Up Against the Wall

by meisie

Summary

"A man who's pure of heart and says his prayers by night
May still become a wolf when the autumn moon is bright"
- Florence Welch, Howl

A shameless love story told with a backdrop of war, politics, past trauma, heroes and villains, dragons and duty. Goes from Dragonstone, to Kings Landing, to the North, and eventually back again. Falling in love amidst the War for the Dawn, as told by Daenerys Targaryen. The explicit rating is no lie.

Season 7 is vaguely followed until Episode 7 and then the story diverges from canon (and thank God for that).

*WINNER of the 2017 Jonerys Fanfiction Award for Smuttiest Smut*
So cold and so sweet

A/N: There are a lot of Dragonstone stories, but this is mine. No lofty ambitions really, except a desire to write scenery, angst, fun dialogue (well, I try) and shameless smut.

This is unrelated to my other two stories, a slightly different style, and canon divergent. I hope it is sufficiently interesting to keep you reading. I’m not bothering with repeating the episodes tediously, this is filling gaps with my twisted imagination.

Let me know if you like it in the comments. Thanks for reading!

It was another gloomy, dank evening of chill mists, creeping up the steps and wrapping around the massive pile of cunningly wrought stone on the clifftops, and lying like a blanket over the noisy, surging sea. The sky outside her chamber windows was a livid grey bruise, shot through with veins of red and orange from the sinking sun. It had been a tiring, frustrating few days of surprises, mostly unpleasant ones, but the drama had receded with the sun’s last weak rays, leaving her dull witted and sunk in lethargy by the fire.

She was clutching a goblet of wine for comfort, pure frustration bubbling beneath her still surface, her fingers toying with the platter of fruit and cheese her friend had set down on the side table, but not picking up anything to eat. There was a lump of lead in her guts, weighing her down in the chair, though her booted feet swung and shifted, urging action, any action, to take her away from her churning thoughts.

Her destroyed fleet, her allies captured or killed by a scumbag pirate who had once sought her hand, and now sought the hand of her greatest enemy. Her precious troops, flung into the unknown, heading for the other side of the enormous, mysterious continent that was rightfully hers but a blank void to her, to win a castle that may not be worth paying the price it took to get it. And, her Northern visitor, her visitor occupied her thoughts as well, too much for her liking.

Her advisor, her only female friend in a life full of men, sat on the opposite side of the fireplace, silent and patient, there to provide advice and support if she needed it, sipping her wine delicately, her warm, golden-brown eyes checking on her occasionally with their usual care, but she was all tangled up in her mind, wandering paths of present and past that made her hide in her wine, much like her Hand. She must be careful not to let wine become a crutch to lean on, like she was always complaining about in him, but Gods, she needed a drink tonight, and damn the consequences.

Since she had left Mereen behind, she had been a calm pool of steady determination, fixed on reaching her goal of taking the lands of her mad father, certain of victory, but now the pool had been peppered with rocks, ruffling the surface, the biggest rock being the dour, sullen, intriguing man who had stood in her throne room and openly defied her with nightmares and portents, grumpkins and snarks.

Those ripples of disturbance were utmost in her mind, despite everything else she needed to concentrate on. Her fury with the erstwhile King in the North had subsided somewhat, after she had taken Tyrion’s advice and spoke with him on the steps. We all enjoy what we are good at, she had said to him glibly, and his terse reply had deepened her intrigue, annoyingly replacing her anger with something new and different. No one with eyes could deny that the man was as handsome as sin, but she had always needed more to spark her interest, and Jon Snow was interesting. Too damn handsome, and interesting, sending a flicker of heat through her, heat that
she had thought was long dead.

In a life dominated by strong men who demanded her attention and coveted her status, there had been little chance to swoon and sigh like a silly maiden. When she was a girl, there was only her brother, who she had expected to marry one day, but made her skin crawl with his irrational moods and flaring violence. Her husband had terrified her, until she had learned how to tame him and cleave to him out of self-preservation, her terror turning to a deep love that was nevertheless tinged with wariness.

Ser Jorah had loved her for years with a quiet, respectful devotion, but she had not felt the same. Daario had amused her with his boldness and swagger, an unrepentant, ambitious rogue who had never given up until she yielded and took him as a lover, enjoying his inventive attentions until the lust faded, and there was nothing left. Her attempt at a strategic marriage had thankfully ended before she was forced to take Hizdahr to her bed, a prospect she had not relished. It was a line-up of misery and disappointment, with only brief moments of pleasure and contentment. No, she had no use for men other than as allies, friends, or troops, so what was flickering within her was most unwelcome.

‘Tell me what you think of this Jon Snow,’ she said abruptly, breaking the moody silence. Her friend had spent her entire life in the background, quietly observing people both high and humble, so she always valued her opinions on the people they met.

Missandei set her goblet down on the hearth, her gaze flicking sideways at her and settling. ‘I think he is a good man,’ she said quietly. ‘He has no artifice, and that is a rare thing in this world. He could not tell a lie to save himself.’

That made her snort in disbelief, though there was truth there. ‘All men lie,’ she said. ‘This much I know. The nonsense he was speaking must be some trick to get me to abandon my plans for some other purpose.’

‘Possibly,’ her friend replied. ‘But I fear it is not so.’ At her frown of response, her advisor gave a small smile, her next words much lighter, an attempt to soothe. ‘He is also very comely, your Grace.’

She hunted for words of denial, trying to bring up flaws to bat away the observation. _He’s too short, he has no bloody manners, he’s downright rude_, but no. ‘Did you notice his eyes?’ she said, rather dreamily. ‘In the throne room, they looked as black as pitch, but they’re actually a deep brown…eyes one could fall into. They are quite lovely.’

‘Your Grace!’ her friend exclaimed with a giggle.

‘Don’t tell anyone I said that,’ she smiled. ‘On pain of death.’

She enjoyed the giddy moment, unable to hold back her own giggle. She could have said much and more, about his fine figure, his gravelly voice, the peculiar accent like honey on his clumsy tongue, his quiet watchfulness, poised and graceful, like a wary animal, but she kept her counsel, letting the moment pass as she buried her face in her wine again.

***

The next morning, after a restless night disturbed by dark dreams that made no sense to her when she woke, she rebelled against her torpor and dressed in breeches and jerkin and thick cloak, and took the path to the clifftops, sending her thoughts into the cloudy sky to call down her sons to her, planting her feet to brace herself against the buffeting wind. A high, thin screech echoed through
the air, a massive shadow of black and red descending in slow circles from high, the flap of wings
growing louder, the screech turning into a familiar, thundering growl of affection when Drogon
spotted her waiting.

His smaller brothers wheeled around as she patted and scratched his nose and around his ears,
leaning into his warmth for reassurance and to counter the icy wind whipping at her cloak. As she
mounted his scaly bulk and gave the signal she had no particular idea of direction, but after
launching she took a sweeping pass over the rocky strand at the food of the serpentine steps,
watching the small figures on the ground lurch and shout, some falling to the ground comically,
but one figure standing straight and watching steadily, his neck craned upwards as she flew over.

In her mind, she saw dark, solemn eyes staring into her, and she shook her head to push the image
away, digging her knees into her mount to make him turn south and west over Blackwater Bay,
leaving her home and her visitor behind, Viserion and Rhaegal flanking their movements through
the sky. It was a gift beyond price, to fly above the earth like a bird, and she was the only person in
the world to know its value, the joy and terror and mirth. She still did not understand why she had
been granted it, but great gifts always demanded payment. She felt she had already paid enough,
the death of her husband and child, the long years of struggle, but it was not over. The real struggle
had only just begun.

She kept her elevation high up above the sea, breaking through damp, sticky clouds that beaded
moisture on her cold face, seeing only glimpses of the flat water below, dotted with the occasional
trading ship or fishing boat. As she drew ever closer to the teeming city of King’s Landing, its
towers glinting in the distance, she fought hard against the bubbling rage in her heart, fought
against the urge to keep going and blast the Red Keep and its false queen to ashes, reign fire and
justice, start a storm of flame and ash that would burn the city to the ground so that it could be built
anew, all its sordid history wiped out.

But she was no monster, despite what people said, no Targaryen tyrant who cared not for the lives
of the people, her possible enemies, and potential allies. So, she turned back before she could be
spotted by anyone other than drunk sailors and fishermen, flying north over empty forest and
rugged green and brown hills, testing her mount with battle sweeps and dives and rolls before
heading home, her faithful sons following her every move.

Windswept and red cheeked, her braid in ratty knots, her body shivering with the cold, she landed
where she had launched, leaving Drogon with whispered words of affection and thanks. Feeling
buoyant and invigorated, she descended the rough, uneven steps down to the beach on quick feet,
the low tide leaving a wide ribbon of golden sand she could walk for a while, unwilling to go back
to the castle just yet. The sun was teasing her through the drifting clouds, turning the rock pools
blue, then grey as she meandered and poked about like a curious child, smiling at glimpses of tiny
fish and sea stars and pretty shells beneath the waters. The waves were only small rolls of white
foam and glassy blue, not their usual towering, angry height, and it was almost warm beneath the
cliffs, out of the muttering wind.

She reached a long spar of grey, cracked rocks blocking her path around the island, and as she went
to climb it she saw someone on the far side, someone who made her duck back like a dolt, but her
gaze drawn and locking on his figure. Her heart leaped stupidly, but she didn’t look away, enjoying
the view while it lasted and promising to chastise herself later. The Northern king was facing the
ocean, and thinking himself alone, he was actually relaxed; his body loose and clad in only a thin
shirt and breeches, the linen clinging to the strong lines of his back. He must have been working in
his precious cave of dragonglass, and had taken a moment to splash himself in the sea and enjoy
the fleeting sun, which was probably hot by his measure.
The pulse in her throat continued to flutter, and she felt rather heated herself, watching him bend over and cup water to his face, his unruly black curls escaping their binding, the glint of a smile, his eyes squinting slightly into creases. To make it all worse, she noticed instantly he had a very nice, well-shaped arse under all those heavy clothes, and at that thought she cursed herself and turned away, running from the realisation that she was more than intrigued, she was aroused.

She retraced her steps quickly, arguing with herself silently as she walked. She didn’t want it, she didn’t need it, but it was there nonetheless, desire taking root and spreading tendrils through her mind, like smothering vines.

***

In an attempt to damp down her meandering, heated thoughts, hoping he would say something rude and confronting to get her anger simmering again, she invited Jon Snow to dine that night, in the small supper room off the main dining hall. He arrived with his cheerful advisor Ser Davos Seaworth, his thoughtful silence a stark contrast to the garrulous old man, dressed in what appeared to be his only outer clothes, dull and sombre, the free man she had glimpsed on the beach well hidden.

Quite unlike the unrefined savage she had expected, his table manners were neat, his drinking restrained. He was so quiet it was beginning to annoy her, wanting to hear that lovely voice again, the rough and the smooth tickling her ears, but she could strangely find no words to draw him out, only able to steal brief glances down the board out of the corner of her eyes, trying to be subtle.

Her reliably loquacious Hand did the work for her, making Snow talk by throwing questions at him cunningly between sips of Dornish Red, the replies careful and sparse, but fascinating, and tinged with a dry humour, despite the subjects being difficult, and very grim. What a miserable life, stuck in the icy North, the bastard son of a shattered house who had risen high in the Night’s Watch and then left without an explanation as to why, only to take back his home with his only surviving sibling in a messy battle of mud and blood and chaos. No wonder he was so very serious. She wanted to see that glint of smile again, that transformed his pretty face into radiance. She wanted to see those dark eyes light up with warmth.

‘Surely you have some happy tales, Lord Snow,’ she said in impulse, and his gaze moved to fix on her face, a flash of mixed emotion in those black pools confusing and stirring. She felt pinned down for a moment, her cheeks warming, her hand fumbling for her wine glass.

‘Not many, your Grace,’ he said huskily. ‘No good jokes, either.’

‘That is fine, our Lord Tyrion is full of jokes,’ she said lightly, breaking the tension and looking to her Hand, who was smirking. ‘Most of them aren’t fit for polite company, though.’

‘He has a story about a honeycomb, a jackass, and a brothel he has never finished,’ Missandei said innocently, and there was a wave of laughter around the table, and requests to hear the joke immediately. She saw it then, those full lips parting, a flash of white teeth, followed by a deep chuckle that stirred her from affection to desire to unease. It was a bad idea, getting to know him, and finding that she liked what she saw.

As Tyrion began to tell his story to great mirth, she rose from her chair and smoothed her skirts, and muttered an excuse, leaving the stuffy confines of the supper room, and escaping to the hallway. She traversed the length of dark stone walls and polished tiles, her hand sweeping over the rough stone blocks absently as she walked by, heading to a small balcony open to the night air to catch her breath and cool down.
She tried to think of dull things, difficult things, strategy and war and the defeat of her enemies, but it was useless. It had been so long since she had been properly kissed, she had nearly forgotten what it was like, but she wanted very much to kiss him, to find out if those plump lips tasted as sweet as they looked, to see if he would pull away in shock or take what was offered. The urge tingled in her hands as she grasped the balcony railing and stared blindly at the stars, and tingled in other places, the urge to make him murmur in surprise, and then hopefully growl deep in his throat, slip his tongue in her mouth, and wrap a hand in her hair.

‘Seven hells,’ she cursed to the empty night sky, and shook away the descending lust angrily, tilting her chin and composing her face into a mask of decorum. She did not want to go back, but if she disappeared for the night people would wonder, so she stiffened her spine and returned to the hall, her determined steps clicking against the tiles, and faltering.

With the worst possible timing, Jon Snow was walking in her direction, the wide hallway suddenly shrinking around her, as tight as a mean passage in the bowels of the castle, the flickering torches dimming, the darkness growing as a scenario flashed into her brain, making her reach for the wall in support. In her treacherous thoughts, she was pressed against the wall under the weight of leather and fur and hard muscle, a sharp yet musky scent filling her nose, her mouth open and gasping for breath, his teeth nipping her throat, hands trapped and flattened against the stone as she wriggled to fight him off, or urge him on, she wasn’t sure.

She blinked it away fast, but a low voice cut through the fog, making her blush crimson as she remembered he was there in truth. ‘Are you all right, your Grace?’

‘I am fine. I just needed some air,’ she said firmly, her gaze bouncing around until she found her composure and settled, hoping what she had been thinking did not show. In the light of the torches, his eyes were black and featureless, but his mouth was curled slightly, as if he knew.

*Get out of my head,* she hissed inwardly, and passed on with a jerk of her chin. One way or another, she needed to get what she was feeling out of her system, and fast, before she went mad.

***

Her risky gambit would play out tomorrow in fire and blood, for better or worse. Her Dothraki had already left for the mainland in the remaining ships, more than one trip made across Blackwater Bay to take them and their horses to a secret spot so they could ride hard inland without being spotted by Lannister scouts.

The flurry of activity, the planning and marshalling of her men and horses and weapons, had kept her mind and body occupied all day, leaving no time to think of Jon Snow, and his findings beneath the hard shell of the island, or what it all meant, or what those eyes of his were telling her along with his pleas for understanding and support. But it was late now, near midnight, and she was tired and vulnerable and pondering endlessly over that encounter in the cave in the earth, beautiful and terrible and filled with dark magic and history that saturated the air.

Words were spoken, serious and full of portent and destiny, but many more were left unsaid, expressed only in a thick, thrumming tension she could nearly touch, the threads drawing them closer in, invading each other’s space and reserve until at one point she thought he was going to take one step further and kiss her. Foolish as it was, she had wanted it, and badly, until she had gathered her dignity and demanded his allegiance again. The moment passed, but there was nothing more appealing than a man that gave good advice, so she could not forget and move on.

She was acting on that advice now, was about to unleash her power and regain the upper hand over her enemies, and herself, but all she could think about was him, ruining her attempts at sleep,
though she really needed it.

She was alone in her chamber tonight, curled up in her great bed of state, the elaborate carved ebony wood and faded red silk canopy dating far back to the time of her ancestor King Aegon the First, who had set out to conquer the Seven Kingdoms and triumphed. But she wasn’t thinking of that heavy legacy now. As Missandei was absent, choosing to sleep in Grey Worm’s room until his return from the Westerlands, she could take the opportunity to do something she had not done in some time, to finally rid herself of her pent-up desire, purge it so she could sleep and face the morning with a clear mind.

She started slowly, stretching out on her back under the sheets and blankets, inching up her bedrobe and reacquainting herself with her body, usually used as a vessel to run and fly, fight and plot, rather than for pleasure. She mapped her skin with her hands, enjoying the feel of the softness and smoothness, the weight of her breasts in her palms, the nipples hardening to taut peaks as she let her thoughts from their cage and imagined.

A man needed to see and touch the object of their lust, but a woman could use her mind to bring herself to a pitch of release, and she did, cupping the mound of flesh between her spread thighs, her fingers delving inside to find herself slick and hot, circling the small bundle of sensitive nerves at the top of her slit until she gasped. He was so real in her fevered imagination, she could feel him under her hands and lips, the setting hazy and unfocused, but he was naked and hard beneath her, his cock pressing against her cleft as she bent to lick the hollow of his throat, nipped at his lips, writhed against all that bare skin and ridged muscle.

At the thought of his mouth closed around her breast, suckling at her roughly, she groaned and rolled over on her front, hiding her face in the pillows as she went further, mildly ashamed of herself but unable to stop working her nub slow, then fast, her wetness coating her busy hand. In her mind, her hidden, twisted mind full of want, she lost control of him, finding herself flipped on her back, open and exposed and helpless, her legs pushed back and held down with strength, and he was inside her, fucking her deeply and viciously, making her ache, making her scream and fight and give in utterly, those dark eyes boring into her as he took her like a beast, like a wolf.

She bowed off the mattress and came hard and fast, the surge of pleasure making her cry out in the silent room, the stroke of his thick cock inside her cunt so real, her walls clamped around her fingers tightly, greedy and desperate for it to become reality, instead of fantasy that faded and withered.

As her tired body relaxed into the bed in repose, her soaked fingers wiped on the sheets, her skin quivering with afterglow, she knew then, before she drifted into sleep, that it just would not work. No amount of fiddling with herself was going to make it all go away. Jon Snow was in her head, and he was never going to leave. Gods help her.
Her blood was still fizzing from the aftermath of battle, keeping her on a high all day, unable to sit still as she worked in her Council chambers, talking over with her advisors what had transpired and what it meant for her prospects. As the sun sunk below the black bulk of the castle, dying the restless sea beneath the balcony window an eerie pink and purple, she bolted the food a servant brought her hastily and kept going, sipping at some wine for her parched throat, as dry as dust from ash and smoke and shouting, and then endless talk.

She revelled in her triumph for a long minute when the last person left the room with a bow, flicking through mental images of thundering hordes of Dothraki riding into battle with awesome fury and grace, the cowering, crying mass of foes, wagons and men and weapons igniting in a conflagration that spared no one and nothing. She had waited for the chance for so long, to go to war with all her wrath and power, and it had been glorious, even if the fallout was not so cheering.

She had burned all of Cersei’s looted food, but they had found no remnants of the stolen gold from Highgarden. She had destroyed an army of troops, but there were others held in reserve. She had won some reluctant allies, but failed to win over the most important. And Drogon had been badly wounded by a ballista arrow, forcing them to the ground and putting her straight in the path of a charging knight before her faithful dragon saved her again with a burst of flame. Overall, it was a mixed victory, making her advisors cautious with their praise and a little afraid of her, near spoiling her high as they fretted and talked at her all afternoon until she was both weary and edgy.

The man whose opinion she secretly most cared about she had not seen, not since that strange encounter on the cliff edge when had boldly approached her very grumpy dragon with an outstretched hand, his compelling eyes liquid with terror and delight as Drogon settled down and accepted his touch. She had panicked for a moment when her mount obscured her view, as Drogon did not normally welcome the touch of strangers or friends, and she braced herself for an irascible roar and a snap of teeth, but the dragon only purred and clicked in his throat, leaving her incredulous and moved.

She scrabbled to the ground to talk to Jon, and a few careful words were exchanged, as was typical so much being said with glances and expressions. She wondered whether it would always be as such, being too awkward with each other to ever speak openly, except of serious matters. She knew enough of him by now to know that silence wrapped around him like that damn cloak, making her want to poke and prod for a reaction, shock him into words so she could unravel what intrigued her so much.
She was about to rise and leave in search of a hot bath, scrub the soot, and sweat from her skin, when there was a knock at the door. At her reply, the door opened, not revealing Ser Jorah or Varys or Tyrion, but the one she had been thinking of, as if her thoughts had drawn him in. She could not help smiling as he approached, enjoying the welcome sight, the elegant way he moved, the tightly bound black curls making her want to snatch them loose, his beautiful mouth quirking in a smile in return that softened his stern face delightfully. Gods, he was so infuriatingly lovely.

‘If you’ve come to carp and lecture me like the rest of them, you can leave now,’ she said tartly, annoyed at herself for slipping into a swoon yet again. A blush threatened to flood her cheeks as she recalled what she had done to herself in her bed, thinking of him inside her, and how much she had enjoyed it.

Undaunted by her mood, he sat down at the map table nearby, near the western edge of Dorne, his long fingers toying with a redundant sigil before he looked up to reply. ‘I want to hear about the battle, since it was apparently my idea, though I am not sure I want the credit, from what I have been hearing from the others.’

She sniffed and tossed her head. ‘Then why seek me out?’ He gave her a look, piercing and no nonsense, and she subsided, determined not to snap at him again, wanting him to stay.

She began to talk, leaving out nothing, letting loose a torrent of honesty about what she and her armies had done, only pausing when he looked as if he had a question, his expression shifting between admiration and disapproval and worry, particularly at the tale of the Lannister knight charging at her.

‘I wouldn’t like to make you angry,’ he said dryly, when she had finally done, slumping back in her chair, and clutching her wine goblet, clearing her throat with a healthy swig.

‘You already have, Jon Snow, and yet here you sit, unburnt and relatively unspoiled,’ she countered, equally dry, but a smile tugging at her lips.

‘I was rather rude and abrupt, when I arrived,’ he admitted with a shrug. ‘We don’t have much need for fancy manners in the North, and I don’t know how to talk to queens.’

She laughed then, delighting in having his full attention, his wry, deprecating words, his interest in her eventful day. ‘You are supposed to flatter and grovel, and profess undying devotion, and write poems to my loveliness,’ she said solemnly, making him snort and dip his head to hide a smile.

‘But I have no need for that either.’

On instinct, she reached out, covering his hand with her own briefly, the touch of his skin giving her a small thrill before she decorously pulled away, her eyes seeking his out. In the fading sunset, they were as dark as night, but she saw a spark catch, quick and hot, making her smile again slowly. ‘I believe you are doing just fine.’

***

The will not to believe was strong, the need to dismiss it all as unpleasant bedtime stories for frightened children, due to the huge inconvenience and unfathomable terror, her distress at the prospect of Jon leaving manifesting itself in an embarrassing outburst that still made her cringe. She didn’t want to accept any of it, the threat to the North and what it could mean to her ambitions, her resources, and her growing affection for the honest man who she was beginning to acknowledge, did not have it in him to tell lies.

So, she had spent the afternoon roaming the island restlessly in a vain attempt to escape it all,
shutting down approaches from her advisors and friends when she rose from a poor night’s sleep, avoiding any part of the castle and grounds where Jon might be found in case she cracked and forbade him to leave, yet again. She took a horse and rode hard across the springy turf that hugged the rolling hills of the island, her riding muscles cramping and aching after a short time, as it had been so long since she had ridden a mount other than Drogon.

She kept going despite her stiff limbs, reaching the far side of the island before turning back, enjoying the cool wind in her face and the open sky, a faded winter blue free of clouds and murk for once. Apart from her armies and followers Dragonstone was deserted of inhabitants, aside from a few hardy farmers that tended crops and gardens to service the castle, and some dour fisherfolk that lived in mean huts on the southern shore who had barely shown their faces since their arrival.

She encountered no one on her ride, blissfully alone and free to dress like a Dothraki in a faded old jerkin and breeches, her hair a mess of tendrils as the wind whipped at her long braid, her mood shifting from quiet enjoyment to brooding as her mind tried to focus on the dramatic scenery of her island, but always returning to tomorrow’s foolish, reckless expedition, and the motives of Tyrion for suggesting it, and the loss of the man who was annoyingly now very important to her, every minute in his quiet, restrained company making her desire and fascination root itself deeper.

On a few occasions since her return Jon had sought her out, in the council chamber, or at dinner, or when she was walking the cliffs. He would never be much of a talker, but he knew how to listen. Reluctantly at first, she revealed pieces of herself, stories of her hard life in the East, her ambitions for the land she sought to rule. The pieces she got in return were fewer, but slowly she was forming an understanding of who he was, which made it so much harder not to cling, not to spend too much time thinking of him wistfully, and of what might be.

She had done it again last night, unable to sleep without it, her anger and worry sending her private thoughts down a darker path, shocking herself as she let it go, keening into her pillow as she imagined being restrained and subdued, taken hard from behind, a position she had never liked before, but in the safety of her head, was very exciting, being forced to her knees and fucked, a hand yanking at a fistful of hair to draw her backwards on his length. After her release, feeling very guilty at using him as an unwitting instrument of self-pleasure, but considerably more relaxed, she had slipped into a doze, but still gave an occasional yawn as she rode back towards the castle, the lack of sleep and hours of exercise making her tired and heavy eyed.

She reached the Dothraki encampment, spread out around the base of the smoking volcano which loomed over the island. Dismounting, she returned the horse to the stabling area with a few grateful pats and strokes, and wandered through the straggling mass of tents and huts and firepits amidst the mud and fading grass. She stopped to talk to any who approached, slipping into their language as she exchanged greetings, laughed at jests, enquired after children and wives and horses. Her troops seemed in good spirits, still revelling in their mighty charge against the frightened men in iron suits on the Blackwater, trophies of helms and swords and armour proudly mounted in front of huts.

They were a powerful force, sixty thousand Dothraki screamers to wreak havoc in the Seven Kingdoms, but as she progressed she began to think of dead men, and drifting snow, hard packed ice, and bitter cold, and wondered how they would fare, fighting in such terrible conditions, if it came to it. Already there were shortages of food and fodder and warm clothes to service them all, and her Unsullied were unused to winter conditions as well, though they would likely be more stoic than the superstitious Dothraki if forced to fight the dead.

‘Bloody nonsense,’ she muttered to herself, but then she remembered the cave beneath the island, the strange patterns in the glittering black stone, the ancient drawings of men and children and
monsters, and her defiant heart sunk into her boots yet again.

***

There were still torches burning in the hacked-out cavern of stone. Stepping carefully in case her wet, bare feet landed on razor sharp shards of discarded glass, leaving her boots on a ledge out of the reach of the creeping tide, she took one up and advanced into the back of the cave, squeezing sideways through the narrow slot that led to the secret grotto further in. It was growing dark and chill outside as the short day ended, but inside the cave it was warm and still out of the wind, the bubbling activity of the island’s volcanic core behind the walls of dragonglass tamed for now but still heating the air slightly, and making the rock warm to the touch.

When she reached the drawings, and raised her torch high to look, their beauty and horror gave her no answers, but she felt that eerie magic in the air, tugging at her mind, making her fey and restless as she ran her hands over each one she could reach with her modest height, only avoiding the one in the very rear, the one with the strange figures with glittering blue eyes of hatred.

She jumped at the scrape of boots behind her, letting out a squeak of fright at the noise as she whirled around to growl at the intruder, then froze as the figure came into the light, carrying a torch of his own that he planted in a crevice. He was lightly clad, some of his many layers peeled away, but cloaked against the cold outside, and armed with a very impressive sword she had not seen before, as striking as the man himself.

‘You look different,’ he said, rather boldly, his dark gaze taking in her bare feet and scruffy attire in a long sweep.

‘I’ve been out riding, it doesn’t call for fine clothes,’ she replied, feeling a bit self-conscious at being caught unawares, but pleased to have him alone with her in the same place they had been before, the flickering light casting fetching shadows across his face. ‘That’s a pretty sword, Jon Snow,’ she added lightly, stepping forward. ‘I know you won’t offer it to me, but can I look?’

He ignored the barb, and shrugged, drawing the long blade from its black and silver sheath. ‘It’s Valyrian steel, so don’t cut yourself, your Grace,’ he warned, handing it to her hilt first. She trailed her fingers down the flat of the silvery blade, grasping the pommel of white, carved stone carefully.

‘It’s beautiful,’ she said, looking up with a smile. ‘I’ve never seen one. The blades that belonged to my house have been lost, years ago.’ It was surprisingly light in her hand, and she tried a little swing before handing it back, wishing again that she had taken the time to learn to fight, like her ancestor Visenya, or other warrior women from her history. She had only her iron will, and her dragons.

‘I hope it will serve you well on your trip beyond the Wall,’ she added stiffly as she watched him slip the fine blade back in its sheath in a practiced move.

‘Valyrian steel kills White Walkers,’ he said seriously. ‘We need to find many and more blades like this, or learn the secret of how to forge it.’

She snorted, but despite herself she was interested. ‘And how do you know this?’ she enquired, frustrated as always at his earnestness, his inability to relax and talk of lighter matters, although there was a tension building in the small space between their bodies. He was there, seeking her out for no particular reason, so close she could see the deep brown of his irises, the soft whiskers framing his lips, a silver line of a scar above a black brow. Suddenly her hand went to her messy, ragged hair, conscious she was not looking her most appealing.
'When I led an expedition to Hardhome to evacuate the Freefolk there, the army of the dead attacked us,' he explained, his words halting, the soft look in his eyes fading. ‘There were thousands of them, it was a massacre. I got into a fight with one of the Walkers, and lost my sword. He was about to kill me, when I found it again and raised to parry. The blade didn’t shatter like the other I was using, that’s how I know. I swung at him, and he shattered into a thousand fragments.’

Her growing disquiet made her throat close up, and she went snappish with worry. ‘And you want to go up there again, and indulge my Hand’s ridiculous plot to capture one of these dead things?’

‘I don’t want to,’ Jon said shortly. ‘I have to. If I am to persuade the stroppy queens of the realm to stop fighting and focus on what is really important.’

Her reliable anger swelled within her, and she snarled back. ‘I don’t think so. I think you just like to be a bloody stupid hero. Either that, or you have a death wish.’

For the first time, she saw him really lose his temper, going beyond sullen defiance, his expression quite dangerous. He shifted on his feet like a cornered cat, visibly bristling, as if ready to stalk out, or take a swipe at her. Her breath was quickening, she forced down more angry words that would drive him away. She didn’t want that at all, but he had infuriated her. She didn’t want to be lumped in with that mad bitch in King’s Landing.

‘You don’t know me, your Grace,’ he spat, making her wince in sudden pain.

‘No, I don’t, and I am not likely to, since you won’t let me,’ she shot back without thinking, her face heating with a blush at letting herself slip. She tightened her jaw, dropping her eyes from glaring ones, and got ready to gather her dignity and leave, but a hand grasped her arm, stopping her in mid-flight. She jerked her chin angrily, but halted.

‘Why don’t you tell me the real reason you don’t want me to go?’

Her eyes slid back to his, seeing something there that made her heart lurch and stop, not just fury, but a yearning; naked and raw, and honest. She tugged at her arm, adrenaline flooding at the urge to flee it, what she had been thinking of for weeks, astounded and disturbed, now that she had it.

‘No, I will not,’ she hissed.

He gave her no chance to speak more words of denial. One step forward, a flash of determination across his face, and it was too late for her. Whatever anger she felt, her outrage at his harsh words melted away, a clumsy kiss that fast turned into a possession of her mouth so sweet and deep and stirring she moaned, giving herself away with the sound. The blood in her veins was as molten as the rock beneath the earth, her body slackening, her hands limp and shaking.

Before she could settle on what part of him to touch first, the seal on her lips was broken, and he pulled away with a flare of apprehension. She cursed silently, watching his face go blank, eyes skipping away from hers. If she didn’t do something, he was going to bolt. The wise thing to do would be to let him leave and pretend it had never happened, but she wasn’t always wise.

‘Don’t stop,’ she groaned, grabbing at his shoulders, and tilting upwards on her toes to kiss him again, nipping at his bottom lip and darting her tongue inside to make it abundantly clear what she wanted. A lick of flame travelled down her centre to pool between her legs, and as she was crushed so tight the air escaped from her lungs in a gasp she was grateful, otherwise she would have slipped to the ground, the flick of his tongue in her mouth, the hands squeezing her arse, the itch of beard on her blushing face was beyond anything she could have dreamed up in her frustrated mind.
She wormed a hand into his thick curls, feeling the springy softness, tugging them lightly to get him closer in, her greedy lips opening wider, then slipping free to drag across his throat. She bit him, enjoying the slightly salty taste of his skin, the warm, very male scent in her nose so enticing she sighed and kissed the little hollow beneath his chin, her roaming hands slipping underneath his cloak to claw at his back as he found the curve of her neck and marked her in turn.

Madness took over, she lost all sense of time or space, or dignity or duty. She was pressed against the rough, uneven stone of the wall, with no idea how she got there, the heft of his body holding her in place as he nipped at her chest, fumbling hands at the fastenings of her jerkin, tearing at buckles and knots impatiently. With a ripping sound, her breasts popped free of the old leather, and she was shameless, arching back against the stone to offer them up, her own hands squirming between their bodies to reach his sword belt, snapping at the leather to get rid of the cold length digging into her thigh.

He did not seem to care that she tossed his precious sword to the floor with a clank, too occupied with making her moan and pant like a back-alley whore, his rough hands scooping her breasts out of her ruined jerkin, and his mouth, gods, that mouth, wrapped around one nipple, then the other, pulling hard, sending a lick of nerves down her torso, his smothered, desperate noises making the wetness between her legs turn to a flood. Her hands mapped him urgently in search of bare flesh, finally sliding under his tunic to find his back, corded with tense muscle. Her nails scratched, then travelled under his breeches to grab a handful of his arse. She twined a leg around his hip and rubbed herself against him, needing friction where she ached the most, and gave a rippling moan when she felt the drag of something very hard and substantial against the damp leather of her breeches.

She cared not that it was stupid, that she was debasing herself, that she would probably would not be able to look him in the eye in the morning, she was in torment, reeling at the need to be fucked; on the sand, against the wall, which was already scraping her back to ribbons, wherever he wanted. Through heavy lids, she watched him free her breast with a sucking sound, both nipples taut and red and sheened from his attentions. He looked as dazed as she felt, the curve of his lashes not disguising the eyes like black, burning coals.

The nervy flick of his tongue on his lower lip as he stared her down she could bear no longer. She closed her eyes, arching in one long slide over the hidden length of his cock, tilting her head sideways to expose her neck. She felt the low growl against her skin, and as he sunk his teeth harshly the hands holding her waist slipped down between her legs, stroking her through the leather, making her squirm and whimper, then dragging at laces, snapping and tearing to get inside to touch her.

When his hand found her bare, slick cunt, devoid of hair except for a patch of curls above her slit, he gave a grunt of surprise that made her smile through the fog of desire, then she cried out in pleasure as he delved, dabbling between her folds, tracing the shape of her, probing and teasing until he found her nub and pinched, two fingers pushing up inside to hold her pinned from inside and out.

Her walls were very tight around his hand, and she lost herself, jerking her hips to take the invasion, sobbing as her climax threatened in a warning pulse under his touch. She was helpless and vocal and nearly naked, and he was distant and clothed and in complete control of the situation. Her sobs of delight were tinged with frustration, and her weak hands moved from his arse with impatience, dipping beneath his breeches to explore. When she found his cock, and curled her fingers around its thickness, the gasping, biting mouth on her throat paused, a ragged, utterly delicious moan escaping with a shudder, the fingers in her cunt pushing further in. She stroked him from root to tip, enjoying the weight in her hand, the taut skin, the throbbing heat, the drip of
moisture under her thumb; wishing she could see as well as feel, and then he snapped.

It was as if she had grabbed a wolf by the tail to tease it, and was met with a snarl, sharp teeth, and a struggle of muscle and bone and power. Her breeches were gone, her bare arse pressed against the bumps and ridges of the wall before she was lifted, all her pent-up emotion, the aggravation, the embarrassing lust, the need that made her horribly vulnerable, all let out in a choked scream that echoed in the still cave as he sheathed himself in her, bringing her down on his length to bury his cock deep, so deep she could feel every hard inch filling her. Her arms and legs grabbed hold for balance, eyes bulging at the sensation of being rent so abruptly, utterly rattled, but then he found her lips, latching on, calming her with a kiss that soothed the sting of being taken.

He was so strong, he moved her as if her weight was nothing to him, lifting her arse smoothly, her back flat against the wall, the discomfort of its scrape barely felt as she was fiercely concentrated on the rough slide of his cock in her body, stretching her with each thrust until it no longer ached but teased her flesh exquisitely, the skin of her belly tensing, her loins pulsing as her orgasm threatened to break all too soon.

She tried to ease off, to calm herself so she could savour it, but she was too roused, panting and whining into his mouth when he let her come up for breath. She bravely opened her eyes, her hands moving to cup the sides of his face, let him see what he was doing to her, as raw and open as her body wrapped around his. His beautiful eyes were liquid black pools of heat, his skin sweetly flushed, his mouth puffed and wet where she had sucked at him.

‘Daenerys,’ he groaned, and she fell apart then, the purring sound of her name on his lips forcing a cry from the very depths of her secret self as she came hard, the sight of her lover mercifully disappearing as she surrendered to the dark which swallowed her whole.

***

The aftermath was awkward, as could be expected. She fumbled for her breeches in the gloom, one torch having spluttered and died, avoiding looking at him as she tried to tidy herself and failed, feeling flayed and exposed and embarrassed. She was a bloody queen, who had travelled the world, conquered cities, routed enemies and faced down scarier prospects than a new lover. She was annoyed at herself for feeling the way she did, but her mind churned away nonetheless.

Cursing under her breath, she drew on the breeches, but they were torn in front, and she had to fashion a rough knot to hold them together. Her jerkin was no better, the laces and buckles hanging loose. She tried to tuck her breasts away decently, but it was no use, it was going to be an interesting trek back up to the castle, a shamed creep through the hallways to her room, praying not to be seen by anyone other than her stoic, discreet guards.

In her muddy thoughts, she was already alone, expecting Jon to right himself and walk out with a few stumbling words and a crimson blush, but he was still there, hovering silently as she swore and tugged at her clothes and tried to smooth her hair. Pain was flaring over her back from the cave wall bruising her skin, but there was a very pleasant heaviness between her thighs, the wicked thrill of his seed slipping from her body, the tingles of aftershocks making her lazy and languid. Whatever happened next, she did not regret a moment, even though her woman’s heart was cringing, waiting for the stab of rejection, being left after he had taken what he wanted.

‘Here, you will need this,’ a quiet voice spoke in her ear, quite close behind her. There was a flap of heavy fabric, and a cloak was wrapped around her shoulders. She was turned around, deft hands fastening the straps across her chest. She looked up cautiously, instantly warm and comforted by the weight of fur and wool that hid her completely from view. He looked at her directly, but warily, and she found that comforting as well, he was also uncertain of her, of which way this would go.
‘Are you going to have me seized and thrown in a cell, your Grace?’ he said wryly, running a hand through his tangled curls in a fidget.

She let him squirm for a bit. ‘Depends, your Grace,’ she said, with a small, secret smile on her lips.

‘That sounds rather ominous,’ he said huskily, moving in closer, reaching to smooth a lock of escaped hair away from her face, the casual, tender gesture making her drop her guard. She tried to keep her forbidding expression, but it was faltering at the urge to laugh.

‘What if I dare to suggest escorting you back to the castle and taking you to bed?’

‘That’s exactly the right thing to say,’ she said, in her most queenly voice, straightening her spine, and offered her arm. ‘Shall we?’

Chapter End Notes

For all of you that were enjoying the slow burn thing, so sorry. I hope you’ll stick with it anyways ;)

A/N: I don’t know whether this will be as popular as #EPICCAVESEX but I have been wandering about in a daze for the last few days, bumping into and tripping over things, such was my level of distraction whilst dreaming this trash up, so it might be good. Let me know if it all works.

Her family seat was so enormous and intricate she had not learned all its secret passages, doorways, and corners just yet, but fortunately she knew of a route to avoid curious eyes; a set of steps leading to a small entrance to a remote wing of the castle that was lightly guarded, only containing a series of bedchambers and storerooms.

Despite the cloak which hid her dishevelled state, she had no desire to run into anyone who might guess what she and Jon had been doing, or drag either of them away on some business that needed attending. She desperately wanted to follow this path to its conclusion, whatever the consequences, and there was so little time left, mere hours to slake her thirst, to rid herself of this madness, or sink herself deeper into its mire. If they were interrupted in any way this night, she would childishly order the offending person locked up in the smallest dungeon in the cellars.

Gathering up the hem of the cloak off the ground so she wouldn’t trip over herself, she left him waiting in the grounds and ran up the steps lightly, speaking a few quick words to the hulking guards in Dothraki that were instantly obeyed without comment on their queen’s appearance and odd behaviour.

At her signal, her lover joined her in the poorly lit hallway, a twist of wary amusement on his face. It was deserted, swept clear of any servants or residents, and knowing it to be safe she took his hand and led the way, changing her mind about their destination on impulse. She had a pleasant idea, one that made the fading warmth in her belly flare into life again. She was chilled and grubby and quite sore, and she craved hot water and steamy warmth and privacy, that most of all.

The bathhouse was as sophisticated as any in Essos, a windowless womb of black rock and smooth, grey marble tiles, centred with a huge square tub with stepped sides that was replenished by a hot spring piped from under the ground. As she closed the door behind them and bolted it emphatically, her silent companion stirred and walked forward into the drifting clouds of mildly sulphurous steam, taking it all in.

‘I didn’t know this was here,’ he said. ‘We have hot springs at home, but outside in the open air. Nothing like this.’

‘We do have some comforts at Dragonstone,’ she said lightly. ‘It is more akin to an Eastern palace than some draughty pile of rocks. I still haven’t explored all of it yet, but this is my favourite part.’

At the cloying warmth sinking into her bones, the lure of getting clean, the prospect of getting him naked at last, she moved quickly, toeing off her soaked boots and dropping her ruined riding clothes, letting the fur of his cloak caress her bare skin for a moment before shucking it off as well. He had paused to watch, his eyes widening at the sight of her nakedness, then creasing in a slow smile.
‘I’ll never be able to wear that cloak again without thinking of you all bare beneath it.’

‘That pleases me,’ she smirked, standing proud and unashamed before him, very much enjoying how his dark gaze slithered over every part of her, her breasts and belly, her rounded hips, and finally her bare cunt.

He swallowed visibly, his voice thick and catching in his throat. ‘I’ve seen nothing like that before, either.’

She sniffed, now mildly annoyed he was hovering there gaping, and still fully dressed. ‘It is the fashion in the East, to take the hair off. I’ve gotten used to it. Don’t you like it?’ She had become a woman in an environment where there was no shame about the human body, but she knew this strange land was different. Despite his impulsiveness earlier, all that latent aggression and want unleashed on her delightfully, he was probably scandalised at her boldness, and more than a little intimidated.

‘I don’t just like it, I love it,’ he said, his accent so husky it poured into her ears. He moved forward to gather her up in a rush, but she threw up a hand to block him.

‘Stop,’ she said. ‘Take those bloody clothes off.’

Instead of obliging, he shifted on his feet skittishly, then froze to the spot, his deep brown eyes now distinctly uneasy.

‘You know, this is hardly fair, Jon Snow,’ she said, with some asperity. ‘You have seen all of me, you have touched me, you have been inside of me, and yet you are still dressed. What could possibly be under there that I don’t want to see?’

She crossed her arms under her breasts in a defensive gesture, and waited for a response. Silently, with obvious reluctance that confused her still more, he began to disrobe, sword belt and boots first, the sword lain carefully on a bench. She watched him, growing increasingly twitchy and aroused at the slow tease, the glimpses of pale skin that had never seen sunlight, the rough black hairs covering his strong thighs, the cock she had held in her hands and body just as impressive as anticipated.

Without his boots, he was a few inches taller than she, exactly the right height so she could tuck her face under his chin and lick that sweet little hollow at the base of his neck. He left the linen shirt to the very last, drawing it off and turning away immediately.

He was wonderfully lean and hard and sculpted with muscle, his lovely arse the only soft, plump part of him, but his raw beauty wasn’t what made her lurch and start. All over his chest and down his flat stomach, were vicious, ugly, half healed marks, marring the white skin with slashes of pink scabs.

‘What happened to you?’ she gasped in horror, reaching out to get him to turn back around, and he flinched at the touch of her hand on his hip, broad shoulders hunching. He did not turn.

‘A mutiny,’ he said flatly. ‘I don’t want to talk about it, your Grace.’

The sullen tone of his voice left her deflated, her lusty mood quite spoiled. Sighing a little, she left him and stepped into the bath, keeping her eyes averted. *He took a knife in the heart for his people,* she recalled. With blows like that, he should by rights be dead, and she was highly disturbed by the thought. In her bitter experience, death was death, there was no coming back from its cold embrace.
The warmth of the water soothed her frayed nerves somewhat, and she dunked down until only her face was above the surface of the pool, her silver hair streaming and floating around her like river weeds. Heat was her element, and she felt a little comforted, despite her churning thoughts; the disbelief, and growing fury. She dearly hoped that whoever had hurt him was dead in some horrible, satisfying way.

She grabbed a sponge and a dish of soft soap and set to work, the splash and hiss of reaction from behind her as Jon entered the pool not making her turn around. She would leave him alone, as he seemed to want, and let him make up his mind if he wanted this continue.

‘I am sorry about your back,’ a voice said hesitantly. A hand stroked lightly over the bruises from the cave, and she relaxed slightly, taking the apology, and the silent one it disguised. She knew she had to tread carefully with this complex, fascinating man that had come into her life unlooked for but very much wanted, and she could not force him to reveal everything at once.

‘It’s fine, they don’t hurt. It was worth a few bruises, and I heal up fast.’

‘I was worth it, then?’ he said, rather sly, and she laughed softly, appreciating his attempt to change the mood.

‘Don’t get cocky,’ she said, pausing in her scrubbing to glance over her shoulder with an arch of her brow. ‘I am not entirely sure yet.’

At the sight of him, all wet and flushed from the heat of the water, sweat beading on his brow, his gorgeous inky eyes taking their fill, she dropped the sponge, her fingers suddenly numb and clumsy, a cramp of need in her loins making her skin prickle.

‘You are so beautiful, I cannot believe you are real,’ he said softly. ‘I am dreaming, and any minute, I am going to wake up, feeling a right fool.’

She blushed like a girl, her cheeks flooding. She, a formidable queen, who had been told she was beautiful all her life, and been unmoved by such flattery. He made her believe it. She wanted to tell him how beautiful he was as well, so frustratingly handsome that she had wanted to kiss him from the minute she saw him, despite her fury at his behaviour, but it would only make him squirm, she expected.

‘Your hair,’ she whispered instead. ‘Take it down for me.’

His fingers went to the knot at the back of his head, and as the black curls fell around his face in a wild tangle, she smiled fondly. It was so pretty, and he looked instantly younger, not as weary and remote. She wondered how old he was, not much older than her twenty and two years, she guessed, a mere pup, but his hard life laid heavy on his shoulders, and the dark stare he was giving her was not that of a green boy with his first woman.

The silence became uncomfortable, only the drip of water and a small splash from her wriggle of impatience breaking the quiet, but she had bossed him around enough tonight, so she waited for his move. A hand drifted to her face, tracing the line of her jaw, the wide curve of her lips, and then she was across his lap, drawn into another draining kiss that made her moan and weaken, her hands trembling against the hardness of his chest, the heart thumping and catching under her palm reassuring her that what had just filled her with unease couldn’t possibly be true.

She willed herself to move, to break away from those enticing lips and go exploring, touch every part of his body, especially the part that was lying trapped against her belly, all hard and thick, but he was one step ahead of her. Letting her go with a little nip of her lower lip, his eyes so dark and
depthless she wanted to hide from them again, he picked up the soap, turned her about, and began to wash her, the slow glide of hands over her sore body making her whimper, her breath quickening at being so carefully handled, the dull throb in her loins becoming an irritant.

She felt hot all over, as she rarely did. She was enveloped in hard limbs, the delicate skin of her throat nipped occasionally, her hair dragged into a handful and pulled lightly to move it out of the way, his cock sliding against the cleft of her arse maddeningly. It appeared he knew exactly what he was doing to her, especially when his soapy fingers slid between her legs, gliding over her nub, pushing inside her gently, exploring every crease and hollow until she started to sob and writhe.

‘I want to taste this,’ he whispered in her ear, cupping her mound in his palm, squeezing lightly. She had never been particularly interested in having a man taste her before, finding it a pleasant but dull and dutiful preliminary, but the thought of his mouth on her cunt was so exciting she started to shake, and when he picked her up out of the water and placed her on the edge of the pool her limbs would not obey her, and she nearly slid off.

Then his hands were on her, arranging her legs so her toes were balanced on the tiled edge, her knees spread wide, leaving her completely exposed. She felt as if she would combust, her skin felt so tight, her ears buzzing at the sight of his face hovering over her open, pink flesh, just looking at her hungrily. His hands slid up her thighs and surrounded her opening, pulling her apart, his tongue flicking over her very lightly, then pushing inside.

She cried out, her legs starting to spasm, her toes slipping off the edge, falling back on her hands as he grabbed her legs to brace them on his shoulders. She could not watch, she just couldn’t, her eyes slamming shut on the scene as the pleasure seized her like a trap, her legs clamping around his dark head as he sucked her into his mouth whole, the drag of his tongue over her nub utterly relentless. There was a slurping sound, as if he was swallowing her down and liking the taste, a low growl that tickled along with his beard, fingers digging into her buttocks to bring her even closer in.

She was being devoured, his lips, his tongue, his teeth, exerting the right amount of torment to send her mad. It had never felt like this before, so exquisitely good, every pore on her splayed and twitching body flared with the sensations, and she was sobbing so wildly she sounded unhinged. He was groaning now, like a starving man, and she was the most delicious thing he had ever eaten, and she could no longer bear it. She gave up the struggle against her climax and surrendered, cracking her lids for one glimpse of him to send her over the cliff edge.

Their eyes met, his completely swamped with blackness, his lips and chin slick with her essence, the flat of his tongue flicking at her nub in a provocative move, and she came so hard she was nearly weeping with it, collapsing back on the hard tiles and flopping helplessly as her flesh quivered in his mouth.

After she stilled, her let her be, tugging at her useless legs to bring her back down into the pool. At his small, secretive smile she had a wild urge to slap him, utterly overwhelmed at what he had done to her, picking apart her seams until she had completely unravelled.

‘Where in Seven hells did that come from?’ she murmured, resting her head on his shoulder. Gods, she felt tired, and as limp as a dead fish, but very contented, more contented than she could ever remember.

‘Thinking,’ he said simply. ‘A lot of thinking, about what I would do to you if I only got the chance.’
She had always loved the sun, the heat on her skin tinting it the colour of honey, the bright noonday light chasing away shadows and fears. Even the weak winter sun of this cheerless land, creeping too low in the sky, was a welcome sight to her. She was normally up with the dawn, eager to start on a new day and deal with its challenges, but as the first rays began to creep through the chamber windows, spilling across the crimson Myrish carpet, inching toward the bed where she lay, she cursed it in her heart.

