happens next? Well, it would seem like our Queen has already taken the first steps by announcing her small council with Tyrion Lannister – irony of ironies – as her Hand…

**Meriwether:** Yes, that was indeed a surprise for many of us. Why would she keep both Lannisters in her court? She also declared Jamie Lannister to become her Lord Commander if I’m not mistaken.
Yandel: There is that old saying of ‘keeping your friends close, but your enemies closer’ yes? While I have no doubt Tyrion Lannister will remain loyal to her, and he has proven to be the most levelheaded of the Lannister brood, we will see how he chooses to rule while the Queen takes a much-needed break.

Meriwether: Speaking of the princess; as I hesitate to coronate her just yet – there is the Grand Council coming up…tell me, Lady Brienne, do you think Daenerys Targaryen will be a good ruler? She has given all these great speeches about restoring hope and change to Westeros, but how feasible is that given the current state of affairs? Because despite her popularity, there are still about 25% of the public who consider her a foreigner, a usurper, and not fit for the crown. What do you say to those people?

Brienne: Thank you for having me on the show, Baron. To answer the first part of your question, we don’t know what kind of a ruler Daenerys will be, because aside from Cersei – and we saw what a terrible short reign that was – Daenerys will be the first official female monarch of Westeros…of all time. Let that sink in for a moment. After the first Great Council, it was decreed that only the males had the right to rule, and even if it was a woman that was rightfully meant to be on the throne, that power would go to the man. Fortunately, that rule will be shattered with Daenerys taking over the throne…

Meriwether: Ah, but will it? Don’t forget the bombshell of that Jon Snow being revealed as the son of Rhaeger Targaryen, and by all rights, should be next in line, yes?

Brienne: That is incorrect. We must not forget that Aerys made a big proclamation the year before the coup d’état where he denounced Rhaeger as his heir. What did that mean? It meant Viserys would be in line for the throne, and since Viserys is dead, it begs to reason that Daenerys is next. Now, there are going to be purists who will frown and wish for Jon to overthrow her authority, but from what I’ve seen so far, it doesn’t look as if he has any intention of claiming it. He seems more than happy just being her consort, and who can blame him? And going back to your question about her leadership skills – here is a woman who was able to get the loyalties of the Unsullied and the Dothraki. You laugh, but do you see how amazing that is? Two of the most powerful armies in the world, let alone managing to assemble most of Westeros to her side, is an incredible feat. We must not forget what she did in Slaver’s Bay either. Bottom line, I think Westeros is in good hands with her, and Jon, in charge.

Meriwether: Sir Wagstaff? What do you make of all this? How do you think the Grand Council will vote in terms of coronating her and Jon Snow as the next monarchs of Westeros, especially when you have public opinion about their incestuous relationship playing a factor in those people wary about their leadership skills?

Wagstaff: Baron, I might be in the minority on this panel, but you are right. I see the incestuous relationship playing a big role in the upcoming Grand Council. Like Lady Brienne stated, there will be some purists or traditionalists, like myself, who wish to keep things as they are supposed to. And though I know the Targaryens are famous for ‘keeping-things-in-the-family’, we must hold our leaders to a higher standard. What kind of an example are we setting for our children, when we openly parade a nephew and aunt as the pillars of our government…

Brienne: With all due respect, Sir Wagstaff, you were a Lannister loyalist, and I can understand you’re upset with all that’s happened, but don’t you see the hypocrisy of your statement when you were more than willing to support Cersei Lannister, who was involved in a well-known incestuous relationship with her own twin brother? Dear gods, I keep hearing all the high and mighty complaints from the self-righteous and sanctimonious, but let’s be honest, our government should be
not judged by what people choose to do in their bedrooms. I don’t care if you choose to have sexual relations with your horse, as long as I have a good job, decent wages, food on my table, good healthcare, peace, and stability.

**Wagstaff:** I find that quite hypocritical of you as well, Lady Brienne, considering your latest op-ed in the *Westeros Times* complained about taboo relationships especially with pedophilia. Would you be accepting of a king or queen who engaged in such things ‘in the bedroom’, but still gave you a good life outside of it?

**Brienne:** Naturally, I’ll have to draw the line somewhere, but since we’re speaking of a man and woman who had no idea they were related, and still fell in love and are quite happy together, I see no reason for us to punish them for it. A majority of the people, according to most polls, have shown that they too feel the same way. Those two have been through a lot, and I think its shallow of us to accuse them of being incapable of being good leaders because of it.

**Meriwether:** Do you want to get a word in here, Maester Yandel?

**Yandel:** (laughs) Well, it is riveting conversation…

**Meriwether:** And do you think the Grand Council will have any problems voting them in as our next king and queen of Westeros?

**Yandel:** Baron, as sure as the hairs of my head are as white as snow, then yes, I see no objections to having Queen Daenerys and King Jon Snow or Aegon Targaryen, as our next rulers of Westeros.

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**CHANGING OF THE GUARD**

*By Arianne Mandel*

*Editor, The Independent*

KING’S LANDING – While the soon-to-be monarchs, Daenerys Targaryen and Jon Snow, remain cooped in Dragonstone on their vacation, the rest of King’s Landing prepares itself for one of the biggest events in decades. Renovations are already on the way at the Red Keep, with many of the Lannister sigils, banners, and paraphernalia removed from the premises and around the city. The most obvious change was the dismantling of the famous throne of blades - the Iron Throne - by several blacksmiths who carted its remains away to cheers and jeers by thousands of onlookers.

The excitement is palpable in the streets, as many store fronts, businesses, and homes now proudly fly the Targaryen banner in the hope of seeing changes for the better.

“We’ve waited so long for this,” says Samora Giller, who owns a bakery shop. “When I saw them on television that night; how they were so strong despite what that evil Cersei did to them, I knew they were going to be wonderful leaders. We deserve it.”