She would have cursed it aloud as well, used all the colourful, vile words in many tongues she had acquired over the years but rarely voiced, if it wasn’t for the sleeping man behind her, his soft breath on the back of her neck, the loose tangle of limbs wrapped around her making her silent and considerate, though she didn’t want to be. She wanted to poke him awake, and damn wasting any more time sleeping, but if she woke him he would soon have to leave her and ready himself for his journey, catch the outgoing tide, which waited for no one, not even a queen.

Carefully, she turned her head, shuffling around a little so she didn’t disturb but could still watch him in repose, trying to fix the image in her mind to sustain her. Lust was a fleeting, slippery thing, the memory of a lover’s attentions quickly fading. She didn’t know what this was exactly, her aggravation and infatuation now mixed with a fierce possessiveness, but she knew it wasn’t just lust. She had had that before, and it had been a frail copy of what consumed her now.

Asleep, Jon Snow looked like the boy he still was, the furrowed brow, the stark lines of his face smoothed out, his mouth slack and sweetly vulnerable, his skin as pale as mist compared to his wild black hair and neat whiskers. He was horribly appealing, making her throat catch and her pulse thrum in that now familiar rush, torn between wanting to hug him to her breast protectively, or climb on top and take him in her again.

She was a little sore, having been well fucked more than once that night, the experience so frantic and hurried and intense it only left her desperate for more, to fill her body, and every corner of her mind, so she could face the prospect of his departure to the North, and her growing dread over what might transpire in the mysterious frozen waste beyond the Wall, without shedding her hard shell and collapsing into useless melancholy.

At the stirring of his form under the silk covers, the flutter of long eyelashes over his cheeks, she broke away from her silly pining and settled down before he could notice, an arm draping over her, a small movement against her bottom to shift her back into the cradle of his hips, a hand grasping her breast. She liked, no, she loved, many things about the last several hours, but most of all his quiet confidence beneath the deceptively awkward surface, the easy familiarity with her body. She was a stranger to him in many ways, and yet he touched her like they were lovers of long standing. All that thinking he said he had been doing must have been more elaborate than her own private imaginings.

At that train of thought, she had a sudden arresting image, a vivid flash that made her twitch at the flood of desire welling in her lower belly, an image of him alone, stretched out on a narrow bed, naked and hard and working his cock in his hand, his white teeth sunk into his plump lower lip as he stiffened and groaned, thinking of his mouth on her cunt. She was blushing again, the wriggle of her arse against his stiffening length not giving her the relief she now needed. She rolled over slightly to leave him be, let him sleep on, trying to quash the urge to wake him, but her soft whine of distress gave her away.

Without speaking, he was wide awake and pulling her back under him, bent so her bottom was on display, the covers pushed off and exposing her to the chill morning air. Her knotty hair was gathered up off her neck so he could nuzzle her there, then his hand flattened and slid down her back, tracing the dip of her spine firmly, and resting on her right cheek. She whined again, and
parted her legs slightly, she could feel the weight of his eyes on her, so she gave him a glimpse of her, raw and pink and very wet from his seed and her own arousal.

Very delicately, his fingers drifted over her, slipping between her buttocks and further down until she was held close in his palm. She made a choked noise, and tensed, the pulse in her ears racing and skipping. ‘I want you like this, from behind,’ a thick voice purred, sleepy and low, asking permission, like a gentleman. She tensed still further, unpleasant memories of previous experiences in such a position filling her head, when she certainly wasn’t asked first, before being taken. She was not sure she wanted to display such trust just yet, to get on her knees and let him master her, even though she had thought about it, in this very bed, more than once.

‘I have a better idea,’ she breathed. Keeping her face hidden in the crook of her arm, she moved to her side again, lifting her right leg and hooking it backwards around his, moving so she was positioned just so she felt the tip of his cock drag across her folds. Like this, she could be held close, and dictate the pace, draw it out for an age until she disintegrated, until she completely forgot that he was leaving her.

His lips were on her neck, taking a mouthful of skin, his hand flat against her stomach to draw her backwards onto him, and he was inside her abruptly, grinding deep. She quivered and keened, and like before, it was too shattering, too damn good to let her hold off for long. She reached backwards with a shaking hand, grabbing at his flank to make him still. ‘Slow,’ she whispered. ‘Go slow…tease me with it.’

The hitch of breath, the helpless whimper she got in response made her smile in satisfaction. His leg slid between hers, aligning them perfectly, and he backed off, small, shallow movements that made her moan softly, his calloused hands moulding her breasts and belly and hips, his mouth against her ear, gasping and muttering sweet words that made little sense. She rolled her hips, taking him deeper within, the friction within her taut, slippery walls turning her moans to sharp cries, every inch of her skin prickling with nerves.

Gradually, she was being pushed over on her front, and she spread her legs wider, knowing he was watching his cock filling her from behind, his hard body now looming over her in a crouch of limbs. She now did not mind that her control had slipped, she wanted it, her walls clenching tightly to resist him, her hands grabbing at the carved railing of the headboard for purchase as she gave up and submitted.

She heard a curse, both sweet and shocking in that gravelly voice, his hands grasping her hips hard enough to bruise, and as he withdrew completely and thrust inside her again she buried her face in her pillow and growled like an animal at the pain and pleasure of being invaded so thoroughly. She was very far from sanity, and her sense of self, biting down on the linen to muffle her cries at the sharp smack of his hips as he drove her down into the bed, the hand dipping beneath her to find her swollen nub and rub it furiously.

All too soon, her body began to jerk and flail wildly as her climax hit her like crashing waves of heat, her walls closing around him tightly, but he did not stop, fucking her right through the delicious agony until she could not stand it any longer, lifting her head and screaming so loud that anyone passing in the hallway was sure to hear it. As she straightened, arching up on her hands, she heard him sob like a child, the fingers now grasping her waist clawing at her skin as he shook with release, a hot spill of seed deep against her womb making her cry out in relief and loss.

She wanted him out; out of her ravaged and aching body so she could compose herself. She wanted him to stay locked inside her forever, her confused urges making tears prick in eyes as she fell forward, hiding her head in her arms as he collapsed across her, his thudding heart pressed against
her back.

There were kisses planted across her shoulders that should have made her turn over and smile, but she didn’t move, her body going rigid and cold as she tried to wrangle her emotions into some order, a layer of defence forming around her heart, despite the storm of aftershocks that flowed through her. There was a deep sigh, and he withdrew from her clasp, making her wince in reaction.

Suddenly and irrationally, she hated him. All of him. His pretty hair, his pretty cock, those big, sad eyes that had captivated her, and most of all, she hated how she had let him sneak through her long held defences and made her feel all those useless, crippling emotions she had no use for. A dragon does not weep and sulk, and lick her wounds in misery at the loss of a lover. A dragon should not get on her knees for any man.

‘Daenerys, is there something wrong?’ he said hesitantly. ‘Did I hurt you?’ She continued to ignore him, and felt him move away completely, the chilly air of the room setting gooseflesh prickling over her sweat sheened skin. ‘I have to go soon,’ he went on. ‘I don’t want to leave you like this.’

‘Just go, your Grace,’ she said tonelessly, refusing to turn and look at him hovering over her anxiously. ‘Go and do your duty, be a hero.’

There was an abrupt movement, and she sensed him climb off the bed, a shuffle and a splash of water from the ewer on the washstand, the rustle of clothes and the clink of buckles. She noted each small sound dimly, knowing that any moment he was going to walk out, as she had expected last night in the cave, but she couldn’t stir herself to do anything about it, only moving to twitch a sheet over her nakedness.

The thump of booted feet across the carpet did not end in an angry slam of the door. Reluctantly, she turned her head from the damp pillow and looked up, her hastily plastered mask of indifference faltering when she saw the puzzled hurt in Jon’s face. Her crazed resentment withdrew to a low mutter in the back of her brain, and she felt only a dull, empty ache, like a missing tooth.

‘I am not a mind reader,’ he said flatly. ‘I don’t know what is going on in your head, but you wrong me, if you think this means nothing to me.’

She searched for words to explain herself, feeling he deserved her honesty, but her thoughts were too snarled, and it was all too new for her to spill her guts and tell him it wasn’t nothing to her either, it was everything.

‘I don’t think that,’ she finally said, sitting up with the sheet wrapped around her, her mess of hair pushed out of her eyes. ‘I just don’t want you to go. After everything you have told me, and what you warned me about, I fear it.’ She tried a weak smile. ‘And after last night, and this morning, I want to keep you to myself. I am afraid I am horribly selfish, especially when it comes to you.’

There was relief in his dark eyes, and sorrow. Carefully he sat down on the edge of the bed, the bright sunlight catching his face so she could see his all his thoughts flow like water, the bitter and the sweet, just like hers. She reached out and stroked his arm through his tunic, and he caught her hand and clasped it tight.

‘I know you are used to getting what you want,’ he said softly, with a wry but fond smile on his perfect lips. ‘I will do my best to come back then.’

She gave a soft laugh, and lifted her chin, her voice determined, and a little bit bossy. ‘If you don’t come back to me, Jon Snow, I will fly up there myself and hunt you down.’
After he had left to find his men and make whatever preparations that were left, she resumed her mask, keeping her sadness and worry locked up tight in her heart. When Missandei arrived to help her dress, she had already made a start, hiding the evidence of the night’s events as best she could with cold water and soap, then donning leggings and undertunic and skirt, but the state of her hair, the bite marks on her throat, gave away her secret.

Her friend studied her closely, her kind eyes all worry and deep curiosity, but as she ventured nothing she made no comment, except to suggest she wear her coat with the high collar. After a concerted effort to brush her hair free of its tangles and knots, twisting it up in a hundred braids, she tried to sit down and eat, only managing to nibble a piece of rye bread and butter before giving up, her stomach a nest of snakes.

The morning waned, the call of the tide drawing ever closer, and she was dull and snappish with everyone that approached, causing eyes to roll and feet to tread warily. When it was time, she dragged herself down the serpentine steps, not giving a hint of what was raging and sobbing inside her as they stood awkwardly beside the row boat.

She managed a few kind words of farewell to her old friend Ser Jorah, but when it came time to speak to Jon it was so painful she could only find a few stiff words, and he was equally tongue tied, his now beloved face polite and contained, only a glint of something more flashing to the surface of his expressive eyes before he turned to push the boat into the foaming surf, not looking back once.

The misery sunk its talons even deeper into her skull, and she did not linger, taking the stairs nearly at a run to get away from the lure of the retreating boat, her attendants following like a flock of geese, anxious glances exchanged between them when they thought she wasn’t looking.

She worked furiously in her council chamber all afternoon, reading dispatches, and talking over troop movements, supplies and future campaigns, the lock holding fast thanks to her steely resolve. But at night, when she had retired early to the great bed of her ancestor, swamped by its massive black bulk, alone under the covers, the sheets still holding the scent of him, she hid her face in the linen and wept, for all that she had gained, and lost.

Chapter End Notes

Updates may slow down a bit. The next chapter is going to be tricky due to all that I have to write around, and its summer here in upside down land, and I need some quality time on the beach this weekend.

Thank you all for your hilarious and supportive comments, it encourages me, and makes me incorrigible.
This is a gift, it comes at a price

A/N: House clean, suntan started, smut finished. If only I was this efficient at work.

This chapter was a bit of a bitch. I wanted to try and write a couple of in-between scenes of what was going on during ‘Beyond the Wall’ and Daenerys’s feelings about it, before I got to the more pleasurable stuff. I do love that episode, it’s the most stupidly romantic episode of GOT ever, and I will fight anyone who rips into it.

Thank you for your boundless enthusiasm for the previous chapter of porn with complicated feels, enjoy this one, hopefully it’s not too indulgent.

Many of the worst episodes of her life had involved waiting. When she was a child, it was waiting for the inevitable moment their money or luck ran out, and they had to move on, fleeing assassins or creditors, or allies that had turned against her brother and his vile moods and lack of charm. Later, there was the Red Waste, waiting to die of thirst, waiting on a glimmer of hope her Bloodriders would return with a way out of the desert. In Qarth, there was the humiliation of waiting on a response to her pleas for support, playing the role of supplicant in front of the arrogant, bejewelled merchant princes. The Beggar Queen, the Little Princess, and other insulting epithets they had called her, as they dangled the promise of gold and ships they never delivered.

They were all pieces of her past where she was weak and powerless, and subject to the whims of fate. No, she hated waiting, and as the grey, cold days slipped by like dull beads on a string she became increasingly agitated at the inertia, the growing dread, hugging the brief memories to herself like treasure, and yet flinching away from the pain they caused.

In a single night, her life, her purpose, had been turned on its head. She had become distracted from the war, turned down a different path, strewn with treacherous ice and thick snow, jagged rocks and monsters lurking around every corner. She had become lusty and internalised, constantly mulling over the incredible pleasure he had given her, and craving more of it. She had become weak, emotions fluttering in her tired mind like wind-blown leaves that she refused to look at too closely, in case she was forced to admit what they meant.

Jon Snow is not in love with me, she told herself sternly, as she sat at her writing desk, staring into space, toying with a quill and inkpot, but not working as usual. He was fond of her, somewhat. She awed him, probably. She had annoyed him, definitely. He had enjoyed himself in her bed, that she knew well enough. But Tyrion was wrong, if he thought a man so dutiful and single minded and bloody noble would let himself be distracted by love.

Regardless of her cynical meanderings, she missed him, as if an invisible but vital part of herself had been cut out, and she was still standing, still moving, but nothing quite functioned as it should. And she worried and fretted about his safety. She had never seen him fight with that pretty sword of his, but assumed he would not be who he was today if he was not entirely capable of wielding it. However, her logic-driven brain could not grapple with the magnitude of threat he had warned her about, and how he might win through. If she believed in any gods, she would have prayed, but she was a godless creature. All she had was her faith, and it was faltering as waiting ground her to dust.

There was the familiar sound of waddling, awkward feet at the open door to her workroom, but she did not look up, her face closing in as she sensed her Hand approach her desk. She had been in an ill mood with Tyrion since their cosy confidences by the fire had blown up into a disturbing
conversation about her lack of hope for an heir. She liked and respected her Hand, and had chosen him for his wits, the idealism hidden beneath his misanthropic surface, and his inside knowledge, but his acid tongue and blunt observations were often wearying, and confronting.

For once, he did not immediately start chattering about the campaign, demanding her focus on the main task at hand. When her eyes slid to his furrowed face, she saw he was deeply uneasy, his green eyes dull, not alight with their usual wry zest for life. ‘A raven, your Grace,’ he said hesitantly. ‘From Eastwatch.’

She immediately turned and snatched the tiny scroll from his hand, finding the black seal was broken, but she didn’t pause to growl at him for prying, unfurling it and reading quickly, her heart jumping into her throat as she absorbed its hastily scrawled message.

Queen Daenerys,

Jon Snow and companions trapped and surrounded by the dead due north of Eastwatch. I beg you, come immediately. Look for a mountain shaped like an arrowhead, then an ice lake.

Ser Davos Seaworth, Hand of the King in the North

‘How long would have it taken for the raven to get here?’ she snapped, rising to her feet, clawing at the neckline of her tunic in a vain attempt to get air to her lungs. She felt as if she was going to be sick at the rising tide of panic.

‘With the wind from the north, maybe two days,’ Tyrion said, immediately moving to block her path to the door. ‘Please tell me you are not thinking about going up there, your Grace.’

She eyed him incredulously. ‘Of course, I am going.’ The panic was thickening, sending her nerves firing, her ears a dull roar of pumping blood. She would push him out of the bloody way, if she had to.

‘I must caution against it. It’s too dangerous,’ her Hand said carefully. ‘I know you are quite taken with Snow, and Ser Jorah is with him, in case you have forgotten, but we need you here, fighting your war, not Jon Snow’s war. We took a chance to parley with my vile sister, and we lost. We must move on, and hope the Wall stands fast against the dead.’

‘I appreciate your counsel,’ she said impatiently. ‘But we are wasting precious time. It may be too late already, but I will go nonetheless.’ Her face creased at the stab of agony in her guts, and Tyrion quivered with frustration, his small figure stiffening in effort as he tried to control his response, and failed.

‘It is worse than I thought,’ he sighed. ‘You have been mooning around here like a distracted maid with the vapours ever since Snow left, and now I see why. You aren’t just fond of the man, are you?’

‘That’s enough,’ she snarled. ‘Remember to whom you speak.’ She rose to her full height, she could feel herself bristling with indignation, but Tyrion was eyeing her closely, his cunning mind working away, his eyes searching through her until she felt a guilty blush on her cheeks.

‘Oh fuck,’ he groaned. ‘You had him, didn’t you? Or he had you, was that the way of it? And now you’re in love with him, you pair of great fools.’

‘I am not in love with him,’ she hissed in fury. ‘And I remind you that my personal life is my own business.’
‘You don’t have a personal life,’ he shot back, his courtly voice rising. ‘You are the queen. Every action you take has consequences, and a pretty face and a nice cock doesn’t justify this insanity. It must be love, and no one knows better than I how stupid love is, your Grace.’

She knew in her heart that Tyrion cared for her, and was only giving her hard truth as he saw it out of sheer worry, but her nerves were so shredded, her anger so volcanic she could have hit him. Instead, she shouted, letting out a torrent of repressed thought she would bitterly regret later.

‘I am not just a figurehead, an empty vessel to fill up with all your hopes and ambitions! I am a woman, as well as a queen. I will do my duty, but I am not leaving him to die. He is my duty as well.’ Her voice lowered dangerously, her face flaming with hot blood, the fiery heart of her raging for action. ‘Now hold your silence, and get out of my way, before I forget that you are my friend.’

‘Your Grace,’ he pleaded, his voice softening, shoulders slumping in defeat. ‘I regret my harsh words, but I am here to advise you, and I beg you, don’t go. It is perilous, and we can’t lose you. I can’t lose you.’

Her anger dimmed somewhat at the concern on his face, but she hurried towards the door as soon as he stepped aside. ‘I have my dragons, Lord Tyrion. I will be well protected. We will speak more on my return, and I will return.’ She paused in the doorway, seeing him hangdog and miserable, but she had no words of comfort in her, so she shook her head and took off at a run.

***

The North was an endless, empty waste of windswept fields, cruel rocky hills and cliffs, bare boughs and dull pines, all sheeted with glimmering white snow and ice. She had never lived in a place that had seen a single snowflake, let alone miles and miles of pure white blanketing the earth. She supposed it was beautiful, in its way, every hill and hollow reflecting back the weak sunlight, but she was mostly blind to it, slumped over Drogon, as close as she could get to his burning hot hide, frozen with cold and exhaustion and being gnawed at constantly by fear. She may be too late, and all she would find would be a smear of his blood on the ice, and the horde of dead, swarming around in mindless triumph, a nightmare come to plague the realm with their shambling hunger and hatred, and she alone to face them.

She had driven her sons hard, flying as fast as they could travel, hugging the rugged edge of the coastline, then passing over fingers of land reaching out into the Narrow Sea, following the picture she fixed in her mind of the map table at home, a straight line to Eastwatch.

They stopped only once, coming to land in a field swept by the buffeting wind from the ocean, scaring off a mob of smallfolk who were grubbing in a field of frozen cabbages as the dragons flew over in a fury of beating wings and skidded to a halt in the hard-packed snow. The people scattered out of sight, and her sons went after their flock of scrawny sheep, roasting and tearing them to shreds with famished growls and squabbling over morsels.

She rested, slumping on a rock, forcing down food and a flask of strongwine for the cold and fatigue, feeling guilty at the despoiling of the flock, but her sons had to eat, and there was no time to hunt. After they had taken their fill she called them to her, speaking words of encouragement in their mother tongue.

*My sons, I know you are tired, but we must fly now, fly hard and fast, then go into battle.*

All three crowded around her tiny white figure, as docile as pet cats, but still grumbling and shuffling in the snow, Viserion and Rhaegal near drooping with tiredness, as they struggled to keep pace with their more powerful brother. She gave all three as much love as she could spare with
scratches and pats, her urgent thoughts flowing into their clever minds, and mounted up on stiff, weary limbs, hoping it wasn’t much further to go.

They flew into the gathering dark, several hours alone with the howling wind and the fleeting stars, and her mind, lurching between fear and misery and regret. If she found Jon Snow alive and whole, she would cast aside all her scruples, all the pain from her past, the walls of reserve she had built brick by brick over the years to keep herself from being a normal, frail woman, just like everyone else. She would give herself, the good and the evil, the strong and the weak, if he wanted her, no matter what it meant for her plans to win back this land for her own. Time was precious, and denying herself any happiness was the rankest stupidity.

Eventually, the night faded, and the sun rose sluggishly over the restless sea, casting three massive winged shadows over the cresting waves, turning pink, then blue, then grey as the clouds thickened in the north, heavy dark clouds with bellies full of snow. It was not long before she saw a line of blue-white towering ice to the north and west, as huge and eerie as she had imagined, and she veered left, picking up speed with a dig of her knees, her mind sending Drogon and his brothers in a shallow dive so she could pass over the top of the Wall, which came to an abrupt, broken end at the edge of the coast.

There were ramshackle buildings attached cunningly to the wall of ice, and twisting stairways, flaming fires and men shouting and gesturing, some cheering as she flew over their heads in a storm of swirling air. She knew then that her actions would win the affections of some in the North, and that gave her some satisfaction. But the brief warmth faded fast, the wind burrowing into her core, surrounding her heart with crackling ice as she steeled herself for what she would find. Life, or death. Hope, or an emptiness that would haunt her for the rest of her days.

***

The bewilderment, the crushing horror, fury and despair, were so overwhelming that she felt nothing. Nothing but a numbness, wrapped blessedly around her mind, only occasional flashes and twinges making her twitch and shift, blink and breathe.

She had long experience at absorbing the shock of terrible events and tragedies, so she became the empty vessel she had rebelled against, holding herself together despite the hairline cracks that were spreading from her broken heart, getting them all back safe to Eastwatch, landing in the castle yard and dismounting in a sprawl of awkward, exhausted bodies.

As soon as they were all on the ground, Drogon took to the sky to join his remaining brother, their cries of mourning spiralling up into the freezing air, causing a sickening lurch of pure agony that made her halt and turn in on herself, hugging herself against the pain of loss. Then there was a crowd of rough, bearded men around her, offering stumbling thanks and condolences, their hard faces blank with shock.

Suddenly, she craved the sight of Missandei, her calm, soft eyes, her comforting presence, inviting her to let it go and fall apart and cry bitter tears, but she was a thousand miles away, and there were only these men, strangers all, apart from Ser Jorah, who stood by her shoulder, his arm daring to encircle her protectively, his bright blue eyes full of his own grief. Like her, he had known Viserion since he was born. Her beautiful son, his tiny cream and gold body held in her palm, his little screeches and purrs, his scrabbling claws clinging to her gown. Then later, wild and fearsome and intimidating, not bonded to her like Drogon was, but still her beloved child, now fallen and dead under the ice. She did not know how she could bear it.

She adamantly refused to believe in the other loss she had borne so abruptly. She had seen Jon fall through the lake under the weight of the dead with her own eyes, but she could not accept it, not
him as well. So, she would wait, and hold on to her thin thread of hope, or else she would collapse in a useless heap in front of these men, and never rise again.

‘Your Grace…the dragon. A great tragedy, I am so sorry for your loss,’ the man with the eyepatch said, in a soothing voice full of sympathy.

A huge man with a bristling red beard crowded in, studying her frozen face frankly. ‘Dragon Queen, don’t leave yet,’ he said slowly. ‘Snow is a tough little fucker. I’ve seen him fall more than once, and he always gets back up again.’

‘Aye,’ another man growled, a towering, intimidating figure with a horrifically burnt face and a permanent scowl, lingering in the background. ‘The plan went to shit, but he saved our arses, and the fucker can fight his way out of anything.’

‘I thank you all for your kind words,’ she said faintly, blinking at a fresh twist of pain in her belly. ‘Shall we go inside and wait?’ The cracks were widening, and her whole body shook as if she had the ague, delayed reaction starting to kick in with a flood of adrenaline. She needed to be alone with herself, to let her dry, burning eyes weep, if they could. She needed to get it out of her, all the pain, with no one to witness.

Inside the main building, she drank three cups of hot spiced wine in quick succession, gulping it down for the oblivion it would grant her, and locked herself away in a room, falling onto a narrow bed and curling in on herself, trembling and rocking. Harsh, horrible sobs escaped her throat like the caws of a crow, but her eyes stayed dry and heavy in their sockets. She thought she would never sleep again, but exhaustion took her down into blackness, where she felt nothing again, her tired body relaxing at last, the tears leaking down her cheeks and soaking the hard pillow she clutched to herself.

When she awoke, she splashed icy water on her face to clear the evidence away, tidied her braids, donned her fur coat and practiced mask of detachment, and left the cheerless cell. Finding Ser Jorah lingering in the hallway anxiously, she dismissed his hesitant advice to leave for the south, back to her war and its relative safety, and demanded to be taken to the top of the Wall to begin her stubborn vigil.

The Night’s Watch and Wildling men she passed in the castle, the courtyard, and then the twisting stairs gaped at her like she was an apparition, a creature from another world, which she was. She was completely out of place and out of her depth here, struggling with the renewed horror that bloomed in her mind at the magnitude of the threat she had faced, and her great sacrifice. It could not be all for nothing.

Come back to me, she thought fiercely as she climbed, her breath heaving at the effort of all those steps. Come back to me, Jon Snow, because I can’t do this without you. I am afraid, and I don’t want to be. I am in love, and I don’t want to be. To her last day, she would remember reaching for him from atop her dragon and him turning away, the bloody stupid hero, and she wanted that memory to not be the last, with all that she had in her soul.

She waited, standing straight, and determined at the platform, the biting cold coating her bones with ice and holding her in place for hours, her eyes constantly searching the empty land beneath the massive bulk of the Wall. All white and black and grey, not a speck of colour or warmth, a pitiless realm of the dead, and her sons circling restlessly above, their sharp cries of sorrow wrenching her heart.

She waited, as she hated to do, her determination dying by inches as the day wore on, her friend by her side, offering silent support, until he stirred to remind her of her duty, to snap her out of her
foolishness.

Finally, she felt the last flame of her burning need splutter and die, and she turned away, tears threatening to burst as she let it go, let it end, willing herself to take the stairs, embark to the ship, and go home alone, without her lover. He was dead, and she had to go on, with only the hollow satisfaction of fighting for what was hers left to sustain her.

And then she heard the horn sound, the shouts at the gate, and the fire flared into life again.

***

She had made a vow to herself, but when it came to it, when she saw the love in those dark, compelling eyes offered to her openly and honestly, she could not keep it. She ran like a coward, muttering a pathetic excuse, and leaving him bewildered and hurt, yet again. As she retreated to the small cabin she had taken as her own and slumped on the bunk, she was so tired of herself, of being trapped in her own brain, she wished she could strip her skin and become a beam of light, a drop of rain, a flake of snow, anything other than Dany.

She tugged off her boots and tunic and leggings, and curled up under the rough wool blankets and tried to rest, the creak of the boat’s timbers and slap of the waves, the whine of the wind from the north, pushing them home at a fast clip across the sea, not soothing her to sleep. The instinct to take flight, to run from the source of all the trauma of the last few days was strong, but she quickly found regret was stronger still.

Jon had just given her everything she never knew she needed, and all she could think of was the price she had paid to get it. Her simmering resentment, the calculating part of her that told her to get out now, would not hold her close, or soothe her raw misery, or love her. No matter that she didn’t deserve it, no matter that she was a queen, his queen now as well.

Cursing herself bitterly, she slid from the uncomfortable berth, opened the warped wooden door and checked the pitching hallway. Clad only in her heavy silk undertunic, she set off on light feet, near running on tiptoes through the ship, which was fortunately functioning on a skeleton crew, who were all up top, struggling with tacking in the wind. When she reached the stateroom and slipped inside, bolting the door, she found the oil lamps still burning, but Jon was fast asleep.

Still fighting the cold that had nearly killed him, he was huddled under a pile of blankets and furs, his already pale skin a frightening shade of chalk white, the long lashes on his cheeks not hiding the circles of fatigue under his eyes. She didn’t wake him, just boldly climbed into his bed in a slither of grey silk, hoping she was still welcome. He was so cold, like a statue encased in frost, that she instantly shivered. On instinct, she lifted her tunic over her head and tossed it to the floor, and naked, she tucked herself into his side, giving him the heat of her body, which ran hotter than most.

When he stirred and muttered, his dark head turning towards her, she went further, draping an arm and leg over him, anchoring herself. Her eyes were on his peaceful face, all the painful, reluctant love she felt spilling from its tightly locked box. She felt a lump in her throat, the corners of her eyes prickling, and when his eyes opened she fought the urge to flinch away, as always a little overwhelmed by their intensity, but wanting him to see her thoughts, though she could not yet speak them aloud.

‘You changed your mind, then,’ he said, his voice low and scratchy from sleep.

‘I was tired of being alone with myself, stuck inside my head,’ she admitted, then smiled slightly. ‘Besides, this is my bed by rights, and its more comfortable than that bunk.’
‘It’s much better with you in it,’ he said, a smile in return tugging at his full lips. ‘And warmer. Like lying next to a very small dragon.’

She had come with only the intention to sleep, and give him the warmth of her body, not expecting him to be capable of anything else, but a giddy joy seized her then, the relief finally registering in her that he was alive and whole and with her at last. Clumsily, her nose bumping against his, she planted a kiss on his curled mouth, and he took what was offered, his lips catching hers and latching on, his tongue sliding against hers until she made a pleased sound low in her throat.

She was dragged closer, across the icy marble of his chest, her legs straddling him, her hot hands grabbing at his shoulders, pressing the weight of her torso against him, soft and warm and melting into his skin. She felt as if it was her that was being pulled down to drown, tingles of response shooting over her like the sting of icy water.

Between her split thighs, she felt his cock stirring quickly to hardness, thickening and sliding against her flesh, and she was surprised, giving a low moan as her thoughts jumped ahead of time, to when he was well enough to take her to bed and fuck her and use her hard, leave her a quivering wreck, sore and red and dripping, the marks of his teeth and bruising hands all over her. The moan became an urgent whimper of need, and he broke the kiss, his hand lifting her chin, his deep brown eyes hunting her down.

‘Tell me what you were just thinking,’ he whispered, and she blushed a little, but then decided to give him a taste of her private thoughts.

‘I was thinking of you,’ she murmured, squirming deliberately on the length of him beneath her loins. ‘Of when you are well enough, and can take me to bed and fuck me in every way possible. Until I am aching and hurting and begging you to stop, until I am so full of your seed it slides down my legs. I can’t wait for that day.’

The wave of shock on his face nearly made her laugh, and then the dark glower of hunger overcame her mischievous mood. ‘I can’t wait either,’ he rasped. ‘I wish it was right now, but…’

A small shrug, a wince of discomfort, and she eyed him carefully, wondering what to do next. Let him rest, or do what she could with him, give him the same care he had given her. As she took in his beautiful, battered body, his quiet heart, his noble soul, she felt a dart of hot fury. She wondered whether anyone had treated him with any tenderness and affection in his miserable, grinding existence. She wondered whether he had ever been given the love and attention he deserved.

‘Just lie still,’ she said. ‘Let your queen take care of you.’

She started out slow, touching every part of him she could reach that she had yet to explore, using the back of her hands, her fingertips, then finally her lips and teeth, the unyielding chill of his white skin jumping and quivering under her caresses. She slid upwards, her mouth dragging wetly over each ugly scar on his chest before she stopped to offer her breasts to his eager mouth, whining as they were squeezed and drawn deep within in turn, pulled at hard and bitten lightly, just the way she liked, her swollen, slick folds rubbing against his hard stomach in reaction.

She slid downwards, shrugging off the covers so he could see all, nestling between his thighs, her mouth taking little bites of tough muscle as she worked her way up to his cock, his body flinching and twitching delightfully, his breath growing ragged as her hand closed around his stones and tugged gently. The way that he sobbed and squirmed as her tongue slid up the lovely length of him and swirled over the fat tip, made her suspect that she was the first to take his cock in her mouth, and the thought made her growl possessively. She pursed her lips tight, as tight as her cunt when he first fucked her, encasing the head, and sliding down in a slow, taut drag, taking him into her
throat.

He was so hard and thick she nearly gagged in her attempt to swallow him all, and as he growled her name and his hands dug into her braids to get her to back off she obeyed, concentrating her efforts on the tip, working her tongue over the head and foreskin, her hand curled around the base and stroking firmly. At his sharp cry, the wild toss of his hips, she flattened her hands on his belly to hold him down with strength, sucking him deep in her throat again, relaxing around him, utterly focused on making him come in her mouth so she could taste him, sweet and salt and musk.

The thrumming tension under her palms told her he was very close to the edge, but then she was yanked off him in a movement so quick and effortless she squealed in utter confusion, then threw her head back and cried out in pain and pleasure as she was brought down hard on his cock, trapped and impaled by powerful hands grasping her hips, her fingers and toes curling at the shock of it.

He was so deep, she could feel him pressed against the entrance to her barren womb, and as she fell forward as if given a blow to the head she had a sudden wish that it wasn’t so, that all this madness would lead to a child, his child, growing inside her. Her shaking hands fell on either side of his head, her nails digging into black locks of hair and pulling, her eyes flying open to meet his, utterly dark and utterly entranced.

‘That face,’ he purred. ‘That face you make, when I take you, I needed to see it.’

‘Do it again,’ she breathed into his mouth, nipping at his lips with a snap of teeth, then keened when his hands lifted her off him in a tight slide of her resisting walls, and brought her down again. He was half dead, and yet still he had found the means to make her shutter, but she found the will to take back control, rolling her hips to stir his cock within her, her cunt slackening and softening as she moved, the climax that she didn’t expect to get now horribly close.

‘Your mouth is sweet,’ he groaned, as she reared backwards in an elegant arch, her hands balanced on his chest. ‘But not as sweet as your cunt.’

She twitched at the bold words, both rattled and thrilled, her nails clawing at him as she moved relentlessly, speechless and utterly overwhelmed how good he felt buried in her heat, how perfect, how grateful she was to whatever strange fate had brought him back to her.

She fell forward again, unable to stay away from his lips, taking him with a jab of her tongue, losing herself in the sweetness, and when her orgasm broke over her in a storm of tingles and shocks, her release was a smothered sigh, a shuddering breath into his lungs. His hands squeezed her waist and he was right with her, his seed flooding her depths, a ripping growl under her fluttering heart. She called his name, for the first time aloud without titles or his bastard label.

‘Jon’

Afterwards, when she had regained her wits and tongue, her face pressed against his chest, his arms holding her close, she dared to ask him, to speak what had been in the back of her mind since the first time she had seen his scars in the bathhouse.

‘You were dead,’ she said. ‘And then not.’

There was a moment of silence, and he she thought was hunting for another excuse to divert her, and then he spoke. ‘They killed me, my men,’ he said slowly. ‘I was dead, and then brought back. For the longest time, I didn’t want to be here at all.’

She kept her face hidden, hoping it would encourage him to speak further. ‘When you fell in the
lake, under the ice, did you want to be dead again?’

‘No,’ he said firmly. ‘I crawled out of there with all my strength, all that I had left in me. I wanted to live.’

She did not need to ask why, she knew. A wide smile curled on her lips, her fingertip tracing the crescent scar above his thudding heart. ‘And the men who did this to you, are they dead?’

‘By my own hand,’ he said, with quiet satisfaction.

‘Good. Otherwise I would find them and roast them to ashes,’ she vowed. ‘And any other enemy you care to name.’

She felt him laugh, low and lovely against her ear.

‘I would expect nothing less of my queen.’
I took the stars from my eyes, then I made a map

A/N: It’s a long way between Eastwatch and King’s Landing (a girl asks, what did they do all that time, and why didn’t Dany hit it like the fist of an angry goddess?). So, I have no frame of reference here. It might be good, it might be terrible, I never know really. This is basically a bit of teasing, bonding, and rather intense smut, though I try to deal with a couple of issues here. No battles or plot twists or clever stuff, but enjoy anyway and let me know the verdict.

For three days, the ship had been caught in a fierce winter storm, tossed from pillar to post on the towering swells, causing all on board, even herself, to range from queasy to violently ill. Giving up on the fastest route, the captain had plotted a course west, to hug the coastline and stay out of the churn of winter gales which raged up and down the Narrow Sea.

The seas were finally calm enough that she could regain her equilibrium and head up top, to take in the very same barren monotonous view she had not enjoyed on her way north. Rocks, and snow, naked, wind-twisted trees, the odd huddled fishing village or crumbling holdfast – all the North, cruel and cold and empty, but part of her life now, whether she liked it or no.

She had embarked with only the clothes she stood in, not even a hairbrush or a change of tunic, and beyond fed up of seeing herself in the same grubby attire associated with events that would remain terrible memories forever, she had borrowed some clothes from a cabin boy, rough breeches and jerkin in green felted wool, coupled with her boots and a cloak of thick grey sealskins which had once belonged to the Tyroshi captain’s wife.

The grizzled old captain had sidled up to her one morning and shyly handed her an ivory brush, a comb, and a hand mirror, more mementoes of his dead wife, and she had been so grateful she had nearly hugged the man. Her long, distinctive hair was a mess, and she had given up trying to keep it in its braids, spending more than an hour on her bunk unravelling them and brushing it out, twisting it in a single cable down her back.

How she wanted to be home at Dragonstone, so she could spend an afternoon in the bathhouse, wash off the chill and grime, and soak it out of her pores. The ship was one of the larger in her fleet, and it had some comforts, but a bath was not one of them. She had lived in worse conditions, but not for some time, and she felt a considerable amount of feminine distress at her disreputable appearance.

She was sitting on a keg of salt fish, huddled under her cloak like an abandoned waif, the sailors working up top giving her a wide berth out of respect, but still flicking their eyes to the sight of a queen on their deck, looking most un-regal. Either that, or they hadn’t seen a woman in some time, and could not help but stare.

They were a mix of men from the Free Cities who had taken the job of ferrying her armies from Mereen, so most were dark skinned Ghiscari, or tattooed Volantenes, a few paler skinned men from Lys and Pentos. They had been sitting idle at Dragonstone for some weeks, and all seemed relatively cheerful about working again, and not being sent out to fight Ironborn pirates, though all looked frostbitten and red nosed from the cold.

Her sons had disappeared during the storm, making her worry, but as she had come on deck that morning she spotted them drifting over the high cliffs, not growling and squabbling and swooping at each other as they usually did, but very subdued, hanging in the swirling wind, still mourning the
loss of their brother, as she was. The nights she had not sneaked into Jon’s bed, she had huddled in her bunk and wept for Viserion, finally able to let go and grieve now the shock had receded, and the hideous waiting for her lover to return from the dead was over and done.

She had quickly discovered that the stoic man she adored hated boats, especially during a storm. A true land lubber, he had been horribly ill during the tempest when she had stayed mostly calm, her stomach well used to ocean travel. Already running a fever from his icy dunking and long ride back to Eastwatch, Jon was miserable and moody, unused to being idle and weak. She had let him rest, absenting herself so Ser Davos could fuss over him with foul tinctures and potions, and had slept alone, only visiting when no one was present, mostly to watch him sleep.

She wanted her stateroom back, weary of her scruffy little cell of a cabin, but only with Jon in it as well. It wasn’t possible though, if one wished to avoid idle talk. A deep, frustrated sigh sounded from under the wide hood of her cloak. If it wasn’t for her better judgement, she would have told them all to go to one of the hells and stayed in his bed, not that anything interesting was likely to happen there while he was ill, but she needed to be with him. It worried her just how much, and how she would bear to let him out of her sight again.

Soon he would have to go home to his family, and ready himself and his folk for the war he was convinced was coming, despite the seven-hundred-foot spell-bound Wall between the dead and the Seven Kingdoms, and like the idiot in love that she was, the idiot also bound by duty to the people that refused to bow to her, she would follow, though the selfish part of her railed against it. In her ideal world, in her childish secret thoughts, she would rather bundle Jon Snow on the back of her dragon and fly somewhere far away, somewhere warm, where there were no dead, no vicious queens, arrogant lords and grumbling smallfolk, and no bloody ice and snow.

There was a shout from one of the crew as Drogon swooped past the main mast and its billowing sails, sensing her presence, and then a wave of guffaws as the dragon dived under the water in search of prey. The sailors who had escorted her all the way from Mereen were well used to the dragons now, and found their antics a source of free entertainment. Drogon emerged from the deeps in a fury of foaming water and steaming red and black scales, a huge, ugly fish in his jaws, making her laugh as well, but then her amusement faltered when he flew to Rhaegal and taunted him with it, trying to lure him into a duel.

Her smaller son ignored the bait, turning away and back towards the coast with a mournful sound which broke the air with a shudder, making her ache anew. She tried to send her thoughts to him, and tell him his mother mourned as well, but he was too upset to hear her.

‘He grieves,’ a low voice said from behind her.

‘He and Viserion were more bonded to each other than they were to me,’ she replied. ‘Since they were so small I could carry them both on my shoulders.’

She felt him move next to her, a swirl of a familiar cloak, a quiet, comforting presence. She pushed the hood out her face, her mouth curling slightly at the ever-handsome sight; the chiselled profile, a straight nose and very kissable lips, the curl of eyelashes over watchful brown eyes that sought her out and softened immediately, the tamed black hair she wanted to curl her fingers within. He looked well, the chalky cast to his skin gone, the wind bringing colour to his cheeks.

‘I wish I could cheer you up,’ he said, in that husky, stirring voice, and her smile widened, thinking of several ways that could be achieved.

‘I don’t think cheerful words and amusing japes are your strength,’ she said, teasing him slightly, getting the glint of a smile in return. Under the cover of their mingled cloaks, she felt a fingertip
caress the inside of her wrist, drawing a lazy pattern that made her twitch in her seat.

‘Lovely view,’ he said casually, continuing to touch her lightly, and maddeningly. ‘I like Dragonstone, but the North is my home, and I miss it.’

I hate it, she thought. How can someone as beautiful as you come from such an awful place. The selfish part of her was nagging at her again, and she eyed the bleak landscape she counted the ways she resented where he was from. The North had risen against her house and helped to bring it down. It had taken her dragon. It had called the man she loved a bastard all his life, until they made him a king they constantly grumbled about. The North was the realm of the dead, of peculiar, terrifying legends come to life. The North had tried to kill Jon Snow more than once, and had nearly succeeded.

‘It’s very…dramatic,’ she finally answered. ‘But tell me, does it ever get warm at all?’

He chuckled, that rare smile making her melt a little, the fingers on her wrist sliding to merge with hers. ‘I know you like to be warm,’ he said, with a rather smouldering look, thinking of her in the bath, she guessed with a fond snort. ‘In the summer, there is miles of green grass and fields of flowers, and the sun doesn’t set until late. You would like it then. I admit it does not look so appealing now, with winter here.’

‘Winter is Coming,’ she quoted, and seeing he was in the mood to talk for once, she started to probe him a little. ‘You said your uncle rescued you beyond the Wall,’ she said. ‘Tell me about the rest of your family, the ones still living.’

He frowned a little, but didn’t let go of her hand. ‘I haven’t seen Arya or Bran for years, I thought them both lost. Arya is my younger sister, she is wild and stroppy and tough as boots, you would like her, I think,’ he said, with a sidelong look that made her snort again. ‘Bran was just a boy when I left, and newly crippled by a fall, and thought not to live long. Apparently he is much changed.’ That made his frown deepen in dark thought, but it faded when she tightened her grip on his hand. ‘My sister Sansa is a formidable lady, just like her mother. She and I argue a lot, but she is strong and smart. We all had to be, to survive what we have been through.’

Her mind drifted to her family, the sworn enemies of his house thanks to the brother she had never known. House Targaryen; dragontamers and madmen and tyrants and conquerors, now all lost, leaving her alone in the world. She envied him that he had people that cared for him, though their relationships were either difficult, or sundered.

‘Why did you join the Watch, and leave your family, and go where there is cold, and savages and monsters, and grinding duty, and no women?’

‘I felt I had nowhere else to go, when my father left to serve King Robert,’ he said, in a dull tone which made her wince in pity. ‘I wanted to serve, and hone my skills, and I had no use for women back then.’ He shook his head as if to clear it, and his eyes slid to hers again, a rich brown in the frail sunlight. ‘I do now, though.’

She smiled slowly, her mood lightening, returning to the simple pleasure she had felt when he appeared, wishing they were alone, instead of being under the curious eyes of bored sailors. ‘Just me, I hope,’ she said softly.

‘Only you,’ he replied, his eyes on her upturned face, full of a warmth that made her squirm at little under them. She suddenly wanted those eyes on her as he lost himself in her body, black and bottomless as he took her, and she wanted it now, the flaring heat in her belly making her press her thighs together under her cloak. ‘Only you, from the first moment I saw you, so beautiful and scary
and bloody annoying.’

Her inconvenient lust merged with amusement, and she threw her head back and laughed, causing Jon to smile as wide as she had ever seen him do. ‘You were bloody annoying as well,’ she sniffs. ‘Rude and surly and horribly pretty. You drove me completely mad.’

‘Did you consider locking me up until I bent the knee?’ he said, his dark gaze alight with mischief, so she smirked secretively, dropping her voice so she wasn’t heard.

‘At first,’ she said lightly. ‘But then I just wanted to fuck you.’

At the sight of him twitching and looking around uneasily for eavesdroppers, she smothered a giggle, and went further. ‘You drove me so mad, staring at me all the time longingly, being all sullen and awkward and infuriating, I would retire to my bed at night, and touch myself, thinking of you inside me. I would imagine many things that you might do to me, and I to you, but none were as good as reality.’

His lovely face was a frozen mask, but his eyes fairly glowered at her, a splash of bright red blush on his cheeks. She was so pleased with his reaction she had to press her lips together to hold in her mirth, but then the hand holding hers crushed her fingers tightly, and the expression turned from shock to something much darker, and very predatory.

‘I wanted you too,’ he whispered. ‘So badly I burned with it. Just as I want you now.’

His voice was so gravelly and thick, she nearly purred aloud, and now not caring less what anyone on the ship thought, she rose to her feet, her thumb stroking his palm firmly before she extricated her hand and turned to leave.

‘Well, do something about it, then,’ she said with a twitch of her chin, her voice a low tease of invitation. ‘You can find me in the stateroom. I want it back, but only if you are there with me.’

***

He made her wait for it.

At first, she was glad of the time to gather her meagre possessions and transfer them to the more comfortable stateroom, and set the brazier alight to take the chill from the air. She then went to the galley for hot water, soap and a flask of lemon juice that the cook had in his stores. She stripped down and bathed herself as best she could, wrapped herself in a blanket, and sat cross-legged on the bed, attacking her hair with warm water mixed with the juice to free its wind-whipped tendrils, running the damp brush over the long, silver tresses until they shone in the sun that filtered through the port windows.

When she was done with that, the minutes dragged by until she became somewhat irritated, and at the discreet knock at the door and the sight of Jon slipping inside, looking quite distracted, she became a bit snappish.

‘Where on earth have you been?’

He gave her a look, annoyed at first, then shifting to frank appreciation, as he took in her barely covered nakedness and loose hair, and bolted the door. He threw off his cloak and draped on a hook, then took off his gauntlets. ‘Ser Davos and Gendry saw me about and wanted to drink a cup of wine or two,’ he said, his eyes flicking to her and halting, his mouth twisting. ‘And if you think I enjoyed sitting there passing the time, hard as a rock, trying to keep a straight face, then you’re crazed,’
She swallowed a laugh, as he wasn’t smiling. The edgy expression, the stiff posture, the pacing across the floor, made her pause.

‘I’ve never met anyone like you before,’ he said abruptly. ‘I don’t know whether to get on my knees and worship you, kiss you, or smack your arse raw.’

She felt herself soften, understanding him at once, despite the clumsy words. She found him intimidating as well, in a different way.

‘All three would be more than acceptable,’ she said, smiling at him with a hint of challenge.

‘Come here, your Grace.’

She thought about telling him no, staying put and ordering him to strip himself of those clothes and come to her instead, but then she decided against. She would put herself in his hands and enjoyed what she had asked for with her teasing and bedevilment. Slowly, she slid from the bed with a sinuous wriggle, her expression defiant, and dropped the blanket and stood before him naked but for the curtain of her hair. Seized and squeezed against layers of leather and wool that dug into her breasts and belly, she opened her mouth in a sigh and yielded, her hands cupping his face as he kissed her thoroughly, his hands on the cheeks of her arse, lifting her feet from the floor as he gathered her up, biting at her lips, his whiskers scratching her gently.

He kissed her so long and so sweetly, she thought his frustrated mood had faded, and she felt mildly disappointed, but then he broke away and spun her around, nipping at her neck before bending her over the bed and smacking her hard on both cheeks. She whined at the sting of pain, the flood of heat in her loins, and then cried out as he did it again, inexplicably aroused by the rough treatment. His fingers found her wet, and when he slid two inside her abruptly, she bent over further, reeling when he told her to be silent in a deep rasp, her cunt very tight around his burrowing hand.

‘You have such a beautiful arse,’ he whispered in a hot breath against her ear, pinching and rubbing her tingling flesh. ‘Gods, I want to be inside you right now, fucking you like this.’

She sobbed urgently, torn between black excitement and unease as a flash of repressed memories refused to stay shut away in the back of her mind. Of her at the age of sixteen, on her wedding night. Of that morning in her bed at home, when she had submitted to him on instinct and struggled afterwards with her very mixed emotions, despite the addictive pleasure she had experienced.

Jon must have felt her tense up, sensed her mood slip. Suddenly she was freed, and she was turned around to meet eyes that were both black with desire and sorrow. She visibly flinched, and he sighed, drawing her down on the edge of the bed.

‘Daenerys, do you think that I would ever truly hurt you?’ he said hesitantly, reaching for her hands and clasping them in his closely.

‘Of course not, Jon. Never,’ she said firmly, angry with herself for ruining the moment, her eyes stinging as she looked at him, sad and worried, and not frustrated with her at all.

‘Someone did though,’ he ventured, and she nodded, seeing a wave of pure anger cross his face.

‘I hate it,’ she whispered. ‘I hate that after all this time I still think of it. I want it out. I want it out of me.’

She closed her eyes, fighting the urge to cry weak, pathetic tears, fighting and winning as she felt the touch of his hand on her face, a kiss planted on her lips. She opened her lids, seeing his
searching eyes looking into her, nothing in them but love, which she still felt she did not deserve of him. He did not know the real her yet, the black, selfish part of her that had done terrible things, and thought terrible things. She felt there was nothing black and evil in Jon Snow, only good.

‘Do you trust me?’

‘With my life,’ she said, without needing to think on it, she who gave her trust so sparingly. His very serious face relaxed a bit, the depth of his dusky eyes on hers making her breath catch.

‘Then let me look after you, so you never think of it again.’

A heart was just a muscle that pumped blood and kept one alive, but she felt hers swell with a pain that she knew was love, out of control and frightening, a spill of words catching in her throat and closing it up. She was dazed and passive, not trying to fight it, or assert herself as usual, the arousal she had lost fast returning as he laid her back on the pillows and kissed her breasts and throat with gentle nips of her skin, then began the tedious business of stripping off his clothes, making her sigh in satisfaction when she saw him all bare and lean with muscle and gloriously hard, crawling up the covers to loom over her.

She hoped that she had not scared him with her brief collapse, that he would not revert to loving her carefully and respectfully. It was not what she wanted of him, and never would be. His expression was a blend of so many things, desire and determination and concentration, that she had no idea what he was truly thinking, but then it didn’t matter at all.

Her parted legs were gathered up, bent over her torso so she was at an angle that lifted her arse in the air, and she blinked and whimpered and slapped a hand across her mouth as he locked her in position with an arm like an iron bar across the back of her thighs. She could not move, or back away to deaden the swift pleasure which took her, when he watched him spread her and put his mouth on her cunt.

It was not as before, a slow introduction, but a greedy invasion, his tongue probing and digging into her sheened flesh, drawing at her firmly, his beard scratching her with a harsh rasp. He was groaning at the taste of her, and the image of his face closed and intent and shattering, buried in her pink, swollen folds, made her bite down hard enough on her palm to draw blood, torn between wanting to watch him fuck her with his tongue, or grab a pillow to hide beneath it.

How she wanted to make it last, to stay paused on the threshold of delirium, but he was driving her too hard, pushing inside her with sharp jabs of his fingers and tongue, working her nub and flicking it constantly, the rest of her sucked between his sweet lips and pulled. Under her muffling hand, she gave a loud cry, the deep, throaty sound escaping into the room, her bent trapped body going completely rigid as she started to climax, and as the flood of ripples and flutters spread out from her centre there was no respite.

He slid up from his crouch, and using his free hand to angle his stiff cock he buried himself inside her in one skilled thrust. Her cry turned into a scream, her arse lifting to take him deep, her walls fluttering around his length as she continued to come, her flesh so fiery and sensitive with his cock held inside her the savage pleasure was a burst of red light behind her quivering lids.

Her legs were bent further backwards so her feet were on the headboard, leaving her completely open and exposed, and as he withdrew and took her again her eyes cracked open and she moaned and growled deep in her chest at the beautiful sight of him using her hard. She was a vessel to be filled, each movement harsh and emphatic, stretching her wide, making her so wet and hot her cunt stroked and clung and sucked him down, the possession of her so consuming she no longer cared about all the noise she was making.
The deep movements within her slowed to a crawl. He bit down on her calf to smother his own urgent sounds, and she barely felt the pain, too wrapped up in the tightening, surging pleasure swirling in her body, too transfixed by watching him watch the view of his length disappearing inside her cunt, his eyes heavy and languid and black as ink, his face intent and flushed with the effort of holding back, making it last.

Eventually she begged and pleaded, unable to stand further torment, the edge she was balanced upon cutting her in two. In a cracked voice cut with shuddering breaths she told him to fuck her hard, make her ache, her twisted, trembling body held down with force as he began to thrust within her clasp so viciously she tossed her head back and forth on the pillows and curled her hands into fists, unable to move to meet or retreat, just lie there helpless and take it.

She came so violently her walls clenched around his throbbing length like a vise, her choked cries blending with his feral growl as he emptied himself into her in a flood, filling her perfectly, and she felt herself, and all her burdens past and present snap free and float away into the sky, into a void that wasn’t dark and cold, but bright and warm, and safe.

She wanted to stay there forever.

***

She lay there for an age, dumbstruck and paralysed, waiting for the jumping, firing nerves under her skin to calm down, for the sweet elixir from being thoroughly deconstructed to wear off, leaving her with memories and dark, resentful thoughts in her buzzing mind as she eyed the man next to her, who had slipped into a very male doze after serving her so well. But none of what she expected happened.

There was only she, heavy with exhaustion and bliss, alone with Jon and all that she felt for him; love and respect and exasperation, and a fierce ownership that would turn to a bloody vengeance if anyone dared to harm a hair on his very pretty head. It still scared her, it overwhelmed her, and she still felt unworthy. The sad, frightened little girl she had been, then the conqueror, then the hard-nosed, often ruthless ruler, none seemed quite good enough. She sighed and shifted slightly against the rumpled sheets, wondering how to tell him who she truly was, and hope he would accept all of her, and the duty and endless toil that came with it.

‘The most beautiful woman in the world, I heard tell,’ he murmured sleepily, looking up at her through lazy lids. ‘I didn’t believe it, until I met you. Why you would let the likes of me into your bed, I really don’t know.’

‘I didn’t get much of a choice, in the end,’ she smiled. ‘And false modesty is not a virtue, my Lord.’

‘You are so quick with that tongue of yours, I can barely keep up,’ he rumbled.

‘Oh, I don’t know about that,’ she said meaningfully, just to make him squirm. It worked, satisfyingly, then she leaned in and kissed him, tasting herself on his lips, giving her another twinge down below where she was sore in a way that only pleased her.

‘Was that all right?’ he said, rather shyly, so she kissed him again.

‘It was more than all right, it was incredible.’

He gave her that smouldering look of his, when she knew he was thinking of her in some sinful manner, but then his brown eyes softened into something that was more difficult to take.
‘Don’t look at me like that,’ she said softly. ‘Like I am some goddess. I assure you, I am not. I am a horrible person, you just have found out yet.’

He was unruffled by her defensive words, calm and confident, still staring at her searchingly. ‘All the horrible things you think you are, I don’t believe any of it,’ he said fondly. ‘I see your heart, and it is brave, and good, and very fiery.’

She sniffed, moved despite herself. ‘All you have done all your life, Jon Snow, is do your duty. Apart from killing your enemies in war, and traitors who richly deserve it, all of you is sweet and noble and good. I am not the same. If you truly knew me, you wouldn’t look at me the way you do.’

‘You are the same,’ he said firmly. ‘I don’t care who you have roasted and cut down and crawled over to get to where you are today. I don’t care that you’re bad tempered and high handed and sometimes bloody wicked. I love you.’

‘Oh,’ she gasped, her face heating in a blush as she absorbed the flow of words, the painful, heart rending stab at the end that made her treacherous eyes fill with tears.

Those three stupid words, that had started wars, sparked murder, and grudges that lasted for decades, and caused people great and small to do any number of reckless things, she had never had any use for them. She had loved her husband, but the harsh life of the Dothraki did not leave room for finer feelings. She had never even used the words before, except silently, when Jon had entered her life and refused to get out of her head.

*Who would ever love a dragon*, she used to ask herself wistfully, all those years ago, before she became tough forged steel, striding through all obstacles in her path, surrounded by followers and believers, but very alone. If she did not want to be alone anymore, all she had to do was tell him how she felt, and take down the last brick in her wall of defence he had broken through.

She hesitated, pinned by the weight of his dark, expectant eyes on her, seeking honesty. She could not bring herself to turn aside with a dismissive laugh, or lie to try and save herself. She took a deep breath, and jumped.

‘I love you,’ she said softly. I love you so much, it terrifies me.’
My body was bruised and I was set alight

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A/N: A change of scenery, an argument, and some highly distracting smut (there is never not smut). If you’re not bored yet, I can’t see an end so far, it could go on depending on your enthusiasm, and mine. Appreciate the feedback, kudos and follows on Tumblr (my page sucks, sorry), all of it.

This fic is getting somewhat dialogue heavy, which I hope you are not finding too dull and OOC, it’s quite the challenge, but Jon and Dany are together now, rather than just pining over each other silently, so I have to stretch myself a bit.

Dedicated to my dear acquaintance, LustonmyFingers. I hope it’s as good as your Chapter 13.

Discretion is the better part of valour. It was a wise epithet, and they had tried to follow it, though she suspected some of the inhabitants of the ship had their suspicions over what was going on late at night in her reclaimed stateroom. Officially, she and Jon had switched sleeping berths, now he was much better, his possessions moved to her old cabin, not a hint left that he was sharing her bed, nearly every night he could sneak through the innards of the ship without being seen by sailors, or his companions from the mission north.

It irked her that such subterfuge was necessary, but it also thrilled in a way; a secret lover, silently crawling into her bed at the hour of the wolf. The nights she was not wide awake, quivering in anticipation, waiting for him to come to her, she would be dragged from sleep by the touch of cold hands parting her legs, the abrasion of his beard, rough against the soft skin of her inner thighs.

She had taken to snatching rest during the day to catch up on her sleep, there not being much to do on board in any case, except stride the decks and talk and take in views of the grey, churning ocean, the ice-locked land slipping past slowly as they travelled south to Dragonstone.

She knew she was wasting time idling on the ship, when she could ask to be put ashore and mount her dragon and fly home in a matter of hours, and the inactivity was starting to get to her, despite the delightful diversions of the nights in her bed. She was a woman of action, of constant movement and advancement, and she had a war to win, and advisors at home who were probably steaming with worry and impatience.

Morning was near, though the sky outside the thick, clouded windows was grey as charcoal, she could sense it closer, the sun lurking sullenly below the eastern horizon, veiled by fog as always. She was wide awake, her mind ticking away for a good hour, whereas her lover was dead asleep, a tangled head of black curls and an elegant stretch of white, corded muscles disappearing under the covers, his very beautiful back to her as he slumbered.

During the daytime, Jon Snow prowled the ship like a restless direwolf, like the massive snowy beast he said was waiting at home for him, similar to her in being unaccustomed to sitting idle. He sought out his companions, or the crew, gruff himself but comfortable with letting others do the talking, speaking of battles and new weapons and strange lands he had never seen, the sailors that could speak the common tongue fast developing a liking for him.

He had a way with people, of drawing them in and earning their respect, which confirmed for her
that he was a true leader of men, and gave her some inkling of how he had moved so quickly from scorned bastard, to humble steward, to Lord Commander, and then king.

During the night hours, he came to her mute and demanding, exploring every part of her body with his deft hands and very skilled tongue, until she was frantic and needy. When he took her finally, when he fucked her to banish the cramping ache in her loins, he always held her down, restraining and subduing her under his weight, as if he was afraid she would slip free, or disappear in a puff of smoke.

When she did the same to him, when she pressed her hands flat on his belly to hold him in place as she took him in her mouth, when she climbed above him and sunk down on his lovely length and twisted herself until she whined and he growled, she would find herself flipped on her back, legs bent backwards, a hand pressed over her lips to muffle her cries as he took control.

It had become an addiction, like weak fools who became besotted on milk of the poppy, or wine, eating away at her mind when she should have been making plans, making progress. She had never spent so much time occupied with another person’s body, yet it still wasn’t enough for her. And despite the words of love they had exchanged, the trust that she had in him, there was still much to learn of each other, and obstacles of reserve to step around carefully.

After he had taken her, before they both surrendered to sleep, his voice was a hesitant rumble against her ear, or her heart. They never spoke about what would happen with this awkward, inconvenient love that had flared up between them so fast they were still dancing around its fire. They were taking small steps into each other’s pasts, trying to discover who the other was, and whether their trust was in fact wise.

It was not all one sided, but she found herself doing most of the talking at his prompting, as he loved to hear tales of her life in Essos, of her childhood as a fugitive, her journeys with the horselords that now followed her devotedly, and her righteous campaigns in Slavers Bay, those most of all, having the same views as her on the vile practice of slavery. He would tell her she amazed him, that all she had achieved scared him senseless, and she would demur. It all seemed so hazy now, and unimportant, safe under the many furs and blankets, two voices in the dark without titles or trappings, just bare bodies wrapped closely together, and nothing to hide behind.

The charcoal dark outside the windows was lightening to ash, it was drawing very close to the time she had to wake Jon and send him on his way, and before she reached out to touch him lightly to stir him she made a snap decision, one that brought deep relief at the prospect of escaping the damn ship, catching up on the news of the realm and the plots of her enemies, and finally having a bath, slathering her skin with scented oil, braiding her hair and donning something soft and fine, not scratchy, borrowed woollens.

‘What time is it?’ he murmured as her hand landed on his thick hair, ruffling it slightly to wake him. Grumbling a bit, he shifted around to face her, lids cracking open, his changeable eyes dark hollows in the gloom of the dawn.

‘Near time for you to leave, alas,’ she said, her breasts swaying as she sat up against the pillows, catching his sleepy gaze. A hand slid up her stomach to cup one, squeezing with a familiarity which made her smile, but she was all business for once. ‘You were speaking to the captain last night, where are we now exactly?’

‘Somewhere near the Dreadfort, by the sounds of it. Still far to go, maybe two weeks if the seas are kind.’

‘I have to go home,’ she said softly. ‘Much as I like this bed, and you in it, there are matters for me
to attend. I failed to send a raven from Eastwatch, as I was too distracted at the time, and Tyrion will be frantic for news. I will ask the captain to get me ashore, so I can call Drogon down and fly home.

His face fell, his dark eyes looking lost at the prospect of her leaving, which pleased her very much, but she had no intention of letting him out of her sight again, in case something ill befell him.

‘I will miss you,’ he said. ‘But it makes sense.’

‘You don’t have to miss me, if you come with me,’ she smiled mischievously. ‘You failed to take my hand and get on my dragon before, so I am offering it again. Wouldn’t you like to go home with me, get off this boat you hate, and take a bath?’

Jon looked equal parts uneasy and intrigued, but he snorted in dismissal. ‘I would be scared shitless.’

‘You?’ she scoffed. ‘You’re not scared of anything, not even Drogon when he is in a very bad mood, I recall. All you need to do is hold on tight, and close your eyes if you must. We will be home in hours, instead of weeks.’ To add more persuasion, she lowered her voice to a purr. ‘And once I have dealt with Tyrion, and the work piling on my desk, you can take me to bed, and fulfil all those desires I told you about.’

‘How could I refuse such an offer?’ he smiled slowly, his lovely voice a low rumble. ‘You will make sure I don’t fall off, I expect.’

‘You have my word, my love.’

Later, on the deck, waiting for two crew to lower a row boat and set up a rope ladder to climb down, clad in her own attire, which she had scrubbed and brushed as best she could, she stared at the wide, rocky beach backed by wind-ruffled dunes that was their destination, Drogon already circling above to wait for her arrival. There was a small crowd to send them off; Ser Davos looking worried, Ser Jorah with his pained blue eyes looking at her with suspicion, young Gendry looking envious, and that hulking brutish man Clegane speaking to Jon in his growling, angry voice about the gruesome, shrieking wight they had locked safe in the hold.

‘We will send word to Cersei of our success when we get back,’ Jon was saying. ‘We will set the parley for three weeks’ time, which should allow sufficient time for you all to get back to Dragonstone.’

_Three weeks_, she thought. Three weeks of happiness. And after that, what then? She did not know, they still had not spoken of his need to go home to Winterfell, and when she would follow with her armies and dragons, abandoning her plans for glory and the honour of her despised house for the real war, the more difficult and frightening battle against the masses of dead, still trapped behind the Wall that she hoped would stand fast forever.

She frowned then, a sickening lurch of dread in her guts telling her that her hopes were futile, and that she and Jon were living in a fool’s paradise for now, but hard reality would hit soon enough.

***

The journey was long and cold, the snows now stretching further south than she had seen on her way north, and she was glad she had chosen to wear her fur coat, though she now hated the very sight of it.
At first, Jon held on to her so tightly she could hardly breathe or shift with Drogon’s movements under their precarious seats, a steady stream of inventive curses flowing into her ear above the howling wind that rather surprised her. Eventually, to her relief, he relaxed somewhat and began to look about, but she made sure they kept a low elevation so he was less uncomfortable, and tried no tricky moves, though she was tempted to show off a little.

There was no sign of Rhaegal following for some hours, but then Drogon growled under them, the vibration ripping through his hot hide and tingling in her stiff limbs, and the green dragon broke through a mass of clouds to the west, threatening more snow. She veered east over the sea to avoid them, but soon there was land spreading out under them again, a crowd of icy mountains reaching up to scrape the sky, and valleys that were still green beneath the grey and white peaks. For hours, they flew over the kingdom known as The Vale, which Jon had told her was sworn to House Stark, thanks to his sister, and therefore she could claim it as well, whether its inhabitants liked it or no.

The short winter day was ending when she spotted the dull green jewel of her island floating in the iron-hued sea, and she sighed in pure relief, now so chilled she felt as if her bones were filled with ice instead of marrow. ‘Hold on,’ she shouted over her shoulder, and dug her knees in to get Drogon to start descending in a slow, careful spiral so the landing didn’t jar too much.

Jon looked frostbitten himself, sparkles of ice in his hair and beard, but he was smiling at last, rather than stone-faced with nerves, and when they came into land in front of the black expanse of the castle, the dragon skidding across the rolling turf until his massive claws gained some purchase on the wet grass, she heard him laugh instead of curse.

Dismounting rather ungracefully, their legs weak and awkward from the long trip, a gauntleted hand grasped her shoulder to help her stand up straight, then spun her around. ‘Quick, before they all come running out,’ he whispered, his lips cold and sweet as he kissed her thoroughly, making the ice in her bones melt as she pressed against him with a tired sigh. ‘Thank you,’ she heard him say as they parted reluctantly, her hands digging into his cloak as she looked up at him, fixing his beloved face in her mind so she could better deal with the hours of duty and recriminations before she would see him again.

As Drogon flew off to join Rhaegal to hunt for their dinner, she saw several figures emerge from the castle, and she composed herself hastily, putting some distance between her and Jon and straightening her spine as they approached.

‘I am glad to see you alive and whole, Lord Snow,’ Tyrion drawled, looking up at them beneath his furrowed brow, his clever eyes switching between the two of them knowingly. ‘And your Grace, I am so relieved to see you. Pity you did not send word to spare me the worry.’

‘I am sorry, my Lord. Matters at Eastwatch on our return were difficult. I did not have time to think of it.’

‘No matter now, as long as you are safe,’ he said grudgingly. ‘Shall we go inside? You must both be tired, and we have many matters to discuss.’

They walked towards the castle, Jon disappearing from the awkward scene with a few muttered words and a deep frown at her Hand, Missandei moving beside her, her arm entwining in hers. ‘Are you well, your Grace? I was most concerned,’ she said quietly. ‘I am glad you decided to fly home with Lord Snow instead of taking the ship.’

‘I would have come sooner, but Jon needed time to recover,’ she replied, her voice lowering so Tyrion and Lord Varys would not overhear. ‘It was terrible up there, but I am well enough, and rested, just cold and in need of a bath.’
Her friend was eyeing her closely as they walked inside the lobby, her golden eyes full of very female curiosity. ‘Is it Jon now, is it?’ she said delicately.

‘Officially, no,’ she replied with a little smile. ‘Unofficially, yes. I will require your discretion, my friend. The last thing I need is gossip and speculation.’

‘You have it,’ Missandei said firmly. ‘As always. I like this one better than the last.’

She went to her workroom with Tyrion near immediately, not stopping to take food and drink in the dining hall, though she was famished, and closed the door behind them, leaving Varys with a promise she would catch up with all the news from his little birds in the morning. She slumped at her desk, suddenly exhausted and hoping she could get this over and done fast.

‘The mission was a success, I take it,’ he began.

‘They captured a wight, it is safe on the ship, but matters went awry, as you know,’ she said.

‘So awry, you left with three dragons, and came back with two. I hope that king of yours is worth it,’ he said acidly. ‘What in the hells happened up there?’

‘It is true. Everything Jon said, it is all true,’ she said dully, leaning her head in her hands. ‘I have never seen such horror. I have never been so terrified in all my days. Viserion was taken by a spear, thrown by the Night King himself. I saw it with my own eyes. I saw him. He is my greatest foe, not your despicable sister. She is a mere amateur compared to such mindless hate.’

‘Seven fucking hells,’ he cursed. ‘Snow is not a liar, and I suspected all along there was a great threat looming beyond the Wall I cheerfully pissed off all those years ago, but this is a calamity. What of our plans? What next?’

She stirred to look at him, her face a stiff mask of carefully controlled worry, but her gaze fixed on his green eyes, creased with frustration. ‘We go to the parley with your sister, and hope it works. Then we go north to Winterfell, and wait.’

‘You will follow him, then,’ he said angrily. ‘Give up all your plans for love. Go where everyone will hate us, where we will all freeze to death as we wait for the dead to break through the Wall and come for us. Are you that fucking enamoured that you will give up everything we hoped for?’

‘I follow him for duty,’ she hissed defensively. ‘As well as love, as you say, and I will snatch whatever joy I can get out of this predicament, whether you approve or not.’

‘I don’t approve,’ he shot back. ‘My sister has as many spies as Varys. What is she finds out you are fucking the King in the North before the parley? She won’t take that well, it will seem like we are all against her.’

‘We are all against her,’ she reminded him. ‘She is my enemy, and the Starks’ enemy, and I could not care less what she thinks of my morals. She, who killed her husband, blew up a sept full of innocent people, tried to have you killed many times, and the Gods know what else!’

She had prepared herself for a confrontation, but her temper was fraying, showing in the sharp tone of her voice, her tilted chin. She felt her eyes blaze in their sockets. ‘I thought you liked Jon Snow. I thought you wanted me to make alliances, and since when do you care who I take to my bed?’

‘I didn’t, in Mereen, but Westeros is different,’ he replied, edging close, unafraid of her visible indignation. ‘The Starks and Targaryens are sworn enemies, thanks to your brother Rhaegar abducting Snow’s aunt and sparking a rebellion that killed thousands of Northerners, including his
aunt, uncle, and grandfather. The Northerners will already resent our presence, but as soon as they catch on to the fact you are bedding their king, they will call you a whore, a seductress, and worse.’

Flinching at his thwarted hopes erupting in anger, a sting of truth weaved among the torrent of words cunningly, she spoke without thinking. ‘Not if I marry him,’ she said firmly, and watched his eyes narrow at her cynically.

‘Has he asked for your hand? Will he? Why bother, when he already has everything he came here for?’

The fraying rope holding her temper back finally snapped, his words causing a stab of pain in her wavering woman’s heart, the part of her that was still uncertain, and waiting for the blow to take her, that Jon did not truly love her at all, it was all a trick, a stupid dream she had indulged in for too long already, to her great cost.

‘That’s quite enough wisdom from you today,’ she spat viciously. ‘Send a raven to your bitch of a sister to tell her we will be in King’s Landing in three weeks’ time, and trouble me no more with your complaining.’

And with that, she rose and strode out, slamming the door behind her in a rage.

***

She had to spend some considerable time floating in the pool of the bathhouse on her back, staring at the ribbed rock ceiling and letting her mind process its thoughts before her anger started to dim, Tyrion’s frank and rather cruel words locked away to bring out and ponder over later, when she could bear it. Then she scrubbed herself near raw, her growing contentment acting like a blanket over the simmering flames of her predictable temper.

She washed her hair twice, groaning in bliss at the thought of sweet, shiny hair at last, and so clean and warm all the way through every pore on her skin was tingling she wrapped herself in a thick robe and went to her chambers, where a former bedslave from Yunkai was waiting for her. The tiny, dark woman was married to one of the Dothraki guards, and she had the special skill of removing body hair with linen and hot wax, an invaluable trade given the practice was relatively unknown in Westeros. The pain was well worth the results, to be pretty and neat, and she would have done it for herself, though she had a lover now who would appreciate it.

After the woman had left with her heartfelt thanks, Missandei came in to brush her crown of hair until it shone in the crackling firelight, and put it up in several small braids off her face, the rest trailing loose down her back. Now utterly relaxed, she switched her woollen robe for a lighter one of wine coloured silk, and slumped in a chair by the fire, her toes digging luxuriously into the thick carpet, glad to be home in civilisation.

Her friend drank a goblet of wine with her, probing for news of what happened in the north, and after her absentminded replies she got up and discreetly withdrew for the night, promising to dismiss the guards at the door, leaving her alone to brood and stare at the jumping flames, seeing no messages or visions of the future there.

She was three goblets down of Arbor Gold, and feeling rather dozy, when the black ebony doors to her chambers opened silently. Jon’s hair was still wet and loose from the bathhouse, curling appealingly around his face, his eyes wide and soot black in the dim light of the cavernous room, and he was clad in only a grey linen shirt and breeches. She eyed him closely, from his tangled hair to his bare feet, her spirits lifting at the fine sight.
‘Even your feet are pretty,’ she observed.

‘How many of those have you had?’ he said dryly, as he moved to stand over her lazy form, a picture of tipsy indolence that made him smile fondly.

‘Three, thanks to Lord Tyrion and his tiresome lectures,’ she replied, a frown creasing her brow.

‘I wish he was bigger, so I could offer to beat him bloody for you,’ he said, only half joking. ‘He did not look pleased to see me. What ails him?’

‘Many things I do not wish to spoil my evening with,’ she said lightly, unwilling to get into a serious talk about their future plans, and especially wishing to avoid the subject of marriage. ‘My Hand has no patience with lovers, or love, and thinks his gracious queen should be the same.’

His eyes flared a little as it sunk in that their relationship was now known, but then his mouth quirked sweetly. ‘You aren’t, though,’ he said softly.

‘I am a great lusty fool, it seems,’ she smiled, stretching out in the chair in a sinuous arch. ‘Do you like me better now I don’t look awful in boy’s clothes with dirty hair?’

‘Daenerys, you never look awful,’ his voice lowering. ‘But you look so beautiful I am scared to touch you and mess you up.’

‘If you don’t mess me up, I shall be disappointed,’ she pouted, making him chuckle, and she recalled the man he had been when he had first arrived at Dragonstone, so dour and subdued she had wondered whether he had ever laughed. He was not the same man now, and it was her doing.

To her delight, he sunk to his knees on the carpet at her feet, resting his head in her silken lap. Her fingers twined in his black curls, scratching his scalp lightly. He smelled delicious, like pine needles and musk and smoke. He was sniffing her as well, his hands fisting her robe and crushing the fabric into crinkles as he breathed her in. ‘I love your scent,’ he rumbled into her flesh. ‘I love how soft and warm and pretty you are. No matter what you look like, I love you.’

She sighed in relief, banishing all her unease over Tyrion’s cynical words. She was an idiot to doubt him, he who wore his heart in out in the open for her, and was incapable of lies and subterfuge. She put her goblet down carelessly on the floor, and gently tugged at his hair to get him to look at her. Her hands slid to hold the sides of his face, her fingertips rasping the soft hair there, and she bent down to take his lips, tracing the plump shape of them with the tip of her tongue before she opened her mouth to his.

The familiar rush roared in her ears, the disorientating surge of want that she had never felt with another, and his hands were inside the neckline of her robe, drawing it back to free her breasts. She was going to tell him to strip, her usual thwarted urge to see him naked before she was, but she forgot in an instant, moaning as his lips dragged down her chest to take a nipple between them, pressing down with sharp teeth until it stood proud and pink, then moving to the other, the gentle tingle of nerves rippling down her belly to twinge between her thighs, which had parted to hold him to her.

Then her robe was falling away, the knot of the sash unpicked, and she was naked, a creamy white expanse of breasts and hips and cunt against the crimson silk. ‘Oh Gods,’ he cursed, his hand moving down her stomach to cup her bare mound of flesh, already slick with moisture, his deep eyes following the path of his hand. ‘This is so beautiful, and soft, like silk, fuck…’ He was barely coherent, his accent thickening and stopping up his throat. His pale skin was flushing, and his breath was uneven and hot against her skin as he eyed her closely, just touching her very lightly.
‘Put your legs up on the chair,’ he whispered. ‘Let me see all of you.’

Shamelessly, she lifted her feet from the floor, balancing on the arms of the chair, spreading herself wide for his mouth, whining as he dipped down for the first taste, his whiskers a sweet scrape against her sensitive flesh. His tongue was as light as a feather against her cunt, only delicately lapping up her juices before pushing inside to find her nub, very gentle, teasing it instead of probing and dragging.

She lifted her hips with a louder whine, seeking friction, but he would not grant it, his hands on her thighs to pin her down in the chair. It quickly became torment, keeping her mightily roused but unable to reach the release she craved, her skin tightening so she felt as if she was shrinking smaller, and she was so wet that her robe was saturated beneath her. She writhed and mewed, tugging at his curls in desperation, until he finally paused and looked up, his beard and lips soaked with her mess, his eyes pitchy and unfocused.

‘Hold back,’ he breathed. ‘Try to hold back for me.’

In the small space between their entwined bodies she noticed his breeches were unlaced, his cock as hard as stone and held close in his right hand, while his left still held her down, and she tossed her head back and sobbed at the thought of him touching himself as he consumed her. She did not know how long she could tolerate it without going insane, the heat between her legs and bursting in her mind, her teeth worrying her lower lip as he sucked all of her into his mouth, the friction inching higher, her legs jerking in small spasms, her breath heaving as if she was sprinting for miles.

Eventually she reached breaking point and pushed him away with a sharp cry, clamping her legs together to stop from coming. ‘No Jon…oh no, oh Gods…’ She didn’t believe in them, but she knew she would be calling on them many times tonight.

The warning throb died down a little, and she wrapped her arms around her belly to dull it further as she eyed him with some disfavour, but her look had no effect. There was a distracted expression in his eyes, as if he was there with her, but not. She was picked up off the chair, a wet kiss on her puffed mouth that made her sigh, her robe stripped from her shoulders, and she was carried towards the great bed, its shadows swallowing her up as she was placed on the edge.

Freed at last, her hands snatched at him hungrily, yanking at his shirt front to urge it off, sliding his breeches down his slim hips, giving him no chance to toe them off before she was on him, her tongue swirling over the fat head of his cock before she sucked him down whole, her hands slipping to his perfect arse to grab great handfuls of it. He jumped and growled long in his chest, his fingers curling in her hair and urging her to take him all, her throat struggling to relax around him, he was so wonderfully hard and unyielding.

She slid back with a slow draw of her lips, her gaze tilting upwards to look at his face, so intent and dark with desire, his mouth hanging open, that it was both lovely and frightening. She worked him with her tongue as he had done to her, delicate jabs and sweeps where he was most reactive, making him squirm and sob in a stream of heaving breaths, tugging at her hair restlessly, twisting it in his strong fingers.

‘Daenerys, stop, please…’ he finally begged her, but she kept going until she wrenched a cry out of him, thick and desperate and very exciting.

As she set him loose with a last kiss on the tip of his cock, she didn’t even think on it. She moved, turning and getting on all fours on the edge of the bed, asking him to fuck her the way he longed to, for she wanted it too, and was no longer afraid what might float into her mind anymore, for she had
trust. It was somewhat imperfect, but enough to submit, her head bowing down as she waited for his response.

There was a long pause, only the sound of heavy breathing, then a hand on her, drifting over the cheeks of her arse and sliding between them, opening her swollen folds with care, then a swallowed curse, a swift movement of breeches being kicked to the floor.

‘Are you sure?’ he asked her gently, and she replied with an arch of her spine, flowing into his touch. ‘Tell me to stop, if you need to.’

Her hands grabbed onto the coverlet, taking handfuls of the slippery fabric, and she tensed her inner muscles deliberately, wanting to feel every solid inch as he entered. The sensation was indescribable; a bend of pain and pleasure and black, focused need that made her growl like a cornered beast, her skin quivering as she absorbed it, slow at first, horribly slow, not reaching far enough inside her to satisfy, her body moving backwards impatiently so the head of his cock hit the back of her taut channel, knocking at the entrance to her womb.

She muffled a strangled sound into the covers. The hands on her flanks tightened their grip on her, then moved her back down, her walls sliding closely along his length, dragging another rich curse out of him. She balanced on one arm, needing to touch herself to counter the warring sensations that were tying her belly in knots, her fingers gliding over her nub in practiced sweeps, the noises she was making quite inhuman as she curled into a ball under his movements, faster now, parting her flesh exquisitely with each thrust.

When he planted a foot on the edge of the bed for purchase, changing the angle of his cock within her, she lifted her flaming face from the safety of the covers and howled, no longer needing her fingers to drive her home, it was too damn good, too much, her bent body nearly breaking in two as he bore her down hard into the mattress, the pleasure now pure agony, but as sweet as honey, as sharp as a blade, the sound of him grunting with effort, muttering nonsense words as he used her harshly, sparking in her brain, which was a mass of light and dark, the two halves of her fighting until both surrendered.

Her eyes flew open as a deep pulse of release seized around his length and ensnared him, drawing him deep, but she saw nothing of the bed, or the room, or the covers held tightly in her fists, only stars in the blackness, then red; the red of blood, the red of fire. She fell forward, the weight of his body holding her flat as she felt him come inside her, thick spurts of heat that trickled down her quivering thighs, marking her as his as he sobbed into her hair, his hands rough and pinching, trying to grab hold of her sweaty skin as he collapsed at last.

She was stiff and uncomfortable, but had no ability to move, lying there as if drugged in a stupor, every pore of her skin gasping, the pulse still flickering in her loins rapidly, and she was not inclined to shrug him off, not this time. He could stay trapped inside her until he slipped out, or until he was ready once more. She wanted him to crawl inside her skin, next to her heart, and stay there, until death took them both.

Chapter End Notes

If you want the second half of what just happened this side of Christmas, you know what to do ;)}
Waters turned from blue to red as towards the sky I offer it

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A/N: Ahh, Chapter 7, a sinful, indulgent cake you shouldn’t be eating but scoff anyway (but not Christmas cake, because yuck). If you read this at work, beware of HR and IT. As always, I hope it does what it’s supposed to. Comments are cool, the last chapter was well received and I loved it, like the attention seeking whore I truly am.

Chapter 8 is likely to be post-Xmas, as I am not that great at multi-tasking. It's already in my head, but it's bloody staying there, in case I forget to buy presents for people and other dopey stuff.

Thanks to my fellow scribblers for their encouragement, and advice regarding the all-important Smut Curve (Ashleyfanfic, FrostbitePanda) and designing the Dragonstone bathhouse slightly better (Sparkles59 the hot housewife).

Outside her chamber, beyond the opaque bubble they had created around themselves, the world was clamouring for attention. Outstanding tasks to finish, the many people who advised them or relied upon them, enemies in need of vanquishing, resources to gather, unpalatable truths, and the cold chill of destiny breathing down her neck. She gave no thought to any of it, not tonight. Her mind was so hazy and vague that if pressed, she would have struggled to recall what day it was, and earlier, when he was inside her, taking her so completely she felt the impact reverberating in her bones, she would have struggled to remember her own names.

She was not one for indulging herself to excess. Her early life had been threadbare and lonely, living off dwindling resources, then handouts, and sometimes nothing at all, in a constant state of stress and hurrying from one place to the next. Later, she acquired the crude trappings of a consort, as much comfort as one of the Dothraki could obtain, but there was never any time to rest and enjoy it, as they were always moving, never in one place for long, and there was a hard edge to her married life that prevented her from truly relaxing with her husband.

Later still, there was the toil of building up her resources to launch herself on the world and claw back the honour of her ancient house, and her responsibilities to the slaves she had freed, trying to wrangle peace and order so they could go on without her once she had left for Westeros. It was not until coming home at last, to her abandoned family seat, full of cobwebs and echoes and ghosts, expecting battles and vengeance and victory, but receiving results that were far different and more complex than she had imagined, that she found it in herself to let go, and shut the world out gleefully.

When she was in his arms, when he was touching her both roughly and sweetly, when he was whispering to her in the dark of matters sad and serious, or subtly wicked or amusing, she only had eyes and ears for Jon. Her bitter regret was that the time flowed through her fingers like water in a brook, too fast to hold back so they could remain suspended in the moment, the regret of all lovers enamoured with each other in a world that would not leave them in peace.

Her body was weary, her eyes heavy, her mouth parched. There was an ache in her loins from being overwhelmed more than once, her neatly groomed hair and perfumed flesh thoroughly mauled, but at the firm scratch of nails down her back, leading to her arse, the skim of fingertips between her legs, tracing her shape and slipperiness, raw and open and lewd, she still found it in
herself to purr and shift under his caress, rolling closer to fit herself against his torso, her bottom nestling against his length, now flaccid with release.

‘You haven’t begged me to stop yet,’ he murmured into her hair, his voice low and languid.

‘I am quite resilient,’ she said. ‘More than you, it seems.’ She wriggled against him in emphasis.

‘You may need to prop it up with a stick,’ he snorted, making her laugh, not believing it for a moment.

‘You can make yourself useful in other ways and get us some wine, then,’ she replied. ‘I am a dried-out husk, and the fault is yours.’

At the bounce of the mattress as Jon uncurled himself and got up to oblige, she managed to lift her head to look, appreciating the view that she should have been accustomed to by now, of his gorgeous round bottom and expanse of pure white skin over muscles honed from constant use running and fighting. He had complained he was getting rusty from disuse from too much inactivity, and needed a partner to spar with, and soon. From what she had briefly glimpsed beyond the Wall before the horror and terror took over, his worry seemed unwarranted.

He was so quick and graceful and deadly that now she had time and space to mull it over, she felt rather giddy, like a highborn lady swooning over some puffed-up knight at a tourney. She could not imagine Jon Snow taking part in such vainglorious Westerosi pastimes, knocking other idiots off horses with sticks. Fighting was not a game to him, but a serious business, and something he claimed to not enjoy. The evidence was all over his body, a dozen scars or more, some rather winsome, others very ugly, marks of betrayal and death that filled her with fury.

She shook her head to clear it of her silly musings as he approached her side of the bed, and she sat up against the satin pillows, taking her goblet and a grateful swig, then shunting over so he could sit next to her lounging form, her gaze lifting from the red liquid in her goblet to land on his, the velvety brown irises catching in the light of bedside oil lamp, narrowing in wry amusement.

‘The lazy, bare arsed queen,’ he observed. ‘Drinking in bed. What would the people say, I wonder?’

‘There is something very decadent about drinking wine naked in bed,’ she agreed, taking another unrepentant sip, swishing it around in her mouth to clear it.

‘There is something very decadent about this place,’ he snorted, glancing around at the rich carpet, the enormous black canopied bed, all the feminine items strewn around on various dressers and coffers, the wink of gold and silver and gems. ‘I don’t know if I will ever get used to it. This is a queen’s chamber, not a place for a bastard.’

She winced at the blunt use of the word, his defensive hunch, a flash of resentment under her contented surface. ‘Did you get banished to a dirty garret at Winterfell by Lady Stark?’ she said acidly. There were a lot of things she didn’t understand about this land, but the attitude to bastard children was high on the list, seeing the results in the man she loved, a deeply buried hurt that he would never shake off, no matter how much time elapsed or titles he earned.

‘No, my chamber was nice enough,’ he said. ‘The Wall was far worse. For the first year, I thought I would die of the cold, or get an old man’s nagging bones from the hardness of my bed. Winterfell is different from the soft life of the south. It is hard and practical and un-fancy by necessity, but there is comfort and warmth too.’
At the subject of his home, which she regretted bringing up and spoiling the sensual mood, her expression grew wary. Jon put down his wine and sighed, pushing his unruly hair out of his now serious face. ‘Daenerys, after the parley, I must go home, regardless of Cersei’s response. The thought of being parted from you makes me miserable, but I have to. You said you would fight with us, you said you love me, as I love you. Which means you need to follow, much as you may dislike the prospect.’

She was going to laugh and deny it, but she wasn’t a liar, not with Jon. ‘Tyrion said the North loathes the Targaryens. He said everyone will hate us, and we will all freeze to death before the army of the dead comes.’ Her voice was neutral, but he could see her heart, he had said. He frowned, his brow furrowing over his thoughtful eyes.

‘I won’t have it,’ he said firmly. ‘No one gets to be an ungrateful shit in my hearing, or yours. My family will welcome you, and the rest of them will swear their allegiance, or else.’ His pretty mouth firmed into a thin line with anger, but then his flaring eyes found her and softened. He tried to smile. ‘Besides, I don’t think anyone will dare to be rude to you, with your Dothraki horde, and grumpy dragons, and your temper.’

She smiled weakly at his attempt to cheer her. ‘I will come,’ she said softly. ‘But the when depends on Cersei. If she will not agree to a truce, then I may need to get ruthless.’ She took another sip of wine, hiding behind her silver goblet, expecting disapproval, but there was none.

‘I am starting to think the same,’ he mused. ‘We have no time for it, and the thought of her lurking in the south, waiting for the chance to strike, makes me uneasy. I trust your judgement. I know you won’t burn King’s Landing to ash and bone, even if it would be an improvement.’

‘Thank you,’ she said simply, cheered that he no longer thought she was capable of such rash action. Her goblet now empty, she put it down, and ran her hand carelessly over the hairy thigh next to her, relaxing into the pillows. ‘Can we leave this discussion until the morning?’ she suggested with a tilt of her chin. ‘Along with the rest I must tackle with little sleep and a ravaged body I must carefully hide?’

He looked at her steadily, exasperation fading to indulgence, the harsh line of his lips softening to a lovely pout, a fingertip reaching to trace a red mark on her breast before untwining a knot in a tendril of pale hair. ‘You are a mess,’ he said in a thready whisper, a flare of black pupils amidst the brown depths, a distracted gaze she knew and loved well.

‘What did you do to me?’ she said, a deliberate tease, shifting against the pillows to display herself, hoping he would take the bait, wanting him to map her with words, exciting because of their rarity, husky and accented with pride and shame.

‘I ruined your hair,’ he admitted, stroking its knotty tangles from her throat and breasts. ‘I did this, while I fucked you the second time,’ he went on, his fingertips skimming over the bites on her neck. A pause, a catch of breath, the hand slipping down her soft belly to her waist and flanks that she quivered beneath. ‘When you invited me to take you from behind, I lost control, and I did this,’ he said quietly, touching every purple bruise on her skin. He swallowed, a blush heating his cheeks, but he went further, stroking her cunt lightly with the back of his hand, making her murmur, the hand resting to hold her in his palm. ‘And this…it is as red as a rose, and full of my seed. I hope I didn’t hurt you.’

‘Only in the best way,’ she reassured him, but he looked conflicted then, diverting her focus from his gentle touch on her sore flesh.

‘You do something to me,’ he said abruptly. ‘I struggle to explain it to myself, let alone you. I am
not good with words. But it is as if… I have this need to conquer you, because you’re so strong, so powerful. You don’t need me, you don’t need anyone, and I want to make you need me.’

She swallowed the jagged lump forming in her throat, and hunted for a reply, both moved and disturbed by the confession. ‘I don’t want you to be respectful and gentle with me,’ she said. ‘I want you to own me, to lose yourself in me, so I can lose myself in you. It is not who is stronger, or better, or who holds the reins, who has the most riches and resources, just you and I, and nothing else matters.’ She was better than him with clever words, but it still felt inadequate. He smiled though, just a small tug of his lips, and the brooding look faded somewhat.

‘And you are wrong,’ she added quietly. ‘I do need you.’

No man had ever conquered her, in the bedroom or out of it. No doubt they would spend the rest of whatever days, weeks or years they had left together squabbling over matters great and small, as she fought to assert herself, as she was accustomed to. She had her pride, so she would never speak it aloud, but he had conquered her, and it was less terrifying than she had expected it to be.

***

With the wine, the late hour, and forgetting to eat, not to mention the fading languor from making love, or fucking, as she preferred to name it, she was very drowsy, in danger of slipping off the step on the side of the pool and into the cauldron of warmth, and drowning without a struggle.

She had pinned up her hair to protect it from further despoilment, then they had thrown on clothes and crept on tiptoes through the empty hallways. They encountered no one, not even guards in the part of the castle where there were few inhabitants, some of the torches unlit, the route shadowy and chilly with the cold seeping through the dense stone, winter tightening its grip even in this softer, kinder land.

The same chill could be felt in the bathhouse, little draughts slipping through the vents in the walls, fighting through the steam from the water, which was turning her boneless and slippery with warmth, too lazy to pick up the soap and wash herself as she intended. Her mind was wandering as she sat, thinking over what Jon had said, and how his lack of confidence manifested in various ways, some intriguing, some worrying.

‘You had a lover before,’ she murmured. ‘You were not a green boy when you claimed me.’ Her eyes were closed, and she didn’t open them, hoping it would encourage him to talk without her seeming to pry.

‘She deflowered me. I didn’t get much say in the matter,’ he said. ‘I was different then. My honour was all that I had to sustain me, but she persuaded me otherwise, in the end.’

She smiled lazily and cracked her lids to look at him, picturing him much younger; vulnerable and blushing and highly annoyed, with some determined girl trying to break through his prickly walls of reserve. ‘What was she like?’

‘Wild and stroppy and funny, and brave. I loved her, but I could not make it work, with her and my duty to the Watch,’ he said absently. ‘I left her, and she put three arrows in me.’

At her burst of irreverent laughter, he turned his head and smiled at her wryly, a small quirk of his lips. ‘I shudder to think what you would do to me, Dragon Queen.’

‘Best not find out,’ she said with an arch of her brow, but his face had changed, awash with sadness. She did not need to ask whether the girl was dead. She decided then to speak of her past,
though it was painful for her too.

‘There was my husband Drogo, who I did not want at first, but I grew to love,’ she said. ‘When he died, and my child with him, I thought my life had ended, but it had only just begun.’ She moved quickly from that, not wanting to talk about her lost son, and her empty, quiet womb, not yet. ‘I had a lover in Mereen, a rogue and a braggart, but loyal and fierce and very persuasive, but I did not love him. When I left, it was without regret.’

‘Only two?’ he enquired carefully, and she laughed again.

‘I had no time or inclination for more,’ she said. ‘You have thoroughly distracted me, turned me into a creature of base instincts I never knew I had.’

That drew a soft laugh from him, a flash of dark eyes beneath heavy lids. ‘Then come here, my queen, before we fall asleep and drown,’ he said softly. ‘I may not be able to manage much, but I will try at least.’

She had the urge to swim off across the pool to make him chase her, and with a giggle she slid off the step to try it, but did not get far, grabbed when she was halfway across in a firm grip it was impossible to free herself from, even if she wanted to. With a yielding moan, she relaxed into his body, letting herself be placed back on the top step with a kiss that caught at her lips, pulling them between his teeth as he liked to do with her cunt, making her whimper as a knot began to furl in her loins, still stinging slightly from his attentions, but more than ready to be tasted and filled again.

Blindly, his mouth still taking hers, his eyes all smoky darkness that pulled her down as he stared into her, he reached for the dish of soap on the ledge, his hand leaving a trail of foam over her breasts, under her arms, making her jump at the ticklish response and giggle again, but the mirth stilling as his hands slipped lower, her thighs falling open so he could clean her. Her hands dug into his biceps in reflex, her teeth nipping at his bottom lip, a whine moving from soft to urgent as his fingers pushed inside her, then withdrew, taking more soap, and returning, moving gently within her cunt, then slipping between her cheeks.

She hissed, her nails scratching at him as one finger probed her other entrance carefully. He had touched her there before, but only cautious feints, teasing but not entering. Her other lover had been desperate to touch her or take her there, but she had flatly denied him, unenthused at the prospect of being invaded in such a way. This time, she did not snarl or edge away, absorbing the strange sensation, a mix of discomfort and pleasure that made her twitch in his grasp, her breath into his hungry mouth cut with a noise of pure distress, quivering at the current of need in her veins.

She wanted more, so she told him, making him growl with his own desire, his cock a thickening length against her thigh, then her cheeks as he flipped her around in a sudden movement and splash, bending her over the edge of the pool, her knees scrabbling for balance on the top step, her bottom lifting out of the water at his urging. At the feel of his hand inside her, filling both holes with probing fingers, she began to jerk and gasp, the pleasure building so fast she was utterly shocked, her mouth wide, eyes staring into space as she absorbed every pulse, the other hand a heavy weight against the small of her back.

It wasn’t his rough penetration which brought her release, or his thumb flicking her nub, but a sudden thought, flaring in her mind, of what it would feel like to have his much larger cock pushing inside her back entrance, stretching her in one stroke, clasped so tight it would hurt him as well as her. The thought was so wicked, so strangely delectable, it was like a blow to her belly, the orgasm taking her so fast she cried out and fell forward on the cold tiles, the lip of the pool cutting into her flesh, her hot face against the marble. Her lower half shook and bucked in reflex, her legs loosening and sliding off the edge of the step, her bottom dragging against his rigid cock, making
her growl at the thought that wouldn’t leave her, no matter that she had come already, and come hard.

His hand eased from her, his lips on the back of her neck, mouthing her through wisps of wet hair, her breasts held in his palms and weighed and fondled, his length pressed flush against the cleft between her cheeks. Suddenly it was too hot in the pool, the heat clogging up her lungs, her skin beading with perspiration, the same suffocating surge she had experienced the first time she bathed with him and he had explored her body like he already owned it.

‘Wait here,’ he whispered. ‘Keep your eyes closed, until I say so.’

With edgy amusement, she waited, her eyes obediently closed, trying to garner hints from the small sounds Jon made as he moved around the room, the flap of fabric making her very curious, the clink of glass, perhaps a bottle, or the water jug that was kept in an alcove. Suddenly a cup was pressed into her hand, and she drank thirstily, opening her eyes to smile up at him in gratitude, flushed pink and sweet, but intimidatingly hard, his cock standing straight between his strong thighs.

‘You look like you’re about to expire,’ he said softly, offering her a hand to help her out. She sniffed, but staggered a bit as she emerged, clinging to him for balance, the doe-like stare he fixed her with, full of love and need, not helping matters. The cup dropped from her shaky hand to the floor, landing safe on a heap of towels he had spread across the wet tiles as a comfortable nest.

‘We could have returned to my room, you know,’ she murmured into his curly, damp hair, nipping at his ear lightly.

‘I like it here,’ he purred. ‘Now lie down, your Grace, before you keel over on me.’

There were enough towels that she could not feel the hard floor beneath as she fell with a sigh, the black ceiling spinning somewhat she was so light headed, her legs falling open as she stretched out, wondering what was on his mind as he settled on his knees. Before he could move, his eyes inky and unfathomable, drifting over the curves and hollows spread out before him, she reached for his cock, curling her hand around it possessively, so stiff and ready there was a gleam of moisture on the pretty pink tip, which she caught and used to stroke her fingers down its full length, making him twitch.

‘This is beautiful,’ she said lazily. ‘Like the rest of you.’

His lashes fluttered at her touch, his plump lips parting in a groan as her hand tightened. ‘Stop that, or else I will be inside you in a heartbeat, and I want this to last,’ he growled, shaking his head to clear it, his hand landing on hers and stilling it. ‘Spread your legs wider.’

She let him go reluctantly, settling down on her back, shifting her legs as far apart as she could manage, her feet to the floor so her hips were tilted slightly, her arms under her head so she could watch. It did not matter that she was exhausted and had found release, it was good enough to send her wild and aching for more, always more, a demanding child writhing uselessly, his stronger hands pinching at her thighs to hold her open as he took mouthfuls of her sore flesh and soothed it carefully.

His tongue mapped every part of her except where it was most needed, until he relented and lapped at her nub firmly, drawing it out, swollen and fiery, only to be sucked until she gave a throaty cry and struggled in a thrash of limbs to escape. She burned and ached, feeling her climax just beyond her reach, but undecided on whether she wanted to let go, or remain in the golden cloud of bliss that surrounded her. Her juices flowed down her thighs and glistened on his face that was fixed in
concentration, wanting to bring her to the right pace before he entered so she could take him deep without any discomfort.

It was the thoughtfulness, the care and devotion that drove her raving mad, sending her babbling breathy words, telling him she loved him, and what he was doing to her, begging him to take her, and just when she thought she would explode, she was loosed, the pulse beating in her ears dying down, her body relaxing into the floor as she took one deep breath, then two and more to calm herself, her gaze finding him sitting up. She frowned slightly, puzzled as she noticed a small bottle in his hand, recognising it as hers, an almond oil she often used on her skin after bathing.

It was poured on his hands, then smoothed over his cock, then dropped on her folds and pushed up inside her, warm and slick. Her keening was urgent and sharp, her legs twitching and then lifting, closing around his flanks and he entered her with a single movement, gliding into her depths until her limit was reached, his belly flat against hers, a deliberate grind that fitted them together perfectly.

He was close, too close; in her vision, in her nose, in her mind, licking at her lips to force them open, his cock barely moving, just pushing against her womb, small twists and shifts to open her up. Her fingers formed into claws, and raked down his back, sinking into his arse to urge him deeper, her head thrown back to expose her throat to his teeth. She made a savage sound, a growl merging to a scream, her flesh so slippery with oil and her nectar and swollen with nerves that every tiny thrust was as devastating as if she was being fucked hard. Her black, lusty thoughts of earlier were thrown aside for now, as she found herself dominated in a different way, only the thick length inside her and the burden of his eyes holding her down.