But not everyone shares that optimism. According to the latest polls, twenty-five percent of the public are still wary of the Targaryens true intentions, and another fifteen percent do not like the incestuous angle of their relationship.
“I jus’ think it’s wrong in da eyes of da Faith,” said Garth Harmund, a local blacksmith. “I mean… ain’t that why all the bad things been happening to them Targaryens? And that ‘ole madness thing that runs in da family? I don’t think I want to be ruled by a bunch of mad people. Aerys was more than enough for me.”

Whatever the feelings and opinions people have, change has indeed come to Westeros…

The National Broadcasting Network

BREAKING NEWS:

“This just in. Due to the current renovations taking place at the Red Keep, Lord Tyrion Lannister, the current Hand of the queen-in-waiting, has announced that the Grand Council will be held at Highgarden this year. The dates have also been set, and the meeting will be held from the 4th to the 12th of next month. We have also received a statement from Highgarden, which says: “We, of House Tyrell, are honored to be chosen as the host for the fourth Great Council. Highgarden, and the Reach, welcome all dignitaries from across the realm for this great event.” Signed Lord Mace Tyrell and Lady Margery Tyrell.”

THE PICTURE TO BREAK THE INTERNET

EntertainmentFeed.com

After nearly two weeks of silence, it took only a single update on the Queen’s Illustrogram page, to have the internet losing its collective mind.

The adorable photo of a pair of white booties and a white husky puppy sleeping beside it, with the simple caption “New Beginnings” as well as the hashtags #blessed #loved #soveryhappy #cantwaittoseeyouallagain – has gotten over five million views in less than twelve hours. It’s also the most ravened image in Raven’s history, and speculation abounds on Daenerys being pregnant; a news that has all her fans going absolutely crazy. Can we really be expecting a little ‘Targling’ on the way? We’ll just have to wait and see!

THE NORTH REMEMBERS

By Daryn Hornwood

Northern Tales, Editor-in-Chief
WINTERFELL – It was a subdued affair; with not much fanfare as it befits the culture of the North. However, the official funeral service for Lord Robb Stark, was attended by many prominent northern Houses and their families. The castle, still undergoing renovations, was also the host for over a thousand smallfolk from all over the region. We were the only members of the media allowed to witness the event, though there were no cameras allowed. One of the reasons was because, in attendance were the future King and Queen of Westeros, who arrived late last night, under the cover of secrecy.

While each sibling gave brief touching eulogies, it was Jon Snow’s heartfelt farewell that brought many to tears. It was clear that he loved his ‘brother’ and was not ashamed to sing his praises or weep openly before his riveted audience.

Once the public services were completed, only intimate family members, including Daenerys Targaryen and Jeyne Westerling – who would have been Robb’s wife – were allowed into the Stark crypt for the burial. All were dressed in the traditional dark and heavy furs to signify their status as rulers of the North, and as the new Lady of Winterfell, Sansa Stark was given the honors of carrying her late brother’s sword to be placed upon his statue…

The Nightly News:

“In an effort to reestablish stability in the regions struck by the brief war initiated by Cersei Lannister, Lord Tyrion Lannister – under the order of the queen-in-waiting – has called the banners of their allies. Those armies once under the Lannister banners have been asked to either surrender or be put on trial for crimes against the realm. Earlier this evening, our reporters caught up with a member of the queen’s small council, Lord Varys, on his way to the Red Keep.

Variy: It’s going to be a long and painstaking process, but make no mistake about it, we will restore Westeros’s army to becoming the strongest and most dominant in all the world.

Reporters: Lord Varys! Where is Jamie Lannister? Shouldn’t he be in charge of the transition?

Varys: At the moment, Davos Seaworth is in charge of things until Jamie Lannister returns. You must remember he has to have time to grieve over the loss of his sister, and the Queen has given him permission to do so.

Reporters: Lord Varys! What will happen to the Lannister loyalists? Especially the Westerlands and Casterly Rock?

Varys: You will have to ask the Hand of the Queen about that, but as for the loyalists, they will have no other choice but to join us or risk being put to trial.

Reporters: Lord Varys! What about the Dothraki? There is the concern that many of them will begin to settle in the Stormlands and Dragonstone. What does the Queen plan to do?

Varys: We have already seen that most of the Dothraki have left. They have no interest in living in Westeros. For those who have chosen to remain, the Queen has given them land around Dragonstone and in the Stormlands, with orders to simply live as normal a life as possible. So no, no
one is to worry about their towns or cities being pillaged anytime soon. Now if you’ll excuse me, I do have some work to do. Thank you…

The National Broadcasting Network

BREAKING NEWS:

“…and we go live to Highgarden, where our reporter, Alysanne Horwath is on the scene. Alysanne? What’s going on? Is it true that we’re finally going to see the future monarchs arriving soon?”

“Berena and Laurence, I don’t know if you can hear me, because it’s so loud with all these fans who have been waiting outside the castle for hours. I think just about the entire Reach is buzzing with excitement because after just over three weeks of being away from the public eye we’re finally going to have our first glimpse of Jon and Daenerys, right here, at the castle.”

Crowd screams at sound of their names.

“Haha! See what I mean?”

“That’s great to hear, Alysanne, but there’s a reason those two are finally showing up today, isn’t there?”

“That’s right, Laurence. As you know, it’s Day Seven of the Great Council, which is very important because it’s when the official voting begins. Now, although no one expects any major opposition – there were a smattering of protesters out here earlier, but as one would expect, they were dwarfed by the majority – this is the point of the Council where the representatives of each major house casts their votes for who is to become the next ruler of Westeros. It’s a tradition that’s occurred in previous Great Councils.”

“Is it necessary for Jon and Daenerys to be there?”