Her legs moved backwards of their own accord to centre him within her, her heels digging into the small of his back, changing the pressure and hitting the spot high up inside her to increase the intensity. Her right leg was drawn up in a smooth movement, straightening against his shoulder and spreading her wider, the muscles under her hands bunching as he began to fill her faster and harder, twisting her in a position that made her screw her eyes closed at the pleasure that squeezed her, taking her breath, racing through her veins, flowing under her skin to every extremity.

There was pain now, despite the oil that dripped from her, a sting of rent flesh, but it was a sweet sting, a counterpoint that only drove her high, higher, balancing on top of the ice mountain she had climbed all evening, only to end with slipping and falling, tumbling into the ether to hit the ground in a heap of broken limbs, or float away like a feather.

She forced her eyes open so she could see him as she came, and he came with her, an image of black sweaty curls, black fathomless eyes, lips as full and bitten raw as her own, a flush of exertion that made him glow, all that strength coiled and poised over her, holding her trapped, then slackening as he growled and filled her with his seed for the last time, unable to give any more, as much as she was unable to take.

***

Ever since she could remember, her dreams had been dark and disturbing, full of signs and portents, images from the past, and the future, blood splashing, fire consuming, bodies piled in heaps, dragons stirring in the shadows, faces known and unknown, evil and innocent. More recently, there was the dream of blue white ice, the towering Wall in the North blasted to rubble, a limitless army of dead, rotting corpses marching tirelessly south, led by cold creatures that defied description, and always Viserion falling, falling in a fountain of hot blood and screams that would echo in her mind for eternity.

She rarely had nice dreams, or the foolish dreams of normal women. Once she had dreamed of a
mysterious lover, his face painted with shadows. That dream had been pleasant, and had become reality, but as she surfaced from sleep with a gasp, fighting against the sheets and blankets that covered her, rank with sweat, a dull, nagging ache in her belly, she prayed to the heedless Gods that her other dreams would not come to pass.

Winter sunlight dappled and lined each item that came to focus in her hazy vision, streaming high through the windows, the other half of the bed empty and forlorn, Jon having left with the dawn to find his own bed before Missandei and the servants arrived to help her dress. The ache in her belly was also in her spine, a painful kink above her tailbone. As she was rarely ill she dimly wondered what was wrong with her, beyond tiredness and too much of everything the night before, her temples throbbing with a headache to complete the discomfort.

There was a knock at the door, and she sat up clumsily, holding the sheet to her breasts as she answered, her eyes skimming over the evidence in the chamber. Her crumpled silk robe, empty goblets beside the bed, the rumpled covers, a linen shirt on the floor beside the dead fireplace, her lips quirking in amusement at the thought of Jon being so sleepy he had streaked to his room half naked.

Missandei entered the room in her usual elegant stride, her calm face rather animated, her eyes dancing as she looked at her. ‘Your Grace, it is near noon, this is most unlike you,’ she smiled. ‘Lord Tyrion is most desperate to talk to you. He said something about having to grovel?’

‘As he should,’ she muttered. ‘I am sorry, my friend. I got little rest last night.’

‘I can see,’ Missandei replied. ‘I trust you enjoyed yourself.’

She smiled secretively. ‘More than you can imagine.’

‘What is he like?’ her friend dared to ask with rather a wicked smile. ‘He is so quiet, and he seems…very awkward.’

‘He has hidden depths,’ she said simply, not willing to reveal any more than that, it was private to her, almost sacred, not anything she was comfortable gossiping about, even with her dear friend.

‘You love him,’ Missandei said, ever observant. ‘I noticed it, on your return. You are glowing with it, but it frightens you too.’

‘How well you know me,’ she replied, smiling warmly at her companion of many years and troubles, who could always read her like a book. Groaning, she slid her legs to the floor and stood up, intending to hunt for her woollen robe to counter the chill in the air, but then her friend gave a shocked sound that made her pause.

‘Your Grace, you are bleeding!’

‘What?’ she said sharply, her hands running down her naked body to look for a cut or a wound she had somehow acquired while abed, her fingers finding blood, sticky and dark red on the inside of her thighs. She stared at her hands stupidly, then the mess on her legs, something she had not seen for an age, not since she had lost her child. Her womb did not shift with the phases of the moon, it was as dry as dust, as fallow as a frozen field. She had not bled for more than half a dozen years, under a curse she believed was permanent.

Missandei drew closer, eyeing her cautiously, her words careful, but firm. ‘Your Grace, in all the time we have been friends, I have never known you to have your moon blood. You know what this might mean. You can now have a child.’
She was so stunned it took some time for the words to sink through, but then she shook her head in denial. She could not bring herself to hope, not about this. She had come to terms long ago that she was the last of her house, the grief still there, but hidden under layers of her other tragedies.

‘It’s just blood. It means nothing.’

Chapter End Notes

Before I forget, nominate your favourite fics in the inaugural Jonerys Fanfic Awards (disclaimer, this is not an inducement to nominate ME) organised by the lovely NoOrdinaryLines, linkie –
http://noordinarylines.tumblr.com/post/168290728305/jonerys-fanfiction-awards-2018
Felt it in my fists, in my feet, in the hollows of my eyelids

A/N: I didn’t think I was going to manage it, but Christmas Smut, yay. Shower me with the gift of comments if you enjoy my trash. I hope people have time for smut this week (there should always be time for smut) and I don’t get the sound of crickets.

In this chapter some diplomacy, unresolved tension, and experimentation. The next chapter will start delving into serious matters as well as sweet shameless porn, and at least some of Episode 7. I am off on summer holiday for three weeks, but there will be an update or two.

Have fun, happy holidays and thank you for reading.

She needed space, a blank space cast up around herself, so she could drag her scattered focus back to what was meant to be vital to her as a queen, not a woman rocked with emotions that veered from one extreme to the next, the half-forgotten turmoil of her moon blood making all that was boiling in her brain that much more jarring.

When she pictured her new-found love, it was as a horse run mad across the moors of the island; a black horse, foaming with sweat, wild eyed, its mane tossing in the wind, purposeless without a rider or destination, and likely to kick out if she tried to bring it to heel. Black, like his curls between her fingers. Black, like his changeable eyes when he was sad, or brooding, or buried inside her body, making her weak and desperate and hungered. Black, like the yawning chasm of the unknown future at her feet.

Although Tyrion had apologised to her the day after her return, his manner subdued and wary, with a thread of lingering exasperation, the bitter truth behind his words still lingered like a foul taste in her mouth. She should never lose sight of the fact she was not free, and Jon was not free, to do as they pleased, much as she may resent it. She could not take a lover and refuse to face the consequences, so she tried to face them now, as her womb ached and bled and piled on more cares and worries.

The unpleasant mess, the nagging fatigue, the possible implications were a huge inconvenience as she ploughed through her neglected work and carefully avoided his confused eyes searching for her at meals, his still figure poised in a doorway, or the hall, or on the fringe of a council meeting, trying to read her mind, but not being given the chance to say anything that might soothe her.

She avoided Jon as best she could, which used to be easy enough when he was a reluctant guest at Dragonstone and used to skulk around, sullen and awed, but now he was everywhere, on friendly terms with everyone except Tyrion, increasingly comfortable in the exotic surrounds, and determined to be in her presence whether she liked it or not. Only her workroom was out of bounds, and her bedchamber when the guards were on duty.

As the days wore down and the blood slowed to a trickle, she began to question herself vehemently, what kind of stupid game of evasion she was playing, letting her misgivings rule her, refusing to accept what was plain on his face, and in his halting, husky voice, her practiced cynicism and that of her advisors ruining her chance at happiness, no matter how brief. She was a weathervane, blown to the four winds, but the three jagged, adult obstacles of children, marriage and ruling had not been discussed, and she was not yet brave enough to bring them up herself, that trust Jon had earned still flawed by her long years of struggle and suspicion.
It was easy to stand toe to toe in the bedroom, or the bathhouse, and give her body freely, but the rest of her was harder to win. She loved him, oh she loved him with a desperation that voided all physical restraint, like an animal with its mate, mindless and territorial, but how to make it work as people, as queen and king, as partners, she was still not sure of that. And even if she let him, she did not know whether Jon had the eloquence to convince her that everything would work out in the end. He was likely not sure himself.

As soon as she had risen after their blissful night of little sleep and much else, she had shut herself away in her workroom and caught up on all the news of the fractured realm, receiving Tyrion and Varys, and her Bloodriders. Then she had turned her mind to the future, and the practicalities of both fighting or holding in the south, and fighting in the hostile north; the daunting task of moving and provisioning thousands of people. Ravens were flung to the sky to seek help where possible, even across the Narrow Sea, and to Dorne; a leaderless tumult of warring lords, some of which might suit as allies.

Word had returned that a deputation was already on their way to Dragonstone, and she dearly hoped it would bear fruit, providing an organised reserve in case Cersei was to refuse their offer of a truce, or told a pack of lies and turned on them in the heartbeat. Her Unsullied were recalled from Casterly Rock, ordered to strip the Westerlands bare of all food and fodder that could be found without leaving the people too destitute. Jon had sent word to the Vale Lords to send more food and men direct to Winterfell, and she was considering sending precious ships to Pentos to buy more provisions with her dwindling gold.

It was a logistical nightmare, but it kept her busy, her advisors happy to have their queen back at the helm, and it kept her from the temptation to lock herself away with Jon, lie her weary head on his shoulder, and tell him she couldn’t do it all without him.

During the daytime, the temptation was easy to resist. When he wasn’t at meetings, or at meals, he was down in the cave working, or out in the courtyard sparring with Dothraki fighters who were far bigger than himself, drawing quite the audience to watch him move like a dancer, staying just out of range of their wickedly sharp arakhs, as fluid and dangerous as a shadowcat. At night time however, she was lonely, her heart slow and hollow, dozing in fitful bursts and then waking to find the bed horribly empty.

This night, she lay awake with a great pile of books and papers, the oil lamp turned up high, hoping to bore herself to sleep, but it wasn’t working, a low drone in her ears from her churning thoughts, a dull ache in her womb that wasn’t from the bleeding, but a need that had retreated for a few days but was building again as she recalled Jon in the courtyard, flushed and sweaty from effort, and other recent memories, the sweet yet shocking intimacy making her squirm a little and send papers fluttering to the floor.

She yawned widely, considering whether to return to her old pastime of relieving herself with her fingers, and then froze, hearing the rumble of male voices in the hall, two different tongues struggling to communicate and failing, becoming raised and irritable.

She rose quickly, knocking the rest of her work to the carpet, and ran to the door, opening it a crack and finding what she expected; her hulking guards menacing a smaller figure, looking uncomfortable, but determined, still fully dressed despite the late hour. She spoke a few blunt words in the harsh language of her adopted people and they stepped aside. ‘Come in,’ she said simply, and retreated, hunching under her heavy woollen bedrobe, unsure if she was pleased or annoyed as Jon slipped inside and bolted the door. She kept her back to him, waiting.

‘Every night I have come to your chamber to find those great brutes guarding the door,’ he began,
his low voice clipped and defensive. ‘Every day I have looked for you, to find you slipping away, or looking elsewhere. Are you going to tell me what I have done to offend your Grace?’

Bloody hell, she thought, guilt swamping her, and she turned on her heel, gathering her wits to soothe his hurt feelings, finding his striking eyes waiting, causing a twist of pain in her heart. ‘I am so sorry,’ she said gently. ‘I needed time to catch my breath, and catch up with my duties.’ She straightened, and tried to resist crossing her arms in defence. He was not a man you could play foolish female games with. It wasn’t enough, so she sighed heavily. ‘As to my nights, I have been having my moon blood these last few days. I believe men find that disgusting and inconvenient.’

There was a heavy frown of confusion, but then it cleared without a blush or shuffling feet of embarrassment, which surprised her. Most men were very uncomfortable with the subject, preferring to think of women as pure and ever beautiful, or objects of accessible desire, not messy and bloody. But then again, Jon Snow was always surprising her.

‘And do you think I am only interested in seeking you out to fuck you?’ he said, weary exasperation thickening his accent.

‘No,’ she said firmly. ‘I know you better than that.’

He sighed and rolled his eyes a little, but the corner of his mouth turned up reluctantly. ‘You’re a damn silly woman sometimes.’

‘I can be,’ she agreed with a soft laugh of relief as he stepped forward, a little cautiously, his smile still wry, but growing. She closed the gap herself, the relief making her limp and clingy as she sunk into his arms, sniffing his familiar musky scent, enjoying the chilly hands through her robe, the warm lips pressing hers briefly.

‘It will be most unusual to be in your bed and do nothing but sleep,’ he rumbled into her hair.

‘It is very unusual,’ she said dryly. ‘I pray it doesn’t last much longer.’ At his chuckle, she knew that she had evaded for now all those serious, stinging words that needed to be said, and that she would sleep deeply, safe, and comforted.

‘I love you.’ He muttered dozily after they had undressed and settled down under the covers, the lamps turned down so the room was pitch dark, no moonlight piercing through the thick cap of clouds over the island. She murmured a reply and rolled on her side, tucking herself into his body in her normal position.

‘Don’t shut me out again.’

***

The morning arrived along with the emissaries from Dorne, unexpectedly early, the wind blowing from the south for the last few days speeding their journey. She woke with the intention of seeking out Jon and having that dreaded adult talk she had been long delaying, but there was no time. As she rose she found no trace of blood between her thighs, and with a growing contentment she bathed and dressed for a formal reception in the throne room, graciously receiving the two lords and their attendants, who had made the long trip to discuss the disruption to Dorne and their support for her war. Their idle troops could do Cersei a considerable amount of damage if they could be convinced to attack without the vengeful Martells leading them on, and she needed them.

It was after noon when she retired to her workroom to read the messages of the day, Missandei following in her wake, but she paused at her desk, hovering over the loaded expanse of rosewood.
Centred within the books and scrolls and quills was a surprise gift from the rocky strand fringing the island; small, pretty shells arranged in a spiral pattern which she traced with a fingertip, a lump forming in her throat, each one delicate and tinted pink and cream and gold. The last one in the centre had a familiar shape, like a pair of lips of either kind, causing her to laugh softly.

'What is it, your Grace?' Missandei enquired with a sly, sideways flash of her golden eyes.

'Wooing,' she said briefly, her mouth curling fondly, picturing her lover fossicking around on the beach, picking each shell with care, not brooding or fretting or fighting, but free and burdened with nothing but an urge to impress her with a frivolous but beautiful gesture.

'Shall I clear away the mess?'

'No, leave them, but please find me a vessel to keep them in for later.'

Her eyes were misting a bit as the lump expanded, making her throat tight, her words clumsy. In a shining moment, she didn't care. She didn't care about any of it; what people would say about them, how they would judge, whether his intentions were honourable, or whether she was barren, or could now bring life into a world threatened by cold, creeping death. It was the same reckless, stupid love that drove her north, rescuing Jon from the monsters that could destroy them all, and paying a high price. She would do it all over again, if she had to.

The rest of the day she was quiet and thoughtful, floating on a cloud, the happiness of a woman in love, not a queen. She dressed for dinner in a gown that would both impress her visitors and provoke her lover somewhat, a half-forgotten gift from the Dornish unearthed from her wardrobe. The gown was a deep crimson silk that dipped in the front and back to display a creamy expanse of flesh, with tight sleeves and silver scrollwork around the low neckline, framing her breasts like half-moons amidst the heavy silk, the skirts loose and layered in a small train. It was not her usual style and not suited for a chilly winter evening, but practicalities were not on her mind.

The dinner was an informal gathering in the supper room, just her closest advisors, Lords Lemonwood and Dayne, and Jon, who had not yet arrived when she entered the room to bows and appreciative looks from the men.

'Your Grace is a vision of loveliness,' Lord Dayne said, his deep blue eyes taking her in from her neatly coiled hair to her slippered feet. He was a tall, handsome man, with the blood of the Andals and the First Men giving his fair colouring. His companion was smaller, dark skinned and sloe eyed with a thin moustache, more like the traditional Dornishman.

'I thank you,' she smiled, taking her seat at the head of the table. 'I thought I should wear something from the south in your honour, though it is now too cold for it.' It was a pretty lie, she had not worn it for them, though appearances were important for tricky negotiations.

They proceeded to start on the food that was brought out by the servants with polite chit-chat, familiar to her from previous events but still dull, her eyes flicking to the open door on occasion, her impatience building as she picked at the meat on her plate, sipped at Dornish Red and used her practiced charm. At last, there was a stirring at the door, a muttered apology. Jon looked as drab as a sparrow compared to the lords in their peacock-bright silks and brocades, clad as usual in layered wool and leather and his gorget, but in her eyes, he outshone them both.

Everyone rose. 'May I present Jon Snow, the Bastard of Winterfell and King in the North,' Tyrion drawled. 'A guest and ally of our gracious Queen.' There was a dry emphasis on ally which made her tear her gaze loose and arch a brow at her Hand in warning. 'Your Grace, this is Lords Dayne and Lemonwood of Dorne.'
'Well met, my lords,' Jon said politely with a dip of his head in their direction, sitting down at the far end of the board, his dark stare taking in every person neutrally, then landing on her and narrowing, his lips parting in a hiss of breath she could see but not hear. 'Your Grace,' he said, rather curtly, the expression on his face twisting, almost as if he was displeased. Confused, she sat down in a rustle of silk, hiding in her goblet. He continued to stare at her most indiscreetly, she could feel the weight of his eyes on the bare skin of her exposed throat.

The lords were eyeing him with considerable interest. ‘We have heard stories of your deeds at Winterfell even in Dorne, your Grace,’ Lord Lemonwood said with a grudging smile.

‘The bastard son of Ned Stark,’ Lord Dayne said thoughtfully. ‘Lord Stark defeated my uncle in combat, despite being the lesser swordsman. I have heard the tale many times. I have also heard rumour that he left Dorne with a babe in arms. You, I presume?’

‘I have heard that tale too,’ Jon said stiffly. ‘But I don’t know where I was born, my Lord. My father told me nothing before he was unjustly executed.’

‘Curious,’ Lord Dayne said softly, his blue gaze locked on Jon. ‘Most curious. I always heard Lord Stark was rather fair of hair. Perhaps your last name should be Sand, instead of Snow. You have the dark eyes of the Dornish.’

Jon was looking so uncomfortable at this, she moved to intervene quickly. ‘The Dornish appear to be quite diverse. You have blue eyes and fair colouring yourself, my Lord. I believe we share an ancestor or two?’

Fortunately, that diverted the conversation down easier paths, Tyrion starting up with his quick wit and amusing chatter, but Jon was very quiet, not contributing much to the discussion, rather sullen and impolite, his eyes flicking to her constantly over the heaped table. She laughed and chatted and worked the room like the queen she was supposed to be, but her gaze constantly clashed with his, sending a confused jolt through her every time.

‘I am surprised you haven’t made an alliance through marriage yet, your Grace,’ Lord Lemonwood said to her abruptly. ‘You have been here for some time, surely there have been suitors?’

She stared at her untouched plate, composing a suitable reply to such a probing question. ‘I prefer to win the crown by my own efforts, my Lord,’ she said steadily as she looked up. ‘Not by marrying some idle, perfumed lord or prince.’ There was a bite to her words that moved Tyrion to clear his throat, but he went unheeded. ‘Besides, the eligible lords of Westeros have been thinned out of late by endless war and treachery.’

‘You are a most unconventional queen,’ the swarthy lord smiled, appearing unruffled. ‘The Dornish do not fear the rule of women, but I hope you will find a suitable consort when the war is won. I pray it will be soon. It would be a shame for a woman of your astonishing beauty and talents to remain alone.’

She gave an automatic smile at his flattery, but she was uncomfortable herself now, and from the other end of the table she felt a thrum of anger in the air. Her gaze flicked briefly to Jon, to find him glowering and struggling to hide it. She cursed silently and moved to act. ‘You are too kind, my Lord, but tell me of your wife, your children, your home. Has the winter reached the deserts yet?’

The simple happiness of earlier had been squashed under the weight of reality. This was her reality, duelling with words, handling arrogant lords and princes with strong views on what a queen must do, not as she pleased, but what was expected.
Her silence was an echo of her lovers’ as the other dinner guests talked idly. Frustration was brewing, the room was stuffy, the conversation tedious, Jon was clearly vexed. She had to get out, get some air. She rose and murmured some lie and left in a trail of silk, retreating quickly down the hall to her usual spot for brooding, the small balcony open to the freezing night. She shivered in her inadequate gown, the stone railing as cold as death under her hands, the stars distant and uncaring, the invisible ocean a dull roar down beneath the cliffs.

There was a scrape of boots on the slate tile, and strong arms wrapping around her, a scratch of whiskers on the curve of her neck, and then lips, warm and plump, dragging up to her ear and kissing the spot behind it that always made her convulse. She did not speak or turn, she went slack in his grasp, urging him on by pressing her bottom backwards into his hips, tilting her head so he could get better access to her throat. A mindless haze took over, and she moaned instead of grumbled as his hands delved beneath the neckline of her gown to catch her nipples and pinch them. She would enjoy the moment, as she always did, and not dwell on her gloom.

‘This dress…’ he whispered. ‘This pretty whore’s dress better be for me, and not for those pair of haughty fools.’

‘Appearances are important to fancy southron lords,’ she murmured. ‘But worry not, I wore it for you, so you can struggle to take it off later.’

‘I will tear it in two,’ he rumbled, nosing at her hair, and drinking in her scent, a blend of eastern perfume and her own body.

‘Don’t you dare,’ she breathed, squirming a little at the hot breath decorating her skin, her nipples hard with the cold and his rough handling, poking above the neck of the gown, on display like a tart parading her wares. ‘Stop that. This can wait for more appropriate time,’ she added, rather annoyed now, trying to shake him off and failing. ‘We have to go back, and I can’t return to dinner looking ravaged.’

Ideally, she wanted him to have her skirts up in a flash and touching her where she was now throbbing with want, but there was common sense to think of. Cursing softly, Jon eased off her after tucking her breasts back beneath her gown tidily. She turned around to kiss him briefly, barely visible in the dark but tense under her hands and lips.

‘I don’t want to go back,’ he muttered. ‘I am useless at empty talk. I will leave as soon as it is polite to do so.’

She kissed him again with a sigh, and stepped back. ‘We need those lords on our side,’ she said reasonably. ‘Much as you may dislike their conversation. I did not care for it much myself, but you are still a king, reluctantly so, but surely you understand the importance of allies?’

‘Of course I do,’ he snorted. ‘But I would be better equipped at dealing with them if they weren’t asking rude questions and staring at the queen’s tits.’

That made her laugh, and she tugged at his arm to get him to move. ‘Come, your Grace,’ she said fondly. ‘They can look, but only you get to touch.’

He did not budge. A hand went to her face, making her turn back and look at him, his face all shadows but his words determined. ‘When it is a more appropriate time, I need to ask you something important.’

Her heart leaped, then sunk into her slippers, the husky, simple words signalling his intentions, and she wondered dimly how she would deal with it, when the moment came, what she wanted with all
her being, despite all the traps she could plainly see and had been agonising over since their return home.

‘Later then, my love,’ she said gently. ‘Spend the night with me.’

***

She managed another hour at dinner with a thwarted ache in her loins, a slickness between her legs, and misgiving in her heart, and retired with grace, leaving Tyrion, Varys and the Dornish lords to drink and talk quite convivially. When she reached her chamber, and dismissed Missandei and the guards with her thanks, she poured some wine to sip, washed and primped, and waited, fiddling with the bottles and jars on her dresser, tidying them absentely as she wondered what would come first, business or pleasure.

When Jon entered the room, it was as if he had the right to be there, instead of sneaking in as previously, and despite the hour being early and the higher risk of being noticed, he had shed some of his formal clothes, clad simply and lightly in a dark blue tunic she had not seen before. She paused in the middle of the carpet, her stockinged feet curling into its thick fibres, her eyes skimming upwards to land on the pulse flickering in his smooth throat, her lips parting at the urge to mouth it in a sucking bite.

The lust of earlier subdued all words as he paced, then circled her still figure, not talking, not thinking over anything other than how to get inside the gown he seemed to both love and hate. His eyes were glossy, absent, and dark, an earthy richness that pulled at her, took all her focus, a tingle burning down her throat to the shallow valley between her breasts, which were rising and hardening under the silk. Pleasure first then, thank the Gods.

‘Take it off,’ he ordered her in a whisper.

‘No,’ she breathed. ‘You take it off.’

She sensed the edge, the glittering blade between their bodies, he would not go easy with her tonight, their mutual frustration with the world and each other leading to interesting results, biting and clawing, her body bent and twisted into a receptacle to absorb all that energy, and the prospect made her quiver from head to toe.

Slowly, her hands went to the neckline of her gown, her fingers hooking under the crusted silver edging and pushing it off her shoulders so her breasts peeked out, her nipples nearly as dark as the fabric, causing a hitch of breath between his lovely lips. ‘This is all yours,’ she murmured, skimming over the small mounds of taut flesh. ‘All of it. Come take it.’

He knew her, the instinctual, animal part of her by now, he knew how to drive her forward, drive her mad, what parts of her to touch, and how to make her melt like a candle. Her faith was perfect on that front, the rest could wait. This silent, subtle man, with his good heart, his utter loyalty and dedication, she truly knew what was hidden inside him, a darkness, an aggression carefully controlled, only let loose in fighting or fucking. Everything about her was aimed to provoke to see it set free, and it worked splendidly.

A flash of brown eyes darkening to ink, hands squeezing her waist and picking her up like a doll, his face pressed between her breasts, suckling, biting, murmuring a curse, and sniffing, breathing in the warmth of her skin. Her gown rucked up in bunches as her legs circled his hips and she ground downwards against the firm length in his breeches, her fingers messing up his hair, searching and tugging it half loose from its knot. Her nipples were caught between his teeth and pulled until they were tender, then the upper curve of her left breast sucked at harshly to leave a purple mark.
The slippery silk of her gown and her weakened legs caused her to drop to the floor in a slide, but she was turned about, her arm bent behind her back and marched to the waiting bed. She feigned a struggle, which invited a tightened grip on her, a grunt of effort as she was hoisted onto the mattress on her knees, the slither of heavy skirts pushed up over her head, smothering her in the crimson fabric and leaving her exposed, naked but for the stockings tied below her knees.

Her arse was on display, fondled with rough, scratchy hands, light pinches near her openings where she was already dripping with nectar, the twinges of pain making her squirm and gripe. A rustle of clothing shed and tossed to the floor, a thunk of boots, then a shifting on the bed. She braced herself, expecting him to take her straightaway and relishing the prospect, but something else instead, his attentive mouth framed by his hands pulling her apart so he could see and taste everything inside and out, his tongue swiping from back to front in a firm sweep, landing on her nub and circling it to draw it out, his lips drawing the rest of her in so deep she felt every hair on his face scraping her raw.

Hoarse, needy moans welled up from her throat, muffled under her skirts but loud in her ears, her shaking legs spreading wider, her spine arching to increase the friction, a soft growl against her cunt as she filled his mouth with her slippery flesh, her unique taste, which he had told her once was akin to an overripe pear, sharp but sweet on his tongue.

The pleasure spiked, she cried out as he her loins throbbed in warning, and she shunted forward, trying to get away to maintain control, preferring to torment herself by holding off for a while. Mercifully, he freed her for a moment, one last drag over her nub before his mouth was replaced by his fingers, dabbling inside her teasingly, then pushing deep, the abrupt stretch countering the pleasure that had consumed her, hurting just enough to keep her safely on the plateau. Then he was toying with her back entrance again, spreading wetness there and easing inside more carefully, the unique sensation making her rigid, then relaxing as she was slowly opened.

‘Ahh...oh Gods,’ she growled, ashamed at how much she loved to be touched there but unable to stop writhing and making noises of pleased distress. That thought, that urge she had felt in the bathhouse that had sunk into the recesses of her mind, floated to the surface. She weighed it, considered it carefully even as she continued to groan and move slightly to take his fingers deeper. She would deny him nothing, he would deny her nothing, and she could always tell him to stop if it was too much, and he would obey.

She sat up, flipping her skirts back down her body, his fingers slipping from her as gently as possible. She leaned back into his arms in a rustle of fabric, now thoroughly creased and annoyingly between her and his bare, hard body. She reached backwards to get at the tiny hooks down the back of the gown, but Jon stilled her hand, doing the tricky job himself with fumbling fingers, the odd nip to her neck as he worked.

‘I thought you liked what I just did to you,’ he said in a low purr against her ear. She did not speak straightaway, instead leaned forward so he could pull the gown over her head and throw it aside carelessly.

‘I do like it,’ she replied, wriggling slightly in emphasis, his cock a hot weight against the cleft of her arse as he pulled her flush against his loins. ‘I like it so much I want you to take me there.’

‘Fuck...what...’ The hands on her waist squeezed in reaction, forcing the air from her lungs. She was turned around, blushing pink, her eyes evasive, but the hand grabbing her chin made her look at him. He appeared slightly crazed, his expression a blend of avid greed and unease, black eyes cutting through her, his mouth hanging open in shock, a slash of red on his cheekbones. ‘Have you...have you even done it in that fashion?’ His voice was as thick as fog, and raspy with it.
‘No, you would be the first,’ she said coyly. ‘But if you don’t want to try it…’

‘I am afraid of hurting you,’ he replied, but he licked at his bottom lip, his gaze now absent and turned inwards. Her eyes dropped down, finding him so stiff his cock was a vivid red at the tip and sheened with fluid. Since she was already revealed as utterly shameless, she tightened her hand around him closely.

‘I will tell you to stop, if I cannot bear it.’

A flutter of eyelashes, the dazed look fading to resolve. ‘Lie back on the pillows,’ he whispered. ‘I need to see you if we do this.’

She rose on her knees and kissed him briefly, running her tongue over his puffed bottom lip, and moved to lie down as instructed, nerves prickling and jumping as she settled and waited, both very tense and very relaxed. To fuck in such a manner had never appealed to her before, assuming it was something brutish men liked to do to whores, but this was very different. She was so aroused she couldn’t keep still, and she ached badly between her parted thighs, so badly she flinched when Jon crawled up the bed and placed his hand over her swollen flesh.

There was no lack of wetness to ease his path, but his fingers sliding over her to gather it up and rub it over her back entrance made her squirm and buck and keen wildly, biting her lip, and then his, her hands clawing deep into his shoulders as she fought her climax hard. When he lifted her leg up and slid inside her cunt, she gave up and released with a sharp cry and a thrash of limbs, frustrated yet eased, her orgasm fluttering around his cock as he slowed and stopped, cursing and going rigid to fight the urge to follow.

His breath was in her mouth, his lips a tight seal as he withdrew and hoisted her leg a little higher, now slick enough to chance it, positioning at her arse and pushing one inch, then two, breaching her with a savage noise and a shudder as he tight muscles resisted, and yielded. It burned, and she whimpered at the pain, but then he pushed deeper, very carefully, and she spread her legs wider, opening herself up with a groan. The pleasure flowed through her in a flood of firing nerves which sent her aching to take more, though it still hurt, her limbs stiffening then slackening as both sensations fought with each other.

When he was completely sheathed inside her, he collapsed, trembling like a leaf, his hands on either side of her head, fistling the pillows with such effort she heard the tearing of cloth. She couldn’t look at him, he couldn’t look at her, his face tucked into her neck, as flushed as the rest of him. Her mouth was gaping, her eyes scrunched as she struggled to absorb the thickness, unsure whether to tell him to pull out, or move, do something at least. She struggled, trapped under his weight, mewling and helpless, and her tiny movements settled her down, her griping turning to throaty moans as the pain receded to nothing but a feeling of fulness that was so incredible her head felt as if it would burst.

Every part of her felt swollen, her lips, her cunt, even her toes, full with the inner pressure, too full. At last, he gained control of himself, lifting up and bending her body a little so he could pull back and enter her again in one tight slide. Her eyes flew open and she screamed, a ragged scream, his hand flattening on her quivering belly to hold her down, then slipping to touch her, wet and spread open, his fingers delving into her cunt to fill both entrances at once as he moved, careful but deliberate, breaking her in slowly though he was fighting to resist the need to fuck her hard.

She had never seen him so tightly leashed, his face all hard lines of strain, his lids fluttering to hide his liquid eyes, sweat trickling down his creased brow, black tendrils falling loose. It was so intense, so fierce and shattering, that when she began to climax it took her by force, and then she could not stop. She was lying in a bed of flame, a burning pyre, delirious with fire flowing over her
skin and under it, her cries tearing at her throat, her body fishtailing in spasms, her fingernails sinking deep and raking bloody furrows down his back.

He finally surrendered and took her harshly, each deep lunge in her arse, each circular movement of his hips pinning her to the bed, drawing the ecstasy out, like a thread that uncoiled and uncoiled and tensed, then snapped as her thighs and taut walls clamped around him, an answering cry wrenched from his chest as he fell forward again, crushing her as he came and came, as ruined and wrecked as herself.

Though she felt oblivion beckoning her into the shadows, she stroked him soothingly and murmured nonsense into his tangled hair, her legs twining around him possessively at every twitch inside her. There was now nothing left for her to hide behind, the last veil of reserve torn away, only what she was struggling with in her mind left to reveal.
I would put them back in poetry if I only knew how

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A/N: If you survived Christmas, awkward family dinners and meh presents, and also the Forbidden Smut of the previous chapter, please enjoy Chapter 9. I didn’t get as far as I was expecting in the story, but I think this works as a single longish piece. Contains mucho dialogue, for reasons. I realise this is a terrible day to post, but I can see my stats, I have a shitload of readers. When you don’t comment, I assume you don’t like it. I make the polite, respectful observation that this is not erm, motivational? Thank you again to those who bother.

True story, part of this was written on a boat. This amused me, so I had to do it, even though it was three in the morning on a cheap arse overcrowded ferry devoid of romance, or boatsex.

Dedicated to sparkles59, as thanks for the ‘technique’ suggestion.

She was in that eerie state, poised between awake and dreaming, where odd flashes of thought and visions rolled through her mind in a stream that she could not shut out by sinking down beneath the wavering, fractured surface.

She heard the howl of a wolf, heart breaking and forlorn, as she wandered lost through the tall grass of the Dothraki sea, then as she stumbled and slipped through an endless field of crusted ice and rocks. She saw her hands in front of her eyes, smeared with blood that dripped from her centre, then the hands were clean, smoothing over her belly in a sensual glide, a belly that was full and round and shifting beneath her touch.

She hovered above another image like a floating ghost from the old stories, watching two figures twisted in a knot on a wide bed, light and dark, their faces unseen but the bodies familiar, the woman’s legs spread wide and held down, the man’s back and arm muscles straining to keep her in place as he took her in slow, deep lunges, a needy keening from the woman echoing in her ears as she flinched away from the scene.

A ring of blades, a high screeching sound that thrummed discomfortingly in the back of her brain, a burst of fire, red and an unearthly blue, a wall of blue-white ice, then black glittering stone rising high into the shadows. A series of hard, cold faces unknown to her, and then her lover’s face, the light in his beautiful eyes shifting to dull shock, then distaste, then blankness, like dark forest pools filmed with a sudden frost.

The last made her turn restlessly under the covers, her lids struggling to open so she could escape, an arm flailing out to find the other half of the bed empty, though she sensed Jon somewhere close by. Grumbling, she forced herself to full awareness, her braided hair an awkward mass at the back of her head, her skin sticky with sweat, a slight feeling of tenderness where he had fucked her that made her twitch at the vivid memory. It was a satisfaction laced with shame; shame at how she had instigated it, then struggled with it, then finally revelled in it, luring him down a darker path in their coupling that she hoped would be repeated on occasion, if he wasn’t too shocked at her forward behaviour.

The satisfaction made her stretch in a languid arch, her waking dreams becoming faded and elusive, and she finally opened her eyes, the blurry image of his face hovering over her smoothing
to firm lines of jaw and nose and pink, soft lips framed by neat whiskers, pale skin slightly flushed and damp, as if he had recently bathed, and those singular eyes, which looked at her as if she was the most precious thing on earth, rather than an imperfect, rather wicked woman who was all creased and rumpled and sweaty.

‘How long was I asleep?’ she murmured dozily.

‘Near on two hours,’ Jon said. ‘You were very restless though. Was it a nightmare?’

‘No, nothing I can really remember,’ she replied, her mind now registering he was dressed again. ‘Where have you been?’

‘I went to get you some food, and some water for washing, if you like,’ he said. ‘I noticed you didn’t eat much at dinner, and I heard your stomach rumble in your sleep.’

She raised a brow at this, then smiled as she felt the rumble herself. ‘You are right, I am famished.’ She sat up, uncaring she was naked, and eyed the plate of food and goblet of white wine beside the bed. ‘Oranges,’ she groaned in bliss, and snatched at a fat segment, sucking down the juice and pulp and immediately taking another. ‘I have seen nothing but withered apples for weeks.’ She was making a mess of herself, but felt childlike greed at such a rare treat, instantly reviving at the sweetness clearing her palate.

‘Your Dornish visitors brought two barrels with them apparently,’ he said with a pleased smirk. ‘And lemons and olives, Missandei said.’

‘Riches better than gold,’ she purred through a mouthful. ‘That was most thoughtful of them.’ She started on the bread and cheese, taking hasty bites, and scattering crumbs, then paused to give him a wide smile. ‘Thank you, Jon,’ she said softly. ‘You are so sweet to me. I found the shells on my desk this afternoon. That was…’ She put down her plate, hunting for words and not finding any to express what she felt at that moment. She was well used to being attended to in a distant, respectful way, but not loved and looked after so thoroughly. She was learning to like it though, very much.

‘I hoped you would like them,’ he said, rather shyly. ‘I was out walking and saw some and thought of you, and there isn’t a flower to be found on the island.’

‘In truth, I hate flowers,’ she sniffed. ‘Picked flowers anyway. Flowers belong in the soil growing free, not plucked so they can be presented to some silly maiden.’

‘Of course,’ he said dryly. ‘You are not the type for posies and poetry, lucky for me.’

The levity faded quickly, and she reached for the wine to fortify herself, a weight of expectation falling between them. He was perched on the edge of the bed, quite close, but as serious lines formed on his face he backed off a little, clearing his throat awkwardly, his brow creasing, brown eyes evasive.

‘Speak, Jon Snow,’ she said softly. ‘What is it you wanted to ask me?’ Pretty words were not his strength, so she was determined to stay silent to encourage him to drag them from his mind in good order, through part of her dreaded to hear them.

‘I have been remiss in not doing this sooner,’ he began, his voice thick with nerves. ‘But I did not feel worthy enough, good enough for you to say it. Though you say it doesn’t matter to you, I am a bastard. I hold no lands, only a title which I am soon to lose when everyone is made aware that I have pledged myself to you. I have no riches. I have dragged you into a war that we may not be able to win. I have been the cause of the loss of your son, and the delay to your campaign to win
the throne you deserve.’

She started to protest vehemently at the bitter words, putting down her goblet with a clank, but he held up a hand to quell her. ‘Let me speak, Daenerys. I need to get this out of me,’ he said firmly, and she subsided, the raw pain in her chest growing. ‘I don’t know who my mother is, some tavern wench, or fallen lady, I don’t know, whereas you come from a great dynasty. I am trying to explain why I am unworthy, but I must speak regardless.’ He took a deep breath, eyes moving skittishly about and then finally settling on her upturned face.

‘Marry me,’ he said abruptly. ‘I love you, for what it is worth. I am so in love with you I can think of little else, when there is so much that should be my focus right now. Though it will do you no good, I cannot bear the thought of being apart from you, of losing you, or you being driven into marrying another for strategy. I can give you nothing but myself, and I hope that is enough.’

There was a blush heating his face, and he looked almost afraid of her, flinching away from her eyes, which were welling with tears that threatened to flow, the pragmatic core of her nature warring with her woman’s heart, which was fluttering like a bird’s. It was the longest string of words she had ever heard from him, and the most devastating. She recalled Tyrion’s blunt cynicism, his withering commentary on their relationship and how it would be perceived by the world, sparking her own misgivings, and she was so furious she felt like hitting something. Instead she clenched her fists against the covers and cursed silently in three different tongues.

This was what she had wrought, with her reckless move in the cave weeks ago, when he had unexpectedly kissed her and caused her to offer herself in a welter of selfish lust. Again, and again, she had given herself, not thinking hard enough of the consequences of taking such a serious minded, quite innocent young man and making him mad for her, and she for him. She was neck deep in the mire, and going under to smother and drown. She tried to hunt for words of caution, to be sensible, but her over-taxed heart was screaming at her to leap in his arms and cry all over him like a stupid girl and say yes without thought.

‘I like to think there is another world,’ she began carefully. ‘A world beyond this one, where I can be happy and do exactly as I please. Maybe it is where we go when we die, or that world only exists in my mind, but it sustained me when life was especially hard.’ She paused, and winced in misery when she saw the wave of sorrow cross his precious face, and hurried to finish. ‘In that world, we are already married, and I have a bellyful of your child, and we have nothing on our minds except eating, sleeping, fucking, and being. No kingdoms, no enemies, no responsibilities. But we don’t live in that world, to my great regret.’

‘We don’t,’ Jon said sadly. ‘But I know for sure it is not waiting for us when we die, at least I didn’t see it. There is only this shit world, and we have to make the best of it.’ It was boldly said, but her hesitation was still evident, and his sadness deepened, becoming edgy and resentful. ‘What did Tyrion say to you, when we arrived home? I know that some of this must come from his counsel,’ he said flatly. ‘I know you haven’t told me all of it.’

‘He reminded me of our shared family history,’ she said reluctantly. ‘And how your Northern lords will see me as a whore and a seductress, turning your loyalty to the North with my supposed feminine wiles.’ He grunted, looking very angry, his mouth thinning as his eyes narrowed. ‘He also reminded me of the wars to win, the need to avoid distractions, and our formidable enemies.’

‘All those truths exist whether we are married or not,’ he countered, still glowering. ‘It seems to me a pile of excuses from where I am sitting.’ He went to get up off the bed, but she snatched at his tunic in a panic.

‘Jon, stop. You are normally a reasonable person, so please listen,’ she pleaded. ‘I see these
problems, and I am raising them, as I would be a fool to do otherwise. It doesn’t mean I don’t want you. I love you, there is nothing I want more than to marry you, but perhaps it is sensible to wait, and not declare ourselves until our path is clearer.’

The flare of temper smouldered like a banked fire as he sat back down, that buried flaw in his otherwise flawless character which she loved and was often thrilled by. ‘You say the dragons are your only children, but what if you fall pregnant, what of that? I don’t want to be responsible for ruining you, I have thought of it little enough as it is.’ The words were clipped, abrupt, but his eyes showed concern, and guilt. Of course it would be important to him, as an unwanted bastard child, to avoid creating more of the same.

‘That won’t happen,’ she said, her voice wavering with her inner regret which she rarely shared, even now. It was hard to speak the final words of her curse, brought on by her own folly, and her resulting barrenness, especially to Jon. She wanted his children so badly, at least three of them, with his solemn dark eyes and curly black hair. Despite her unexpected moon blood, she still felt there was little chance of such a miracle, so she did not elaborate. ‘Trust me on this.’

He was deathly silent for a long moment, as still as an animal scenting prey, his eyes burrowing into her tear streaked face, down into her naked soul under her naked skin, seeking out a lack of regard for him, a superficial fixation on enjoying his body and little else. He would find nothing deceptive there, her love was a pure and elemental thing, but she had not survived this long without caution tempering her reckless instincts. ‘When is the right time, then?’

‘When the war is done,’ she said with a shudder of breath. ‘Or in the unlikely event your family and your people accept me when we go north. Until then, I am yours, but we must be discreet outside of this room, or at least try. But I swear to you, if you want me, and all that entails, I will marry you, Jon Snow. You honour me by asking, and you belittle yourself. There is no better man in this shit world than you.’ She laughed, a weak stutter to lighten the crushing mood. ‘It does not matter to me what you are, or not. You are mine, and I will kill anyone who tries to take you from me.’

She wished hopelessly that this moment could be straightforward and beautiful, posies and poems, but that wasn’t her, and it wasn’t him. It was what it was, but still she wept, as if was the most romantic proposal in history, sniffing messily and wiping angrily at her face. The edgy defence in his face was fading, a creeping light in his lovely eyes, turning from black, back to brown as a spark kindled, her reply sinking in at last.

‘You are so bloody frustrating, Daenerys Stormborn and all the rest,’ he said gently. ‘But you honour me, and I see the sense in what you are saying. I hate it though.’

‘I hate it too,’ she said, gulping back a fresh wave of tears. ‘Now come here and kiss me, before I start sobbing and reveal myself as a silly maiden after all.’

His mouth was sweet, so sweet she growled, succulent and scratchy with whiskers, and wet with his tongue probing her mouth thoroughly, not the kiss of a nervous suitor but a lover who held all the keys to unlock her, her bare legs twining around his waist, her hands wrapping in his unruly hair. It had started this way, with raw lust, unexpected but welcome, then immediately an obsession. The affectionate regard, awe, and respect that was already there laid foundations for a love that had frightened her with its swiftness and lack of logic, but was now everything she needed to keep going, keep trying. They may fail, they may fall sooner than later under a mountain of threats, but it did not matter. She had thought she was drowning in it, but it was in fact a lifeline she clutched at, her hollow, dutiful existence now filled with purpose. Strength, not weakness, though he was good, so very good at making her weak.
‘You taste of oranges,’ he murmured as he broke away, his lids as heavy as his weight above her. ‘Oranges, tears, and sex.’

She giggled, and then wrinkled her nose. ‘You sneaked off and had a bath. I really need one too.’ Suddenly, she was self-conscious, feeling sticky and spoiled, her tight formal braids making her head ache.

He eyed her thoughtfully. ‘I could carry you to the bathhouse and throw you in the pool,’ he said mischievously, his lips twitching. ‘Or I have an alternative.’

‘The alternative sounds better,’ she said agreeably. ‘I am very lazy tonight.’

‘You lie there and wait,’ he suggested, and climbed off the bed. She was immediately intrigued, trusting that whatever it was would be a pleasant preliminary to other things. Her body held no secrets anymore, so she was not bashful when he returned with a basin of steaming water, a cloth, and her good soap from the washstand. She went to get up, but he pushed her back against the pillows gently. ‘Let me serve you,’ he said thickly, and she hitched a breath, now needing more air in her lungs.

Water dripped over her, warming her skin, and yet causing gooseflesh to ripple, dampening the costly sheets and covers as she murmured and squirmed, every corner of her tired body attended to with the soapy cloth, the juice on her face and cleavage, the drying sweat on her belly, the slickness between her thighs and buttocks, the last causing a needy whimper, her legs opening wide so he could reach and see her growing pink and plump and wet all over again, the drag over her reactive flesh making her bite her lip and hide beneath her lashes.

She was pleasingly disturbed by the personal nature of his care of her body, the way his darkened eyes followed every stroke of the cloth. When he was done and she was clean and sweet enough to be despoiled again, she gathered her wits and authority and sat up, tugging impatiently at his tunic. ‘Get this off,’ she said firmly. ‘Take it all off and bloody lie down and stop teasing me.’ Her mind was made up on a whim, she would not let him dictate what was done to whom this time. For as long as she could, she would hold out before yielding and letting him master her, as when she did let go the surrender would be so much better.

‘As your Grace commands,’ he said, bemused. It always mildly irked her that she was the one that ended up naked and panting and disarmed before he, much as she enjoyed the outcome every time, so when he got up and began to strip with no reluctance, feigned or otherwise, she smiled in triumph. ‘You are the most beautiful man I have ever seen,’ she cooed to discomfort him. ‘It absolutely infuriating and distracting. I just want to spend the whole day in bed with you.’

He snorted dismissively, not blushing as she had hoped. ‘Nonsense, but if it gets me in your bed, then its good nonsense.’ His boots and tunic were on the floor, and she moved to help him with the rest, her fingers at the lacing of his breeches, her legs on either side of his to draw him closer. When his shirt was off, she rubbed her face against his hard stomach like a purring cat, the skin a chilly white and horribly marred forever, but warm and scented with piney soap and his own unique flavour.

She dragged her lips over him by inches, her hand drawing his lovely cock out and gripping it gently, hard as stone with a silky feel, thick and well-shaped. He had taken her many times, but was still a wonderful shock when he entered her, a pleasurable struggle as her body adjusted to fit. She didn’t open her mouth to swallow him down just yet. Instead, she teased him, running her tongue along the pretty crease of muscle on either side of his groin, her hands slipping to his arse to scratch at the taut, round buttocks. His hands were burrowing in her braids, searching out pins and flicking them to the floor, the drag of her coiled hair on her scalp relaxing as it fell free and messy.
with unravelling braids.

Since unbinding her hair was likely to take a while, and enjoying the soothing touch of his fingers combing it through, she forgot about having him on his back for now, sliding her fingertips down the cleft of his arse, closing the other hand around his stones and weighing them, twisting very gently, the hands on her head curling in response, a sting of hair being tugged at the roots. She tormented, touching him lightly everywhere but his cock, only breathing on it, pressing her face and then rising to rub her breasts against it, darting her eyes upwards to glimpse his expression, fluttering eyelashes and a crease of frustration forming on his brow, then he pushed her in closer; a silent plea.

She gave the inside of his thigh a sharp nip, then trailed kisses upwards, her tongue swiping over his stones slowly, then along the underside of his cock, which was standing straight and proud. A strangled noise, then a hoarse groan as her lips parted and took him down, down into her throat, her hands spreading across his cheeks and digging in, pulling back, her lips tightening around the head, then staying there, working over it lovingly, her tongue circling, lapping up his musky taste, mildly flavoured with soap.

One day soon, she wanted him to come like this, fill her mouth with his seed so she could drink it down, but thus far she was on her back or knees with him buried in her cunt before it could happen, to her selfish delight. Still, she clung like a vine, taking him deep again, forcing down the urge to gag as he yanked at her hair and grunted, controlling the pace of her ministrations, moving her over him almost as if he was fucking her mouth, and being used as such was making her very wet. She felt the slipperiness between her thighs, the dull throb of demand, a moan caught in her throat and muffled by each thrust.

She was fighting to get air through her nose, and his body was tensing like a bowstring, when he growled and loosed her hair, letting her back off, his cock popping from her lips, flushed pink and twitching. ‘No more,’ he gasped. ‘Do your worst, or else I will have you on your knees and your arse in the air in seconds.’

She wanted that very much, but it would be too quick, and she wanted to hold the reins for a bit longer before that happened, so she stood and with a quick kiss on his lips pushed him down onto the bed, intending to mount him and sink down until her toes curled in response, but as she shunted up against the pillows she changed her mind.

She had seen much beauty in her life as well as horror, but nothing as beautiful as the sight of Jon Snow gloriously naked and hard and under her hands, taut and expectant, his eyes and rumpled hair midnight dark, his skin as white as snow aside from the splash of pink on his cheekbones, the deeper pink of his cock, flushed red at the tip and gleaming. ‘Keep your hands to yourself,’ she said sternly, flicking her loose hair out of her face, then crawled, sliding her breasts and belly and cunt up the length of his body, then parting her legs over his shoulders, hooking one hand around a rail on the headboard.

She couldn’t see what he was doing to her, but the delicate sensation was enough to send her moaning, his tongue going straight to her nub and lapping at it very lightly, making it swell and ache and her nectar flow, every careful touch answered by a twitch of her thighs. She kept distant, letting him tease her for as long as she could bear before she ground downwards onto his face, asking to be devoured and receiving what she wished, lips and tongue and teeth working her over until she writhed, circling her hips, trying to control the friction, wanting his cock inside her when she came at last, but he had other ideas.