“Well, I wouldn’t say it was necessary, but considering the whole issue about Jon’s legitimacy where, yesterday Oberyn and Doran Martell put on a fantastic show and laid out the case for Jon Snow’s birth and the annulment between Rhaeger Targaryen and Elia Martell, while a surprise appearance by Howland Reed – who was with Ned Stark at the time of Jon Snow’s birth – was there as a collaborating witness. There were documents that showed the legitimate marriage between Rhaeger and Lyanna Stark, which now pretty much buries the questions about Jon’s claim to the Throne.”

“Does anyone think Jon will want to overthrow Daenerys, so to speak?”

“I doubt that, Berena. From all we’ve seen and heard so far, especially with Lord Tyrion and Lord Varys being the spokespeople for the couple all this week, it doesn’t look as if Jon has any real interest in overshadowing Dany. If anything, it seems like they’ll rule together, which will be a refreshing change.”

“Indeed it will because as we reported the other day, two thrones were seen being moved into the Red Keep…aaah. Hint hint.”
“Indeed…oh…oh, I hear the screams picking up from down the road, and yes, if I’m not mistaken, there’s the procession of black cars coming toward us…aaaand the doors are opening…and honestly, I can’t hear myself anymore because they are literally screeching at this point. So I’ll just try to describe what I see as best I can. Coming out of the castle right now are the hosts of the event, Lady Margery Tyrell – looking gorgeous in a couture gown in the colors of her house – green and gold, with her father Lord Mace Tyrell – who is in a wheelchair because of his poor health but looking quite proud, being pushed by Loras Tyrell, who is also getting quite a lot of the female audience screaming as well. I can also see Lord Tyrion Lannister; looking quite dashing in a maroon and gold suit, Lord Varys a member of the Queen’s small council, Davos Seaworth who is still interim Lord Commander, Sir Johar Mormont who is the new Lord Commander of the Queensguard, Prince Oberyn and Ellaria Martell, and a host of other dignitaries all lining up to receive the couple…who are now stepping out…woow. Sorry, for gushing, Berena and Laurence, but even I have to admit they make a stunning pair. And as you can imagine, the crowd is going nuts.

“…Jon is stepping out of the car first, looking handsome and, much healthier, in a well-tailored black three-piece suit, with that famous hair of his that even has a Maesterbook fan page devoted to it! – I think even he’s shocked at the number of people here, and he’s pretending to cover his ears, while smiling – sort of shyly – and waving at them before making his way around to where Dany is now stepping out of the car to even louder screams. She’s dressed in a lovely dual toned red and black long-sleeved gown with a beautiful silver chain draped over her shoulders on which a three-headed dragon brooch is attached. Obviously, a tribute to House Targaryen, and she is still working the short hairstyle, Berena and Laurence. It’s a cute pixie-look that’s bound to be the next big thing in the fashion industry, mark my words.”

“She looks just as overwhelmed at everyone cheering for them, doesn’t she, Alysanne?”

“Yes, she does, but she’s keeping her cool and waving to them as well – although Jon’s now whispering something to her and she’s laughing at whatever joke he might have cracked. They are stopping to pose for pictures, and now both are are now walking up the steps to shake the hands of the waiting guests…with Dany and Margery sharing a very warm hug…”

“Is the baby bump showing yet? I can’t tell from here.”

“No…not really, the gown is designed in a such a way to sort of hide it? I don’t know, but it’s got that Grecian feel to it, so even if she’s showing, it won’t be that easy to tell, but hey, with the way she’s glowing right now…she’s definitely carrying the future heir to the Throne.”

BREAKING NEWS:

“We have breaking news. After nearly five hours of deliberation, Westeros now has its new rulers. With the final vote tally of 262 yays to 5 nays, Daenerys Stormborn and Jon Snow of House Targaryen are now officially recognized as the Queen and King of Westeros. The first time in history the realm will have two leaders at its helm. Alysanne Horwath has returned to give us more details of exactly how it all went down. Alysanne? I’m glad to see you’re away from the crowd, but the cheering is no less loud.”

“Yes, Berena and Laurence. There are several jumbotrons set up outside the castle walls, and the public was allowed to see the votes being counted live. The voting, itself, was not made public. It was conducted in secrecy – to protect the integrity of the votes as is tradition – and then counted by
Grand Maester Gormon of House Tyrell. With an overwhelming vote of 262 to 5, it is now law and in the history books that Jon and Daenerys will be leaders of The Syndicate and sit upon…well there’s no more Iron Throne, but they will rule over Westeros together.”

“Alysanne, do we know who those five ‘nay’ votes were from?”

“According to my sources, these were probably Lannister loyalists, and members of smaller houses not really worth mentioning.”

“How did Jon and Dany take the news? Were they in the voting chamber as well?”

“According to the sources, they only gave brief opening remarks to the representatives; not really making a case for themselves as much as simply thanking them for conducting a peaceful meeting of the Grand Council and both saying that no matter the results, they will do all they can to ensure the smooth transition of power. After that, they left the chamber and spent the rest of the afternoon holding court with the Tyrells in one of their many private gardens. We do expect them to address the realm later this evening according to a statement by Lord Tyrion.”

“And we’ll all be glued to our television sets for that. However, the party’s just beginning right?”

“That’s right. Now that the boring official stuff is done, the coronation itself, will be hosted in King’s Landing. As of now, the date hasn’t been set, but we expect it to be in a month or two.”

“And is there any truth to the rumor that we might be having a dual celebration of a wedding and coronation at the same time?”

“Aaah, wouldn’t that be wonderful! Well, we don’t know yet. Some say the marriage has already taken place at Winterfell, and others say, that yes, it will be done the same week as the coronation, but, it’s going to be a pretty crazy week if that happens. King’s Landing is expected to have over a million visitors pouring in from all over the Westeros to witness it live. It’s been a long time since we’ve had the opportunity to see such an historical event, and as you can well imagine, everyone is excited.”

“Indeed we all are. Thank you for the great reporting, Alysanne. We’ll let you get back to the celebrations.”

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King’s Landing:

Two months later

Tyrion would find him sitting on the veranda outside his solar sipping from a gilded chalice filled with just one of the many delicious wines delivered from beyond the Narrow Sea. Tyrion had lost count of how many gifts and tributes they had received from not just their subjects in Westeros, but from visitors as far as The Shadow Lands. Once empty cellars now stored all these wonders until Jon and Dany could figure out what to do with them.

“I’m surprised to find you up here already,” came the dry comment as he refilled his cup. “With all the women draped over your arms, I was sure you would be keeping them busy for the rest of the
night.”

Above them, the sky lit up with a brilliant display of fireworks, while the cheers from seemingly miles below, drifted to their place of solace.

Tyrion made a face and sat beside him, not bothering to use a glass as he drank right from the bottle. He burped rudely and sank back against the cushions; a small smile of satisfaction on his weary features. Almost three months ago, he was a breath away from this death, and now…Life had never tasted sweeter.

“This is the fifth day of celebrations, my Lord Varys,” came the lazy drawl. “Unfortunately, I’m not as young as I used to be. One can only feast so much on the succulent temptations presented before him.”

Varys might have smiled, but the play of light and shadows made it difficult to tell. He took another sip of his wine; his gaze drifting toward the gaily-lit ships and boats dotting Blackwater Bay. From way up here, at the Tower of the Hand, it was still possible to hear the loud music and see the dancing silhouettes flitting like dark fireflies in the light. It was a beautiful sight, if one was into those sorts of things.

“And how are our King and Queen doing at the moment?” he asked.

Tyrion took another long draught and closed his eyes. “Last I saw them, they were saying their goodnights and trying to make their escape from their adoring audience. You can hardly blame them. This week has been fun, but chaotic. It’s a good thing we decided to have the coronation at the beginning of the week, otherwise, they wouldn’t have lasted this long.”

Varys snorted. “It doesn’t get any easier, especially with her condition.”

“She’s pregnant, Varys, not dying.”

“I’m merely saying that she will want to take things easy and let Jon handle most of the work until she’s given birth.”

Tyrion gave a noncommittal grunt. “Seems to me, you don’t know our queen as well as you think you do. She’ll probably keep on working until the baby’s about to drop at her feet. Jon’s going to have a hard time convincing her to take a break.”

“And in the interim, we have you and Davos to deal with things, yes?”

“Hmm.”

There was another comfortable silence broken only by the sounds of gaiety and jubilation below. Varys shifted positions and lowered his chalice to the ground. His hand brushed against the heavy iron brooch attached to his samite robe, and he stared at the emblem with a rueful smile. It was a brooch in the shape of a lavender spider surrounded by three silver dragons. The surprise gift had been awarded to him the day after the coronation, when Jon and Dany began their first official duties by rewarding all those who had served them during the war, while honoring the lives lost. Varys hadn’t expected to be recognized publicly, and really took no pleasure being the center of attention but after listening to both Jon and Dany’s heartfelt words of gratitude for all he had done to help them succeed, it was all he could do to keep his emotions in check. He didn’t think himself a sentimental old fool, but there were few moments when he remembered he could allow himself to feel such emotions.

I serve only the people, he had told them during a private meeting. And those who desire to do what
is best for Westeros. I will do all I can to make sure you both keep to your promises. You serve the people, and not the other way around. Your father forgot that and paid dearly for his mistakes. I sincerely hope you two do not do the same.

So far, he had seen nothing to give him cause for concern. Daenerys, despite her upbringing in the wilds of Essos, had learned the ways of leadership and was quick to adjust to her new role. Jon, on the other hand, was still relatively a novice, and naturally more cautious at this stage. Varys had no doubt he’d grow into his position and wear it upon him like an old favorite jacket eventually.

“When do we expect to hear from your brother?” he asked out loud. “He’s been gone for a while. Surely he still keeps in touch.”

Tyrion scoffed. “I would have assumed your little birds would keep you up to date, but I see Jamie’s ability to make himself ‘disappear’ when necessary is still effective. Not to worry, my lord, he will return when he’s good and ready. I might have grieved for the loss of a sibling that wanted me dead, but their bond – however disgusting it was to the rest of us – was quite deep. If he needs more time to gather himself, we ought to respect that.”

“Well, he ought to be careful. Davos is doing such a good job your brother might find himself becoming useless in this new Westeros.”

Tyrion’s lips firmed for a moment. He lifted his lashes and took another swig of his drink, grimacing at how much was left. He’d need another soon.

“Finding one’s role in the new Westeros, huh?” he murmured as he lowered his lashes again. “I wouldn’t worry too much about him. Jaime can be a chameleon-”

“And those can be the most dangerous,” Varys finished with a sly smile.

Tyrion rolled his eyes and decided to end the conversation. He knew Varys would never truly trust his brother; a sentiment that was echoed by several other wary Houses around Westeros. Hell, even being named as Hand did not sit well with some, but his performance in the role so far had silenced a few of his harshest skeptics. In the grand scheme of things, it could be considered a hallow victory, but it was a victory all the same. They had come a long way, and to finally taste the sweet wine of success was all worth it.

“To the new Westeros,” he saluted without opening his eyes. “Long may they reign.”

Varys smiled as the sky blew up with another stunning kaleidoscope of colors. “Long may they reign indeed.”