Disobeying her order his hands snatched at her arse, holding her down so she could not back away,
and he drove her hard, concentrating on her nub with relentless sweeps until the pleasure was threaded with discomfort. When she came, it was with a thwarted cry, deep and feral, but the ripples of warmth spreading outwards in gentle waves soothed her, and his satisfied murmurs into her throbbing flesh, the way he licked every drop of her juices and savoured the taste until she could not endure it and fought free.

She felt flushed from the roots of her hair to her feet, limp and clumsy, and taking him in her was going to be sweet torture, but she gathered her wits and moved down his body, only pausing to give him a vicious bite of warning on his throat, sucking firmly to leave her mark. Instead of facing him, she turned around so her back was to him, remote and determined, giving him an interesting view of her arse which she knew he found endlessly arousing, her open cleft red and glistening. She spread her knees and her cheeks wider before she took his cock in hand, rubbing the head against her lips and her back entrance before finding the right angle and using her weight to take him into her cunt.

She was so tight and resistant she hissed loudly, recalling how intense it had felt earlier, when she had taken him in the other manner, and when she was fully seated, she leaned forward a little, reeling at the incredible feel of his substantial length pressing against a spot high up near her womb, an undiscovered place that made her curse and twist to deepen the pleasure. She heard him curse as well, his wandering hands digging into her hips to assist her, the harsh words smoothing to a husky flow of appreciation that increased the pitch of her now urgent cries.

‘My queen…my wife…how beautiful you are…take me.’ The muscles in her belly were straining with effort, but she lifted until he was almost out of her, then sheathed him again and again, loosening with each movement until she was a soft as butter. His fingers toyed with the place they were joined, then upwards to her other entrance, causing a sweet throb of pain as he probed her carefully. ‘One day, I want to fuck you here again,’ he rasped at her as he entered with the tip of his thumb. ‘I want you on your knees taking me, right here, very slowly, until you beg me to go deep…will you let me?’

‘Yes…oh Gods yes,’ she sobbed, feeling quite mad at that moment. She would have promised anything, was acting on pure instinct, nothing in her mind but the consuming pleasure that built and built until her ears buzzed and her eyes grew heavy and hazy with thick fog. Her head sagged forward like a wilting flower, and she was panting with effort.

She now needed him, needed him to hold her, to take the reins and finish it, she needed to feel his heart beating and racing against her own. She reached backwards to snatch a hand and tug at it, and he moved smoothly upward, his quiet strength wrapping around her, holding her pinned in his lap, his lips on her throat, grasping her waist to move her relentlessly over his cock so she felt it in her womb, the skin of her stomach tensing with each thrust.

Her second climax was just beyond her reach, but she screamed in delight when she felt him jerk and spurt up inside her, praying to no one and nothing, hopelessly and irrationally, that his seed would take root and swell her belly with his child. But her lover was not satisfied, never satisfied, unless she came and came with him. His fingers found her nub, manipulating it once, twice, three times until she released with a shuddering sigh of relief, her pulsing walls absorbing all of him, a burst of white light within the black turmoil of her mind.

If he wasn’t holding her, she would have collapsed in a boneless, twitching heap, her heart in her mouth, sweat trickling from exertion, but Jon eased them down onto the ruined covers, keeping himself locked inside her body. Her hair was smoothed away from her face and as her breathing began to slow and match with his, her eyelids drooped. Though the fire was dying and a chill was beginning to creep into the chamber from outside she felt delightfully warm, as if floating in a
tropic sea in the east; something she had never had time to do but often imagined.

‘Your hair is the sun and the moon,’ he whispered, sniffing it, nosing it out of the way so he could kiss the nape of her neck. ‘And always smells like flowers and grass and summer.’

She smiled fondly. ‘That was quite poetic, for you.’

He chuckled, a soft vibration against her back. ‘Don’t get used to it.’ He shuffled a bit around her, so he could lean on his elbow and gaze at her with those eyes of his, a dark, compelling trap she had happily ensnared herself in. ‘I cannot believe you said yes,’ he said with some awe. ‘Though I wish it was tomorrow and not a vague prospect for the future.’

She smiled again, feeling the returned hint of melancholy in the air, her words carefully light to counter it. ‘Of course I said yes. I want to fuck you every day until you grow bored of me and we become one of those old married couples who politely despise each other.’

His lips quirked in disbelief, his eyes rolling a little. ‘That would be never, I swear it.’

‘You will have to be king, you know. There is no escaping it,’ she said bravely. ‘You think you have problems now, wait until you have seven kingdoms to rule. I hope I am worth it.’ She was tempting fate, letting herself imagine for a moment, as she rarely did lately, her triumph over many adversities, taking her father’s throne and setting the disordered, cruel realm to rights, but not alone this time, with Jon by her side, helping her, giving her his quiet common sense and innate goodness to counter the hardened, cynical part of her nature, and her Targaryen temper.

‘I will hate it,’ he sighed, then smiled sweetly. ‘But I will put up with anything, as long as I am with you.’

Chapter End Notes

One last promo, please nominate your favourite fics in the inaugural Jonerys Fanfic Awards organised by the lovely NoOrdinaryLines, linkie – http://noordinarylines.tumblr.com/post/168290728305/jonerys-fanfiction-awards-2018
I held it in but now it seems you set it running free

A/N: Happy New Year everyone. In this chapter, inspired by my current summer road trip, we go outside somewhere pretty for fresh air and other things. I am still not at Episode 7 yet due to the narrative doing its own damn thing, sigh. I kept getting interrupted every five minutes writing this (grr, husbands on holiday always wanting fed and to do stuff), so apologies if it’s a talky, hot mess.

Thank you to Ashleyfanfic for the fic fanart. Girl can write 3 or 4 stories at once, and still make nice things for her graphically challenged mates, she truly rocks.

I just got the news as I was updating that some of you might have nominated this fic for SMUTTIEST SMUT in the Jonerys Fanfiction awards. I am so honoured. If you can bring yourself to vote for me and make my month, here is the voting form, you have a month to put in your votes https://goo.gl/forms/W4gV0cX795ntUCfT2

It had been relentlessly grey and cold for days, causing her southern visitors and everyone else to shiver and huddle under cloaks or by roaring fireplaces to escape the persistent draughts that made their way into the castle. That morning as she descended the steps, dressed in her formal clothes for
one last meeting with the Dornish lords before their departure home, the sun broke through the clouds, a lick of warmish wind from the south making her itch to stay outside all day, while she still had the chance.

But as she made her farewells on the beach, mildly optimistic that all the talk would gain results, she steeled herself for the meeting she had been putting off, returning inside to the close confines of her workroom and sitting down at her desk. It was now relatively tidy after the backlog of work had finally been cleared, and she smiled dreamily at the glass bowl of shells that was now a permanent fixture, her fingers dipping into the collection and fondling their intricate shapes and smoothness as she waited for Tyrion.

He would have plenty to say about it, and she would let him, with limitations, but he was her Hand, and therefore needed to be told of her promise. Long ago, back in Mereen, they had spoken of her need to make an alliance through marriage, and although it was not the one Tyrion seemed to have in mind, it was ultimately her choice, and though it was tempered by caution, there was no other.

Though the stresses of her life were still there and always growing, she felt such a deep-seated contentment that she drifted through her days intoxicated with love, dealing with each crisis or commitment, such as the upcoming meeting in King’s Landing, with calm confidence rather than sharp words and frowns of anxiety.

She and her betrothed were too happy at this moment, too turned towards each other, to escape the more observant. In company, when they were trying hard to be distant and polite, their eyes would be ever seeking each other out, his dark depths full of quiet satisfaction, an ownership that made her purr inwardly, though she often checked people’s faces to see how much they noticed.

Lord Dayne had mentioned to her they had little hope for her considering a marriage alliance with Dorne, without stating why. She had demurred, continuing to dangle the non-existent bait, but the lord was not stupid, but in fact uncomfortably observant. Whether the Dornish armies would march she still was not sure, but she had done her best to charm and persuade that it was in everyone’s best interests to see Cersei dead, and soon, without putting herself on the slave block.

She used to be calculating about how to use her beauty and status to get what she wanted, when love meant nothing, but those days were now over for good, though she had the occasional qualm about it being too quick, too heedless. Once they were in Winterfell, life would be different. She would have little control over the people and the environment, and there was bound to be conflict between her and Jon that would lead to second thoughts. How she dreaded it, and childishly wished to delay it for as long as she could.

A brief knock at the door interrupted her meanderings, and at her answer her Hand shuffled in informally, taking a seat in the low chair kept for his frequent visits. There was a heavy silence, and he cleared his throat to start filling it with words as usual. ‘So, our visitors are off,’ he said in his courtly voice. ‘Let us hope they were charmed enough to send us the Dornish army when we most need it.’

‘There are no guarantees in this world, but they were sufficiently interested to make the journey,’ she replied, folding her hands in her lap after she turned her chair to face his.

‘They seemed to be dropping unsubtle hints about a marriage alliance,’ he observed. ‘But I think they got the message you are not interested. A pity, it might have guaranteed their support.’

‘Seeing your vile sister dead should be a sufficient incentive to support us,’ she said dryly, her gaze narrowing. ‘All of Dorne hates the Lannisters, though you seemed to get on with the lords quite well.’
‘I am the world’s greatest Lannister killer, as I told you,’ he said, equally dry.

‘So you say, yet you are most anxious that I should treat with your sister and brother rather than just burn them to ash and bone,’ she said tartly, but when he winced, she relented. ‘No matter, we will see it through, though I still have my doubts.’

‘The Eastwatch ship should return in days, with the north winds we have had lately,’ he said. ‘It would be foolish to waste Lord Snow’s heroic efforts on a fit of temper.’ The words were tinged with sarcasm, and she bridled.

‘I remind you that you should refer to him as his Grace, or your Grace, as a courtesy,’ she said sternly. ‘And as I said, I will see it through for now. For you, for Jon, and for my better nature.’

‘That is well,’ he said, in a softer tone, relaxing his stiff posture. ‘I must say, though I still have my misgivings, it is good to see you so happy lately. You have had little chance at joy, and I don’t begrudge it. And his moody Grace, I even heard him laugh the other day, and I don’t recall hearing him do so before.’

‘That’s an exaggeration, you made him laugh at dinner once with one of your filthy jokes,’ she smiled grudgingly, rather comforted by his words.

‘You are both terrible at hiding it though, especially his Grace,’ he ventured. ‘Those pretty eyes of his smoulder whenever you are in the same room. You both need to improve at being deceptive.’

‘This is my home,’ she said calmly. ‘If I can’t relax here, where can I?’

‘A queen should never relax,’ he said, rather sadly, his green eyes clouding over. ‘I wish it were otherwise, for your sake.’

As always, Tyrion cut through to the truth with a finely-honed blade. As time had worn on, memories of constantly walking on eggshells in Mereen had faded, and being cocooned on her island had made her lax. When out in the wider realm, she would have to try harder, until it was no longer necessary and it was safe to marry Jon openly and stand together as partners, and rulers.

Another knock at the door saved her from answering, and Missandei entered at her call, Jon following in her wake. He had been prepped beforehand, so immediately went to stand by her chair, his face revealing nothing but his hand landing on her shoulder protectively, which soothed her itchy nerves.

‘Both of you are my most trusted advisors, so you need to know this,’ she said, her tone formal. ‘His Grace the King in the North has asked for my hand in marriage, and I have accepted.’

Missandei instantly broke into a wide smile, and murmured her congratulations, but Tyrion’s reaction was as expected; worry and weary exasperation flashing across his clever face, which then stilled to a carefully neutral mask. Through the hand on her shoulder, she felt tension coiling, and she didn’t need to look to know Jon was frowning.

‘Well…I cannot deny that you are both well suited,’ Tyrion said hesitantly. ‘Idealists, and as stubborn as rocks. But what of the people of the North, the unruly lords, will they be pleased at this news?’

‘It is hard to know, until we move north to Winterfell, and they get the chance to see the queen for what she is, and what she brings to the fight,’ Jon said, his low voice spiked with defence. ‘Which is why her Grace has listened to your advice and made the decision to delay the marriage until the time is right.’
‘Which is wise. Advice is what I am here for, much as sometimes our queen does not want to hear it.’ Tyrion got up from his chair and began to pace the carpet, a sure sign he was about to deliver more of the same. Suddenly, she felt tired, again feeling the urge to be outside under the sky, with no judging eyes following her every move. ‘And what of you, your Grace?’ he shot at Jon. ‘It seems to me you are a very reluctant king. Sometimes they make the best rulers, but how will you cope with being king consort of the Seven Kingdoms?’

‘I suppose I will make the best of it,’ Jon said. ‘As I always try to do. And I won’t be making the hard decisions, I expect. That will be my wife, and her advisors.’ He seemed set on this path, but she still wondered. Her lover was strong minded beneath his humble exterior, and was now used to being in command.

‘Who is to be told then?’ Tyrion said, seeming to relax somewhat. Perhaps he was concerned that Jon was replacing his position, along with his other concerns about the match. She knew the role as her Hand was very important to him, after his miserable years of trying to win the approbation of his family and the realm, and receiving ingratitude, scorn, and hatred. ‘I suppose this answers the question of bending the knee for good and all.’

‘As far as I am concerned, Jon is still King in the North. It is better for us if he appears as such,’ she said. ‘And only you two are to know, Ser Davos on his return, and Jon’s family.’

Missandei’s eyes fixed on her meaningfully, and moved to her belly, concealed by her folded hands. She knew what her friend was thinking, but was too discreet to speak it aloud. Recently she had brought up the implications of her moon blood again, and she had shrugged it off. ‘I hope the right time is soon, for both your sakes,’ her friend said decisively. ‘It is a hard, cruel world, and we must take happiness where we find it.’ Her eyes were sad, she was probably thinking of Grey Worm, still on the dangerous march back from Casterley Rock.

‘Thank you, Lady Missandei,’ Jon said pointedly.

Tyrion had halted in his pacing, and was eying the pair of them together closely. ‘Both of you are useless liars,’ he sighed. ‘But try to use your discretion. We can’t have the queen being called a whore by the realm.’

‘If any man calls the queen a whore, they will answer to my sword,’ Jon said, darkly serious. It was foolish, but it made her smile at the small flare of pride in her silly heart.

‘People have been calling me a whore for years,’ she sniffed. ‘It bounces off me like arrows off Drogon’s hide.’

Tyrion found a smile. ‘While I enjoy the sentiment, being fond of whores myself, you can’t run through every opinionated, pox ridden peasant between here and Last Hearth,’ he observed. ‘I’ve always thought you were a bit of a hothead under that quiet surface, your Grace.’ Cautiously, he approached Jon, offering his smaller hand to shake, and her lover moved to take it, still surly when she glimpsed his face, but he took the offer. ‘Look after our gracious queen, she is precious to us all, and be careful, especially with my sister. She is very observant of deception, being an arch deceiver herself.’

‘I will guard the queen with my life,’ Jon said formally. ‘As to the rest, perhaps you can give us lessons in lying effectively, given your vast experience of liars.’

The jest had a bite to it, but his mouth was quirked in his grudging, almost-smile, so Tyrion chuckled weakly, and backed away. She sunk into her chair in relief, feeling it had gone as well as could be expected.
She spent a rare night alone, wondering where Jon had gotten to and why he had looked so lost in thought at dinner, but despite his absence she fell into a much-needed, uninterrupted sleep. When she woke to red sunlight streaming low through the chamber windows overlooking the ocean, she turned over to find a note on his pillow in his neat writing, bidding her to dress in riding clothes and meet him at the Dothraki horse camp.

Rather bemused, she washed and dressed in her good beige leathers and asked Missandei to do her hair in a simple braid, complete with her Dothraki battle bells for a touch of vanity, an extra one added for the Blackwater Rush victory. Donning a thick, fur trimmed cloak with a hood for extra warmth after a few bites of breakfast, she bid her friend goodbye and left the castle quickly.

When she arrived at the sprawling encampment to friendly shouts of greeting, she mingled for a while to be seen and available for any who needed to talk, making it to the horse camp later than she anticipated. She found two horses saddled, quite laden with gear which made her pause, and Jon waiting somewhat impatiently. ‘I wasn’t planning on being out for a day and a night,’ she said before she mounted up, eyeing him suspiciously. He was dressed warmly in his usual cloak, his bound hair slightly ruffled in the wind that blew ceaselessly.

‘I cleared it with Missandei, she will put off anyone who asks for you. And no, I am not telling you where we are going. It’s a surprise.’

She huffed a little, but could not help melting at the intrigue in his eyes, which glowed in the strong sunlight, his sight frown fading away at her flash of smile. ‘I hate surprises,’ she muttered defiantly, but mounted the smaller grey mare in a single bound. They set off, and though she was still out of practice she began to relax with the horse, a spirited beast that broke into a trot at her signal so she could outpace Jon for her amusement, but he kept up with her easily on his black gelding. She had never seen him ride before, and it was an impressive sight, like anything he did with his lean, agile body.

Her bells jingled pleasantly as they rode, and he asked her about them, smirking proudly at her when she explained their significance. When they reached a flat stretch of turf, she broke into a gallop to show off, laughing when she heard him curse and take off after her, but she couldn’t keep it up for long, feeling thoroughly jolted after a few minutes, so she slowed. There was no one in sight, only waving grass and scurrying clouds in the sky, and the odd sheep or cattle beast grazing.

‘You’re too far away for my liking,’ he said, in a sweet, raspy drawl. ‘I have the urge to throw you across my horse like a maiden I caught out on the moor and stole away for my own.’

‘This maiden would stab you in the leg if you tried such tricks,’ she said pertly. ‘But if you insist…’ They were entirely, pleasantly alone, so she drew her horse to a halt agreeably, and dismounted, tying it to the back of his saddle with a spare length of rope so it could amble behind. She took his outstretched hand, finding herself hauled up awkwardly. He settled her in front like a small child on its first ride, and she shuffled back into his body, feeling instantly warmer.

‘It’s too cold to be sleeping outside even with this weather,’ she grumbled, and he sighed, giving her a nicely scratchy kiss on the curve of her neck.

‘You won’t be cold, trust me,’ he murmured, flapping the edges of his cloak around her. He smelled of leather and horse and a tang of sweat overlying his usual soap, and she drew it into her lungs and snuggled closer.

‘I am so mad with curiosity I’m cross with you, secretive sod.’
‘Good, I like it when you’re cross,’ he said, making her snort. ‘It gives me the excuse to bend you over and smack your arse.’

‘Stop it,’ she breathed, wriggling slightly in her seat. Wherever they were going, she was sure she would enjoy the end results. The lapsed into a comfortable silence, plodding along at an easy pace for some time. It was the southern part of the island she hadn’t yet explored, grey cliffs starting to frown above them in masses of cracked rock that held back the rolling hills. The stunted trees held more leaves here, and she saw the odd tiny meadow flower still bravely blooming under a bush, a remnant of the long-ago summer that made her feel sad, wondering if they would survive to see another.

The path became steep and stony, and Jon slowed so the horses could pick their way through without injury. ‘We could have flown on Drogon, you know,’ she said, feeling wearier as the time stretched out, despite her very comfortable position.

‘I like it my way,’ he said stubbornly, then added. ‘How do you call the dragons down to you? I have seen you do it, but I can’t figure it out exactly.’

‘I send out my thoughts,’ she explained. ‘It is difficult to describe to another person…like throwing a hook with my mind to catch them in the air... not demanding, but asking their permission.’

‘You are magic,’ he said with some awe.

She turned in her seat to look at him, alive and breathing and beautiful, despite all that had happened to him, and pecked his cheek, her hand placed over the thudding heart under all his layers of clothes. ‘You’re magic too,’ she said softly. ‘If not, then why are you here?’

‘I have often asked myself the same question, and the answer used to be to fight for the living, and perhaps fall again. But now there is more than just that,’ he replied, his eyes captivating her with their inky warmth. How he loved her. She could see it, scent it, feel it in the marrow of her bones. She still wondered what she had done to deserve such a gift, and again felt a qualm of sadness; sadness shot with fear that it would all be taken from her in an instant.

‘I love you,’ she said simply, kissing him again, catching his bottom lip between hers as she loved to do. The horses came to a stop as he became distracted, a gloved hand holding her face as he took her in return, a scrape of bristles, the dart of his tongue in her mouth making her head tilt in an awkward angle to yield with a sigh.

After a giddy moment he freed her, and she settled back into his arms. The horse resumed its difficult climb, and soon they were at the top and descending a path into a narrow valley with a chattering stream, steaming thickly in the cold air, signalling its origin from the hot springs beneath the earth. The trees that lined it were much larger than the usual island specimens, a mix of bare boughs with clinging yellow leaves, and dull green towering pines.

The valley had sides of grey veined rock, cutting most of the wind, and as they reached the bottom in a scramble of pebbles she took it all in with some wonder. The air temperature was climbing, the grass was still green in patches, and she saw a few hardy birds flitting between branches. ‘This is wonderful,’ she said. ‘How ever did you find it?’

‘I did a lot of wandering the island when I first got here, going out of my mind with frustration,’ he said ruefully. ‘It’s quite a special place. More like my home than the rest of Dragonstone.’

The air was still, but she felt something strange thrumming through it, silent but felt in her core, the same feeling she had in the dragonglass cave. The bones of the island were old, the feet of the
ancients had walked there, this must be another of their sacred spaces.

As they rounded a slight curve in the valley the stream emptied from a large, rock lined pool that made her gasp in delight, fed by a spring gushing from the rocks, but then the tree took her full focus. It was a most peculiar tree, disturbing in its colouring, with a bone white trunk and gnarled roots with a shallow grip on the soil, a thick canopy of leaves as red as dried blood. ‘What is that?’ she said as Jon drew the horses to a final halt. Immediately she slithered to the ground and went to inspect it closely.

‘It’s a weirwood tree,’ Jon explained. ‘We have one at home. This one is relatively young though, as it doesn’t have a face. It is a symbol of my Gods, a tree of the First Men and the Children.’

Tentatively she touched the trunk, finding it smooth and cold, and she felt that thrum again. She backed off, rather spooked, and turned to find him unloading the horses of their burdens and setting them loose to graze. She didn’t speak, though she had a dozen questions. Instead she went to the pool, washing her hands in the water and finding it the perfect heat. It would be delightful to swim under the sun and the stars, and pitch a tent and fuck under furs, but they weren’t the only reasons he had brought her here.

She searched through her patchy knowledge of northern traditions as she explored the pool and its surrounds, avoiding the eerie tree, then froze. ‘Oh, I see,’ she said suddenly. ‘You have brought me here to make a vow.’ She did not know at that moment whether to feel cornered, or deeply moved. ‘Don’t you trust my word, Jon Snow?’

He rose from the ground where he had been untying bundles, and turned to face her, looking nervy but determined, and though she had the lingering feeling of being neatly caught in a trap, she didn’t dwell on it. She knew subterfuge was not in his nature, and she would not listen to that carping voice in the back of her head anymore, it was too late for that.

‘I trust your word,’ he said decisively. ‘And I accept your decision to delay making it formal, but I wanted to bring you here regardless, so I could swear in front of my family’s Gods. It is important for me to know you are my wife in truth, given what faces us. We could all be dead in a month, or a year. You saw it too. You know.’

She took a shuddering breath and nodded, seeing the horrible images in her mind from her excursion beyond the Wall, the dire threat that had faded with the demands and pleasures of everyday life returning in a rush. ‘I don’t believe in any Gods,’ she told him. ‘No one is watching over me. I have nothing to swear by, except myself.’

‘You can swear by anything that has most meaning to you,’ he said gently, his eyes a compelling plea for her final commitment. ‘The Old Gods may hear us, they may not. It is not tradition what I am asking, we would need witnesses and the right words, but for now, it would be enough for me to know you are mine, now and always.’

‘Oh, Jon,’ she said inadequately, feeling the warning prickle of tears, and she stepped forward and took his hand, the leather cold against his skin, and let herself be drawn under the tree’s strange embrace. He dropped her hand to strip off his gloves so they were handfasted skin against skin, their gazes locked so intently that all she could see was his velvety dark eyes blazing with relief and love, the grip of his stronger hands holding her pinned. There was a long pause as she waited for him to speak first, letting herself be led, which she usually fought against, ever since she was tough enough to assert herself.

‘Old Gods, hear my vow,’ he began, his voice so low it was like the rumble of distant thunder, and deadly serious. ‘I swear by the blood of my father, the blood of the First Men that is in my veins,
on my honour, on the strength of my sword arm, on the lives of my family and people, I take Daenerys Targaryen to be my wife, to shield, protect, and love, until the end of my days.’

She swallowed down a sob, but she felt the tears spill down her cold cheeks regardless as she struggled to find words just as earnest, and beautiful.

‘Old Gods of the earth and rocks and trees, Old Gods of my lover’s family, hear my vow,’ she said clearly. ‘I swear by the honour of my lost house, by the blood of the dragon which is in my veins, by the lives of my friends and people, by the fiery hearts of my sons, and myself, that I take Jon Snow to be my husband, to shield, protect and love, until the end of my days.’

***

They kissed for a long time under the tree, sealing their vows, until she felt as if she were floating like a seed pod, or fallen flower caught in the kind southern wind. Afterwards, she stripped off her clothes and floated on her back in the pool, and she was still floating now, gazing at the wide azure sky, the tips of her breasts and face somewhat chilled but the rest of her deliciously warm and buoyant and idle.

She was alone as he worked to set up camp, until she heard a splash and a curse as he finally joined her. ‘I don’t know how you float like that,’ he said as he swam towards her, his white skin flushing instantly pink at the sweltering heat of the pool. ‘I tried it, and I just sink.’

‘It’s my tits and arse,’ she replied with a soft laugh. ‘You’re all muscle, my love.’ She fanned her hands through the clear water, enjoying the silky feel on her skin, heavy and slightly astringent.

The water was so hot that even she felt the burn on the soles of her feet if she stood up. ‘I am going to fall asleep and drown if I stay in much longer.’

‘I don’t intend on letting you sleep at all,’ he promised, grabbing her, and pulling her into his lap. ‘Gods, you’re as slick as a baby seal.’

She laughed at this. ‘What a comparison.’ She wriggled to feign reluctance, inviting him to tighten his grip on her and bite her neck to make her sit still, and it worked gratifyingly.

‘It was advice from a friend of mine,’ he told her between hard kisses and nips of teeth. ‘He said you shouldn’t go near a woman with your cock until she was in that state.’

She was giggling helplessly, despite her growing arousal. ‘It’s good advice, and you learned well,’ she said, taking his hand and guiding it between her legs so he could feel what he did to her just by marking her throat. His fingers glided over her mound, holding her in place against his hardening cock, pressed against her cleft firmly. Her laughter faded, and she made a pleased noise and arched back further, then gasped as he pushed two fingers inside her abruptly, his other hand teasing her cold nipples, as hard as cherries and just as red after he pinched them.

The arousal escalated, racing through her nerves to build in her mind and below where he was fondling her, practiced and demanding. She turned around in a surge of water to take his mouth, her hands gripping handfuls of thick hair to tug it loose, a flash of black brows, blackened eyes and falling curls before his pretty, plump lips took all her attention. His fingers resumed their place inside her cunt, spreading slightly, opening her up so he would hopefully fuck her very hard and deep, until she was ridden raw, breathless and boneless.

There was a current of urgency between their entwined bodies that made her whine in her throat, muffled by his tongue moving with hers smoothly, his hoarse moan as her hand found his cock and stroked it closely, catching at the delicate skin at the tip and pushing it back and forth with her
fingertips. She needed him in her, right now, first his tongue, then his thickness filling her to her very limit. ‘Take me to the tent,’ she pleaded, not knowing why she was in such a rush, but following her base instinct, not even feeling the cold when he lifted her out of the water and carried her easily over the stony bank.

Her steaming limbs were uncoiled from his and she was slid inside the low hide tent, on top of a pile of furs and blankets. The light inside was dim, but she could see him well enough to purr at the sight and undulate against the bedding in response, all poised with predatory, shadowy eyes looking her over, ready to pounce once he had decided what to do with her body, now all his forever. ‘Get on your knees for me,’ he said lowly, and with a moan she obeyed, turning over and rising to present her arse, the rest of her flush with the wolfskins under her face and breasts and belly, her head tilted to the side so she could glimpse him.

She spread herself a little, exposing her cunt just enough to tease, wanting him to grab her and position her how he wanted her. She was entirely submissive, as it made him and her wonderfully crazed. She would let him fuck her arse like this right now if he asked it of her, though she wanted to save that dark treat for another time. Today she wanted all his seed inside her womb, an irrational craving that caused her to squirm with sheer impatience.

As always, he sensed the direction of her lusty thoughts without having to ask her what she wanted. His fingers slid inside her folds to collect some of her flowing juices, and probed her back entrance, and she mewled as he entered her with a slow, deliberate penetration, slightly uncomfortable as well as blissful, making her imagine his cock doing the same with more force and girth. Oh, it was so sinfully good, just thinking of it, that she would anticipate it for as long as possible.

‘When?’ he rasped as he moved his fingers deeper. ‘When do I get to fuck you here, with you on your knees like this?’

‘I enjoy making you wait for it…oh, Gods…’ She began to move with each careful advance and retreat, her wetness dripping down her inner thighs as she dwelled on it, the pain and the pleasure. Then her legs were wrenched apart, and she was lifted near off the ground so he could get at her with his mouth whilst still fingering her arse. She dissolved in a turmoil of throaty cries and jerks and struggles against the ticklish furs as he fucked her with both tongue and fingers, hungry and needy, grunting and burrowing deep with his mouth and teeth, devouring her whole, pushing inside with deft jabs until she reached that point where she could not endure it.

She was entirely helpless in this position and very exposed, the itch of his whiskers against her open folds adding to the torment, and his fingers in her, fully inserted now and working her taut inner muscles, a reminder of what he would do to her when she consented, but with him in complete control this time. When he put her down with a ragged growl she cried out in release, then frustration as she felt the head of his cock tease her entrance, only entering by one or two inches then retreating, then repeating the cruel move over and over until she clawed at the furs and felt like screaming at him to do it, fill her cunt with one stroke and let her come, but she held her silence for now.

His hands were pressed against the small of her back to hold her down and stop her from arching backwards in demand, because he knew, he knew what she needed and was denying her for as long as he could. She reached under herself to get some relief with her own hand, but he grabbed for it quickly and pushed it away. She did scream then, in anguish, her skin prickling and flushing with thwarted want, every small, mean movement a pleasure that was not quite enough.

‘Fuck me, Jon,’ she begged. ‘Bruise me, take me deep.’ That worked, with a luscious moan his hands grabbed onto her hips and he obliged, and she was so wet and ready he was right against her
womb in an instant, bathing in her slippery heat, grinding hard to ease his next movements, which were satisfyingly vicious and deep, giving her some sweet relief. Her moans of gratitude then became a wild keening of pure distress as the pleasure spiked unbearably, a twisting and shifting behind her, a foot planted at her side to find the angle, that agonising angle that hit all her hidden spots high up with each thrust.

Her body trembled and cowered at the impact, her hair snatched at and used for more leverage, the lick of pain in her scalp adding to the delirium she was lost in, blind and deaf, only hearing the call of her tightening loins, nagging at her to let it go and climax. No... no wait, she told herself fiercely, wanting to draw it out until she felt it, the kick of his release, a throb and a flood of hot seed. She tasted a drop of blood on her lip where she had bitten herself with the strain, and she fought on, seeing her climax held back by an unravelling rope in her mind.

She focused on the image as a distraction, centring herself there as he split her in two, her spine aching, her teeth clicking together at each jarring impact, her thigh muscles stretching as was spread wider to receive him, and just as the rope was about to snap he pulled out and she found herself flipped over in a tangle of slack arms and legs, and bent backwards, nearly sobbing as he took her deep again, harshly at first and then slowing to a crawl of subtle, devastating movements against her womb; the rough and the smooth, the bitter and the sweet.

His sweat sheened face and liquid eyes came into focus, the full weight of his pelvis chafing against her swollen flesh. She was a tense, quivering mess of pure animal need, and yet the sight of him soothed her, and at his husky urging, the low caress of his voice in her ears, the sight of his face creasing with a strangled cry her orgasm came, not with swiftness and violence, but like the lapping of water on the wind-ruffled pool, endless ripples of heat that drew her up tight in a knot to take his essence inside her core with slow pulses.

She clung on and broke into sobs, dragging him down to lie flat against her, her lips in his black hair, on the flushed skin of his throat, catching at his gasping mouth as he rode it out, prolonging the pleasure until its edge finally grew sharp and cut her to pieces. She collapsed at last, her legs shaking but still squeezing his waist, slightly elevated to hold his seed within her as her husband finally rested against her breasts, his breath heaving and loud as an accompaniment to his heart, racing and skipping against hers. She made that useless prayer again, that it would be now, in this sacred, beautiful space he had brought her to make their secret vows, that her bloody curse would finally be broken, and damn the consequences.
There’s a ghost in my mouth and it talks in my sleep

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A/N: In this chapter, Daenerys fulfils one of her minor life goals, and an attempt at a Dragonpit rewrite, which had to be done given where I am in my story. I am currently dying of the flu, so writing this was my only pleasure in the last week, I trust it all works. Let me know in the comments. More writing done on a boat as I am on my way home now, thank fuck. Going to spend the next week in my bed, sulking over the worst holiday ever, and writing smut.

She had been born blessed with a rebellious spirit, but the first moment she became aware of it was at the age of seven, when she looked at her brother askance as he grew into a petulant, unstable young man and concluded disloyally that he was weak, and a poor choice for the last hope of their house. As she grew older and the realities of life for the poor and powerless, and female, began to register, she would rail inwardly against the unfairness of the world, but was too timid to speak such thoughts aloud, knowing it would earn her disdain, or worse.

As a new bride, sold into slavery in exchange for an army, she found the courage to resist, but had no resources, no supporters to save herself from it. It wasn’t until she learned to truly rely on herself, to learn from, win over and sometimes exploit the people around her, to learn how to suffer savage blows and get back up again, that her rebellious nature came to the fore. She used it to escape the cage of widowhood, then to gain support to take back her father’s throne, and then channelled it to help others along the way. Being a rebel against convention had served her very well, but with it came less desirable personality traits which had dictated her actions these last weeks – recklessness, and selfishness.

Recklessness, in taking a lover who was noble, earnest, and very entangled in commitments that were now hers, and finding herself too besotted with him to leave it to mere fucking and walk away when it became too complex. Rushing to rescue that lover from certain death and losing her precious son. Accepting love instead of denying its seductive comfort, binding herself to Jon so tightly there was no way out, and continuing to pray to the heedless Gods for the miracle of a child when it would be the worst possible timing if that prayer was answered.

Selfishness, in gleefully spending every minute she could snatch in his company and neglecting important matters and wise counsel. Secretly resenting the imminent move north to Winterfell, something she would never reveal to him as she was so ashamed by it. And this early morning, as their time of departure to King’s Landing drew closer, she gazed at her sleeping secret husband and quietly fumed about having to go out in the world and share him and his attention with others, and worst of all pretend that he was nothing to her but an ally.

She was alarmingly territorial about sharing Jon with anyone, friends, family or foes, to the extent she had become quite irked by him spending some of last evening drinking with the men who had finally returned on the ship from Eastwatch. Likely pleased to have some male companions he could understand who weren’t Varys or Tyrion, and worrying about the parley, she didn’t blame him for the few ales he’d imbibed, but when he came to bed in the middle of the night and woken her she had been quite acerbic, that childish territorialism escaping its box.

‘I believe the usual response to a husband coming to bed drunk is to hit him with something heavy,’ she had said rather tartly as he sat down on the edge of the bed to remove his boots and the
rest, but his deep chuckle and persistent kisses had dampened her grouchy mood somewhat. As he crawled under the covers to gather her up, she accused him of not being about to perform after all that drink, and he proceeded to prove her deliciously wrong.

Using her fading ill mood as fuel to her fire, she put up a goodly fake struggle just to get him to hold her down and take her forcibly while she whined and bucked and clawed, and then finally cried out like a vixen on heat as he held her thighs pinned and fucked her until she saw stars falling in the darkness of the room. He did not last long, but neither did she, and she had fallen asleep soon after in her favourite state; all tangled up in his body with mussed hair, an ache in her belly, dripping with his seed and with a lingering afterglow that zapped her with the occasional static shock.

It had been so fast and overwhelming that she had woken up aroused, the recent lusty activities occupying her thoughts as she eyed his form in repose, horribly appealing no matter how many mornings she came to awareness and was met by the sight; black and white, vulnerable and strong, battered and beautiful. Judging the light filtering through the chamber windows, she concluded she had enough time to wake him up in the best manner possible before they had to part and assume their agreed roles at the parley.

Perhaps Jon was sufficiently sleepy that she would achieve one of her more frivolous goals in life, and although it would deprive her of her own pleasure the satisfaction would be well worth it. As she had extricated herself from his arms to sit up in bed, he had rolled to his side, shrugging off the covers as he usually did, not seeming to feel the stinging cold of the winter morning, which had drawn her nipples to tight knots and dusted her skin with gooseflesh. His bare back was all sinuous, sculpted lines she traced with her nails, neatly kept and long enough to leave thin red marks on his pale skin.

His curly hair was falling loose from its knot from when she had yanked at it last night to expose his throat to her teeth, so she untangled the rest with a light touch that made him stir against the flattened pillow beneath his face. Smiling, she dug her nails into his scalp, scratching it lovingly to make him murmur and twitch, twisting the springy locks around her fingers. Returning to his back, she used her nails again, then her breasts, dragging the small, taut mounds down his spine until she was under the covers and curled against his shapely bottom, unable to resist giving it a sharp bite, her loose silver hair slithering and tickling as it fell around her face.

At the nip of her teeth, the stroke of her hair and warm hands on his arse, she heard him mutter an oath, so she bit the other cheek in turn, smothering an urge to giggle. Her hand slipped underneath his hips, concentrating on touching his inner thighs, then his stones, rough black hair itching her palm, then the smooth, silky sheath of his cock as she took him in hand, already rigid and heavy. When she turned him over and took him in her throat he would taste of musk and sex, reminding her of all the times he had brought her to dizzying heights with his pretty, perfect length. She was still torn on what was her favourite, to see his face as he fucked her, or she fucked him, or to be on her knees being used as a willing object, seeing nothing of him but feeling everything. He moved slightly, pressing down into her encircling hand with a pleased sigh.

‘Turn over,’ she whispered into the small of his back. ‘Turn over, lie still and keep your hands at your sides.’

‘Dany…’ he muttered as he rolled over clumsily. ‘What are you up to…’ As he settled into the mattress, she smirked at the small frown of a headache on his brow, the long eyelashes fluttering open gingerly. She did not correct him, though she preferred to hear her full name fall from his lips in a low caress. She gathered up her hair and twisted it in a messy cable to the side so he could
watch her at work, and did not dither with teasing and dancing around the hard length which stood straight, blushed dark pink and very reactive in her hand, twitching in her small fingers, his thick, corded thighs quivering as she bent and breathed him in.

The scent of her juices was blended with his sharper male scent, condensing on her palate as she took an exploratory swipe from root to tip, rising on her knees slightly and moving side on so he had a good view of her arse as well as her attentive mouth.

Before he could snatch at her and bring her down on his cock as he usually did when she served him, she needed to move quickly. She flattened her hands on his hips, feeling the sharp, curved bones in her palms, and took him in one swallow, filling her mouth with him entirely until she couldn’t breathe, her moan of satisfaction choked off as he pushed upwards with a grunt, eliciting a slight gag reflex with the aggressive movement. She backed off before he could twine her hair in his fist and take control, scraping her teeth lightly over the length of him in warning.

He went a little wild then, and she fought to hold him down as she tongued his foreskin mercilessly, pushing it back and forth and swirling over the exposed head roughly, using her lips to hold a tight seal around him, her saliva easing her deft movements. Her eyes travelled up the length of his compact, hard-muscled torso to meet his, half hidden behind his creamy lids, slits of smouldering darkness, his full lips wet from his tongue darting out as he groaned and struggled beneath her.

Given the way he was coiling up like a snake, the pulse of blood in her ears as her mouth took him whole again, he was very close, so she let him go with a slick pop and preceded to lick him with the tip of her tongue, like a cat with cream, speaking quietly but firmly as she tasted him. ‘I want you to come in my mouth…come in your queen’s mouth.’ At the strangled, raspy cry that earned her, she went for it, pressing her legs together to dull the throb of excitement from pleasuring him, so roused she could almost release without being touched herself. He was deep in her throat now, tightly held so he could not wriggle free, her lips so close to the soft, black curls of his groin they tickled her nose.

Pleased with herself for being able to relax enough to engulf him all, she hummed and moaned, and as he called her name and grabbed hold of the sheets, arching off the bed with in an elegant bow, a surge of energy in her throat, she pulled back in a tight glide to drink him down, making sure he could see her catch the hot, creamy seed on her tongue and consume it lovingly. He tasted earthy and smoky with a hint of sweetness, and he filled her mouth satisfying until she swallowed it down with a visible movement.

When she pulled loose and glanced up she found him looking at her closely, handsomely dazed and flushed with dark blood in his cheeks and lips when it had rushed to his head in climax. His eyes sparkled like black diamonds, his smile crooked and lazy. ‘What did I do to deserve that?’ he rumbled.

‘Nothing in particular,’ she said, arching a brow. ‘I just wanted to do it for quite some time. Did you enjoy it?’ Her cheek rested on his stomach, which was so unyielding it made a poor pillow. His hand rested in her hair, threading its slippery brightness through his fingers.

‘I haven’t got the words to describe how good it was,’ he said dreamily, making her glint of smile widen. ‘But what of you, my love? We can’t have you neglected.’

‘I am fine,’ she said lightly. ‘This was about you, before we have to go our separate ways for this bloody farce tomorrow.’ Her smile widened in mischief. ‘I wanted to give you something to think on, while you’re standing there in front of that horrible bitch, trying to pretend you don’t know what it’s like to be buried in my throat.’
‘Bloody wicked woman,’ he murmured approvingly, tugging at a lock of hair. ‘I don’t believe you that you’re fine. You have that dazed look, when your big blue eyes go all cloudy and dark, and your lips all puffy and red, like your pretty cunt.’

She tried to shrug it off, but his knowing words made her wriggle visibly. She felt achy and horribly empty, and she flinched when his hand found her hardened nipples and skimmed over them before taking her arm and hauling her upwards across his body. Her wet folds found purchase on his thigh, and she rubbed herself against him for friction as he kissed her languidly. ‘How may I serve you, wife?’ he insisted in a voice thick and scratchy and beguiling.

She rubbed her cheek against his bearded jaw, and nipped at his lips, losing herself in the richness of his eyes, while considering. ‘I want your fingers in me, she said with a breathy moan. ‘Yes, I would like that very much.’ It would soothe the empty feeling inside her, and send her out into the world with contentment counteracting her simmering temper, a temper in danger of erupting if provoked, but she wouldn’t think about that now. Instead, she found herself tipped over on her back against the pillows, her thighs parting lewdly in invitation as Jon crouched before her. She moved into her accustomed position for being pleasured in this manner, planting her dainty feet against his knees and lifting off the bed.

Her own fingers slid down to find her nub and drag across it in a practiced move, and he watched her for a while, her subtle writhing and pants as she gave herself a little push towards her climax solo, in the same manner she used to pleasure herself thinking of him in the beginning. Now he was all hers, and he was watching her avidly with those beautiful eyes of his, brimming with love and desire, and then his hand was joining hers, filling her with two fingers, the rending of her slick channel with deep, beckoning movements making her moan with abandonment and brace herself with her feet for each sweet thrust.

When two fingers became three, then four, she tossed her head back and gave a feral growl, the lick of pain in her core drawing her closer, her fingertips working her nub quickly now, hips jerking in an attempt to take it all. Her moans and growls merged to a sharp cry, and her eyes slammed closed, the throaty trickle of his voice in her ears goading her to let go. ‘Come for me, my queen.’ It was not nearly as good as his cock, but still blissful, her release a turmoil of ripples and inner pulses that made her pant harder and clench her thighs around his hand.

‘Thank you, love,’ she said as he withdrew his hand from her body, leaving her a raw, sticky, replete mess. Her eyes felt heavy, and she sought the urge to doze off for a few minutes. With a last kiss on her quivering belly Jon got up, moving to the washstand to clean up and then back to retrieve his clothes from the floor. She struggled to sit up, blinking at him lazily until she regained her faculties. ‘You best be getting back to your chamber, your Grace,’ she observed, a hint of sadness in her words.

He regarded her fondly for a moment before resuming his struggle with buckles and laces. ‘I will see you in King’s Landing, your Grace,’ he said with a reassuring smile. ‘I expect you to make a suitably grand and scary entrance to put the Lannisters in their place.’

She managed a soft laugh at that. ‘On that you can rely, husband.’ Her hand reached for his, and clasped it briefly before letting go reluctantly.

‘I look forward to seeing it, wife.’

***

The assembling spot for her two armies was located some ten miles to the north and west of King’s Landing, a collection of fields beaten into a sea of mud by thousands of horses and men that she
had to step carefully through to avoid being coated head to foot in muck. She had arrived alone with Drogon and Rhaegal to spend the night with her generals making plans if the truce was to be broken by treachery on the morn.

The Unsullied troops had reached the Crownlands without incident, followed by wagons holding a collection of booty commandeered politely but firmly along the route; fodder and grain mostly. Her Khalasar had been ferried over in two trips of her shrunken fleet, and it was likely they would stay on the mainland to be sent north on the Kingsroad to Winterfell, once the women that were not being left on Dragonstone, and the remaining weapons and stores, were transferred as well. If the parley failed, they may be used in another manner, to batter the city into submission with her Unsullied, though it would be a shameful waste of good men if the siege dragged.

As she paced the large tent that had been erected for her comfort she mulled her options. The best option, what her gut was telling her, would be to find the means of killing the false queen and her entourage if she did not listen to Jon’s pleas or accept the shrieking, rotting evidence of the wight wrangled from beyond the Wall. Whether a siege or a cunning ambush, the chances of it all going wrong were high, and a delay to her move north was very likely. Neither prospect would please Jon, who had advised against violence and vengeance since she had first asked for his counsel, and who was anxious to pack up and leave for home with her, her armies and her dragons in tow.

He wasn’t there to quell her flaring temper, so she cursed vilely in her mother tongue as frustration gripped her mind like hot pincers, turning on her heel in a flare of cloak as she took another pointless trip across the tent. She knew her duty, she knew her commitment and vows to the man she loved, but to see all she had dreamed of and worked so hard for collapse into nothing was a bitter cup to sip to the dregs.

If the parley didn’t work, could she bring herself to walk away from her advantage without resentment? She knew herself; doing her duty, making sacrifices for the greater good, or for love, were easier in theory. Inside her was light and dark, the light side of her had chosen the more difficult path to victory, but her dark side was petulant and vocal, nagging at her to bring fire and blood, secure her position in the south before committing to the north and hope that Jon would accept her high handedness along with the other more pleasant aspects of her nature.

The Wall, that seven-hundred-foot wall of ice, only if it remained standing would she have time to think of her own position, the image of its solid, towering presence, glimmering blue and white and grey in the low winter light, pasted in her mind for reassurance. She could not see how the army of the dead could find a way through it, and this dangerous assumption left her free to consider all options, whereas her pessimistic husband could see only one; go home, marshal their resources, and wait in a cold, hostile land where she was likely to wither with despair and frustration if his family and people rejected her.

The appearance of her Unsullied and Dothraki generals in the tent prevented her from further gnawing away at herself. She took a seat calmly and watched them crowd around, their dark, exotic faces, strange garb and harsh tongues familiar to her but likely to be intimidating to the Westerosi folk tomorrow, particularly after their victory of the Blackwater Rush. Switching between High Valyrian and Dothraki, tactics were gone over carefully, Grey Worm gave a report of his doings in the west, and at the end she left the floor open for any questions or comments, which was always a routine of hers to show her generals they were partners, and not mere followers. She was grateful to every one of them for being here, where they didn’t need to be, fighting a war that was becoming more puzzling as time went on.

‘Khaleesi, I do not understand,’ a younger Bloodrider spoke up, his knotted hair and beard a modest length compared to the others. ‘Why treat with the pink men in iron suits? Why not just kill
them all with your dragons?’

She smiled wearily. ‘I intend to rule this land of my father,’ she said. ‘And this is not Essos. We do not come to conquer and enslave, we must win over the people to rule them, and burning them all was my father’s way, not my way.’ There were a few dark, sceptical looks from the Dothraki, but little reaction from the Unsullied, who didn’t dare to question her judgement, and more of the same comments ensued, testing her resolve sorely as she silently agreed with some of it.

One of her older generals spoke up thoughtfully, his growly voice devoid of judgement but blunt, causing a faint blush on her cheeks. ‘The pretty Khal from the frozen north, the small one who likes to fight with our warriors for sport, we all know you have taken him as your lover. He has turned your head with his strange Westerosi ways. You are Khaleesi, be a Khaleesi and burn this whore Lannister queen to ashes as you did to Vaes Dothrak, and to the slavers in Slaver’s Bay.’

‘Thank you, Ogo,’ she said firmly. ‘As always, I appreciate your counsel, but we will try these strange Westerosi ways first.’ She paused, her eyes sweeping over the faces of her men. ‘For those of you not coming to the Dragonpit, stay alert. At the first sign of trouble, show no mercy. If you see the dragons return above the city, you will know we have been betrayed.’

She scowled again and the calculating insult of the venue, the crumbling temple to the folly of her house as the men muttered their farewells and withdrew, Grey Worm offering to remain behind to guard her against potential assassins. She nodded at the offer and let him stay, glad of his steady loyalty, his comforting silence as she got her feet to walk again, too wound up to consider eating or sleeping, despite the plate of food set out for her and comfortable furs laid out on her narrow camp bed.

Her mind was so crammed with impulses, the fight instinct kicking in hard, that she closed her eyes and breathed deep to centre herself for a good few minutes, choosing an image of her secret husband to focus on, smiling at her proudly from atop his horse, awed and pleased with the warrior queen with the good heart he had won for himself. She must try, try hard to stay that goddess, and not revert to her dark half that implored to be let loose, like a wailing ghost in her mouth.

***

The dry bowl of crumbling mortar and stones, friable bones and dust that coated the toes of her boots, was the perfect symbol of her barren hopes, her barren womb, the ruin of her house. Struggling with repressing her deep resentment, the only aspect she was capable of presenting to her enemies was calm detachment, which was sufficiently annoying to rile her usurper rival, a once-lovely older woman with cropped hair and the narrow green eyes of a spitting cat. Her brother and lover, the man who had murdered her father, was dignified and subdued, and more weathered and world weary that she expected, no malice there at all.

It went against her nature to be a passive observer, and to defer to others, but it was Jon’s tale, his crisis, she was merely there to be the better queen and demonstrate all her power. The hatred that radiated out from Queen Cersei’s stiff, black-clad form made her amazed and exhausted at how someone could maintain that level of loathing. She could taste the jealousy in it, a burn of sweet acid on her tongue. The woman was an abject failure, quite mad and as desperate as a cornered rat, soundly hated by the people, and had left a trail of wanton destruction on her climb to the top. When she had her bad moments, she should tell herself firmly she was not the same.