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A NEW ERA BEGINS

The Westeros Daily

By Arianne Martell

KING’S LANDING – The streets are silent now, the last colorful pieces of confetti and ribbons
swept away. Yet one is still likely to hear the echoes of revelers shivering amongst the stone, mortar, and steel of King’s Landing. In the horizon, still looming over us all is the Red Keep, but for a building once seen as a place of dread and oppression, the last few months have proven that it can indeed become a place for the people.

Though it still maintains its signature crimson exterior, the interiors continue to undergo much-needed renovations that please the eye. Gone are the dreary shades of clay and crimson in the Great Hall now replaced with more earthy tones that are warm and inviting. Gone is the once intimidating and deadly throne of blades, and in its place are twin thrones made of the sturdiest granite from the North, polished weirwoods from the West, and adorned with gilded sculptures of majestic dragons as its backrest and wolves for its armrest by the finest artisans from the South. Gone are the sigils of roaring lions within the hallways and rooftops, since replaced with the familiar red three-headed dragon upon a black background which hang and wave proudly around the city.

For one week, King’s Landing – once regarded as a cesspool of decay and despondence – came alive for the first time in decades. Historians agree, that not since the coronation of the good King Jaehaerys the First, and his queen, Alysanne, have the people celebrated so freely without fear of the unknown.

From the moment the prince and princess arrived at the Great Sept of Baelor for the coronation and wedding – a dual event – we marveled at their youthfulness and beauty despite their choice to be adorned in relatively ‘simple’ attire. While tradition demanded pomp and grandiosity, Jon Snow chose to represent his dual parentage by wearing a tailored dark three-piece suit with a grey vest and top hat by the royal dressmakers – Corlys & Sons. His only other major accessory was a silver brooch combination of the Targaryen and Stark sigils pinned above his left breast pocket.

Daenerys Targaryen – who has already become a fashion icon – was dressed in a silk sleeveless off-white empire-waist dress with a matching bolero jacket of the same design. Accentuated with handsewn beads and intricate lace trimmings, the dress – a wonderful creation by Sansa Stark – highlights the queen’s petite figure as well as the growing bump of her pregnancy. Her hair, still in that pixie style – is adorned with a crown of rare blue roses; a tribute to Lyanna Stark, who was known to favor the flower.

They were welcomed at the steps by the High Septon himself, who performed the duties admirably and on time. The traditional wedding vows were exchanged before a packed house and to the millions watching worldwide.

Then it was off to the Red Keep for the official coronation, where another packed house was treated to the sight of Jon and Dany walking down the Great Hall in more traditional attires highlighting their Houses. Jon was adorned in finely embroidered doublet of grey and black, which was finished off with a matching cape held in place by twin silver direwolves. Daenerys chose a dual toned red and black satin gown – which gives one the illusion she’s engulfed in flames – accentuated with a silver chain depicting the dragon and wolf sigil intertwined; another amazing design by Sansa Stark.

Both had given designs for their crowns to the talented (and now official royal blacksmith) Gendry Waters, who did not fail to deliver the spectacular creations. For the queen, her crown is an open circlet of gold with red rubies and a centerpiece of three dragons entwined, and for the King, his is an open circlet of bronze surmounted by thirteen spikes in the shape of longswords. Inscribed within the circlet are the runes of the First Men; another subtle tribute to his Northern roots.

Next was the procession of subjects, a tradition where all representatives of the major Houses in Westeros, pledge their fealty to the throne and present gifts. However, due to the unforeseen number of foreign dignitaries in attendance, this activity was continued the next day.
It was clear that our young monarchs were overwhelmed and exhausted, but they put on a brave face and carried on their duties; making sure they took the time to greet all their guests and attend the numerous parties held in their honor. They also gave the people what they wanted, for the couple would eventually be driven through the streets of King’s Landing, where they smiled and waved to the joyous crowds, who showered them with flowers, rice, confetti, and blessings.

On the seventh and final day, it would begin with a prayer service for the royal couple at the Great Sept of Baelor, before they were ushered into the waiting ship taking them back to Dragonstone for another much-needed break. They were sent off by thousands of cheering fans from the port of Blackwater Bay, who are already counting down the days until their return.

It was seven wonderful days of celebration and happiness. It was seven days of unity, love, and peace. We are not naïve to believe that all our problems will be fixed in a day or two, but we leave King’s Landing with a sense of hope that things will get better. Queen Daenerys Stormborn and King Jon Aegon the VI have inspired all of us, and as we begin the latest chapter of the Targaryen Dynasty, let us never forget that we are truly one family.

*Long may they reign.*

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**THE ROYAL WATCH:**

You can now follow, His and Her Majesty, King Jon Aegon VI and Queen Daenerys Targaryen on the following social media platforms:

- The Official Royal Website – [https://thetargaryenroyals.ws](https://thetargaryenroyals.ws)
- The Official Raven Page – [https://raven.com/thetargroyals](https://raven.com/thetargroyals) Fire and Blood (@Targaryenroyals)
- The Official Illustrogram Page – (@the_targaryen_royals) [https://www.illustrogram.com/thetargaryenroyals](https://www.illustrogram.com/thetargaryenroyals)

For further information or official House Targaryen requests/authorization, please contact the Master of Communications, Samwell Tarly.

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**Dragonstone:**

**Six months later**

For some reason, he did not find it strange that his dreams or visions were no longer as frequent. Perhaps the experience in the dungeons, and ‘becoming’ Ghost, had been the final link needed to set him ‘free’ from those fevered dreams. However, it did not lessen his feelings of loss at not seeing his loyal companion as often as he used to. The last time his direwolf had appeared, he had something
clutched between in his mouth; a black choker with a dulled ruby in its middle.

*She’s gone, isn’t she, boy?*

Ghost had simply whined with a knowing look in those red eyes, and with what appeared to be a bow of its majestic head, he loped off into the blizzard, leaving his master to wonder what could have possibly happened to the mysterious red woman who-

Her low moan would jerk him awake. Before his sleep-fuddled mind could fully function, he was already leaning closer, his hands reaching to squeeze hers before raising it to his lips.

“Jon….?” came the breathy whisper.

“I’m here, babe,” he reassured her with a tremulous smile. “I’m still here.”

The cobwebs of sleep were now swept away completely as he focused on her sweat-flushed features fatigued from a day filled with false starts and stops. Her eyes were still closed as he wiped her face with the towel gently, and with every grimace she gave, Jon felt as if his heart would stop. Her pain was his pain, and it killed him to watch her go through so much. Never had he felt so helpless and… useless. His eyes threatened to water again, but he checked himself and glanced at his watch to begin keeping track of -

“What time is it?” she asked, forcing his attention to her again.

Her half-lidded gaze was focused on him, and as he brushed away the damp strands of now shoulder-length hair away from her face, he whispered in return. “Two-fifteen in the morning. You slept for about an hour this time.”

She winced again and tried to adjust her position, and Jon was ready to assist when she fell back to the pillows with a low sound of resignation. “Oh gods, I’m sorry,” she sobbed helplessly. “I don’t know why he or she’s not coming out yet. It’s already overdue and-and-and-”

“Shssh, don’t do that again, Dany,” he chided her with a hard lump forming in his throat. He got up to lay beside her, their hands still entwined as he placed a hard kiss on her head, forehead and then her quivering lips. “You have to stop apologizing for something you can’t control. The midwife says it’s not uncommon and-”

“I’ve already lost one baby. What if I lose this one too? Is my mother’s curse going to affect me too? Am I doomed never to have children?” she interrupted him as she clutched a fistful of his shirt, her words of insecurity and fear flowing out in a rush. There was a haunted expression in her eyes, and Jon could just imagine all the horrible flashbacks she was having of losing Rhaego.

*Not this time*, he thought fiercely as he pulled her shaking body closer as if hoping to transfer all his hopes and prayers into her. *The gods will not be cruel to us again. We’ve already been through so much, and having this baby born is all we ask. Please. Don’t make us suffer any longer.*

He couldn’t remember all the words of reassurance he whispered, but she would eventually fall asleep in his arms, and this time, Jon had no intention of leaving her side until the contractions started again.

His free hand slid down to the swell of her stomach, and not for the first time, he marveled at the gentle sensation of his son or daughter (for both had agreed they would not learn of its sex until its birth) moving restlessly beneath his palm.

“You’re a stubborn one, aren’t you?” he whispered as a tear broke free to slide down his cheek. “I
know you’re dying to come out already, because you’ve kicked Mommy quite a few times harder than necessary. I was sure you’d be ready yesterday, but nope…being in Mom for just a little longer is all nice and cozy, right? Well, guess what? We both want to see you outside for a change, so please…give it your best shot, all right? We’ve got so much to show you. So much to do…”

His voice broke and he buried his face in Dany’s hair; wishing he could be as strong as everyone else stated he had been since this all started.

They had to be careful every step of the way, a warning that had not helped Dany’s mental state after their first prenatal visit. Because of the complications of her first pregnancy, and the likelihood (not high probability they had been reassured) of continuing the family tradition aka Rhaella’s ‘curse’ of delivering stillborns, Dany would have to cut down her royal duties and be monitored closely. It was a news she did not appreciate, but Jon had done his best to talk her into returning to Dragonstone while he remained at King’s Landing. She had wanted to stay in their private home over there, but with the pressure of the press hounding them at every turn, it was safer to be as far away from the capital as possible.

Life in his new role as ‘king’ was hardly anything as he had imagined. Perhaps a naïve part of him had assumed it would consist of lounging around, signing orders or decrees every now and then, or showing up to one or two events per week. Unfortunately, he was in for a rude awakening. His day started at five a.m., where after a brief workout and breakfast, he was bombarded with piles of grievances, pardons, disputes, favors, or solicitations. He had meetings with his small council, his war council, his economic council, council of elders, council of Houses, council of foreign powers, and the list went on and on.

His previous life was now almost non-existent, for changes had occurred there as well. He was, naturally, no longer a landlord of the White Castle Apartments, and that role was designated to one of Davos’s trusted friends, a former Lyseni smuggler by the name of Salladhor Saan.

Mr. and Mrs. Martin had now taken up resident at the brand-new complex, and last Jon heard, the writer was just about ready to finally publish that novel of his.

Grenn was still dealing in the underground, but with his flourishing brothel business, it was likely he would become a legitimate business man soon. Jon wasn’t holding his breath for that miracle.

With Jaime Lannister finally returning from his mourning – and it was safe to say everyone was quite shocked at his new appearance for he had shorn his trademark golden locks, grown a beard and looked as if he had lost a few more pounds. Most were worried he would not have the mindset to handle the job, but he proved to be still lucid (and sarcastic) and choose his first assignment in the Iron Islands. This left Davos to become exclusively Jon’s Hand – or an assistant to Tyrion – which was a much welcome addition to help ease his workload.

Sir Jorah – now Lord Commander of the Kings/Queensguard – was also responsible for the City Watch, which was under new management with about 80% of its officers being Unsullied and led by their captain Grey Worm. If one noticed the single gold band around his finger, it was only a sign that he had finally popped the question to the love of his life, Missandei. If Jon got his dates right, their wedding was set for later this year. There was no way he and Dany were going to miss that event.