The woman even had the gall to try and turn Jon to her cause, invoking the name of his father she had helped end, but Jon was not having it. To her surprise and exasperation, he announced to all that he had pledged himself to her, and she still was not sure whether to hit him for being such a dolt, or kiss him stupid. Neither was an option with a dozen pairs of eyes looking, people mingling
to pass the time, all on edge at Tyrion’s last-ditch attempt to win over his sister, at the risk of his life. She had to acknowledge that her Hand was devoted to the cause of peace and minimal bloodshed, though his reasons were muddled. He loved his revolting family, he was devoted to his queen, and he truly cared about the people who had spat on and mocked him as Imp and dwarf all his life. Much as he annoyed her sometimes, she wanted him back whole and safe.

Twitchy and unable to stay close to the others in case she betrayed her worry, she moved further away from the group, across the sandy wasteland, melancholy flooding her in a grey wash as she saw tiny twisted dragon bones, the failed hopes scattered and forgotten amidst the broken stone and rank growth. Her hand glanced across her belly under her thick grey coat, recalling the strange pain she had felt there this morning, like being stabbed with a Braavosi blade, and the brief welling of dark blood she had sponged off her thighs. Now her moon blood was back, it was being erratic, returning in three weeks instead of four. She swore under her breath at the inconvenience. She had few days left to enjoy life at home with Jon before it was time to leave, and she didn’t want to spend that time all moody and bloody.

Unable to stop herself, she gravitated towards his silent figure, the swirl and fall of a cloak she had once worn to hide her near-naked body from view that was really too heavy for the unusually warm day, a stubborn but wary look, like a puppy expecting a kick, an attempt to apologise in his gravelly voice, which was an instant balm to her jumping nerves.

‘No one is less happy about this than I am.’

How she loved him and his blunt honesty, his complete lack of bullshit, no matter that it was poorly timed. ‘I respect what you did,’ she said carefully, keeping her eyes evasive, her posture formal. ‘I wish you hadn’t done it, but I respect it.’ She paused and looked around, but no one was in earshot. ‘I have my doubts whether the woman really meant her pledge in any case. She seems quite unstable and incapable of reason. What was your impression of her?’

He frowned, considering, shifting on his heels a little. ‘When I was a boy, before I left for the Wall, King Robert came to Winterfell with Cersei and the rest. That was the beginning of the end for the Starks,’ he said slowly. ‘She never deigned to notice me, a bastard boy, but I couldn’t help but see her. I had never seen a woman so beautiful, but she scared me half to death. I have now seen worse than her in terms of foes, but she is still a formidable enemy.’

‘Your enemy now, you honest fool,’ she said softly.

He gave her a very weary look. ‘She always was, as my sister likes to remind me.’

A fresh wave of frustration made her stir, again thinking that a burst of dragon flame directed towards the Red Keep would solve both their problems. It would be the way of her ancestors, who weren’t always wrong. ‘This place was the beginning of the end of my family,’ she said, casting her gaze around the ruins. She had not spoken to him much about the history of her house, but she did now, her mood making her words dreamy and sad. The greatest fear of her house was to become normal, frail humans, with no magic in their veins. Only she remained, the last Targaryen, the end result of the centuries long battle to remain extraordinary.

‘You’re not like everyone else,’ Jon said gently. ‘And your family has not seen its end.’ She gazed up at him with naked affection, appreciating his determination to make her feel better about this appalling situation. He had that look, that deep, sultry look when he regarded her more like a goddess than a woman that was small and weak, reckless and selfish. They were tucked away in a crumbling alcove, she could have safely caught his lips in a brief kiss to give herself a taste of reassurance, but it would not be wise. She had created a bubble of reserve around herself that she would not cross while they were out in public, thin and wavering but strong enough.
'I have tried to tell you this before in different ways, and been a coward about it, as it clearly did not put you off,’ she said, the pain in her voice evident. ‘I can’t have children.’

‘Who told you that?’ he challenged her, calmly sceptical. ‘It doesn’t matter to me whether you can, or not, but I don’t believe it. I never have.’

‘The witch who murdered my husband, then cursed me,’ she said with a wince.

‘Has it occurred to you that she may not have been a reliable source of information?’ he questioned with a small quirk of his mouth, a quirk of flat denial.

‘I tried to buy back my husband’s life with blood magic. I lost my son Rhaego that night, and I didn’t bleed for over six years,’ she explained, and she saw a flash of insight in his attentive eyes, his brows rising. ‘Yes, I know,’ she sighed. ‘I did bleed, since we were together, but on its own it means nothing.’ His hands reached for hers discreetly, and she let him, needing the support. ‘I pray for it,’ she confessed. ‘Even though it would be a disaster, though I believe in nothing, though I deserved the curse I earned, I am stupid enough to pray for it.’

‘And I am stupid enough to keep trying for it,’ he replied, and she smiled weakly at his optimism.

‘I like the trying bit, very much,’ she whispered. ‘But don’t think it will come to anything. Fate has been both kind and unkind to me since you came into my life, Jon Snow, but a child is too much to expect.’ She remembered the witch’s warning, echoing through the long, hard years. *Only death can pay for life.* She had bought Jon’s life with the loss of Viserion, she had thought. What else would she need to sacrifice to have his child as well? She was afraid of the answer.

‘That ideal world,’ he said wistfully. ‘The one you talked about. Where we are properly married and with child and entirely alone with no enemies to worry about.’ She forced down the urge to sob, willing her eyes to stay dry and she looked at him, her heart out in the open, just like his. ‘I hope we find it someday.’

‘As do I,’ she swallowed, and untangled her hands from his at the sound of carrying voices from out in the pit, and straightened. ‘You were right from the beginning,’ she added with regret. ‘If I trusted you, everything would be different. Maybe we wouldn’t be standing here. Maybe that world wouldn’t seem so bloody impossible.’ She jerked her chin, sliding her eyes away from his quickly, hunting for her iron will, lost somewhere under all those inconvenient emotions he had awakened.

‘What will you do?’ he said, more distantly.

‘I don’t know,’ she said. ‘I can’t forget what I saw beyond the Wall, and I can’t pretend that Cersei won’t take back half the Kingdoms once we go north.’ It was a window into what she had been struggling with lately, he saw inside, and didn’t seem upset, not yet. Perhaps it was safe to share her turmoil with him, ask for his input instead of trying to conceal it, but not here.

‘Don’t do anything rash, Daenerys,’ he said, quietly but firmly. ‘Regardless of what happens today, I need you with me. None of this really matters compared to what faces us in the North.’

To keep the peace for now, she nodded, though the ghost in her mouth wanted to howl in protest.
Story update:

So far, apart from the accelerated relationship and considerable amounts of awesome sex that are the heart of this fic, I haven't been particularly canon divergent. This may change from here on in, otherwise I would be winding it up soon. There are two possible routes to an ending, the conventional one, or something different. We will see how it works out, thanks for indulging my smutty meanderings.
And no rivers and no lakes can put the fire out

A/N: An interlude with the gorgeous beasts, some quality time before it all goes to hell, and my aforementioned divergence. Small spoiler, we won’t be going to Winterfell via the canon route. Listen to my confused brain straining as I strictly do my own thing from now on, ah the fun we’ll have.

Another reminder about comments. Comments are magic beans for writers, they make you write faster, and try harder. A common lament from all my writer colleagues on here, but sigh...

I am going to hell for eternity for the smuttiest of smut in this chapter, but if you like it, vote for it, and show the other, more classy categories some love as well in the Jonerys Fanfiction Awards, voting closes at the end of the month –
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeT08SkDKcO1Td2CPL9hLRHZzX61jZNus1ZlHonC5VUhSP

Dedicated to the talented, prolific and good hearted Ashleyfanfic, get well soon doll xxx

The leisurely indulgence of that period between leaving Eastwatch and the trip to King’s Landing was already a distant memory, a series of highly personal events that in hindsight, seemed to move so quickly despite the drowsy, lengthy days of not doing much other than bonding. First, she was admitting to herself, and Jon, that she was in love with him. Then she was shining strong light in the dark corners of her body and soul with little reserve about it. Then she was bleeding for the first time in many years, betrothed, and married, in a pleasantly informal way that was more real to her than any glittering affair in a sept or Godswood.

The end of the world was nigh, all who inhabited Dragonstone and bustled about in frantic preparation knew it. The atmosphere of urgency partially explained their haste, like that out of control horse she had fancifully imagined running across the moors, and now she was trying desperately to sprint and keep up with it. She, who had always tried to put the holistic view first, to do what was best for all, had done many unthinkable things that were all for herself.

Strategic advantages may have been there, it had been what had brought Jon Snow to Dragonstone in the first instance, but love and strategy did not mix well. Love was dangerous, love made you frighteningly vulnerable to loss. Love made you do stupid things to avoid that loss, as her cynical Hand liked to remind her. But still, she would rather be in this lusty, besotted state of vulnerability and vexation than that empty vessel she had been before, even if she suffered with continuing misgivings about abandoning her home, her throne and sending all her resources north to work with a nation of people that would likely loathe her on sight, and her motley collection of foreigners.

Well tough, she thought mutinously, taking heart from Jon’s blunt words – ‘No one gets to be an ungrateful shit in my hearing, or yours.’ They had not had much time alone since returning from their suspiciously successful parley to discuss how to manage the people on reaching the North, they were too busy for cosy talks abed. She was lucky if Jon managed to find his way to her room every other night, usually quite late, the work that needed doing to prepare for the journey and the number of demanding, curious people now staying at the castle making lengthy, pleasurable visits difficult. They would have time on the journey to White Harbour, she anticipated, although discretion would be a harder prospect.

She cursed discretion as she trudged through the swirling wind, sheltered under a heavy fur cloak
of rich black sable as she took the path to the clifftops, pellets of icy rain stinging her face on occasion when she peeked out from under her hood. Increasingly she wondered what the point was, who was really foolish enough to get outraged about her choice of partner when death bore down upon them all. Her growing mental and physical deprivation and the reality of the onrushing conflict that was about to dominate everything was twisting her resolve, but she would continue to attempt to hold herself apart, until the lay of the land had been established.

The previous evening there had been a discussion at a council meeting about her travelling to Winterfell alone with the dragons to avoid potential assassins. She and Jon had squashed that idea as subtly as possible, but there was an interesting response from the attendees in stances and facial expressions which said it all. They appeared to be fooling no one in her inner circle, not even the traumatised Greyjoy boy, and even Tyrion did not even bother to venture his two coppers’ worth. Only Jorah still held out hope that she could be dissuaded, her poor, devoted old bear.

In the stasis of being trapped aboard ship, she intended to take advantage of everyone’s acceptance of their relationship, and spend every minute possible in bed, regardless of the potential for spies and gossips. Again, she wished her husband had not bent the knee so publicly and then stubbornly adhered to it, as appearing as equals would have made matters easier, but Jon was his singular self. She might as well of wished for a wild wolf of the woods to transform into a cunning castle cat. In the end, Tyrion had managed to avert disaster, and he had the right to feel smug about it, though having met Cersei and taken her measure, she trusted her not a whit.

Reaching the sheltered area of rocky walls curved in a half circle that the dragons had chosen as their new sleeping spot now the weather was growing worse, she cleared her mind of complex business, huddling under her furs as she waited for her sons to return from their ever-restless circling above the island. They had recently been brought a cattle beast apiece, and Drogon had devoured his, but Rhaegal’s was only half eaten, making her frown in concern as she toed the burnt carcass. She needed both her sons in peak physical condition to deal with the cold and coming strife, but Rhaegal was clearly still pining for his brother.

She had woken that morning alone with a strange impulse, a strong, stirring image of Jon boldly reaching out to Drogon many weeks ago, the very moment she had felt something in her tough little heart break for good. They needed every advantage they could get in this fight, and though she had no idea why, her lover seemed to have an affinity with Drogon that no one else had. Perhaps he could do the same with Rhaegal and give her lonely son a distraction, someone else to connect with, as she alone was not enough.

The weak sun broke through a resentful crack in the clouds for a minute, bathing the scorched, flattened grass in dull, white light and signalling the arrival of her dragons to the call of her mind. She stepped backwards out of the circle of cliffs to meet them as they descended, as graceful as birds in an updraft, but all noisy flapping and growling and slithering as they landed in tandem, the impact of their massive bulk hitting the ground vibrating through the soles of her boots.

‘My beautiful boys,’ she greeted them affectionately, not feeling the least ridiculous in the way she spoke to them, her gloved hands patting and scratching their elegant long necks, her cheek rubbing against one, then the other with a scrape of hot scales. ‘Where have you been, did you range far today?’ There was a low rumble, and through their odd symbiosis she caught images in her brain of the open sea, towering waves, a school of tasty fish, and a boat full of grey-faced, knock kneed, shouting smallfolk that made her bubble with laughter. ‘Thank you for not roasting them,’ she said.

They crowded in so close she disappeared between their enormous bodies, the heat soothing her instantly and blocking the bitter chill, but she heard him arrive, her Jon, heard his deep chuckle to find her smothered by dragon. Drogon immediately cocked his spiky head like a dog and moved...
towards his wary, still figure, not roaring in challenge, but chuffing in a curious, relaxed manner. Man and beast had not spent much time together since his ride as her passenger, but they continued to intrigue each other. Was it merely her son feeling what she felt for him in her veins, or something else?

She walked toward his wind-whipped figure, letting out a breath of tension as she watched her deadly, oft-irascible son settle on his haunches for a pat, keeping herself between the pair and Rhaegal in case the smaller dragon decided to be aggressive. He was following her, all four of them crowding into the bowl of rocks, the air temperature shooting up from the dragon’s perpetual inner fire.

When she reached Jon’s side he let off his patting and tucked her under his cloak, dropping a kiss on her forehead. ‘I missed you,’ he said sweetly, and she smiled into his throat in a curl of lips, a little snap of teeth.

‘Good,’ she said archly, giving him a mildly indignant flash of her blue eyes. ‘I was beginning to wonder.’ His own eyes were warm, as brown as new fallen leaves, focused on her entirely and not distracted by cares, or looming nosey dragons.

‘Tonight, the queen is going to be indisposed,’ he said casually, with a subtle glint of mischief.

She snorted. ‘And what is wrong with me exactly, that I am so indisposed?’ She dipped her head, trying to hide her pleased smirk.

‘I don’t know the name of the sickness,’ he said solemnly, and she could not resist kissing him again, higher up this time, rubbing her nose against his neat, dense beard. ‘All I know that you will be confined to your room, and quite naked, which is hardly a condition to deal with court business. I will be there to look after you, of course.’

‘Of course,’ she said, equally solemn, but then she giggled, enjoying the brief levity from her ever-serious man, and anticipating whatever he had in mind for tonight. Her tired body and overworked brain craved his full attention.

‘Did you ask me here to feed me to your dragons, finally?’ he said, with one last scratchy nuzzle against her cheek before letting her go reluctantly. ‘It’s a bit late for that, surely.’ The pair of them were being watched by the dragons with considerable interest, which she admitted was slightly off-putting. She straightened, returning to the point of the meet up, hunting down eloquent words to explain herself.

‘I wanted my sons to meet their father, officially,’ she said lightly, gaining a mildly quizzical look. ‘I know it is difficult to understand, but they’re not beasts to me. They are my children, so they are your children now, too. It matters to me, and to them, and it’s important for another reason.’ She took his hands and stripped off his heavy gloves, tossing them to the ground for now. Their fingers entwined, and she stared up at him earnestly. ‘You know better than I what faces us,’ she said. ‘You seem to have an affinity with the dragons that no one else has. If the time comes that I fall, or I cannot fight, if you can communicate with them, it may make all the difference in the midst of battle.’

He was frowning, appearing as if he was ready to protest, but subsided. ‘No one else?’ he said wonderingly. ‘Not even your friends who have been with you for years?’

‘No one. That is why it was so strange when you approached Drogon. He merely tolerates others, even Ser Jorah who he has known since he hatched.’ She gave a soft, deprecating laugh. ‘I think I was already half in love with you then, but that made it so much worse.’
He squeezed her fingers tightly, and gave her a dark, possessive look, warmly glowing embers beneath long lashes. ‘Nothing is going to happen to you while I live, Daenerys,’ he said steadily. ‘Do you hear? I am man of the earth and rocks and solid ground. I am not made of air and magic like you. I fight with my sword, not with dragons, but tell me what you want, if it will make you happy.’

She spoke then, in two tongues; the ancient tongue of her house silently, sending the flow of words into the minds of her sons, and then in the common tongue so Jon could understand her, guiding him to reach out and touch each dragon in turn, both of them docile and patient, to her relief, and listening intently. He may be earthbound and practical, a man of ice, as hardy and stubborn as granite, but there was something that had whispered to her right from the start, that spoke to her secret self, elemental and compelling, and she had trusted in it, as she trusted now.

‘Drogon, Rhaegal,’ she said directly. ‘You know this man, you have seen him and felt him in my thoughts, in my heart. He is yours now too, your father and your friend. You must guard him with your lives, as you guard mine. If he needs your help, you should listen for his voice, and come, even if you can’t hear mine anymore.’

She knew it may seem absurd to him, pleading with two monstrous beasts, and she said much and more silently, warning them of the great wars to come, apologising for all the burdens she would place on them in the coming months. In the end, they grumbled and then purred in acknowledgment, Rhaegal giving Jon a cautious sniff, then a nudge that nearly knocked him over, his yellow-green eyes flaring, and she gave a tremulous smile of relief. It was the first time she had seen the green dragon touch anyone else willingly since he was small.

Jon looked a little ruffled, but he kept upright and reached out to give Rhaegal a stroke on a safe spot on his nose, smiling a little. Consciously, her hand went to her stomach under her cloak as she watched him with her singular children, wary but fascinated, feeling wistful. Horribly, uselessly wistful. The brief flow of blood of last week had not returned, and four weeks and more had passed since her moon blood, and nothing. Missandei had been giving her that concentrated look again this morning, but there was nothing out of the ordinary to see, just an imperfect queen with too many worries and a slumbering womb, her only offspring likely to be these two sons of fire.

***

She wasn’t going to laugh cynically and order him out of her chamber for his presumption. She wasn’t going to disappear in a puff of smoke. She wasn’t going to turn around and tell him she had changed her mind and that oaths she had sworn in front of Gods she didn’t believe in had no standing. In fact, it was somewhat pathetic how dependent, how tightly bound she now was to this man. She wouldn’t blame him if he seemed to take it for granted, but no.

The sweet desperation was still there, needing to grab and snatch, rip and tear and crawl inside, the darkness in her heart speaking in a secret, complex tongue to the darkness in his, the lack of time left to be utterly alone and unobserved, unburdened by duty. All of it served to make her feel as if the top layer of her skin was being flayed off by his lustrous dark eyes as he entered the room and stared at her for a lengthy minute, making her discomforted, shifting restlessly on her toes, part of her itching to pick up the skirts of her robe and run for it.

She had spent a long time in her beloved, soon to be missed bathhouse and had preened and prettied herself like a costly whore, and she was pleased to see Jon had made a similar effort, wearing that dark blue tunic that looked so well on him. She took quiet enjoyment in seeing him wear something that wasn’t dull brown, and was amused at the thought of him bashfully asking Missandei for help obtaining it.
'You are always telling me to take my bloody clothes off, so I thought you might like something different,' he said with a shy smile.

'In truth, I prefer you naked, but you look especially handsome,' she said cheekily, earning her a dry snort. There was a small dining table set up with choice food and wine, but she suspected it wasn’t going to be enjoyed, judging by the heavy silence, the fixed hunger on his face for something other than food. But first, it seemed he wanted to vex her, the sultry stare that had taken in the intricate knot of satin under her small bosom, the heavy, sheeny, lace trimmed black robe that wound around her body, her hair unbound and falling to her waist in a river of silver, that stare faded away, and he looked entirely stubborn, and annoying.

'No,' he said softly. 'I don’t think so. Stop fluttering those blue eyes at me like you want me to have you on the floor with your skirts up this minute. I want to see you sit down and eat a proper meal for a change, you’re getting scrawny.'

'Scrwany?' she repeated, mildly incredulous. ‘I’m not hungry, eating is a waste of time that could be better spent on other things.’

His mouth went firm. ‘Scrwny,’ he said obdurately. ‘I’ve barely seen you eat for days, and you need a good layer of fat on those tiny bones if you are to survive in the North.’

She couldn’t help her burst of laughter, despite her indignation. ‘You still really don’t know how to talk to queens,’ she teased him, then moved off to sit at the table semi-obediently, contemplating the plate of food; herb-crusted fish and vegetables, and feeling unenthused. Instead she took a big sip of Arbor Gold, swirling it on her tongue, savouring the richness.

Jon sat down at the other end of the spindly table, eyeing her suspiciously. ‘If you don’t eat, I’ll hold you in my lap and feed you myself.’

It wasn’t much of a threat, but to please him she forked up some of the fish, then a roast potato, nibbling idly as she watched him work his way through his plate neatly and methodically, still annoyed by the change in mood to mundane matters, and wondering how to get it back. But she supposed she had been neglecting herself lately, and his care for her was a potent factor in what drove her so very mad over Jon. He didn’t just want to spend their time alone fucking her, he wanted to worship her, and she should enjoy it while she could.

Her desultory attempt at eating slowed, she was too busy drinking him in, enjoying herself as always, more interested in winding her fingers in the damp curls at his neck, tidily scraped back to display the strong line of his jaw, than eating fish. He put down his fork and knife finally, glowering. ‘Stroppy,’ he observed. ‘All right then, have it your way.’

He was quick, so quick she was up off her chair before she could blink, but not for a smack on the arse, alas. He sat back down in her place, holding her across his lap. She grumbled a bit, but was cheered by having him so close, filling her greedy senses. She wriggled her satiny bottom in his lap, then settled. ‘All right, I will eat,’ she sighed. ‘You don’t have to feed me like a babe.’ Awkwardly one handed, she polished off the rest of the plate, pausing occasionally to offer him a bite.

It was strangely comforting and domestic, if undignified. He snatched her wine, drank it down, and poured her another considerately so she could clear her mouth of the food. She kissed him briefly, and he tasted of wine and herbs and warmth, and she pushed the plate away and snuggled closer, all the stresses of the long day fading away.

‘What did you tell them all?’
‘Missandei told some lies about the queen being *indisposed*, and arranged the rest. She really is a gem,’ she murmured. ‘No one will bother us, although your drinking companions may go looking for you.’

‘I told them I was going to bed early,’ he said. ‘I didn’t say *which* bed.’

She sniffed, the corner of her mouth turning up at him. ‘Not to sleep, I hope.’

His eyes grew heavy, as if he was sleepy, but there was the tell-tale dilation of his pupils, wide and glossy. ‘Not until I have had you in all the ways I have been thinking on today, when I should have been working,’ he said lazily. The last occasion he had spent a lengthy time buried between her thighs had been in the tent the night of their vows, and suddenly she felt that dull burn, that emptiness that needed filling up, and she knew she wouldn’t last long before begging for whatever it was he had been thinking of, though she had guessed the moment he had entered the room.

She ran her lips up the cord of sinew at the side of his throat, breathing in and out, a tickle of air that made him shiver. Gods, he smelled so good, lulling and familiar with a tang of dangerous animal, tensing up under her weight, a rough hand slipping inside her robe to cup a breast. ‘All the ways,’ she murmured significantly. ‘I don’t want to wait any longer for it.’

The hand on her breast squeezed, indenting the flesh to leave bruises, the first of many, she hoped, needing to be marked, branded. She would rather wear him on her skin than some fancy piece of jewellery. Her hands delved, down his fine tunic and under it, finding bare, warm skin cut with scars, and further below, a sizeable bulge under the lacing of his breeches. His mouth was at her throat now, soft and ripe and bristly, then sharp, lupine teeth sinking in ownership, not caring that she would have to hide the evidence in the morn under white paint or high necklines.

She gave a little, helpless sound, a sound of submission, as evident as her body going slack, as if she was prey that had been grabbed by the scruff of her neck and carried off to a dark lair, and then she was carried, lifted in his powerful arms and delivered to the waiting bed.

The long sash of her robe unravelled in a stream, until she was completely unwrapped from the layers of satin, her hair streaming brightly over the black fabric, the thicker grey covers of the bed, her skin creamy and tinted slightly gold from the heat of the east that had never left her. She had been plucked bare of most of her hair again, her cunt exposed and slightly pink from the wax, and she spread herself in a languorous stretch, her eyes bold and heavy lidded as she stared up at him, his darker eyes fixed where she had displayed herself, his tongue darting out as if he could not wait to taste.

He would have her with his attentive mouth, then he would bend her double and fuck her to the point of agony, she craved it now, the dizzying surrender to his superior strength, and the dark impulses that were buried under love and care and worship. ‘Gods help me, but you’re beautiful. I feel as if I am about to burst already,’ he muttered drowsily, his eyes fluttering as regarded her hungrily, a shuddering breath against her glistening mound, then his arms hooking her smooth legs backwards and further apart.

She braced herself, but there was no means of retreat, he had her pinned, dipping his dark head to the highly sensitive seam between her inner and outer lips, tracing the shape with the very tip of his tongue with perfect familiarity, the left side, then the right, causing her nub to throb for attention, a sudden gush of wetness. Her own tongue darted over her lower lip in response, a shaky moan, then a wrenching sound from her throat as his soft mouth took her whole, her lips drawn inside with a lusty growl.

Alternating between slow, loving sweeps from the top of her open slit to the dark crease between
her buttocks, and firm jabs and careful bites that had her spasm wildly, her focus narrowed to a bright spot of light beneath her eyelids, dancing and elusive, the rasp of his wool tunic against her trapped thighs, the abrasion of whiskers which only heightened her delight in what he was doing to her. The rising pressure in her belly was a dense, inescapable mass, and she began to whine in protest, not wanting to come so quickly but unable to stop it, and he broke away for a moment to purr at her. ‘No love…I want you to come. I need you nice and relaxed for me.’

This made her jerk against the covers, her fingertips and toes curling as the words echoed through her distressed mind, her brow already trickling with sweat though she was barely exerting herself, an indolent tangle of legs and arms and trailing hair and wetness, her skin flushing and tight, tighter, the hitch of her breathing rapid, the spot of light flaring to fill the space behind her flickering eyelids. The delicate circling of her nub, a sucking kiss over the tiny bundle of nerves made her break with his name on her lips, and she came back to earth with another violent jerk, lying in a stupor for a restful age.

Her legs were freed and she curled them around him closely, his face hidden in the hollow of her stomach, and she reached for him with a clumsy hand, taking a fistful of curls to get him to look at her. She recalled the first time he had tasted her, how she had promptly lost whatever wits she still possessed that night. It was still the same, every time. ‘Clothes,’ she ordered weakly. ‘Clothes off, and boots.’ Her climax had only taken the edge off, her blood was fizzing, and as he gave her his deep, inky look and sat up to undress she sat up as well, shucking off her robe and reaching for an item on the bedside table, holding the small bottle in her palm.

She had brought it to her room for this purpose, remembering the heightened pleasure she had experienced when he used oil on her before. She felt a sinful twitch in her loins, so strong it was painful, and her reality stayed fuzzy around the edges as she mutely watched him reveal his perfect body, no layer of fat, only striated muscle and sweetly rounded cheeks, and his beautiful cock, somewhat daunting given what she had consented to, but the dark thread of worry only made her arousal richer.

When he took her in his arms, she tensed, but then he kissed her slowly, exploring her mouth with a tongue that tasted of her, and his skin slid across hers, blessedly cool in contrast to her prickly heat. He held her and touched her as if she was made of finely wrought glass, murmuring endearments and taking his time to move her into position. It only served to make her skittish, her hands roaming everywhere, and she took back the initiative, straddling his lap and taking his cock in hand to sink down upon it, letting out a grateful curse as she was slowly filled, just a few inches advancing and retreating until he grasped her arse to still her with a tortured groan. ‘You are not making this easy,’ he rasped. ‘Do you want me to lose control?’

She did and she didn’t, so she said nothing, revelling in the feel of him clased inside her cunt. He growled into her breasts, unable to stop her downward path, taking all of him with a slippery wriggle, and she leaned backwards, the bottle falling to the covers to wink in the lamplight. She moved over him a few more times until she was entirely loose and relaxed, then she opened her eyes, finding him watching her transfixed. ‘Now?’ he said simply, and she hissed a breath and nodded.

He moved decisively then, lifting her off his cock and turning her over on her front. She sank her face into the pillows, lying prone with her bottom raised, and another pillow was taken and placed under her hips to elevate her further, hands drifting over her cheeks, the drip of oil down her cleft, the familiar probing of his slick fingers to open her up, then his body covering hers in a blanket of hard flesh. When he took her arse, it was with a single thrust, and slippery with oil he was inside her with no resistance, only a luscious friction and fulness, the crazed sounds she made, the clawing of her hands against the pillows, the shiver across her skin like a thousand tiny creatures
were crawling all over her, only small manifestations of what she was experiencing.

His hands stroked her hair away from her neck so he could nuzzle her and gentle her with incoherent words, but then he could not hold back, quite rough with her, deliciously rough, the carnality of taking her from the rear in this manner eating away at his control. She keened at the rending of her taut channel, turning her head to muffle the sound in his hand, her teeth sinking into the fleshy pad at the base of his thumb as he clapped his palm over her mouth and swore, his other hand sliding between the pillow and her belly to grab on for more leverage so he could go deeper, a cramp of muscles protesting, her keening merging to a wail, loud and savage.

She had imagined it for some time, rolled it on her tongue like a sweet morsel, but the reality, oh it was so consuming she could feel her mind splintering with cracks. He moved easily within her now, so he dared to fuck her without restraint, yanking her back onto her knees and driving her hard, spreading her cheeks further apart to change the angle, the agony she had looked for only pleasure, the kind of pleasure that sent one spiralling lost into the outer darkness, too much to endure for too long.

The cracks ran like lightning across her vision, like blue-white arcs. With her own fingers working her nub and urging her on, she broke then, into a thousand glittering pieces, coming and coming with a sharp scream, terrified by the way it seized her as if she was pitching a fit under his weight, his cock slamming into her once, twice more, his ragged nails cutting into her flesh, a complex surge of energy that left her bruised and torn up, her conscious mind winking out as she heard him cry out in dark triumph at conquering her utterly.

***

She was enough of an imperious queen to deeply resent being woken up in the dead of night, no matter the urgency, so when a gentle rapping at the chamber door worked its way through her sludgy semi-consciousness she sat up and snarled at the offending person to sod off, flopping back down to snuggle into Jon’s sleeping form, hiding her face in the cool expanse of his back and pretending she had heard nothing.

But the knocking did not stop, so she rose again with a growl, blinking owlishly in the guttering light of the near-spent oil lamps. ‘Your Grace, it’s me. I am so sorry, but it is urgent,’ she heard a familiar, female voice say firmly. ‘I won’t come in, but both of you need to get up and dressed, Tyrion insisted.’

‘I will hit him,’ she muttered darkly. ‘Dwarf or not.’ But she slid out from under the covers, something telling her the matter was not trivial, at this late hour, when everyone should be sleeping. She was exhausted and achy, and very dishevelled, it was going to take some effort to make herself semi-presentable without assistance. She did her best, washing herself quickly with lukewarm water at the ewer and basin and running a damp brush through her hair to free the tangles.

The gentle snoring from the bed faded, then a grumble and few oaths, and she was dressed in grey tunic and trousers by the time Jon sat up, looking confused and boyish enough to make her scowl fade a little. ‘What is it?’ he rumbled dozily. ‘It is the middle of the bloody night. Are we under attack?’

‘I hope it’s that serious, to justify the intrusion,’ she huffed. ‘Best get up, love. Tyrion needs both of us apparently.’ Now waking up properly, she began to fret and pace as she finished dressing, knowing whatever it was, it was not going to be good news. Jon was up and dressed much faster than she, a deep frown marring his face, which had been so peaceful and absent of worries while he slept beside her.
For decorum, pointless though it seemed, Jon left first, a quick, efficient shadow darting through the empty corridors of the castle, and her trailing behind, Missandei waiting outside to join her on the trek to the council chamber, hastily dressed, her frizzy hair quite untamed.

‘I don’t know much,’ she relayed as they walked. ‘A fishing boat arrived with two men on it, very late, asking for Tyrion. He woke me near straightaway to get both of you out of bed.’

‘Did you see these men?’ she asked, and her friend shook her head regretfully. ‘No, I came straight to your chamber. I am sorry for waking you and Lord Snow, your Grace. I know you said you weren’t to be disturbed.’

‘Don’t apologise,’ she said gently. ‘The matter will be of great import, otherwise Tyrion would not be so foolish. Perhaps its news from the North.’ She hoped not, the worst news they could possibly receive now was from that direction. The Wall falling, the relentless march of the dead, fixed on slaughter. Her heart leaped into her throat and her boots clicked faster on the tiles, but it was silly. Such news would come via raven, this bad news would be closer to home. That fucking treacherous bitch, she swore to herself, all her misgivings about the parley, and Queen Cersei’s last-minute change of heart, returning in an acid rush, burning on her tongue like bile.

She strode into the council room in a swirl of loose hair, her eyes taking in the scene as she halted, trying to compose herself in a regal, dignified pose despite her hurry, her half-assembled queenly armour. Jon was there, looking restless with fury, a smouldering anger in his tired eyes which roamed and never settled, not even on her face as she stood in the doorway, drawing everyone else’s attention. Varys was there, wringing his hands in the sleeves of his brocade robe, and Tyrion, frozen and wretched, failure painted in cruel lines on his heavy brow.

Two men waited as well; a black haired, bold eyed man with a lived-in face, and Ser Jaime Lannister, stripped of his fancy red and gold plate and looking grey and old, and very ashamed. Both the men were still damp from the frozen rain that beat against the castle walls and drifted in through the open balcony that overlooked the roaring ocean, the torchlight flickering in the bitter draughts. It did not snow on Dragonstone, but she guessed it was snowing now on the mainland.

‘Ser Jaime Lannister,’ she said calmly. ‘To what do we owe this pleasure? We thought to see you in Winterfell with your bannermen, not on Dragonstone with only a sellsword for company.’ They had not spoken directly, but she knew him by sight and reputation, Kingsguard and betrayer, Kingslayer and loyal lover to his sister queen. This was bad, extremely bad. Her temper, so tightly reined in by duty, wise counsel, then the soothing elixir of being in love, boiled and fumed beneath her surface. The look in her eyes must have been frightening, as Lannister stirred uneasily before finding the courage to explain himself.

‘There will be no bannermen, no truce,’ he said quietly. ‘I have come to warn your Grace and Lord Snow of my sister’s treachery, and no matter the cost to myself. I am sorry, your Grace, to bring you this news, but I thought it best you were warned now. Cersei will turn on you the minute the Golden Company arrives from Essos on the Greyjoy fleet. She could not care less about your army of dead men. She has gone completely mad, and I could not in conscience endure it a moment longer, so I ran, hoping to catch you in time so you can act.’

She was reeling, desperately needing to clutch on to something to brace herself against the wave of pure anger and shock, which should have been no shock to her at all, she was smarter than that. It was others that were idealistic, focusing on better natures, good hearts, the righteousness of their causes. Not her, she had seen enough of the dark hearts of men and women to not be surprised.

She kept her feet, her posture tightly contained, her hands folded before her, but her eyes betrayed her, flicking away from Ser Jaime to find her husband finally looking at her, as if she was a barrel
of pitch about to explode and destroy his hopes, and he had no idea how to stop it.
And you can’t hold me down, because I belong to the hurricane

A/N: This fic is basically a vividly smutty love story about two prickly, broody, sexy loners finding each other at a most inconvenient time. However, I was really, REALLY bored with the idea of taking the usual route to Winterfell, so here is my attempt to introduce a bit of action and alternative universe/fuck canon plotting without veering from the main theme too much. You can blame my husbean (read husband), who came up with the suggestion.

As always, let me know what you think. Worry not, there will be delicious smut, because that’s the main point really. Thank you for being such fabulous readers. And thanks to Sparkles59 for the beta of this long-arse chapter.

There may be a longer gap until the next chapter, but I’m receptive to nagging in comments. Enjoy.

She had to remember it wasn’t just her anymore, and resist the urge to take control and start snapping out orders to piece together a plan to find their way out of this mess. But it was hard for her as a queen, very hard, particularly since they were still entangled in a tedious charade of being allies, not partners and equals. If she lost her tenuous grip on her temper and ignored his fuming, fretting presence in the corner of the room, Jon would not take it well, so in the end she wearily told everyone to go back to bed and reconvene in the morning for a full war council, earning her some puzzled looks from those who expected her to start spitting fire immediately.

She gave orders to Missandei to find food and beds for their unexpected guests, slipping in a few words in Dothraki about having their chamber guarded and their movements watched, as she trusted them not, despite Lannister’s bravery in coming to her and finally slipping free of the golden net his sister had tangled him in for all his life.

The peculiar, toxic nature of that relationship occupied her thoughts as she trudged back to her chamber, second-hand accounts of a passionate romance frowned upon by the realm but not really scandalous to her, bastard children foisted on the Baratheon usurper, vainglory, greed, treachery, and ugly feuds with the other great houses of Westeros, including House Stark. She had assumed that Ser Jaime was as vile and twisted as his sister, despite Tyron’s love for him, but he had honour, a tiny glint of it, and it was enough to warn them of the plotting lioness at their backs as they headed north.

Well, they would not be heading north in two days as planned, not now. She felt so tired her feet dragged behind her, too tired to think ahead, only wander aimlessly in circles in her mind, and try and snatch words out of the fog to explain herself to Jon without ending a very pleasant evening together in a squabble. He wanted to go home. He was itching with the need for it, feeling out of touch with his family and people and desperate for news from beyond the Wall, good or ill. He wanted her, her dragons and her armies where they were most needed, the wrangling for the throne in the south of lesser importance in his mind. She understood it, she was committed to it, but still it irked her, now in particular.

When she reached her room, depressed by the scene of half-packed coffers, piles of her possessions and the abandoned dinner, she poured a big glass of wine to fortify herself, poked at the dying fire to stir the embers, and waited for him in her wing chair, fidgeting and unable to settle into its comfort. She didn’t have to sit long before Jon arrived, a cloud of dank gloom over him that was near visible. ‘What’s your plan?’ he said abruptly, moving to stand in front of her, his eyes blackened with ill mood, his usual straight-backed stance rather hunched, as if expecting a blow or
reeling from one.

She sighed heavily and put down her empty glass. ‘I don’t have one at this point beyond finding the most efficient way of removing that bitch from the game,’ she said. ‘But she must be removed. You can’t go to war with a knife at your back. I should have had her dispatched weeks ago. There are options other than burning the entire city to the ground.’ Her tone was spiked, her eyes flashed up at him, but she wasn’t allotting blame. She had listened to counsel, tried the noble way, to her cost, and it had failed. Now she would try her way, which had served her so well in the past.

His frown deepened. ‘None of what happens south of the Neck is going to matter once the Night King breaks through the Wall,’ he said sullenly. ‘And if we survive, we can take care of her then. Winter will stop her mercenaries moving on us.’

Her temper smouldered like the sluggish fire in the grate. ‘These aren’t mere mercenaries, they are the finest army for hire in Essos,’ she snapped. ‘And what of the people? Shall we leave them to starve and suffer under Cersei’s boot? Do we fight for the living only to find nothing left but desolation if we win through? And what of me?’ Annoyed with having him looming over her, she rose to her feet, trying to keep her voice calm and reasonable, but she could hear the bite in it. ‘As I recall, you married me in front of your Gods. Then you swore allegiance to me in public view. I am your wife, and your queen. Whether you like it or not, the welfare of the south is yours now, as well as the North. Does it not matter, do I not matter?’

At the stunned look on his beloved face, she felt equal parts resentment and guilt, and unable to look at him any longer she turned away, wishing for more wine, but the jug was empty. If he wanted to leave her, go home alone without her, she would not stop him, she had her fierce pride, but something inside her would be forever tainted, in her woman’s heart that she had thrown open and let him crawl inside, to her great joy and fear.

‘Daenerys,’ he said quietly, his hand landing on her back, stroking it cautiously. ‘It hurts me to hear you say such things. Of course you matter.’ At his deep sigh, she turned slightly, finding him struggling inwardly to say the right thing to settle her, his warring duties making him utterly wretched. She softened a little, letting some of her useless anger out with a breath. ‘I am just worried,’ he said. ‘Worried that if we spend too long sorting out this disaster then it will be too late for all of us. But I will stand with you, and help you evict that bloody woman from your throne. But promise me love, as soon as you can extricate yourself, we must leave for home.’

His brown eyes were earnest, no resentment there to react to. She slumped, somewhat relieved. ‘It is not my throne until we have defeated all our enemies and Spring has come and we are all still standing,’ she said, with grinding regret. ‘It seems so far away from where we stand now.’ Sometimes she wished she was the kind of woman that could weep and cling, and expect her man to make all the decisions. She felt so exhausted she was swaying on her feet, and panicked that no good ideas had yet come to her. And under pressure, the weight of expectation from Jon worse than from her friends, followers and subjects. ‘I will do my very best to make an end quickly,’ she said honestly.

It wasn’t enough to wipe all the creases off his brow, but he managed to drop a kiss on her cheek. ‘If you don’t mind, I would like to go write some messages for home, and find my own bed,’ he said dully. ‘I need to do some thinking.’

Nodding, she patted his arm briefly and turned away, feeling a little stung, but understanding. ‘As do I,’ she said. ‘I will see you in the morning.’

***
In contrast to her raggedy, recently ravished state in the dead of night, her public face was now immaculate, as was called for. A true Targaryen, in all the striking colours of her house, charcoal and red, black and silver, her hair twisted and looped in intricate battle braids, her spine arrow straight, blue eyes calm and impenetrable until she cared to show her inner fire.

She had to retreat inside that shell of tough forged steel now and stay locked there, use all her wits and cunning and torrid history to extinguish that nest of snakes in King’s Landing, and then turn about and do it all over again, not snakes this time, but legions and legions of dead men. No wonder she was so tired, her bones felt filled with lead, and her stomach was oddly queasy, her nerves and lack of sleep giving her the unpleasant urge to vomit, but she would let none of it show.

She had called him in alone for an audience ahead of the rest of the key players in the castle, to try and get a read on him, the man with shit for honour who had suddenly found a clean part of himself. He had severed his ties abruptly, as he had tonelessly described to them last night, but could she trust his motives? It hardly mattered once all her resources were in place to attack, and if he cared anything about the people in his city he would not want to see her full fury unleashed.

‘I don’t need to relay to you what your house has done to mine,’ she said remotely, staring down the expanse of the map table at his carefully bland face. ‘My father the Mad King, much as he deserved your blade. My little niece and nephew, my sister in law…now your sister occupies my throne, and would rather see this country swamped by the dead than make even a temporary peace. Tell me why I shouldn’t kill her, or tell me you will stand by my side and help me do it.’

Ser Jaime had entered the meeting with a mask of sleek arrogance, which she guessed was his usual manner, but at her words the mask faltered and she saw real pain there, complex and raw. ‘You should kill her,’ he said quietly. ‘Gods help me, I wish I had it in me to do it myself, to put her out of her misery, but I cannot. I won’t stop you. I have come here to help you, knowing what it would mean.’

She studied him coldly, trying to sift through his mind and confirm his motives, and damp down her own simmering resentment over all he stood for. She thought of Tyrion, who loved his brother, who had probably worked so hard to bring about a truce for his benefit. She knew he loathed his sister, a hatred shot through with reluctant love, but for Jaime he had only high regard, and that was worth something. ‘I have heard of your love for your sister, and your children together, and what you have done to protect that love,’ she went on. ‘Can you really bring yourself to stand aside?’

‘The things I have done for love,’ he said flatly. ‘I am burdened by them. I wish to leave them all behind and serve until I fall in defence of the realm. I will swear allegiance to you, or the Starks, if they don’t kill me first, just let me earn back my honour.’

His words were stiff and formal, but honest, and she relaxed an inch. ‘Lord Snow has not tried to kill you, yet,’ she said dryly. ‘His sisters may though, if you follow us to Winterfell. I hear they are quite fearsome.’

‘Lord Snow,’ he mused, giving her a narrow green look, much like Tyrion. ‘Formerly King in the North. I have also heard things, little whispers and idle gossip. They say he has been staying on Dragonstone for some time, and you are quite taken with each other, and now he is your liegeman. When we saw you together in King’s Landing, my uncouth friend wanted to wager how long it would be until you er, married the handsome brooder. I said you had more important things on your mind. Ser Bronn said inside a week. My sister called him your northern pet. I won’t repeat what she called you.’

She bridled, but her reply was nonchalant. ‘All of you were wrong, and it is irrelevant to proceedings. He is my strongest ally, and my Warden of the North, that is all you need to know.’
He gave her another cynical look, but swallowed his words and chose others more suitable. ‘Do you wish me to pledge my sword in front of your court? I will do it, if it will help.’

‘You have sworn oaths in your life you have broken, Lannister, you are famous for it. I am not sure it will help me, but it may reassure others.’ She was as dry as dust, but the corners of her mouth softened, and his face looked less grey and weary, a hint of his famed handsomeness returning.

‘You look so like your mother,’ he said softly. ‘A fine woman, it was an honour to serve her, and I did the best that I could to protect her until your father sent her away during the rebellion.’ She stiffened in surprise, listening eagerly as she always did for any hints about the woman she had never known. ‘She was soft and gentle though, too soft for this world. You may look like her, your Grace, but you are very different.’

She shook her head a little to clear it of the distraction, and smiled carefully. ‘Perhaps if I don’t end up roasting you for treachery, you will be so kind as to tell me more about my mother. It may help me to forget about my father.’

Ser Jaime gave a wry laugh. ‘You nearly roasted me already on the Blackwater. I have no wish to repeat the experience, so I will pledge you my sword, for what it is worth, and tell you anything you like.’

She still didn’t trust him particularly, but she relaxed another inch. Whatever the knight was, he was here, at great cost to himself, and no small amount of pain, and she appreciated his snarky wit. ‘If I don’t roast you, thank your brother. He loves his family near as much as his queen, though little you all deserve it.’ She rose to her feet, signalling an end to the meeting. ‘You and your uncouth friend will attend the council meeting. Pledge your swords and give us the information we need to plan an attack, and I will let you live to fight for your honour.’

***

It had come to her in the hour of the wolf, as she huddled alone and cold to the bone under the covers of her great bed, permeated with his very male scent blended with hers, which was comforting but not enough to warm her; a vision. A vision from her past that could be a vision of the future, confusing and disturbing then but now as she remembered it, and fitted it within the context of recent events, it made perfect sense.

That vision was in her mind as they all filed into the council chamber, and she ticked off their names as she watched them take a seat, some of them hers, some of them Jon’s, and some sworn to no one. All had something to offer, to help her execute a plan with minimal fire and blood, though it was inevitable that there would be some death and destruction.

Some weeks ago, several young Dothraki who had begun to learn their letters had been trained to send and receive messages via raven, and so word had been sent for her army to turn around in their ride up the Kingsroad and assemble at the same marshalling spot outside the city. Messages were also sent to the Dornish lords, though whether they would come in time to be of any use was debateable. Her Unsullied were back on Dragonstone, and would be better used inside the city for containment and close fighting.

The rest of her and Jon’s collection of followers could be used in other ways, as swordsmen and women, and for knowledge of secret ways in and out of the city and the Red Keep, if they were willing. They mingled awkwardly, some greeting each other, like Lady Brienne and Jaime, who looked at each other with great unsaid feeling and clasped hands like brothers in arms. Others were already voicing their opinions, that huge, ugly man Clegane complaining to the room at large that he was once again surrounded by Lannister cunts, making her mouth twitch at the urge to laugh.
All eventually settled down, and looked to her at the far end of the table, framed by the open arch of the balcony, then Jon swept in at last in his usual Stark greys and browns, minus his cloak but armed with his distinctive sword, and took the other end, flicking his eyes to her briefly. They had not spoken since the previous night, and she suspected he was avoiding her, trying to get his thoughts in order. She could not help feeling stung, now was not the time to be uncommunicative, she needed him more than ever.

Aside from his concerns about the greater threat in the North, he had always been cautious about the Targaryen way of achieving results, and though he loved to hear her stories of her battles in Slaver's Bay, he was wary of such methods, and the potential for mayhem to ensue, particularly with the dragons involved. He had been awed by her victory on the Blackwater Rush, but she recalled that he also had misgivings about it. Killing the dead Jon had no qualms about, but living men were a different story. Again, it was the darkness in her, not the darkness of lust and possessiveness that she was happy to share, but the other darkness she was afraid to show him, and now she must.

'Before we begin, I believe our new guests wish to pledge their swords to House Targaryen,' she said, her tone appropriately formal. Ser Jaime and his companion go to their feet and moved out to meet her in the centre of the floor, the sellsword fellow somewhat reluctant, but it was done quickly in the accustomed manner, and she accepted graciously, despite her lingering mistrust. When they resumed their seats, she remained standing to take the centre of attention, rather than sit passively. She must appear in charge, but receptive, a delicate balancing act.

She wished Jon could stand with her, instead of sitting there like a foot soldier awaiting orders, and she knew it was annoying him too by the glowering look on his face. She was beyond sick of it, following Tyrion's advice, and in light of their change in strategy, it hardly mattered anymore. If she wrestled King's Landing back from the Lannister witch and marched north in triumph with a swollen army she could bloody well tell the entire country, including the rebellious northerners, that she was married to the Warden of the North. She took a breath, filing the pleasant thought away for later, and began to speak.

'All of you here know where the real war is, and what lies ahead of us. We tried to negotiate a truce in the south to concentrate our efforts where they are most needed, but now it seems we have no choice. We can't deal with the threat to the north without first securing the south. Some of you are sworn to me, others to the Warden of the North, others are free agents. I will not ask of you anything your liege lord does not sanction.' She paused, flicking her gaze to Jon significantly, hoping it would ease his mood. 'Nor do I ask anything that you would not do yourselves, but I need your help, your wits, your sword arms, and your inside knowledge to come up with a plan that will work with minimal loss of innocent lives.'

There was a silence filled only by the gusting of the wind from the balcony, the crackling of the great fireplace in the swirling draughts. With all the bodies crowded close, the chamber was very warm, and she felt a flush of heat under her heavy clothes, and another churn of the tiresome nausea. Jon rose to his feet, a glow of approval in his dark eyes which cheered her somewhat. 'I know little about King's Landing, and the foes that face us there,' he replied. 'But my sword is yours, now and always, and my people are yours to do what we can to rid us of this woman who has plagued my family and the country for too long. I only hope for a quick resolution so we can all move north as planned.'

She smiled at him openly, pleased to see he remained standing confidently while the others took their cue to speak up to reaffirm, or offer advice, her deep regard probably plain to see, but she did not give a damn. All the talk settled down to a discussion on how to safely infiltrate the city without drawing too much attention to themselves, and in this Tyrion, Varys and Ser Davos were
most useful with their knowledge of secret coves, paths and the intricate passages that wound beneath the city and the Red Keep. Then they moved on to tactics, who needed to die and how, which buildings and strongpoints needed to be seized, potential allies who hated the queen and might lend assistance. This was when her vision moved her to speak.

'How often does court convene?' she asked, looking to Ser Jaime. There were other ways, the way of the assassin, or the forward assault of an honest army, but in the fashion of her house she wanted to make a statement, a dramatic rallying cry to the nation that the old ways were over for good.

'Every other day,' he said. 'Usually in the morning, and for no more than an hour. My sister has little patience for dealings with smallfolk and merchants. It is all for show, and not well attended.' He frowned in thought. 'There are usually many guards due to her unpopularity with the people. If you wanted to take her there you would need to smuggle in a good number of men, and root out resistance in the Keep as well.'