Another wedding he couldn’t afford to miss was that of his best friend, Samwell Tarly to Gilly Craster. Sam finally got the nerve to ask for her hand in marriage about a month ago, and with the added news that Gilly was now pregnant, the happy couple planned to have their nuptials exchanged as soon as possible. The date was yet to be decided.
His other best friend, Gendry, had been such a hit with the crowns he designed for Jon and Dany, that he was getting offers to open a shop in King’s Landing. However, it turned out Gendry seemed quite happier being in Braavos, and although he kept denying it to hell and back, it was clear his reason for remaining there had to do with a certain Stark female currently attending The Prestige. While Gendry seemed embarrassed to admit he was now dating Arya, his sister had no qualms letting anyone who cared to know that they were now a couple. After all, she had free ‘board’ during the weekends in Gendry’s apartment over there.

Jon was still not sure how to feel about that.

Sansa was settling into her role as Lady of Winterfell, and though the work was consuming, she still found the time to design Dany’s official clothing when requested, while making plans to open her first boutique in King’s Landing later in the year. There were already demands for her to showcase her works in fashion shows around the world, something she was still considering. She had also taken to caring for Jeyne Westerling, who was finally ready to move back in with her parents.

Bran had returned to college, and Jon was hardly surprised to discover that he and Tyene Martell had started a relationship that went beyond just sharing lecture notes. Rickon was about to start his first year of college, and he had chosen to remain closer to home after all; deciding to forgo the basketball scholarships that came his way and to focus on helping to run Winterfell with Sansa.

*It’s like graduation day or something,* Jon mused with a pang of sadness. So yes, they were all still close, but it was also a realization that they were all ‘growing up’ and ready to move onto the next stages of their lives.

It was an inevitability that hit him while in the midst of reading through pages of documents outlining the plans for the creation of a permanent Senate. He was only twenty-four years old, yet he felt he had already aged in the space of a month!

Moments of respite came during the few private lunches he could manage, where he was glued to the phone or on his computer watching and listening to his wife showcase the baby’s room at Dragonstone. Dany seemed determined to purchase every baby-related item in stock, for her argument was that she had three rooms to prepare for; the Red Keep, their private home in King’s Landing, and of course Dragonstone.

“But babe,” he’d begin arguing. “We already have interior designers just dying to do that-”

“I want to do it myself, Jon.”

And that was apparently that.

The weekends were the best. It was when he could finally escape to be with his wife at Dragonstone (a castle he had come to love), their newest addition to the family – Balerion - a rescue husky puppy Jon had fallen in love with (no small thanks to him looking like Ghost except for the color of his eyes), and Monterys who was back to normal. Somewhat. There were moments when the boy would fall into contemplative silence during their walks or pester him with thought-provoking questions about war and death. Winterfell had changed him for better or worse, but Jon knew it was probably for the best.

*He’ll make a good leader for his House someday,* he mused as he watched the boy chase after Balerion along the cliffs of Dragonstone. And it was a sentiment his wife had shared though she was still concerned about the change in him.

Ah…his *wife.*
He could finally think of the word without blushing up a storm these days. There was something quite intimate and beautiful about that word, and he no longer bothered keeping count of how often his heart would swell with love and admiration as she pitter-pattered about in her flowing blouses (or tight ones if she was feeling particularly sexy that day). If he could take a million photographs of her glowing features and how cute she looked with that baby bump, even when she was ‘not-in-the-mood’ and would get exasperated or short-tempered for no reason, or want to eat an entire box of chocolate mint ice-cream, or chew loudly on a cucumber in bed to keep him awake, or complain of having to pee every two minutes or prop her swollen feet on his lap and all but purr in delight when he rubbed them, or eye him with barely controlled amusement as he held long ‘talks’ with the baby every night –

“…seven hells, Jon, you do realize you’re boring it to death, right? I literally can’t feel it kicking anymore. You put it to sleep with your droning.”

Of course he’d pout at her inability to understand his need to have these conversations, and she’d placate him later with tender kisses or the sweetest lovemaking sessions, where watching her ride him with that expression of ecstasy on her features was simply…pure bliss. It didn’t help that she had confessed being in this state seemed to make her even hornier, and he considered it his husbandly duty to fulfil her needs.

_Gosh, you’ll make a great father, Jon Snow_, she had whispered one night; words that had made him feel a hundred feet tall and ready to conquer anything.

Dany moaned again, and this time, Jon could feel the hard kick of their baby against his palm. Her breathing quickened; her features darkening with the pain to wrack through her in spasms. Trying to control his sense of panic, he glanced at his watch to time the contractions; just one of the many things he had to learn from all the classes they attended, books he devoured, and online videos he studied like a man possessed.

She whimpered again. Another contraction…ten minutes apart. He could ring the bell to summon in the midwife and her assistants, but they had already gone through something like this, and he wasn’t sure if this was another false alarm or –

“Jon…Jon…”

“I’m here,” he sobbed and held on tight. “I’m still here. I’m never going to leave your side, my darling. You remember our vows, right?”

She nodded through giving a soft whistle beneath her pursed lips as the memories of their wedding vows beneath the heart tree rushed back to mind. Yes, they had given the world the big lavish celebration, but they were technically already married long before that. In Winterfell, a few days after Robb’s funeral, when all the guests had left and only their most intimate family members were left behind.

“How had she known?"
“You are mine,” Dany was saying as she struggled to control her breathing lest she begin hyperventilating. Jon had thought her grips were painful, but his fingers were just about being crushed as she was helped into a better position by the women.

“From this day until the end of my days,” Jon finished with a hard kiss to her forehead as he was being shooed away by the Septa. He reluctantly began to withdraw when -

“No! Don’t leave me!” Dany all but screamed as she clawed desperately for him; her eyes wide as saucers with such pure fear of abandonment within them, Jon felt his heart all but rip in two at the sight. Ignoring the Septa’s concerns, he was at her side again, murmuring his love for her and their baby as more pillows and towels were put in place and her legs spread apart.

_Oh dear gods…I can’t fucking breathe._

“Now, Your Grace,” Septa Morgana was saying as she crouched before Dany; her features stern with concentration. “The wee one is crowning, guess he or she’s had enough of sitting in there, so you’re going to have to push like you’ve never pushed before. Show me some of that strength you displayed in the dungeons, my dear. At the count of three…one…two…”

Dany strained with all she had; a guttural almost primal scream of her exertion erupting from her lips as she followed orders.

“There we go now, my dear,” Septa Morgana praised. “You are doing a wonderful job. Now a little more….ooh…lovely silver hair there….more now, child. One last push!”

_Come on, babe. Comeoncomeoncomeoncomeon…oh…my…gods…_

Jon wasn’t sure if it was the combination of Dany’s last scream or the sudden lustful cry of their newborn that caused his knees to weaken. It was akin to being sucker punched and the air rushing out of your lungs and the world spinning all at once. With dazed eyes, he could only watch as the slimy squirming ‘thing’ was pulled out of his wife with the long umbilical cord …

_Oh…it’s…it’s…_

“Here you go, son,” Septa Morgana was ordering as something silver was shoved in his face. “Go ahead and cut it.”

_Cut…cut what?_

“The cord,” she explained with a rare smile as if understanding Jon’s momentary sense of disbelief and shock at all that was happening. “You can do the honors, or I do it, either way, this baby needs to be cleaned as soon as possible.”

Jon didn’t need to be told twice. When he could finally pry his hands away from Dany’s, he gripped the scissor with trembling hands and followed instructions as carefully as possible lest he mess things up. He tried not to worry about the amount of blood still flowing, but he could vaguely hear the Septa saying it was normal, and still in a daze, he watched as they swept to the side of the room with their child to get him as clean and checked out as possible and –

“Jon? Jon? Is it okay? Was he or she okay? Is it a boy or a girl or…?”

Jon spun around quickly; no longer bothering to hide the tears now streaming down his cheeks. He looked at his wife and now mother as if seeing her for the first time. She was hardly at her best; hair disheveled, sweat on her flushed features, eyes puffy from crying, lower lip caught between her teeth, the once white nightgown now stained with blood –
Dear gods, she was a complete mess, and yet the most beautiful woman in the world to him.

“I love you so much, Daenerys Targaryen,” he finally whispered in a husky tone that was barely audible.

“And I love you too, my darling, but is it a boy or a girl or…?”

“Here we go,” Septa Morgana interrupted as she approached with the still wailing infant now swaddled warmly in her arms. “Ten fingers, ten toes, with beautiful eyes like his momma…though he just might favor his father in the looks department.” She placed the bundle into Dany’s waiting arms, where she could only stare in silent wonder at the new life she had finally managed to bring into the world.

The infant, perhaps aware that he was now in the presence of his awe-struck parents, stopped his caterwauling and opened lilac-hued eyes to stare in return while waving his tiny hands until his father reached for one of them.

“Seven hells,” Jon choked softly between a helpless laugh. “His grip is strong already.”

Dany tickled his cheek and then lifted her gaze to the man still staring at their little one in amazement. Her heart was full, and she was sure it wasn’t humanly possible to love two people as much as she did right now. She leaned closer still to place a hard kiss on her husband’s cheek, before lifting the baby a little higher so they could both nuzzle him at the same time.

“We still agree on the name go give him?” she whispered just as the door burst open again and Arya dashed in first, while tugging on a sheepish Gendry. They were quickly followed by an excited Balerion who was now much bigger and able stick his muzzle against the new thing that would become its ‘sibling’, a wide-eyed Monterys thrilled to finally have a new playmate that wasn’t four-legged, a tearful Sansa and Missandei who was also recording and taking pictures, the not-quite-sure-how-to-react-but-still-excited Rickon and Bran, proud Davos, Tyrion, Varys, and a bashful Jorah, a beaming Sam and gushing Gilly, including a squealing Ellaria on the phone with Oberyn trying his best to get a word in or even see his new godson.

I wish you were here Robb, Jon would think with a pang, though he and Dany would eventually have to sit back to let them all have a chance to lavish the baby with all the attention he was going to get until they were ready to give him a sibling or two…or three or…

“Like what you see?” came the sudden quiet words which had him turning to Dany again, his heart skipping a beat at the shy expression on her visage.

In her eyes, he could see the shadows of fear and insecurity fading away. In her eyes, he could see the light of hope, joy, and a promise of what was to come. In her eyes, he saw the strength and beauty he had fallen in love with so long ago, and in those eyes, he could see his future; a future where they would be together until they were old and gray surrounded by those they loved.

Did he like what he was seeing?

“Yes, I do,” he whispered as his lips slowly found hers to seal their unspoken promise.

Thank you so much…for everything.
Announcing the arrival of

The Prince of Westeros

Robb Jaehaerys Targaryen

8lbs 6oz

On August 22nd, XXX AC, at 3:45 a.m.

“Her Royal Majesty and her child are both doing well.”

- Dragonstone

And so begins the dynasty of Queen Daenerys Stormborn and King Jon Aegon VI of House Targaryen.

Long may they reign.
**Addendum**

**Note:**

Suggestion was made to leave a note so new readers can find this story.

So here ya go! I know most of us were disappointed with the last season especially those of us who supported the Jonerys relationship. I am still upset over it and doubt that taste of bitterness will ever leave.

I invested a lot into this show considering how late I started into the fandom anyway, and the ending left me feeling betrayed.

So many characters were did wrong, and I could get into an essay about that, but I'll spare you.

But with all that said, I hope you enjoyed reading my humble contribution to this fandom.

Will I ever write again for Game of Thrones (Jonerys in particular?)....I really don't know.

Never say never as they say, right?

Thanks again for stopping by and for reading! You're very much appreciated! :D

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!