'We won't need my entire Unsullied legion inside the Keep,' she said calmly. 'The bulk will land at the port to be let inside the Mud Gate. Only our best swordsmen, and a few hundred men.' She turned to Ser Davos. 'Can you fit that many on one ship, my lord?'

'Aye, your Grace, if you can keep them all hidden in the city until the time is right to strike,' the kindly old man said.

'There are sufficient wide passages under the Red Keep to hide that many and more,' Lord Varys said. 'And my little birds will make contact with friends inside the city that will help us open a city gate or two.'

'And I know a good many Gold Cloaks who would look the other way, or join us, for a keg of ale and money for whores,' Ser Bronn said confidently, and she graced him with a small smile.

'I wonder about the Greyjoy fleet and their whereabouts, and the Golden Company,' Tyrion mused. 'All of this may be for nothing if they arrive to sack the city when we are stuck in the North fighting the dead.'

'The Golden Company won't fight if there is no one there to pay them,' Jon said practically. 'And Theon may be successful in stopping his uncle. There is nothing we can do about it in any case. We don't have the time or the ships to go off chasing the Ironborn.'

'We can send word to Essos though,' she said. 'If we can find out where they are stationed. Make contact and let them know they should expect no money from the new regime in King's Landing.' She glanced at Varys, who nodded, unflappable as always compared to the agitated, lively crowd of people around the table. She felt another flash of bodily discomfort, and shifted on her feet a little, hiding a wince. 'Who is to help secure the throne room?' She moved her eyes to Jon significantly, pushing away a qualm for his safety. It was silly to fret about him, she was confident there was no one at that court of fat lords, pompous knights and sycophants who could match Jon Snow in a swordfight.

'I will lead us, but Lannister must come with me, as I don't know the ways in and out or the fighters to be aware of,' he said sternly, giving Ser Jaime a look of deep suspicion. 'And perhaps Lord Tyrion should guide us in, to ensure his brother's good word.'

'I am no fighter,' her Hand said dryly. 'But I expected to be there. I don't want to miss this.' There was a savage glint in his eyes as he allowed himself to imagine their triumph over his hated sister and the court who had despised him, and she snorted at the sight of his premature glee, but then she heard Jon speak again, low and rough with concern.
'I would like to know where her Grace will be when it all happens, and what she will be doing.'

She turned her eyes to him, smiling serenely in response. He was worried, and wary, but his sullen mood was gone for now, replaced by a fierce pride in her that probably would not last if matters went awry, as they so easily could.

'I will do what I always do,' she said. 'Come in from above, and bring fire and blood.'

***

She had created herself a very cosy nest, to attempt to leach out some of the adrenaline that thrummed through her veins, to calm herself sufficiently for sleep later. Her tiny workroom consisted of her desk, a low couch and two chairs, a small fire in an iron grate cunningly shaped like a dragon’s gaping jaws, and a thick Myrish rug tickling her stockinged feet. Her gown was new; a soft blue wool that wrapped around her breasts and hips, lined with rabbit fur, designed to fit in better with the fashions in the North, and very warm. She yawned over the pile of books and papers that she was studying, squinting in the lamplight at the crabbed writing. The council meeting had gone on for some hours, and afterwards she had not rested for a moment, not until she had bathed and dressed and retired to do yet more work.

Jon was being elusive, but there was hardly time and privacy to properly talk, and earlier, hearing the clash and ring of swords from the courtyard and masculine shouts and grunts, she discerned the partial reason, he was sparring for practice. It would be a pretty, distracting sight, but she kept her distance, confused and hurt by his brooding. She thought she had gotten through his stubborn head, and provided enough reassurance, but perhaps not.

Heaving in a deep sigh, she took a sip of the drink Missandei had prepared her, tepid but pleasant, lemon and honey and herbs to settle her stomach, offered silently, but with a look that spoke volumes. Surely not, not now, and in any case, it was far too early to know for sure.

She shrugged and banished the speculative thought, and swallowed the rest of the drink down, then rubbed her itchy eyes. There was then a discreet rap at the door, and at her call Jon entered. She smiled in relief to see him, stripped down from his sparring session and still a little flushed and sweaty, but tense, very tense, pacing the small room and not sitting.

‘What are you reading?’ he said finally.

‘Information about the governance of King’s Landing,’ she said. ‘I need to give some thought to how to manage the city’s affairs if we are successful in unseating Cersei, particularly if we can’t stay long. It will take some effort.’ Her frown matched his, and she swiftly grew tired of watching him fidget, her nerves too prickly to find sweet, loving words. ‘Are you going to keep pacing about like your pet wolf, or speak and tell me what is on your mind?’

He halted at last, regarding her closely, his expressive eyes brimming with worry, very male worry over his woman. ‘Your plan, I don’t like it,’ he said bluntly. ‘It’s too risky for you, too risky for everyone. I will be sick with fear for you, for what might happen if they don’t yield.’ She huffed, her posture stiffening in offense, but he raised a hand to silence her. ‘And most of all, I hate that I will be stuck on the ground, unable to protect you, or stop you if it all goes wrong.’

She was touched and irked, but mostly irked. ‘I have been looking after myself, and controlling myself and my dragons for many years before I met you. I don’t need you to protect me, or control me.’

It was the wrong thing to say, his face closed up like a slamming door, and she quashed the urge to
let loose a torrent of angry words that would make matters worse, swallowing them down like a lump of dry bread to lodge in her gullet, but not all. ‘This is my war,’ she added, her jaw clenching and eyes narrowing. ‘My war, my way. It’s not a war you are interested in fighting anyway.’

‘That is not true,’ he snarled, quivering in a rush of carefully buried anger. ‘I am with you, no matter the cost to my family, my people. You are my wife, my heart. I would gladly lay down my life for you, but there are matters more urgent than the bloody throne. They keep me awake at night, they have driven me ever since I woke up from death, and it is hard to set them aside, even for you.’

This was getting out of hand, her nausea returned in a queasy rumble, and she felt panicky at prospect of being out of sorts with Jon, when they had been so blissfully happy. At that moment, she hated their world and all its cruel demands, she wished it would all just go away. She sank her head in her hands, tempted to let him storm off in a huff to leave her to wallow selfishly, but she fought herself hard, under her tired, hunched form.

‘I know what is most important. I have seen it with my own eyes,’ she said dully. ‘My son died because of it, and now he rots under the ice forever, because I believed in it, and I believed in you.’ She lifted her head, letting him see the pain in her eyes. ‘Don’t let this happen, please,’ she said softly. ‘I cannot bear to look at you and see your mistrust. I am yours, and you are mine. We swore it. We need to be partners in this, in everything.’

His face twisted, too wound up to let it go. ‘But we are not,’ he said flatly. ‘Not in the eyes of the world.’ And with that he turned on his heel, his smouldering resentment at her being too cautious to commit driving his steps. Without thought, without pride, she leaped out of her chair to stop him, reaching the door and stopping him in his tracks. She would hate herself for it later, but at that moment, she didn’t care.

‘Stop, Jon Snow,’ she said firmly. ‘I haven’t given you leave to go, and I am not finished.’ He glowered at her, his hands clenching at his sides, so she hurried, the right words finally forming in her head to calm them both. ‘Know this, when we take that vile city as ours, if you still want me, I will find the nearest sept and marry you in front of the entire realm, because I don’t give a damn for your northern lords, or any lords. It doesn’t matter anymore, they can fucking well say what they like.’

He looked incredulous, his cold mood warring with a flare of hope and light, his mouth softening, but his eyes cutting into her flawed soul, so full of clashing emotions it would be hard to untangle them, but there was honesty, plain to see. ‘I don’t believe in the Seven Gods,’ he said gruffly.

‘Neither do I, but I believe it is tradition for fancy southerners to make it official,’ she said with a sad smile.

‘I’m sorry, Daenerys,’ he whispered. ‘So sorry. I don’t know what came over me today, I have been all over the place in my mind. I was an arse, please hit me, or forgive me.’

She knew that the bitterness and mistrust which had horribly come to the surface was not entirely banished, but she didn’t have it in her to drag it out, thrash it out. Not when he was looking at her like this; a dusky, fixed stare of entreaty, and oh, the temptation of sinking into his arms and forgetting everything, if only for a minute, or an hour. ‘You are a bit of an arse, but I would rather kiss you.’

Her lips parted, and she tilted her head back against the door in invitation. A hand lifted, reaching behind her to draw the lock across, then skimming lightly over the curve of her neck, the line of her jaw, pushing away tendrils of hair to expose the fluttering pulse below her ear. Then his mouth
was on it, taking her with a deep inhale of her scent, then a mouthful of skin.

She felt her defensive stance start to loosen, the heft of his body holding her against the door, the little bites trailing across her throat, the aroma of clean sweat from fighting, the heat of him rising through clothes still chilled from outside, settling her down. She let all her aggravation out with a single breath, and lunged, throwing away passivity, twining her fingers in his black locks and bringing him in close so she could devour his lovely, full lips, the sweet slide of them across hers, the rasp of whiskers, the wet jab of his tongue taking her in response, raw desire flooding her veins.

As she clung and murmured, pulled his hair, moved restlessly to get closer in, and find a way under his clothes to reach bare skin and sink her nails deep, she marvelled at her surging lust. Despite her tiredness, her agitation and worry, despite being fucked within an inch of passing out last night, she wanted him, she always wanted him.

Breaking the seal over her gasping mouth finally, he pressed his forehead against hers, and when she opened her lids he was so close that the deep, velvet brown of his eyes pulled her down. Her hands, hidden under his gambeson and shirt, flexed and clawed at his lower back to hold herself up.

‘I love you so much,’ he said unsteadily. ‘I don’t know what I have done to deserve you, so I am terrified of losing you. I want to tuck you under my cloak and next to my heart to keep you safe, though I know you don’t need it.’ He took a breath, stealing more air from her lungs as she listened, hurting inside to hear him speak so raw and honest. ‘If I am an arse, it’s only because I love you, and I want this to be over, all of it, so we can shut out the world and live, laugh, fuck…all the things that you dreamed, I want to give them to you.’

She wasn’t going to ruin the beautiful moment by saying what she wanted would never come to pass. ‘I am sorry I was a stroppy bitch,’ she said with a dry sob that fortunately didn’t dissolve in tears. ‘My nerves are bloody shredded, and I am tired. I want it to be over too.’

‘Too tired for this?’ he said with a sultry tilt of his mouth, rubbing against her skirts closely.

‘I am never too tired, my love, not for that.’ She reached for his hand, and put it over her left breast, where her heart was thumping, a functional muscle which was nevertheless full of the kind of love that was rarely comfortable, all fire and ice and fury and need.

Then both of his hands were inside the low neckline of her gown, bringing her breasts out on display, and his head dipped, lips dragging down her shallow cleavage with a small groan at her warmth and scent. She gave a yelp when his teeth closed around one rising peak, oddly sensitive there, but then he soothed the bite with his tongue, suckling at her more gently than usual but enough to cause a low moan and the lolling of her head back against the door.

A hand was sliding up under her skirt, past the top of a stocking, pinching the flesh of her inner thigh and then...
off her nectar with a swipe of his tongue, and she sighed like the maiden she definitely wasn’t. Pure, teasing seduction that wasn’t required to get her roused, but a stirring sight nonetheless, items of clothes strewn, milky skin, a faint trail of black hairs, breeches peeled off his narrow hips, his cock bouncing, heavy and rigid, and desperately needed in her mouth, in her hands, in her cunt. ‘Go sit down on the couch,’ she breathed, keeping her hands to herself for the moment, cursing inwardly as she watched him walk off, his bottom like a peach in need of biting into.

The hooks of her gown were not easy, but she moved to stand over him and found them all, and slid it off her shoulders to puddle on the floor, then the silk tunic, drawn up her legs slowly. At his avid attention, she smirked and turned around, giving him a close view of her arse, shifting her feet wider so her cleft was revealed. His hands were cupping her, kneading the flesh, a kiss pressed at the base of her spine. There was a husky purr, and she drew the tunic over her head, letting him fondle her arse intimately, knowing he was thinking of the previous night, for she was as well.

Whimpering, she turned around suddenly, unable to wait to feel it, that glorious length engulfed in her core. She was barely ready, it was going to ache, but the pain would be a sweet burn. She straddled him quickly, planting her feet flat on the couch and balancing her hands on his shoulders. Jon was holding himself upright so she could sink down gracefully in a squat, his liquid gaze on her face as it contorted, her cunt slick with arousal but resisting every slow inch.

She sobbed and wriggled to spread herself to take all of him, and he made that purring noise again, holding her arse to guide her down, a wince of discomfort flashing across his intent face. ‘Fuck, you are so tight…’ His teeth sank into his lip in reaction, so she kissed him there, a sharp whine passing into his mouth when she felt him at the entrance to her womb, the pain a dull throb under the welling pleasure that rose to fill her veins with fire. ‘I am a beast,’ he groaned. ‘But I love that face…I love to see you struggling and hurting when I fill you…oh move love…take me.’

She couldn’t, she was hissing through her teeth, not sure why it was so intense when she had done it many times before. She shifted, moving to a kneeling position, her thighs on either side of his hips, losing herself in his luscious, scratchy mouth, the black pools of his eyes for a good while before she started to rock him deep within her, keening as the pleasure expanded in her head like a bubble.

Inside a minute, she was going to combust, it was too good, grinding within her cunt in all the right places, and she rode it out selfishly, entranced by the pulsing sensation in her womb, driven even higher by all his strength lifting her and bringing her down hard, the thrust of his hips up off the couch, punishing blows meeting her subtle movements. ‘Oh Jon, I’m going to come, I can’t…’ She clawed him and bit down on his neck, smothering the cry from her heart as she started to ripple over him like waves on a quiet shore. He went dead still, holding her down on his full length, groaning her name at the endless stroke of her climax, but not quite with her.

She had bitten him ragged, purple bruises on his neck that she lazily kissed as she relaxed all the bones in her body, blooming with contentment, idly thinking on how to finish him off. She could get on all fours and invite ravishment, or sink to the floor and have him fuck her mouth, she wanted him to use her as she had used him, and take the same mindless joy in it. ‘I love you, my king,’ she said, in a slow luring drawl. ‘Now you can have me any way you want.’

‘I want to spread you across my face and kiss it better,’ he rumbled, toying with where they were tightly joined. ‘While you swallow me whole.’ She let out a shuddering moan of assent and writhed a little, excited again by the prospect of his tongue soothing where he had just fucked her, and the taste of herself on his cock.

It was a challenge to fit together prone on the narrow couch, but he managed it ably, pulling her
backwards so his mouth and fingers could reach every fold and crease and hole, distracting her mightily from her own task, her hair slipping down between his thighs as she drew her lips tight over his swollen length and down, down, hitting the back of her throat, tasting of salt and honey and him. It was hard to split her attention, and she freed him to replace her mouth with her hand so she could concentrate on the teasing of her raw flesh, writhing on his face greedily to make him burrow deep and eat her up before muffling her mewling around his cock.

Under her hands, she sensed the surge and thrum of hot, pumping blood, hard muscle tensing, the thickness filling her mouth twitching as she took him deeper, ignoring her own pleasure to bring him home. At the stretch of her walls around his hand, the feathery sweeps over her nub, she lifted her head in a loud cry, not caring if she was overheard, and then silenced herself, humming and groaning around him, her tongue swirling over silky, reactive skin, sealing tight around the fat head of him, her hands stroking him firmly below.

Then he was growling like the beast he named himself, growling and sucking at her fiery nub, burying his fingers deep enough to hurt her again as he bucked under her and let go, his come hitting her throat in spurts which she drank down with her own growl of possession. She shook from her mussed hair to her toes as he ripped another orgasm out of her, sharper this time, her teeth sinking into him slightly as she rode it out, her ears droning with blood and sparking, jumping nerves.

Temporary escape, temporary bliss, free of duties and squabbles and nagging retainers and vicious foes. It was all they could snatch for themselves, but she swore to herself that if they survived the next few days, she would hack and slash and carve out a private space, wherever they were, and their public face would be as partners, and future rulers, and to the hells with anyone who stood in their way.
I thought I should do a brief recap of events, since this story is turning into a lengthy monster with a considerable number of punters reading. I saw the idea on another story (Silent Declarations, read it) and I thought I’d steal it (thanks Jaqtkd). If you’re in here regularly re-reading the smuttiest chapters (I recommend Chapters 3, 6, 8 and 12), you can probably skip this recap.

The story follows Episodes 3 to 5 of Season 7 with speculative pieces in between the show events, and then the night before Jon leaves for the Wall, he finds Dany in the dragonglass cave and after an argument, unresolved sexual tension is resolved. They spend the night together, he leaves anyway. Episode 6 is handled similar to previous, but on the ship, after Dany walks out and leaves Jon all puppy eyed and sad, she decides sod it, I’m in love with this stupid hero, comes back and gets in his bed.

They spend the next few weeks hopelessly in love and fucking, and being the honourable proper lad he is, and the end of the world being nigh, Jon asks Dany to marry him. She says yes but later, as she’s concerned by the political situation in the north (thanks Tyrion). Being also a stubborn lad, he lures her out for a ride on a sunny day and persuades her to swear in front of the Old Gods that she will indeed marry him. So, they’re married, but no witnesses so not official.

The Dragonpit parley goes ahead but the end of Episode 7 is thrown out. Just as they are about to leave for Winterfell Jaime and Bronn turn up on Dragonstone with the news Cersei was lying all along (quelle surprise). Infuriated, Dany decides to remove the threat before heading north, Jon is reluctant and broody but agrees, and a plan is hatched. At the same time, Dany’s fertility has returned rather inconveniently.

Show timelines are hazy and fluid, which I have taken advantage of in this narrative. As at Chapter 14, the Wall has not fallen yet. I hope that was amusing, thanks to you all for liking, disliking but still reading for the porn, or loving this story.

***

A/N: This chapter was going to be action as mentioned, but it turned into a different beast. This is basically a set-up, scene setting chapter with mischief and tension relief before the attack on Cersei. I started thinking about King’s Landing, the early seasons and various bits of A Clash of Kings and decided to have some fun.

I hope you all enjoy it. Let me know either way and cheers for reading, and especially commenting. Shout out again to my girls the Discerning Tarts for gratefully receiving spoilers and making useful suggestions.

Last pimp for the Jonerys Fanfiction Awards, voting closes next week, vote for your favourites – https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeT08SkDKcO1Td2CPL9hLRHZzX61jZNus1ZlhonC5VUh
The Spider, the Spymaster, the Master of Whisperers, and many other names. Lord Varys was an opaque slippery man who technically wasn’t, who had served many bad kings before her. Her trust in him was not entire, given he was not a man who invited confidences and warmth, and his chequered history, but she had to admit he had been a staunch ally since Mereen, and now they had entered the snake nest of King’s Landing, had proved himself invaluable.

Varys and Tyrion, and that sellsword fellow Bronn, were in their element, as this was their home ground, their methods of dealing with enemies and obstacles put into play; whispering and sneaking, backstabbing and undermining, putting on masks and costumes, worming through passages and alleys and taverns and houses of ill repute, like the one she currently resided in impatiently, waiting for all the cyvasse pieces to be in place.

Jon had protested vehemently, stating that it was not safe for her, that she should stay out of the city until it was time to attack, but she opted to indulge her daring whim to be on the ground, to wander the streets and sniff the foul air and fouler atmosphere, and besides, no one would think to look for a queen in a brothel. He had muttered something under his breath about her Targaryen love for drama, but had been persuaded grudgingly when the bolder members of her war council voiced their cautious approval at infiltrating early.

No one in the city had much idea of who he was, having spent all his life in the North. His deeds were spoken of highly by some, as Varys had relayed, but people expected the King in the North to be a grim, bushy bearded barbarian, much as she had expected before this graceful, beautiful and subtle man landed on her island to annoy her, then sweep her off her booted feet.

All knew her hair, if not her face, so in the two days they were hiding out she limited her wanderings, heavily cloaked and veiled and escorted by a scowling husband and Ser Jorah, constantly reaching for their swords beneath their thick cloaks. They were meant to be disguised as a rich merchant and son from White Harbour, though their hard warrior bodies, their prowling, watchful stances, belied their fine clothes.

Her cover story amused her, but not Jon. She was a highly prized whore from Lys, where some still had Valyrian colouring, sold to the brothel they resided in for exclusive use by select customers. The brothel madam was a hefty woman with enormous breasts called Bessie, a friend of Varys, and a secret Targaryen loyalist due to a gift of money from her older brother Rhaegar many years ago. She recalled the story Ser Barristan had told her once about her brother and his singing in the streets, and how he would give the money away to orphans afterwards, and she delighted to meet someone who was part of that tale, and found herself liking the madam at once.

The formidable woman had wisely banned her from wandering the house, so she was confined to her gaudy jewel box of a chamber most of the time. The secret door which lead to the passageways under the city hidden in the large wardrobe tempted her itchy feet, but she respected Jon’s wishes and stayed put, relying on him to bring food and news while she waited for the dreaded morning, fizzing with agitation and as bored and restless as an unpopular whore.

When she ventured out escorted, she had been shocked but not surprised by the state of the city and its people. No food in the markets, people scuttling fearfully to hide from the cold wind and drifting snow and rain, abandoned corpses of the old, weak and slain, a bubbling miasma of shit and spoiled food and resentment, threadbare clothes and hollow faces. It was going to be an enormous task to keep this city fed and quiet and intact over the winter, and she would not be here to see it through.

She got up from where she was lolling in the bed in a pink silk robe she had found in the cunning wardrobe, poked at the iron brazier and fireplace to coax more heat, and went to the window,
peering out at the dark street to look for Jon and the others who were sufficiently unknown to be safely hiding in the brothel. Tyrion and his equally notorious brother had to hide elsewhere, and the others would be arriving with Ser Davos in the morning, but Varys was about in one of his many disguises, Ser Jorah, Ser Bronn, and young Gendry Waters.

She wished for Missandei to be by her side at this stressful hour, but she had been left behind on Dragonstone to help with preparations, and probably fret in her quiet, internalised way. So, she had to manage her own hair and clothes, and travel light. Her dragons were hiding in the Kingswood awaiting her call, hopefully having a fine time hunting Cersei’s deer and boar.

Her stomach churned, that bloody nausea again which was still unexplained; either her roiling nerves, or Missandei’s unspoken conclusion. Her hand slid to her lower belly, groping it beneath the flimsy, cheap silk, finding it soft and flat as usual, and she frowned, letting herself wonder for a moment, not sure whether to swear vilely or weep for premature joy, then shook her head. Now was not the time. She needed all her wits, not wasting them on mooning wistfully and poking and prodding herself.

She also needed Jon to return so she could get some news, comfort, and distraction, and perhaps some fleeting escape from her constant edginess, though he was no better, as jumpy as a wildcat and as snarly as a cornered wolf. Varys had appeared through the secret door this morning with an update, completely un-phased at finding them abed together, not doing anything interesting fortunately, but events would have moved quickly since then. One piece of news had relieved her somewhat. A little bird had gotten from a handmaid that the queen’s pregnancy was faked; a desperate attempt to get a faltering Ser Jaime to cleave to her, so she would not be killing an unborn child in the morning as well as Cersei, something that did not sit well with her at all, given her history.

Her whore’s attire was inadequate against the creeping cold. She returned to the bed to get warm, but before she could climb under the cosy blankets she heard quiet northern voices in the hallway, the rattle of a key in the lock. She sat down on the end of the mattress, swinging her furred slippers on her toes, and managed a smile as Jon entered alone, looking moody and flushed from the chill outside. Handsome as sin though, in his fine sable cloak and tunic of grey brocade. In a concession to the small risk someone might remember him from their last visit, he wore his hair loose, and had wrapped Longclaw’s distinctive white pommel in leather strapping.

‘What is the matter now?’ she said rather tartly, as he halted to give her a very weary look. He wasn’t wind kissed, he was blushing.

‘I got my arse pinched by half-naked girls coming up the stairs,’ he grumbled.

She laughed, she couldn’t help it, needing the brief levity badly. ‘I understand the urge, you do have a lovely arse,’ she snorted. ‘Although if I find them I may have to teach them some manners.’

‘They were too quick for me to get a good look at them, luckily,’ he said, a corner of his pout turning up reluctantly. ‘Gods, I will be glad to get out of here, but I admit it has been useful, being able to move around the city, and make sure everything is all set. But still, a whorehouse?’

‘It’s not as interesting and educational as I hoped,’ she said mischievously. ‘Apart from the odd fake groan or shriek from next door, it’s been rather dull for me.’

He shook his head at her, shedding his cloak and putting a package of food down on the table. ‘I don’t know how you can laugh at a time like this.’

‘If I don’t distract myself, I will drive myself mad pacing and fretting, like you,’ she said softly.
‘Come, my love. Sit and rest, eat that food, hold your wife. We can take an hour off to not think and just be. We need it.’

She pushed aside the urge to quiz him for developments, and went to the table to fuss with bread and cheese and wine like a good wife as he disarmed, locked the door, and removed his boots, then finally spun her about and kissed her thoroughly. ‘Mmm, you’re all soft and sweet and silky,’ he murmured into her neck, his hands immediately cupping her bottom to bring her closer.

She wriggled against him for a while, then spoke bossily. ‘Sit down and eat first.’

He let her go reluctantly, then sat at the table and attacked the meagre fare. As she nibbled at her portion like a mouse, wary of her rebellious stomach, and gulped at the sour wine, she eyed him speculatively. The heady, sinful atmosphere of the brothel seeped in even here, turning one’s few idle thoughts to the pleasures of the flesh, but she had been too tired and worried to act on them, though she knew it was exactly what she needed before tomorrow, a good hard seeing to, to vent all that pent-up stress.

She wondered how exactly to coax it out of him, but it was already there, under his preoccupied, dutiful surface, she had sensed it in his rough kisses. And Gods help her, his pretty raven curls and smouldering eyes and fine figure under that tight, fancy tunic he hated…it was little wonder the brothel girls had taken a shine to him.

‘What did you see downstairs?’ she said idly, when he had cleared his plate and finished his goblet.

He gave her that broody look, then his tempting mouth quirked. ‘Many things not suitable to tell nosey queens,’ he said. ‘Some we have already figured out for ourselves. Others I couldn’t get my head around. I didn’t know where to bloody look.’

She bubbled with laughter, instantly eased by it. ‘I thought we had done most things.’

His reluctant grin widened, and he ducked his head sweetly to try and hide it. ‘Not a Mereneese Knot. I don’t suppose you know how…’

‘Jon Snow!’ she exclaimed, still giggling. ‘How does a nice lad from the noble Watch know of such things? And no, I don’t. Don’t even think about it.’

‘I swore to have no wife,’ he said, rather slyly. ‘That didn’t mean I didn’t think about women, or listen to other dirty sods talking about them all the time.’ She heard it distinctly, a deep chuckle, delighting at the sound, as she had not heard it in some time. Then it faded too quickly, the frown lines on his brow replacing the blushing boy with a very burdened man.

She got up from her seat, smoothing the robe over her curves. It had complicated red ribbons in front which left most of the breasts exposed, the kind of ribbons that drove a man mad trying to unpick. Underneath, she wore a cream silk nightgown that was too large and hung off her shoulders and modest bosom. His eyes lifted from the spot on the table he was glowering at, and watched her fixedly.

‘You know, our cover story is not very convincing if there are no sounds of an expensive whore being well used coming from this room,’ she said innocently, the words designed to provoke, her stance expectant, her eyes wide as if fearing, or hoping to be seized.

‘You are not a whore, you are my wife and queen,’ he said gruffly, but his eyes flared with dark interest.

‘But I am good at acting and sounding like one, when you’re fucking me,’ she mused. ‘Better
actually, since it isn’t for show. Particularly when you lose control and use me hard, like that night when you took my arse. I loved that so much I am sure I was very loud…’ She turned and left him, drifting across the room like a lost waif in her oversized clothes, but she did not get very far before he was up and on her.

‘Don’t tease me tonight,’ he warned, grabbing her chin and getting in close, looming over her and holding her flush against his hard body. ‘You may not like the results.’

‘I am sure I will like them very much,’ she breathed, struggling a little for effect, but thoroughly pleased to be held so tight, to look up and drown in his inky eyes, so vexed and lusty and distracted. She reached for his hair, curling her fingers amidst the springy, shiny locks, her lashes lowering over the selfish need in her own eyes, but he had already seen it, and given in.

‘All right, wicked woman, you asked for it,’ he whispered thickly, and took her mouth with a clash of teeth and tongue and soft, bristly lips, sucking and dragging, an echo of his hungered attentions further below, where she was already throbbing in anticipation. He would likely thank her later for her boldness, but now his irritation and jumpiness made him rough and urgent, not easing her into the inevitable result, but grasping and demanding, tearing at the ribbons rather than untying them, and yanking at the nightgown beneath to expose her tender breasts.

He lifted her from the floor, her slippers falling off her toes, his face rubbing and scraping against her flesh before he carried her to the bed as easy as if she was a tiny child, then sitting down with her straddled, taking a rising nipple in his mouth and drawing his teeth and lips over it repeatedly, then the other, then back again, until she whimpered in delight and discomfort. Normally it was merely pleasant, but now it roused her swiftly, the licks of heat shooting down her belly to flicker where she was fast growing soft and wet, her peaks turning a deep crimson in his pretty mouth, sheened with saliva.

It was such a stirring sight she closed her eyes and whined, her shaking hands trying to reach down the tight space between them to get at the fastenings of his tunic, but he grabbed at her and placed them firmly at her sides. ‘No Daenerys,’ he muttered. ‘You gave me permission, so this goes my way this time. You don’t touch me unless I let you.’

Her trust, that exquisite, shining, fragile object which she held in her soul and cherished, would not crack under the strain if she submitted, she had tested it before, but still it was a trial to be a passive recipient, not fight and claw and bite as was her wont, especially when he nibbled and suckled at her nipples until they ached, then tore at her clothes until they pooled at her hips, then fell to the floor as he lifted her again, not to split her thighs and enter her as she hoped, but to place her in an undignified position.

She was face down across his lap, torso pressed against the covers, her hands free to grab at them for purchase when the first stinging blow came flat against her left cheek, then the right. She cried out in shock and tried to slither off in reflex, though he had spanked her before in play, never so hard, and never like this, across his lap and on full display as if he had indeed paid for the strange privilege.

The first blows had vented some temper he needed to get out, as when he hit her again it still stung, but was less emphatic. Her buttocks were tingling and taut, and when he ran his calloused hands over them lightly and dipped between her legs he found her dripping wet. She let go her coiling tension with a hiss and relaxed into it, the sharp slaps only making her keen now, high pitched and needy, and when his fingers moved upwards to penetrate her arse carefully she moved backwards to take them deep, wailing into the mattress, her mind becoming wonderfully blank except for the flitting shadow of her climax, which she was closing in on fast.
She couldn’t see him, but his musky scent, the low rasp of his voice as he spoke to her, and his
harsh caresses filled all her senses. He had three fingers in her now, using them to hold her in place,
permitting her to writhe in search of more sensation as he continued to spank her until her cheeks
were burning. At her growling and mewling and thrashing, the voice crooned. ‘No love, you are
not allowed to come yet, I forbid it. Hold back.’

Cursing bitterly into the fabric she had bitten into to muffle her distress, she fought to gain control
of herself. She would not beg, she would endure the nagging pain and pleasure he was
administering until he let her fall into the abyss, for the dragged-out torment would make the fall
infinite. She concentrated on the covers beneath her face, the nubbly silk embroidered with red
vines, as red as her bottom, her nipples and likely her cunt, empty and bathed in nectar, craving his
thick length buried entire and clasped tight enough so he was locked inside.

How she wanted to claw him right now, rake her nails down his marble white skin to draw blood,
smack his peachy arse raw, leave teeth marks on his throat for all to see, hold him down and fuck
him blind, but she would get her turn. Now she was subservient, and oh, it was such a relief to let
go, drop that pile of jagged rocks she had been hunched under for days and become nothing but an
eager whore.

‘Hells, your arse,’ she heard him groan. ‘So red, so beautiful…’ One last rubbing of her tingling
skin, and he hoisted her up, leaving his hand inside her until he left her with a biting kiss and stood.
She looked up, flushed and hidden behind stray wisps of hair, gasping for breath when she saw
eyes as black as night, a maddeningly satisfied face, fluttering lashes not disguising his quiet
pleasure at having disciplined her like an errant young squire. But she didn’t shrill or huff, she sat
there uncomfortably, waiting and watching as he shed the fitted tunic and linen undershirt, then the
breeches slowly unlaced and dropped, a gorgeous naked savage criss-crossed with scars of battle
and death, his cock so rigid with blood it stood perfectly straight, the plump head crimson and
leaking with moisture.

He hooked a hand in her braids and brought her in close, and she took him in her mouth obediently,
her lips stretching around his girth, his eyes intently watching as she served him, every lunge into
her throat a sweet struggle. As he would not notice, she touched herself lightly for some relief, just
cupping and pressing to relieve the dull pressure in her loins, so wet her juices flowed through her
fingers. He would glide into her as smooth as silk, she was so ready for him, and she was now so
desperate she began to whine and grip around his cock, her eyes pleading silently with him to
relent.

When he pulled out of her mouth slickly she sobbed in gratitude, then cried in triumph when her
legs were snatched and drawn upwards, and he leaned forward in an elegant coil of muscles to grab
her ankles and position himself at her entrance. Her knees bent, legs trapped against his chest, and
she fisted the fabric beneath her and grabbed on tight as he took her, her walls parting and yielding
to take his cock, all of it in one perfect movement.

She arched in a bow and quickly became very loud and distinctly unhinged, likely convincing to
anyone who heard her in the hall or the next chamber. It was good, so good it was near anguish,
deep but not deep enough, harsh but not harsh enough, and oh the infuriating sight of him, beautiful
and remote and deadly focused, fucking her in just the right manner to send her spiralling towards
the edge but not off. And she couldn’t touch herself, as he would see it, he could see everything, his
inky pools watching his length fill her puffed, glistening cunt, and then moving to her face to check
her response to being taken.

It was not long before she broke her word to herself. ‘No, oh Gods, no…please Jon, I need to come,
I need you deep…’ She was pathetic, a quivering wreck, the frantic mass of warring sensations in

her core needing to explode and let her fly free, and only he could set it alight. He slowed, leaning closer in, bending her body in half with his weight, groaning at the lift of her hips, the scorching heat of her sucking him down, then gone, horribly out of her, making her growl in protest and slump in utter defeat. And then, exactly what she craved to end it.

She was flipped on her front, her hair wrapped in his hand, another positioning her on her knees on the lip of the mattress. The pull at her scalp, the pull of her inner muscles as he entered her again, not toying with her now, brutal thrusts in the depths of her cunt, a sharp cramping ache blending with agonising pleasure, her wild cries competing with his, and then his fingers finding her neglected nub at last, grazing it in delicate circles, a hiss of words into her shoulder. ‘Come for me, my queen.’

It set her off every time, those sweet, raspy words, the stroke of her nub not needed when she heard them. She was flying, flying through a void of glittering stars, her eyes rolling into her head sightlessly, only the night sky in her mind as she stiffened and spasmed under his relentless movements. She came beautifully, her pulsing walls grabbing tight and making him groan as if his heart was torn in two, bucking hips, clawing hands, a gush and flood of heat inside her that would run down her thighs when he withdrew to see the mess he had made of her. She was raw red flesh, mingled fluids, a tangle of slack, twitching limbs, and ruined hair, that she would make him fix for her later.

She smiled in pure contentment, and came to rest under his heavy weight, letting the eternal pulse and pump of her climax flow through her to every corner. She slipped into a fitful doze, like one of her dragons after a heavy meal, stirring and murmuring when she felt him move them to a more comfortable position under the sheets, curling around her protectively, keeping his cock pressed against her cleft, still a solid presence despite his release.

Eventually she slipped further, losing all sense of her surrounds as a deep sleep took her, undisturbed by dreams or visions, just nothing at all, an empty space of rest, thoroughly safe in his arms in this dangerous, wretched city she had foolishly hoped to rule.

***

In the early hours she was wide awake, the temporarily banished adrenaline flowing through her veins and sparking in her brain like flint to tinder. Her lids lifted to find the room bathed in light from the oil lamps and extra candles, and she rose to face the long, bloody day ahead. Jon was up, dressed in layers of leather and wool, no steel to be seen, only his usual thick leather armour, which gave her a qualm of worry. However, he had said he wasn’t accustomed to fighting in heavy plate like the knights of the south, and he was quick enough on his feet to stay out of reach of lumbering southron fighters.

He preferred to fight clean, and dirty street fighting was not in his experience, but there was a curved Dothraki blade at his back, his usual straight blade at his right hip, and his pretty bastard sword on his left, the white wolf gleaming against his dull brown armour. If anything happened to him today because of her sudden change of strategy and fading ambition, she would never forgive herself. If she lost him, she doubted she would find the will to go on, to continue her path to the throne, and bring herself to defeat all her enemies, human or other. She would become a dry, empty husk, like the shed skin of a snake, to blow away in a puff of desert wind. Or she would go mad, as frothing mad and unstable as her famed father. But it wouldn’t happen, her iron will and her considerable wits and resources would prevent it. She had to believe that.

‘Morning, my love,’ he said absently. He was sitting at the table with a goblet at his side, his scarred, battered hands flexing and releasing with nerves.
‘I’m sorry Jon, I forgot to ask you for all the news last night. I fell asleep so fast,’ she said, her voice still thick and dozy. Forcing herself to her feet, she padded over to the washstand, finding warm water in the ewer, soap and a cloth. As she began to clean herself, she found a small patch of dark blood on the cloth, and frowned at it confusedly.

‘Before we get into that, I want to talk about something,’ Jon said from close behind her, and as she turned at the sound of his voice she found him eyeing her with deep concern. ‘When I went to wash, I found blood on me, just a little bit,’ he said. ‘It’s not your moon blood, is it?’

‘No, I don’t think so,’ she admitted. ‘The timing is wrong, and the blood is not like the last time.’ Shivering naked in the chill, she felt weirdly exposed, so she rummaged in a coffer for her battle clothes, putting on the trousers and undertunic to cover up.

‘If it’s not moon blood, then what is it?’ he said softly, but firmly. ‘I have been watching you lately. You’re tired all the time, you look green at meals, your breasts are often sore when I touch them. I don’t know much about these things, nothing really, but I want you to see a maester, as soon as this is over.’

She huffed, winding up to spit out words of denial, remind him he had married a barren, cursed woman, that it was foolish to even speculate, let alone hope, especially now, but she subsided, his careful observations and her Missandei’s delicate hints confirming her own quiet suspicion. ‘All right, I promise I will. There must be a decent maester somewhere in this city,’ she said finally, then straightened. ‘After the attack, when matters have settled down, we will talk about it then. But now I need you to help me fix my hair.’

It was an excellent change of subject, he looked both amused and daunted. ‘I supposed I did mess it up,’ he sighed deeply. ‘It will end up looking worse, but I will try.’ She moved to the dresser and sat down on the stool, her reflection hazy and indistinct in the cheap mirror. His fingers in her hair were quite deft after all, tucking away loose strands, and brushing out the tangles.

‘How is your arse this morning?’ he said casually, and she made a strangled noise somewhere between a laugh and a snarl.

‘Rather uncomfortable, but I shall have my revenge one day soon,’ she said warningly, wriggling in her seat. It was nothing, just a slight tenderness that gave her a thrill, something to quietly savour, though she would pretend to be irked until the next time it happened and she gave herself away as mightily roused by such treatment. ‘Tell me the news now,’ she added, returning to business.

‘There isn’t a lot,’ he said. ‘The Gold Cloaks are bought and paid for, well most of them. Apparently they haven’t been paid by the crown in some time, so that was easily done. They will open the Mud Gate and the sally ports, and lay down their arms when your troops enter. Don’t expect them to fight for us though, they’re a lazy, drunken bunch, more used to harassing smallfolk than fighting.’ His voice was dour with northern disapproval, and she smiled lazily.

‘Lord Varys’s little birds are waiting to guide us into the Keep and grounds though the tunnels,’ he went on, his low voice very soothing despite the troublesome subject matter. ‘We don’t know what to do about the port raising the alarm when your fleet arrives, but by then we will be inside and attacking, so they’ll be distracted. Court is scheduled for ten in the morn, I hope we can get the timing right. We’ve scoped out the guildhalls, the armoury, and the other positions to take first. Most are heavily guarded by Lannister troops, so there will be some fighting.’

‘My Unsullied are used to street fighting and taking cities from within,’ she reassured him. ‘That will be easy, it’s the throne room I am concerned with. Once Cersei is dead, the rest will likely surrender quick enough, with the Dothraki waiting outside the city walls. I will be up above
scouting when the sun rises, to check on everyone’s arrival. With this grey weather, I won’t easily
be seen until I choose to.’

There was a lengthy silence, only the small sounds of the hairbrush, a fumbling for pins to secure
falling braids. ‘I hope you can control them, the dragons.’

‘My mind is strong, our connection stronger. I will not let them run wild, worry not.’ She reached
backwards, groping for a hand to squeeze it gently in emphasis, then picked up a small velvet bag
from the dresser. ‘Here, please put these in for me.’

There were seven of them now, tiny silver bells threaded with silver cord, held in his sword-worn
palm. ‘Tell me what they are for again, each victory you have had,’ Jon said roughly, sounding
proud and scared all at once.

‘The Warlocks of Qarth,’ she said, picking up the first bell and handing it to him to fasten in her
longest braid. In the mirror, he was only a blur of grey and brown, white skin and tightly bound
black hair, but she sensed his smile. ‘Astapor, Yunkai, and Mereen,’ she added lightly, handing
him three at once.

‘Now you’re just showing off,’ he teased her, and she snorted, settling back on the stool, her bright
head resting against his belly for a moment, turning into the gentle touch of his hand on her cheek.
‘And the last three?’

‘Slavers Bay again,’ she said dismissively. ‘Stubborn fools. Vaes Dothrak, when I took the
horselords as mine, and the Blackwater Rush. I don’t have one for beyond the Wall, as that was no
victory.’

‘It wasn’t,’ he said sadly, busy fastening the last lower down on the braid. ‘And more of the same
faces us, once this is over.’ That dread prospect made both of them fall silent for a long while, until
he was done with fixing her up to the best of his ability. Peering in the mirror, all appeared tidy
enough, so she rose to finish dressing and find Varys underground. He was going to show her the
route to the Dragonpit, the perfect deserted spot in this teeming city to call her sons to her, the
irony of the location acid sweet on her tongue.

She rarely hated people, despite all the enemies she had faced down in her eventual life, as it was
such a useless, crippling emotion, a waste of energy unless it could be channelled into righteous
fury. But she could not help loathing Cersei Lannister, everything she stood for, and the disorder
and misery she had helped spread throughout this ailing city and the Seven Kingdoms. She and her
loathsome house, two members of which were now hiding underground, ready to stand with her to
dismantle its ruins. Her world was very strange, but the people that came and went weren’t all
puzzling or devastating, some were challenging and beautiful, an unexpected gift she did not
deserve.

When she stood, she spun around and grabbed Jon on either side of his very handsome, much
adored face, staring deep into his compelling, earthy eyes, imprinting them in her mind for
reassurance, and kissed him, pouring all of herself into it so his arms slid around her and tightened,
his lips parting in a sweet rumble, like a contented wolf being scratched by the fire. She would
hoard him and treasure him until the end of her days, and give everything she had to keep him by
her side.

‘I can’t wait,’ she gasped as she broke away at last. ‘I can’t wait to put on a silly gown, and go to a
silly sept with some pompous septon, and marry you in front of this horrid city, and to the hells
with them all.’
He laughed, his face transforming with a flash of white teeth, and the alluring creases at his temples. ‘I can’t wait to take my stroppy wife home, and her armies of fancy southern folk and eunuchs, and her Dothraki horde and dragons, and tell those grumpy shits to bend the bloody knee, or else.’

Her laughter welled up, along with her tears, which threatened to leak and spill. She was giddy and terrified and riled, and most of all, she was in love. Love made people do terrible, stupid things, so she had always been afraid of it, contemptuous of those who fell into its clutches, scared of being weak, and having cracks in her hard shell that would bring her carefully constructed world crashing down. But she wasn’t afraid anymore, not of that, and not of Jon. Far worse faced them, and they must face it together, or perish.
And there’s fantasy, there’s fallacy, there’s tumbling stone

Chapter Notes

Winner, in the category of ‘Smuttiest Smut’ in the Jonerys Fanfiction Awards 2017

To some, this may seem a dubious honour, but smut can be art, and it is damn hard to make it good enough to guarantee you are a puddle of fangirl mess after reading (or writing). If you were so impressed with the quality of my smut you voted for me, I thank you from the bottom of my dark and twisted (and quite fluffy) heart. Have a consensual spank.

***

A/N: In the first part of this chapter I collaborated with Ashleyfanfic (you might remember her from such fics as Love on the Brain), who has awe-inducing abilities in the field of action sequences, so enjoy this even more than usual as it had the hand of the master involved. Thanks so much Ashley for your help, and good luck with your long-awaited surgery, and thanks to Sparkles59 for the quick beta.

The angst, fluff and smut are mine. My gratitude to those who bother to tell me what they think of my efforts, especially on every chapter. Feedback makes interesting stuff like juicy collaborations happen.

A dreary grey dawn greeted her when she stepped cautiously out into the skeletal remains of the Dragonpit, the sand and pebbles and shattered bones of long dead dragons and their prey crunching quietly beneath her high leather boots. Her sharp eyes detected no guards on the ramparts, as there was nothing to defend; an abandoned curiosity from the distant past that was probably only used for summer trysts between lovers and the cheaper sort of whores and clients.

Chosen as a venue by her enemy as a petty insult, she now reclaimed it for her house, closing her eyes and sending an arrow of thought shooting upwards into the sky. It was going to tax her mightily today, keeping half her mind concentrated on her sons while the other half was on scouting, watching events unfold on the ground and eventually swooping in to make her dramatic, perhaps reckless entrance so the whole city would learn the last Targaryen had come to reclaim and remake the capital her ancestors had founded and built.

Her symbiosis with her sons was now powerful and practiced, but a dragon was not a slave, and like herself her sons had a fiery temper. If riled, the hooks she held them lovingly tethered with would slip loose. She had to hope there were no weapons deployed like the one that had brought Drogon down on the Blackwater Rush, held in reserve in case of attack from above, but Varys has been unable to discover any in the Red Keep or on the city walls, so it was likely safe enough.

Her forces would arrive, the throne room would be surrounded and stormed, and she would descend to claim and dismiss the symbol of oppression, war, unequitable wealth and simmering disorder which had been the crown for the last hundred years. The Iron Throne was hers, but she was no longer sure she truly wanted it, and certainly not in its current form. Tyrion may cynically
call her an idealist, remind her that the people were sheep in need of a strong but just leader, but she had always hoped for better and tried for it, ever since she was strong enough to do something about the shit world she had been born into on a night of driving rain and wind, furious seas and crashing skies.

Her brooding over the future of the Kingdoms occupied her thoughts even when Drogon arrived, her heavy, structured battle dress of charcoal grey masking her as a winter shadow in the empty pit before her son descended in a flap of massive, leathery wings to give away her location. As they ascended quickly to hide among the sticky, laden clouds, the tiny corner of her mind that was free was with Jon, fussing and angsting like any wife who had sent their man off to a stupid war they may not return from. And it was stupid, wasting time and resources desperately needed for the war to come, to rid herself of a venal bitch she could have had killed months ago.

Today they must make an end, then be wed officially, set up a makeshift governing system in the interim, and go north in a much stronger position. If only it could all happen fast enough to ensure no more conflict flared up between her and Jon like that unpleasantness in her workroom on Dragonstone. A marriage of stubborn people meant fights were inevitable, and quickly made up afterwards with sweet words of concession and sweeter fucking, but the gravity of their situation meant it was more than mere squabbling, and she had hated it so much she still felt churning nausea at the memory.

They quickly left the city behind, travelling north and west a modest distance over empty country until she reached the Dothraki army, who had ridden hard back south to make it in time. They would have established scouts around the perimeter to shoot down anyone who ventured close, and had travelled through the night and not thrown up tents or dug firepits, but word of their sizeable presence may have reached the city and alarmed the Lannister queen and her troops. As she landed in a flurry of mud and clumps of grass, leaving Rhaegal circling above, her Kos was assembling for their orders, huddled in their new furs and tunics, looking fierce and energised at the prospect of a good fight, but hopefully it wouldn’t come to that. Their role was to surround and menace the city from the land, but not force the gates unless she flew in to give the signal if all went wrong. The Unsullied would enter from the sea, and they would be frightening enough for the city inhabitants without letting the Dothraki in as well, and she needed every man she had alive for the greater fight.

In her pocket was a peculiar and marvellous invention from the strange land of Yi Ti she had been gifted in Mereen. Like a sundial it told the time of day, with a series of lines around a circular face, with tiny cogs and wheels inside that were wound by a key to match it with the position of the sun. It was difficult to know how exact it was, but without the sun it was the only guide she had to ensure she arrived at the Red Keep at the right time. She checked it now as the Bloodriders went over their orders. The sun was setting later and later every week and now it was a little after nine in the morning, the leaden sky lightening a few shades as the sun rose and faltered above the horizon.

The instincts to pillage and plunder, take women and carry away any portable treasures were very strong in her adopted people, but they loved her, and listened to her when she asked them to refrain from terrorising the people of this strange, cold land she had led them to. There were a few dubious, even resentful looks when it sank in for them all that they were to surround from the land out of range of projectiles and wait, but they would obey in the end. She did not know how to repay them for the service they had given her, and for what still lay ahead, except to ferry them home to their beloved Dothraki Sea if they still lived at the end, and say goodbye perhaps forever.

The thought gave her a sharp pang of sadness as she mounted up again and surveyed them all from atop Drogon. ‘If you see me return, charge the gates and kill every last man in iron you find for your Khaleesi!’ she shouted, gaining a raucous, bloodthirsty cheer and brandishing of weapons. At
the wave of approval, Drogon gave his own throaty snarl, sensing her surge of determination, the dark core of her heart where her fury boiled, waiting to be freed and remake the world with fire and blood, a hint of hot copper on her tongue, the acrid scent of smoke in her nostrils.

The dragon bounded across the rolling heath to launch, eager to be off, and she gripped the spikes in front and settled into the comforting heat of his scaly hide. Grey clouds like dirty linen wrapped around them swiftly, but above the sun shafted across the pale blue sky directly into her eyes, blinding her as she flew east over the ocean, ducking below the belt of grey on occasion to check her location. The sea muttered and churned and heaved up streaks and eruptions of white foam above the ashy murk, but her ships were arrayed in a neat arrow formation, their black and crimson sails billowing in the erratic wind, her troops lined up on the decks, poised and ready to disembark on the docks, or by rowboat, or even leap and swim ashore.

At the sight of the two dragons diving in close the Unsullied looked up in unison and saluted with their spears in perfect alignment, and she dug in her knees to turn around and up to veil herself in cloud again, satisfied that the timing would be right after loosening a hand to reach for her timepiece and confirm. By the position of the sun above the clouds it appeared to be roughly accurate, she had enough time to circle and wait and commune with her sons in her mother tongue, sending her thoughts down the tethers of magic that bound them to her. They were restless and mettlesome, swooping close to each other to snarl and growl in their own language, the hide beneath her seat twitching like a horse trying to shake off flies, the heat in Drogon’s core building until she barely felt the biting wind and clammy cold.

The clouds were breaking loose around her as the sun strengthened, ripping away her hiding place, but it wasn’t needed now. She dived to a few hundred feet above the bay, tension coiling and coiling in her belly, sending shooting sparks through her veins, and coaxing a fresh churn of sickness in her empty stomach. In full view now, facing the high cliffs that slanted down to a rocky cove where a single ship with plain sails was moored, she saw small figures above pointing and piping shrieks as she passed overhead in a fury of air and irascible bellows, sending the watchers dashing for cover.

As she entered the city confines, the busy streets swarmed with ant-like figures running and freezing and diving for doorways, windows and under market stalls, and she felt a qualm of guilt at their sheer terror, knowing they expected the dragons to erupt in flame like the beasts of old, but she only flew over, Drogon’s imposing shadow cast over the burnt orange rooftops. She was keeping out of shot of arrows or worse, appearing as if she was surveying the city instead of leading an attack.

When she reached the Mud Gate she nodded in satisfaction to see it wide open, sailors and merchants and porters sprinting inside at the sight of her sons, and even better, plenty of empty berths for the ships that were now streaming in on oars and sail, the beat of the drums thudding upwards into the morning air. She wheeled around in a tight arc, the wind whipping at her hair and painting tendrils across her face, and the last thing she glimpsed as she flew back over the city walls were men in golden cloaks standing down, dropping weapons, and taking the winding steps, ignoring the scattered Lannister guards that cursed and shook fists at their desertion.

Lower down, she could hear the yelling and screaming of the citizens, smell the choking stench of the open sewers and a dozen other scents equally bad, taste the sharp fear of the truly terrified. Burning the city down would be an improvement, but it was not her way, so she took out the timepiece again to check it was after ten as planned, closed her eyes and her nose and sent a rapid stream of thought through her dragons’ clever minds, heading straight to the aloof and splendid sanctuary of the Red Keep, high on its hill above the common folk.
Diving over the towering walls she felt the hiss of arrows pass her hunched figure, but she barely noticed the danger, though a roar of Drogon’s irritation shook her from boots to braids. The scene below was so chaotic it was difficult to absorb in a quick sweep of her eyes, figures in fine clothes and plain streaming out of the imposing rectangular building she had been told was the throne room, the grey clad, deadly focused figures of the Unsullied duelling with guards in red plate, servants and archers and others she couldn’t identify. Then they were coming into land, Drogon’s claws screeching hideously across the copper sheeting of the roof as he scrabbled for purchase, and she had to forget the events unfolding below.

Her mind strained in three directions now, no space left to worry about her husband fighting somewhere beneath the dragon’s weight, the roof beams and plating creaking and straining, as Drogon nearly spanned the entire building. Rhaegal stayed back hovering and threatening the enemy troops on the wallwalks, his smaller body and faster movements suiting him better as a rearguard.

The din of shouting, screaming, clashing blades and clamouring bells, as well as the riled dragons made it impossible to decipher any sounds from inside, so she sent a spear of words through her bond with her son, Drogon’s claws hooking into sheets of copper and tearing them like paper, sending them spinning and crashing to the courtyard. There was a burst of directed flame form behind them together with a savage roar, Rhaegal losing patience with being shot at from below by brave but very stupid archers, but she didn’t turn to look.

A scene was opening up beneath them; torn and broken bodies of friend and foe, blood splashed liberally on the marble floor, wheeling figures locked in combat, and the utter joy and terror at seeing a lithe, lightning fast figure in brown and grey spinning on his heel and sinking his razor sharp bastard sword in the exposed armpit of a lumbering Kingsguard. A familiar slender woman in black was frozen in place on the throne from her long-ago vision, oblivious to the mayhem surrounding her, her cruel, narrowed gaze locked on the tall, elegant greying knight and dignified dwarf standing together, spitting venom to the last.

There was an ominous creak and shift of beams and mortared stone beneath Drogon, and his long, sinuous head poked through the ragged hole in the roof, and she saw nothing but sudden red rage, flowing like lava around the woman on her bloody throne she no longer truly wanted. At the sight of Drogon’s spiky head and slavering jaws those who were left standing began sprinting towards the open doors at the rear, but she did not spare the time to note who was who. She opened her mouth and spat out a stream of words through her clenched jaw, loud and carrying over the tumult. ‘Anyone here who does not want to die for this usurper get out now!’

She had lost it, had let her righteous fury consume her, the endless treachery and despair and murder which was the legacy of the Lannister bitch, the utter waste of lives and energy to try and make an end, sending the lava boiling over. She felt the tethers that held her sons in check snap, the carefully repressed bloodlust had taken over, she wanted to see this woman dead, a pile of ash on her seat, and stop this madness before more died for nothing.

From her eyrie above the emptying space of the throne room, she felt a parting of the air, the whistling path of a huge, sickeningly familiar iron bolt pass a hand’s breath from Drogon’s left haunch. She swore and ducked, and all became chaos; blistering, primal roars of dragons, pillars of flame and crashing, falling blocks of stone and oak beams and metal plates, drifts of dust and smoke. She fought to keep her seat desperately, clinging on for dear life and screaming herself as her son brought the throne room to ruin in a storm of temper, any who were left inside surely crushed to pulp by the debris.
She wrestled to latch on with her mind and drag them both up, up into the safety of the open sky, not knowing who was alive or dead, her last fleeting glimpse of Jon flickering and dying in her mind to taunt her as she retreated, sobbing for breath in the thick, smoky air, a mess of sobs and curses and bruised, straining hands gripping her riled son tightly as she left the destruction behind.

***

The tears started like a trickle of water through a crack in a wall of rock, oozing slowly down her numb face for an age, then a heaving sob twisted her tired body into a tight knot, her bruised and scraped hands clutching at her belly, the tears now falling like rain, dampening the covers of the bed. Apart from a few recent sniffles, and silent weeping in the dead of night, she rarely cried, and now she could not stop, shaking and sniffing and wallowing in the pain and fear that gripped her like a choking fist at her throat.

Only death can pay for life. The mocking refrain echoed through her ears, and she had paid and paid today. The bodies in the streets, the bodies in the courtyard, the bones and meat buried under the debris of the throne room, the body sprawled out in the bed, coated in dust and splashed with rivulets of blood, not dead but knocked senseless, out cold for over an hour.

The maester had come and gone, and done nothing but feel his scalp for cracks and depressions, check his pupils with a lighted candle and dole out potions for the pain if he eventually woke. She had left it all behind, the mess she had wrought on the city, leaving the others to take stock and receive reports, send word to the Dothraki, and clear out the Red Keep of all lurking threats. Her dragons she had sent flying where they willed as soon as she could find a place to dismount, to cool their ire, and feed and rest. She was alone with her misery and guilt, the tiny being under her grasping hands that was cautiously acknowledged but unconfirmed, and her battered husband, who they had dragged out from under a pile of rubble near the doors, breathing but lifeless, his skin as white as his name under all the muck and bright blood.

Panicked and unable to bring Jon anywhere else she knew was safe, she had him hauled back to the whorehouse, and the madam had summoned the kindly local maester to tend him at their abrupt arrival. The city and the brothel were loudly boiling with excitement and terror and speculation, but she barely noticed. This was all she cared about, in this room, and she would gladly sacrifice her bitter victory if it would only bring him back whole and alive.

She was so locked down and internalised, rocking silently with each sob that burst from her mouth, that she didn’t register the stirring and muttering coming from the bed until a hand flailed out and landed on her dusty hair, stroking her feebly. ‘Dany, why are you crying?’

At the scratchy whisper of his voice, she looked up through her clouded gaze, wiping away the film of tears to see dark eyes sharp with pain, but mostly coherent, deep creases on his brow under the smears of dust and gore, but instead of babbling her thanks to the heedless Gods she sobbed anew, beyond annoyed with herself but unable to stop. ‘I’m crying because I never want to sit by your bloody bed and wait to see if you live or die ever again, Jon Snow,’ she heaved. ‘And this time it is all my fault.’

‘I’m hard to kill, you know that,’ he managed to joke weakly. ‘And it’s hardly your fault I got hit on the head. I should have gotten out faster, but you were very distracting and I was staring like a dolt.’ He paused in a grimace of discomfort, as if every word hurt him to say. ‘What sent the dragons wild?’

She wiped her sodden face with a corner of the sheet, the useless tears finally subsiding as it began to dawn that Jon was indeed very hard to kill, and was none the worse but for a fearsome headache, a few cuts and scrapes and a layer of grime that was strangely alluring. ‘A ballista, like on the
Blackwater. Drogon has learned very quickly to hate those things,’ she said. ‘I hope that was the last of them. Rhaegal destroyed it, but I lost control of their minds. If I didn’t get out fast they would have lit up the whole Red Keep.’

A shudder went through her at the prospect, and her hand reached for his and gripped it for reassurance, both equally dirty, then she straightened her aching back, a small wavering smile managing an appearance as she looked down upon him to see his deep brown eyes full of concern and love, not thinking about his own very unpleasant state, only her. ‘That’s better,’ he said approvingly. ‘I don’t like to see my fierce little wife crying.’ His fingers tightened around hers, the pain in her hand both a discipline, and an anchor. He glanced around, his mouth twisting a little. ‘Are we back in the brothel again?’

She gave a soft gust of laughter. ‘I couldn’t think of anywhere else to take you,’ she said. ‘I am afraid the girls are more enamoured of you now, as they all saw you carried up the stairs, all mucky and bashed about and heroic.’

There was a chuckle, then a flash of agony. ‘Gods, my head. It hurts to think, let alone laugh.’ A line of stubbornness appeared between his black brows, his liquid eyes sharpening. ‘Are we truly safe in here? Has the fighting stopped? And what of the others?’

At the string of questions, she quelled the crippling emotions that still churned under her bedraggled surface, stinging at her eyes, tugging at her heart, squirming in her queasy guts. ‘There are six Unsullied downstairs. I don’t know about all our friends, I was in too much of a hurry to get you out of the Keep, but I saw Jorah, Ser Jaime, and Tyrion alive and whole.’

‘Tyrion would crawl out of the rubble intact if the entire city burnt down around him,’ Jon said dryly. ‘I know for sure Clegane is dead, I saw him die. It took three of us to bring down the Mountain, and Clegane did not make it. That one merely lived to see his brother dead by his hand, at least he had the satisfaction before the end. Monstrous big, and unnaturally strong…’

Every word he spoke was still a struggle, so she shushed him, her free hand stroking his furrowed brow gently. ‘There will be time enough to tell me what happened later,’ she said soothingly. ‘I don’t know about the fighting. I didn’t care, all I wanted was to see you safe, and wait until you woke. I am afraid I am a very selfish queen.’

He snorted affectionately. ‘You’re a very tired and weepy queen. Come to bed for a while and rest. I won’t sleep unless you’re naked beside me, keeping me warm.’ It was blatant beguilement, even if it was only sleep that was offered, slits of velvety dark eyes luring her beneath fluttering lashes, and this time she would not get up, murmur a lame excuse, and walk out. At that reassuring thought, she felt all the stiffness in her joints loosen at once, and she slumped on her chair, the call of duty shoved aside at the prospect of peace and comfort, the beat of a heart against her ear, and sculpted muscle and chilly white skin under her softer, hotter body.

She got up, quickly stripping off her battle clothes and leaving them scattered on the floor sluttishly, the shift and sway of her naked form as she moved about watched appreciatively, if exhaustedly. It was still daylight, but the room was dim due to the drawn shutters, the lighted lamps and candles from the maester’s visit mostly extinguished. There was a flask of milk of the poppy on the bedside table, and she picked it up. ‘I am not getting in until you take this. I can see you are in horrible pain.’ Jon looked mutinous, so she brandished it and threatened. ‘I will get dressed again and leave.’

‘I don’t believe you, but all right,’ he grumbled. ‘Vile stuff, hand it over.’ He shifted up against the pillows with a curse, and downed half of it as she stood over him, arms crossed below her breasts, and satisfied, she climbed into bed, moving into her usual curled position tucked into his side, a leg
and arm draped possessively, a tangle of unravelling silver hair across his chest. His heart was an audible thump, an ebb and flow of life, and his scent was all smoke and sweat, and the tang of blood and dry dust.

Under the blankets, the space was cosy and dark, and her eyelids drooped as sleep began to suck her into the black. A voice, thick and drugged, reached into her faltering consciousness, drawing her back from the threshold. ‘You weren’t just crying because you were afraid for me.’

‘You did give me a nasty hour I don’t wish to repeat again,’ she murmured in response, moulding herself into his flank. ‘But you know me. I was very afraid you would never wake up, but I was also afraid you would wake and think of me less. So much death and destruction, and for what? My own glory and vanity, and vengeance. There is a dark part of me I never wanted to show you, terrified of what you would think if you saw it first hand, and now you have seen it.’

‘That wasn’t vanity,’ he replied, grabbing a handful of her hair to bring her eyes up to his, his gaze steady despite the poppy filtering through his addled mind. ‘That was necessary. I have also done many violent deeds in my life. I don’t judge you now, and I never will. I never thought you acquired all your armies and riches by being pretty and nice, my silly queen.’

She smiled faintly as his gentle ribbing. ‘Very silly,’ she said agreeably. ‘And scary. You married the scariest woman in the Kingdoms, and yet you seem very relaxed about it.’

‘I am very relaxed,’ he purred. ‘And I’ve hardly had a moment to be relaxed and happy since as far back as I can remember. You gave me that gift, so I don’t give a shit who you burn down, within reason. This is war, and you did the best you could to spare the innocent, even if you were bloody scary in the way you went about it.’

Her laugh of relief was soft, so not to jar him, the kiss she planted on his plump mouth softer still, and then she settled down again, happy for a shining moment that he had seen all of her now, inside and out, and she was good enough for his noble heart. His own deeply buried darkness spoke to hers in the language of deeds and actions and desire, and forever would. How fortunate she was to fly through fire and death and disorder, and come out the other side to rest in the arms of her lover and partner, victorious and battered about, and understood.

***

The idle winter sun had set and risen again to be veiled by dense grey murk, casting the quiet city streets in an eerie half-light, reminding her that they had limited time to tarry in the south before heading to the North, where the true winter and its demons and horrors lurked. She had slept, then dressed and left, then slept again, Jon alarmingly comatose throughout, until she returned from another escorted trip to the Red Keep and had a bath brought up and filled for herself.

She stripped and sat in the cramped copper tub, soaking for a long while in the scented water, and when she rose and donned a new, more modest robe of creamy wool she tiptoed over to the bed to check on him. He was beginning to stir finally, and she breathed a sigh of relief, dropping a kiss on his grubby forehead before going to the door to ask for the servants to come empty the tub and refill it with fresh water.

The madam had been paid well for her regal guest, and for closing down the establishment until they made the move up to the Keep, the bored whores lounging about with only the stoic Unsullied guards for company, their gossiping about the Targaryen queen and her intriguing, injured lover falling silent whenever she passed through. The streets themselves were less raucous, the people cowed by the sight of strange Essos folk patrolling the streets, the dragons wheeling above Blackwater Bay, and by the destruction of the throne room and the death of their hated queen.
Very soon she would have to make a proclamation, declare her intentions to the city and the realm, but it was all too disordered to think about it, half of her preoccupied with Jon, desperate to have him awake and mobile, the rest of her with clearing out pockets of resistance and hunting down Lannister toadies she had no wish to leave lurking about to stir up trouble. And scarce gold, scarcer food, sullen lords, and disrupted trade, and all the rest...she had no choice but to delegate. Her banners streamed from the walls and towers of the Red Keep at last, but the city was not hers, and might never be.

Worry gnawed away at her like a rat, leaving her wits scattered, her body crying out for rest and comfort, and love. Not just hazy dark eyes and low, soothing words pouring into her mind like honey, but the rough and the sweet, being held and stroked, scratched and grasped, then conquered, the growing satisfaction over her victory needing expression in a frantic tangling of limbs and fiery release. She eyed the muttering, restless form hiding beneath the covers from the maidservants, wondering if she should fetch the maester again, or order him to get up selfishly.

When the maids scuttled out of the room with their pails, eyes to the floor, she saw a rumpled head of curls emerge, and a grumpy expression under caked dirt and dried blood. She was sitting decorously in her bedside chair, her hair loose and brushed to her waist, looking as innocent as a maid for once, and she was pretty enough to wipe the frown off Jon’s face. ‘You’re a beautiful sight,’ he said with a sleepy rasp. ‘I’d kiss you, but you’d get all dirty again.’ He struggled to sit up, but managed it slowly.

‘I am glad to see you awake at last. There’s a bath drawn. I’m afraid I must insist, even if I have to haul you there myself.’ Vertical, the covers falling away from his marred chest, she saw a livid purple bruise on his ribs, and another on his shoulder. Thank the Gods it wasn’t worse, no broken bones or stab wounds to add to his collection.

‘That sounds good actually, and I can walk, I think,’ he replied with a wince, but slid out of the bed easily enough, wobbly as a newborn colt as he padded over to the tub, which was placed in front of the crackling fire to keep the water hot. The men had stripped him of all his clothes when they brought him in, so she got a nice view as he stumbled, then stepped into the tub carefully, hissing as he always did at the stinging heat.

She poured him a cup of water mixed with lime, knowing his mouth would be dry from the poppy, and sat down next to the tub in a sweep of robe, not wanting to be parted from him even by a few feet. Solicitous, she took the cup when he had finished, handing him soap and a cloth, feeling the urge to mother him a while, even picking up a sponge and wetting it to scrub his back gently, which was certainly no hardship. Silent and dozy at first, and intent on getting clean enough to hold her, eventually he began to talk at her probing questions, all he had seen and done at ground level spilling out, the words flowing easily as he settled into the bloody tale.

‘I know the sight of Tyrion and Jaime standing together knocked all the wind out of her, but after that, we had to cut down Ser Gregor, and it was no easy task. Lady Brienne, the Hound, and
myself, and still the ugly fucker wouldn’t lay down and die, until the Hound stabbed him through his visor. Then you were through the roof, and I ran, but I lingered by the door to watch, and then I woke up in bed with you weeping all over me.’

His head tipped forward as her hands dug into either side of his spine. She didn’t want to talk about it again, her panic and misery and guilt, so she replied rather flippantly. ‘I was worried about what the roof had done to your very pretty head.’ She leaned in, her sleeves dragging in the water, and laid a kiss on the side of his throat with a little nip of teeth. All the sweat and grime was gone, all she could detect was lemony soap, and the musky scent of his pale skin.

‘I’m not pretty,’ he grumped as usual.

‘Of course you are, my love. Do you think I would marry a plain man, or even an attractive one? I had no use for men before I met you, but you were exceedingly pretty and hard to resist.’

‘As were you. If you had known then what I was thinking you would have had me burned for sure,’ he said ruefully, catching on to her changing mood. Her mind was all over the place lately, but lust was a place they were very comfortable with, right from the beginning, even if Jon could not do much about it at present.

‘Mmm, you can tell me what you were thinking now, it is quite safe,’ she replied naughtily, and he chuckled. She rewarded that with another kiss, her cramping fingers releasing his neck and sliding down his chest, slick with soap. Her robe was getting soaked, clinging to her unpleasantly, but it was worth it just to handle him. She traced the mortal wound above his heart, then ran her thumbnail around the nipple below, then her other hand was taken in his, brought down his flat belly to land on a surprising erect and very impressive cock. ‘Surely not,’ she marvelled, but curling her palm around his girth regardless, sneaking down to tickle his stones, making him jump a little, the water sloshing until she relented and resumed her attentions.

‘A man’s lust after a good fight is a dangerous thing,’ he said lowly against her ear, her head resting on his shoulder comfortably as she stroked him silkily from root to tip. ‘I never had an outlet before but my own hand, but now...all I can think of is binding you to the bed and rutting with you like a beast, take you in every way and mark you and fill you with my seed. Or I want to get on my knees and worship you like the warrior queen you are, make you moan and come in my mouth...right now, I just want.’

‘You are still weak,’ she demurred in a breathy, faltering voice. ‘Just lie back and I will relieve you.’ She wanted him, craved all the things he had spoken of, a warning twinge and flash of heat in her loins causing her to bite her lip, then his elegant neck, and tighten her hand around his cock. She was afraid he would tax himself too much and regret his exertions afterwards, but Jon was ever stubborn.

‘No, it’s not enough, love,’ he said thickly. ‘Help me get up, I need you, I need to be in you.’

She considered refusing, urging him to save it for another time, but her desire had other ideas. There was nothing she needed more than to take her hard-headed hero of a husband in her body, however he could manage it, feel the perfect thickness and length inside her, all the hard knots in her spine melting like ice in summer as she yielded completely.

They were clumsy and saturated with bathwater, stumbling away from the tub and across the floor to the messy bed, clutching and clawing and mouthing each other frantically, his tongue diving between her lips to flick at the roof of her mouth as he dragged the robe from her shoulders to bare her breasts and belly and glistening cunt to his inky eyes. She slithered backwards across the mattress, guiding him down with her to rest between her thighs, and he was so hot from the bath he
matched her inner fire, their skins moulding and sticking together, holding him trapped against her full length.

His wet hair was as black as a crow’s wing, dragging across her face and breasts, and the damp bristles of his beard abraded her sensitive peaks as he suckled at her hungrily. It would be very quick and abrupt, her cunt filled before it had time to adjust, a deep ache in her womb leading to a jolt of climax rather than a lengthy induction. His fingers were testing to see if she was wet enough, holding her cupped in his palm and then opening her with his thumb, penetrating her firmly, then tracing around her nub to draw it out as she spread herself in preparation. His luscious mouth around her nipples was taut and rough, a hint of pain flaring at each pull, and she was already wriggling with impatience, little gasps and a splay of bright hair across the bed, her hands finding his arse and sinking nails in wordless invitation, her knee drawing upwards to centre his cock at her entrance.

She freed a hand to grab at his curls and bring him to her face to face, wanting his fathomless eyes on her when he took her, the dark fantasy of all he wanted to do to her forgotten for now, but she would remind him later. Under his skilled hand, she was plump and slick, and when he slid into her, forcing himself past her clenching channel in a series of sharp thrusts into he was completely engulfed, her mouth flew open in a cry of pain and bliss, his pelvis pressing down onto her nub, catching it perfectly to counter the invasion, and his mouth sucking at hers, his gaze a liquid brown and glowing with life and love.

She swam under him, moving languorous and slow, dictating the pace and inviting him to relax and not strain himself by taking control, circling her hips to hold and twist him where she was most responsive, just throaty, lazy moans coming from her lips as he kissed her until her face was scraped raw, the pressure in her belly building only gradually, a slow burn as she squeezed her walls around him, both her legs lifting to encircle his narrow hips.

She was so slippery and open to him now she eventually began to crave more friction, more force, a whine and a swifter arch of her back muscles to take him deeper, nails sinking harshly into the bunching muscles above his buttocks. ‘More, I need more,’ she whimpered. ‘I need it hard, Jon, I need…’

She didn’t get what she desired, not yet. He nipped at her throat, sucking at the skin until it hurt, then murmured into her ear. ‘You are so greedy, my love.’ And with that, he was gone, and her growl of frustration was savage, grabbing to try and stop him pulling out of her cunt but quite useless against his superior strength. He was so quick she was surprised given the wobbly state of him earlier, but all that self-control honed through the years meant that pain was nothing, the brute urge to fuck her until he came so he could sleep again soundly ignored in favour of picking her up and placing her high up against the headboard, her bottom resting on the pillows.

She blinked, confused at the sudden change in tack, and then she caught on, leaning back against the cool slab of carved oak and spreading herself with a sigh of anticipation. She looked down upon herself, gleaming with nectar and lewdly open, a deep pink colour from being freshly fucked, and her sigh merged to a soft, helpless cry, watching him crawl between her thighs and settle as if he intended to be there for some time. He taunted her at first, scraping his whiskers up the length of her legs so she quivered, a single finger tracing the pattern of her folds as he just drank her in silently. ‘I don’t know what I like better, when you’re all tight and closed up and neat, or when you’re like this, all red and open like a flower,’ he mused, husky and glottal, a flash of soot black eyes glancing up to find her breathing hard and braced for the inevitable torment.

‘Stop teasing me, Jon Snow, and make me come,’ she gasped. ‘That was a cruel trick you just played, and I am dying here…oh Gods…’
Her hands landed on his head and threaded through curls to hold him as close as possible to her bare, burning flesh, which he immediately sucked into his mouth entire, his tongue pushing inside her, her own head knocking against the headboard repeatedly as she tried to absorb the intense pulse of firing nerves in her loins. She loved to be delicately teased with little licks and bites, but she also loved to be devoured, feasted upon, teeth and tongue and lips employed to send her mad, so aroused she was near to jostling him off her when the pleasure became too sharp. And oh, the sound of him moaning and grunting as he attended her, the sight of him fisting and tugging at his stiff length beneath him, as it excited him just to serve her well.

Two fingers replaced his tongue, twisting deep and curling upwards, and she loosed his hair to grab at the headboard behind her, her cries growing louder. There were guards out in the hall somewhere, but she didn’t care at this point, needing to give voice to the pleasure that was sinking its claws into her guts, her buzzing mind, her racing heart, her nub given his devoted care, feathery jabs and circles alternating until she gave a hoarse scream and released with a flood of wet heat into his mouth. A wild tremor rippled under her skin, the buzz in her mind rising and falling like the tide, her hips riding it out until she could no longer stand the lap of his tongue in her cunt and reached to push him away at last.

‘Fuck…oh fuck…’ she cursed, slumping backwards against the headboard and sinking down between the pillows, hoping for a few moments to catch her breath and regain composure, but he wasn’t done with her yet. Her climax had not yet receded, and so when he rose up on his knees, arranged her legs to his satisfaction, and guided himself back into her depths with a violent thrust it was pure devastation.

She curled inwards in reaction, cowering under the rough movements stretching her further open, anchoring herself to the headboard with her feet for each jarring impact, her hand hooking onto the edge so she was bent completely in half, only making it worse for herself as he was able to take her very deeply, the weight of his eyes like glittering black stone until she closed her lids to hide away. ‘No love,’ he growled. ‘Look at me. Show me how this feels, open your eyes.’ She obeyed, rattled but transfixed. Blue met black and locked as tight as her core around his cock as her body tensed to resist each slide within her depths.

Then she was freed, his lashes falling and the pace increasing, hard hands holding onto her legs, his face contorting as if in pain as he slapped against her raised bottom in erratic, jerking movements, a raspy cry escaping his wet lips met by her string of sobs and high-pitched whines as she came yet again. It was hard on the heels of her previous release, very different this time, a pulse like a heart contracting, so scorching hot she felt as if a fire was lit inside her womb, and yes, the soothing spurt of seed filling her up, her bent limbs falling loose and twitching.

Her sated lover collapsed, hiding in her breasts as if seeking a mother’s comfort, wrecked and sweaty under her hands, feebly patting and stroking. He was heavy, near comatose again, and when she finally began to calm and sink into the rucked-up covers in dozy repletion, she smoothed a handful of unruly hair away from his face to check on him. ‘Jon, are you all right?’ she said, her voice blurry.

‘My headache has gone,’ he rumbled, a dark glint of an eye opening to regard her lazily. ‘We should have done this yesterday, and bugger the poppy.’

She gave him a look through heavy lids, then smiled crookedly. ‘They breed them tough in the North,’ she observed. ‘Tough, and foolhardy.’

She felt the vibration of a laugh, and he managed to lift his pretty head to catch her tired eyes, the creases at his temples fading, a familiar serious expression descending. ‘When can we go home, do
you think?’ he said carefully.

‘As soon as we can safely leave this place in some order,’ she replied, equally careful. ‘Will you help me with it all?’

‘Always.’
At the end of my road

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

A/N: Faced with the prospect of a ridiculously long chapter, I’ve decided to stick with personal matters and smut in this one. The next chapter will be politics and angsty stuff (and smut). Thanks to everyone being generally enthusiastic about the last eventful chapter, I’ve FINALLY decided what to do with this fic going forward, so well done, smut fans, I’m here for a while yet.

Special thanks to Sparkles59 for the midwifery stuff. New mood board on Tumblr post kindly provided by Justwanderingneverlost, and the banner above is my prize for bringing the Jonerys Smut (this year at least) provided by FrostBitePanda. Love you guys *sniffles*

The maester was a well-built man with sympathetic blue eyes and alarmingly red hair, so bright it was orange. She had seen few people with such hair in the east, so had stared at him with interest when he entered the room with a bow and a stammer of words in a cultured voice, his sombre robe and long chain of metal links belying his youngish age and awkwardness. She had not noticed his looks on his first visit, being too frantic with worry, but today she noted he was comely in an odd away, unintimidating and sweet natured.

Her detached interest in his looks had not helped matters. Jon was already edgy about the visitor and what he might find, and being possessive in nature had prowled the room restlessly and glowered at the maester the minute the man began his questions and examination. Maester Willum did not touch her below the waist, thank the Gods, but did handle her to check her vitals, and coaxed her patiently to spill her tale of her stillbirth, the curse, the years of no moon blood and its sudden return, the subject matter not easy to relay to anyone, let alone a stranger.

‘Your Grace, I am a man of science,’ he said when she had done. ‘I do not believe in curses, or witches. I do not know the real reasons your blood stopped, and then returned, but what you have told me about your last bleed means it is too soon to know whether you are with child. The symptoms are clear, but it could be nerves causing your nausea. From what I have heard around the city, you have been very busy lately.’

When she was pregnant the first time, she had been a child, completely unaware of her state until her handmaidens pointed it out. She hadn’t even been particularly ill, so she had no frame of reference. Despite fully understanding his caution, she slumped in defeat, wrapping her woollen
robe around her for comfort. ‘I expected as much,’ she said flatly, her eyes flicking to Jon, paused in the middle of the floor, his face awash with disappointment. She rose from her seat on the edge of the bed, very much on her dignity now the consultation was over. ‘I assume you swore an oath at the Citadel to uphold discretion with personal matters,’ she added, making the man gulp and redden.

‘Of course, your Grace. Everything you told me is in the strictest confidence,’ he managed to reply. ‘I will leave you a tonic for your stomach, and please call on me in a few weeks if you still have not bled. I can carry out a more thorough examination and check for certain signs.’

At the subtle growl from across the room, she shook her head. ‘In a few weeks we will not be here,’ she said, kindly enough. ‘But I thank you for your time today.’ The young man bowed again with a sweep of robes, retrieved a bottle of green liquid from a pocket, and retreated quickly, giving Jon a wide berth, but as he reached the door there was a scuffling outside, a strident female voice and a halting reply from the Unsullied guard on duty.

‘Let me in, you great idiot! The madam sent for me, and I am too busy to piss about arguing with strange folk from foreign parts.’

The maester sighed heavily, trapped by the altercation, and turned. ‘That’s Tansy, your Grace, the local midwife and the madam’s sister. A dreadful woman, but she knows much about birthing and woman’s matters. She often tends to the girls here when I cannot.’

Intrigued, and not willing to give up just yet, she called out. ‘Red Flea, let the woman pass.’

The door flung open, the maester scuttled out gratefully with a muttered farewell, and a woman swept in, plainly dressed but handsome, with a mass of dark hair streaked with grey, and wide eyes as green as grapes. She didn’t curtsey, but eyed her with frank interest, her hands on her meaty hips.

‘A bloody Targaryen,’ she marvelled. ‘A real Targaryen with that fabulous silver hair and fucking huge dragons come to deliver us all. I saw you fly over the other morning and nearly shit myself. It was a great day though, hearing Cersei Lannister had the roof come down on her head. What an entrance you made! Everyone is talking about it.’

She tried hard not to laugh at the woman’s bolshiness. ‘The maester says you have some skill with woman’s matters,’ she said.

‘More than he does,’ she scoffed, moving further into the chamber, her green gaze taking it all in, the queen in her nightclothes, and the lurking warrior in the background, looking rather stunned at the gust of bossy femininity that had descended upon them. ‘This one is pretty,’ Tansy said with a glint of imperfect smile. ‘Your husband? Or could you not wait and he got you with child before he could make an honest woman of you? I don’t blame you if so.’

She swallowed another laugh, and said coolly. ‘I need your knowledge and discretion, my lady. My husband thinks I am with child, but the maester said it’s too early to tell.’

‘Never mind about your man, what do you think?’ the woman said, her bright gaze cutting through her.

‘I don’t know,’ she replied quietly. ‘And if you sit down and listen you will find out the why, if you give me your word that this does not leave the room.’

The lively woman’s face grew solemn. ‘I swear on the Mother, and the on the lives of all the babes
I have brought into this world,’ she said. ‘Now then, let’s sit, have some of that good wine over there, and you tell me your tale, your Grace. Your man too. I do like looking at a lovely lad, even if they give no end of trouble, and more work for me.’

Her mouth twitched when she noted the telltale blush on Jon’s sullen face. ‘Please sit, and help yourself,’ she said graciously. She felt strangely comfortable in this bold woman’s presence, unlike with the maester. They all sat down at the dining table, wine was poured, and she repeated her tale again, a rough hand reaching for hers under the table and squeezing it for reassurance.

When the story faltered to its end, she looked up to see a sceptical look on Tansy’s broad face. ‘It’s a strange tale,’ she said. ‘But like the esteemed fool Maester Willum, I don’t believe in witches, or curses. I believe what I can see and touch and smell. I’ve done this for so long I can look at a woman, and just know. I get called a witch for it too.’ She was studying her closely again, reading her face like a map. ‘Your skin glows like a pearl, but you have dark circles under your eyes, and you are so tired sometimes you could lie down on the floor and sleep,’ she began. ‘Your teats are sore, and yet you like your man touching them or suckling at them more than usual. You want to spew your guts at the sight or thought of food, but you haven’t yet. Your feelings are all over the shop, like you could cry, laugh, fuck, or punch someone in the face within the space of an hour. Do these symptoms sound familiar to you?’

‘They do,’ she said dryly. ‘What else can you tell me? Do not be afraid to speak true.’

The green eyes drifted over to Jon, and the woman smirked. ‘If this one has been in your bed regularly in the middle of your cycle after your first blood, that is when a woman is most fertile,’ she imparted. ‘I assume you didn’t let him out of it, you look like a sensible lass.’

She snorted, hiding a smile behind her hand. The midwife reminded her of a fierce Dothraki woman, open and uninhibited by matters to do with bodies and their interesting parts. It was refreshing, but her lover’s face was turning pinker. Despite his embarrassment, Jon didn’t look inclined to draw his sword on her, as he did with the quite useless maester, he was too interested despite all the teasing.

‘Not every woman has this happen, but one to two weeks after he’s knocked you up, you might have felt a sharp pain in your womb,’ Tansy continued. ‘And if your man takes you deep and hard, you may notice a spot of blood, just a bit. It’s your womb getting ready for the babe before it closes up to seal it inside.’

Her mind flicked back to the morning of the Dragonpit parley, and her free hand went to her belly at the memory. ‘I did feel such a pain, like being stabbed in the guts,’ she said cautiously. ‘And blood, well…’ She paused delicately, the hand holding hers squeezed tighter, and finally Jon cleared his throat and spoke.

‘If you examined the queen, would you be able to confirm or not?’

‘He speaks!’ Tansy said, shooting a gap-toothed smile in his direction. ‘Very nicely too. I always liked Northerners. No nonsense with that lot, and lovely accents like thick honey. No, my lord. I would be able to find nothing except sore teats. It’s not until three months when anything is obvious. To know for sure, you’ll have to wait until her Grace starts throwing up her breakfast. It will be any day now, or maybe not at all. Every woman is different.’

‘You are not sure either, then,’ he said, his voice tinged with frustration, a flash of moody eyes beneath lowered brows. ‘I am worried for my wife. Soon we must leave the city and go to war, and I would feel better if I knew for certain whether she can fight or not.’
The midwife let exasperation show plain on her face. ‘More bloody war, and bloody chivalrous men,’ she groaned. ‘Don’t you mollycoddle her. She will be fine, long as she doesn’t fall off that great beast of hers. It’s best for a woman to continue as normal, until she gets too fat to stir from a chair without hauling her up.’ She reached over and patted his shoulder familiarly. ‘Stop brooding. I am near certain the queen is with child, but give it more time.’ Her wide lipped mouth curled mischievously again. ‘Another sign you can look for is her nipples and cunt lips turning darker. It’s not exact, but a more pleasant sight than watching her Grace heaving over a chamberpot.’

The pair of them coughed awkwardly in response, herself swallowing the wild urge to giggle shamelessly. ‘I thank you for your candour,’ she managed to say, and she rose, offering her hand to the woman to take. ‘It was indeed more useful than the maester. Thank your sister as well, for thinking to send you.’

The woman’s hands clasped around hers were clean and soft, yet strong, her regard warm and kind, and though she was a stranger and a raucous one at that, she felt eased by her practical advice and presence, and trusted her to keep her counsel. ‘If we return here after the war is done, and I am in need of a midwife, I will send for you,’ she added, and the woman beamed again.

‘It would be an honour to serve the queen who got rid of the last evil bitch,’ she sniffed. ‘You can’t possibly do worse. And though your father was as mad as a box of frogs, your brother wasn’t. A sweet prince, I still remember the day he came to the septa’s home for waifs with a big bag of gold. The handsomest man you ever did see, and kind to the smallfolk. I don’t believe a word of that bloody slander about him. He would have been a great king, but perhaps you and your broody Northerner can set things to rights at last.’

Moved by another glimpse of her brother Rhaegar, who she knew so little about, she squeezed the woman’s hand and smiled before disengaging, and with a fussing over herbs and how to prepare them the woman was gone in a flurry of roughspun skirts, one last lascivious look at Jon before she slammed the door behind her.

She slumped in her chair again, reaching for her goblet and taking a swig to clear her throat. ‘That was exhausting,’ she said, to fill the leaden silence. ‘But interesting, although we still don’t know for sure.’ Her gaze wandered around the room, deliberately avoiding catching his gaze, suddenly glad they were leaving in a few hours for the Red Keep. She needed a change of scene, a jolt into action to start the unenviable task of setting the city to rights. She craved the luxury of a bathing chamber, and her own damn clothes, arriving with Missandei in time to meet her up the hill.

Her frustration at being stuck in ignorant limbo, not knowing whether a miracle had occurred or not, was the main cause of her restlessness, manifesting in the need to move on, instead of pacing the room pointlessly as Jon was now doing, his boots tapping annoyingly on the worn floorboards. Watching him was making her more tired, and she wished she could find the words to soothe him, but they were lodged fast in her throat. He would continue to fret, and watch her like a hawk, and she would snap at him for it, especially if he was stubborn about her fighting. She had no choice in that, only she could control the dragons in battle, and even that was chancy.

As was now familiar to her, he moved so swiftly it didn’t register until he was crouched at her feet, his arms wrapping around her waist and pulling her forward in the chair. His dark head dipped and pressed against her belly, the loose curls subdued and neat in their knot, and when he looked up at the tentative touch of her hand his eyes wrenched at her heart. His eyes were ever expressive even when he was guarded, and so lovely she could never protect herself for long. Anger, tenderness, wonder, and raw fear were there, as easy to read as a book.

‘I don’t need a maester or midwife to tell me what I already know,’ he said, his voice like gravel
underfoot it was so full of all he was feeling. ‘You are with child, and I am a selfish arse for getting you in that state when there is so much horror still to come. I was already afraid for you, of losing you and being left alone in this world again. But now…now, I am terrified.’

To make it all worse, she saw a shimmer of tears gather on his lower lashes, jarring her horribly. If he hated to see her cry, she would hate to see him do it a hundredfold more. The blockage of words cleared, her tone soft, but firm. ‘If you are so sure, my love, then you know as much now as you did two days ago, and you saw me off to battle regardless. You can’t think like that, I can’t think like that. Although I wish it wasn’t so, this isn’t just about us, or our child. It is everything, and everyone.’

Her hands found his shoulders and petted him through the layers of leather and wool and steel, and she watched him struggle to get himself under control, a visible twitch of his lids to blink away what was welling beneath, his soft, vulnerable mouth firming up. ‘You’ll be careful, though,’ he said bravely. ‘More careful than before. I know how reckless you can get when your blood is up.’

‘Very careful,’ she promised with a determined smile, knowing deep down this would not be the end of it, but relieved somewhat. ‘What other woman can boast such protectors as you and my sons? You don’t need this worry, you are burdened enough. Let it go, and trust.’

***

The short journey up to their temporary home in the Red Keep had been odd, but informative. Very reluctantly, she agreed to be borne in a litter for safety, carried through the winding streets of Flea Bottom surrounded by her scowling, heavily armed menfolk and guards, only a blurry view of the gathering crowds through the latticed windows. The people were feeling braver now the city was settling down and no rape and plunder had ensued, and few deaths of people other than soldiers reported. They drifted out to watch her pass, not throwing shit and rotten vegetables or voicing foul rants, just standing and commenting, some cynical, some optimistic.

‘She’s just a silly slip of a lass,’ one old man said dismissively.

‘Aye, a lass with fucking enormous dragons,’ his companion said. ‘So more than a silly lass. She could burn down your house, so watch your mouth.’

‘The Mad King’s Daughter,’ another carped.

‘Can’t be worse than that mad cow Lannister,’ his wife said acidly. ‘We’re well rid of that evil, brother-fucking tart.’

‘Aint been no stealing or raping,’ another man observed. ‘Not like the Sack twenty-odd years ago. Her troops are savage looking, but well ordered.’

‘Might not last if they get hungry. Not much food around for any man, let alone a horde of horselords.’

There was more of the same, none of it particularly vicious, but it was disturbing for her to glimpse inside the heads of the common people, so she closed her ears to the rest.

The opinions dogged her steps as she was shown through the main royal quarters of the Keep by Tyrion and Varys, the opulence and comforts barely noticed as she pondered over what to do with this wretched city of a million souls while she was absent in the North. Gold and Braavosi coin had been found underground in a hidden vault, and it would have to be dispatched to Essos to buy food, as there were few fertile places in the Kingdoms that hadn’t been destroyed or pillaged by years of
war. The crown would be destitute, but that was a problem to be tackled later.

Missandei was at her elbow, hopefully taking more in than she was able, her methodical mind working out suitable quarters and servants to be trusted. She would have all of Cersei’s personal servants dismissed and paid off, as she would not have them near her person. She would prefer all remnants of the dead queen to be wiped as well, but she would not be staying long, so it hardly mattered.

‘Very nice,’ she said absently as she was led into a huge chamber with a canopied bed and delicate furniture, the open windows now shuttered for the winter with carved panels set with clear glass panes, and swathed with thick velvet drapes. Every item was black and red and gold, with lion motifs displayed proudly. The royal chambers, now hers and Jon’s. She had not seen such ostentation since Qarth, even Dragonstone was humble and rough-hewn by comparison, and it wasn’t to her taste. ‘Is there a bathhouse?’

‘There is a private bathhouse attached, with water piped up from a boiler kept heated at all times, your Grace,’ Missandei said with a pleased smile. ‘I knew it would be the first thing you asked for.’

She longed to dismiss them all and have a long, hot soak in a huge pool of steaming water and scrub away the stench of the city, but her mind stayed on duty for now, as she had so firmly reminded herself and Jon earlier. ‘Have this chamber checked for any secret doorways leading to the tunnels,’ she instructed Tyrion. ‘Your sister’s disgusting spymaster Hand is slain, but his little rats may still be about. We don’t wish to have our private business spied upon by rats in the walls.’

Tyrion had started the tour looking very sleek and satisfied in his fine court clothes, pleased to be back in his city as a victor over his sister, and she was happy to see him so contented, but at her request his demeanour changed, a familiar caution appearing on his mobile, eloquent face. ‘Is that a royal “we”, or you and Lord Snow?’, he said, careful but determined. ‘I remind you as your advisor to tread carefully. This is not Dragonstone. Your doings will be noted regardless if the rats are all caught, and already there is talk among the lords and merchants about your stay in the Street of Silk. The common people were more amused by it, but it’s not the smallfolk you need to worry about.’

She rose to her full height, calm and measured, though it gave her great, childish satisfaction to spit out the words that formed on her tongue so fast it was almost as if she had devised them and rehearsed them for this very moment. ‘Lord Snow and I don’t particularly care for the opinions of any lord, north or south,’ she said calmly. ‘They may talk about my choice of king, but not my morals. We were already married in front of the Old Gods a month ago.’

At his Lannister eyes widening in shock, and the bland, knowing smirk of Lord Varys, she swallowed a gleeful snort and continued rather relentlessly. ‘All we lack is an official ceremony with witnesses, so it would please me if you could find a willing septon and arrange it as soon as possible. I am the queen, and this bloody mess of a city and continent is my burden to shoulder when the war is done. Remind me, my Lord, what your father used to say?’

‘The lion does not concern itself with the opinions of the sheep,’ he said grudgingly.

‘Well, neither does the dragon,’ she said silkily. ‘We have more important matters before us than my marriage. It is my own business, and your fears no longer matter. The lords will fight with us against the dead, or die screaming. They can complain about their new king later, though I doubt they will when he saves their worthless hides from an army of walking corpses, and worse.’ She turned on her heel, fed up with looking at his deep frown, with his continuing wariness when it was all so trivial, and went to walk out with a last order.
‘See to it, my Lord Hand.’

***

An impromptu celebration was going on in the dining hall two floors down, with good food and wine and cheerful company. She had stayed long enough to eat a proper dinner, which managed to stay in her stomach without any qualm of queasiness, then left before the level of drunkenness became tedious. The two glasses she had imbibed were enough to make her a little tipsy, combined with the hot bath she indulged in for a good hour.

When she had finished cleaning herself thoroughly, rubbing her skin with scented oils and wrestling to comb out her hair unaided, she went to get a good look at herself. The bathhouse was equipped with the finest of glass mirrors from Myr, and she spent some time peering at her naked form, her hands skimming over her breasts and hips and the delicate pink folds of her cunt, exposed but for the small patch of curls above the slit and a downy furze of re-growing hair, but she could see nothing different. Shrugging, she dismissed it before she could sink into confused gloom, and wrapped her crimson robe around herself loosely, her hair a damp mess of eldritch locks down her shoulders.

In the bedchamber, she found a stunning but somewhat irritating vision of manhood face down on the bed, naked and dozing, a trail of boots and clothes strewn across the marble floor. Clearly Jon had drunk more than two glasses, though she knew from experience it would make no difference when she woke him. Gods, his arse was glorious, so plump and well-shaped it was very tempting. She smothered a giggle as she recalled her threat of retribution she had uttered that night when he had unexpectedly disciplined her to great effect, though she doubted she would get more than two spanks in before she was flat on her back.

She added her robe to the mess on the floor and clambered onto the high, wide bed, the flashy cloth of gold coverlet slippery against her bare limbs. The room was warm, lit by two enormous fireplaces, the icy winter night shut out by the cocooning drapes. It would be easy to get used to such luxury, and pine for it miserably when shivering in some grey, spartan tower in Winterfell, or up to her neck in snow, her armies freezing to death all around her. She had no illusions over how hard it would be, so she would enjoy herself while she could, but not get too attached.

The sweet and wifely thing to do would be to curl herself around her sleeping lover and wake him with kisses, but her mood was darker than that, after wallowing in the tub thinking of their last encounter, and of the many times before when he had acquired her consent and then unleashed himself upon her. Always the careful query, sometimes expressed in a wordless gesture or expression, other times in a low, ragged voice that she could not deny. Well tonight he would not need to ask, she would tell him what was foremost in her thoughts.

Settling on the back of his corded thighs, her nails scratching over the curve of his buttocks and then slowly up the dip of his spine was rewarded with a small shifting beneath her. Her breasts rubbing against the small of his back gained a ripple of response across his skin, and then a drag of wet hair and few biting kisses resulted in a sleepy rumble. Wrapping his curls in her fingers, she bent to nip at his neck, smelling musk and woodsmoke and a slight tang of wine.

There was enough space beneath him to slip her hand beneath his hips, discovering a cock rapidly stiffening with a rush of blood and nerves. She touched him only lightly, a slow stroking over his stones and down his length until the head grew thick and engorged in the centre of her palm. He gave a little groan and pushed down into her encircling hand, and she fully intended to turn him over and take him into her throat, but first...she raised her right arm, and brought her hand down on one cheek with an emphatic slap.
‘Fuck, Dany!’ he yelped, and he bucked beneath her in protest, and with an unheeded giggle she raised her stinging hand and gave the other cheek the same treatment, admiring the splash of pink on his buttocks before he flipped over and nearly jostled her off. He glared at her with a flare of vexed brown eyes, but his mouth twitched when he saw her smile. ‘I guess I had it coming,’ he muttered reluctantly.

‘I keep my word,’ she said sweetly. ‘Though unlike you I can’t bring myself to smack you hard, you’re just too irresistible. It’s most annoying.’

‘That’s the reason why I wanted so badly to give you a spanking,’ he purred at her. ‘I don’t have your conscience, especially when you’re a bloody tease.’

‘Good, please don’t acquire one suddenly,’ she replied, settling more comfortably on his belly. She felt wide awake and restless, and if she didn’t distract herself with the pleasure they could give each other she would be up all night worrying over the work that waited for her outside the door, the long list of threats to the entire continent, and themselves. No, she needed to remain suspended in the moment until she was utterly spent, and the dark, gleeful part of her wanted to be taken hard by her husband in the bed of her fallen foe, a thought instinctual and feral, as feral as a Bloodrider gloating over the heads of his enemies slain in battle.

It excited her, and made her uncomfortable with herself. She writhed a little in response, her hands roaming over his chest, tracing every ridge of muscle and ugly scar, her hair shining in the firelight as she bent to taste a nipple, worrying it with her teeth. But he didn’t grab and squeeze, his hands mapped the swell of her hips and arse reverently, his eyes soft and doe-like as he gazed up at her. ‘I believe you mentioned something about binding me and having me in every way,’ she murmured. ‘I’m not tired, and you seem quite recovered.’

A hint of wariness twisted his face slightly, though his eyes welled with dark want, lips parting with a flick of his tongue. ‘Why do you want me to be rough with you tonight?’ he said hesitantly. ‘I would be afraid of hurting you, now more than ever.’

She gave a long sigh, unsurprised but still exasperated, but she tried to keep her voice light and persuasive. ‘Because you love to conquer me, and I love to be conquered,’ she said, her hands continuing to roam with familiarity, one finding a handful of crow black hair and tugging it in emphasis. ‘Nothing has changed, and if you spend the next few months making tender love to me I shall grow very bored.’

She scooted back a little until she felt the length of his cock against the cleft of her arse. Jon may be trying to be chivalrous, but it would not last, and sure enough, he caught at her streaming hair and pulled to bring her down to his lips. ‘Gods, you tempt me,’ he whispered into her mouth. She moaned breathily at the cushiony slide of his lips on hers, the lick of pain in her scalp, but the kiss slowed to a gentle pressure, a taunting hint of tongue, and he handled her not with the usual possession, but as if she was made of fine porcelain and like to crack in two.

She sunk her teeth into his bottom lip and huffed a little, pulling back from the unsatisfying kiss. He was so breathtaking lying there under her with limpid, dusky eyes, curling lashes and swollen lips, she felt a qualm for wanting to goad him, but he was also bloody stubborn. She stretched upwards and back with a deliberate arch of her spine, and settled as far out of reach as she could manage, and spread her legs wide, leaning her left hand on his thigh so she was slightly elevated and quite exposed, her lower lips sheened with nectar and as soft as silk as her fingers dabbled lightly inside to part them.

The touch of her hand on herself was pleasant, the distracted look in his eyes pleasanter still. ‘What are you doing? Come here and let me serve you,’ he husked, but she only sighed languorously and
grazed over her nub in a sweep of fingertips.

‘No, I won’t,’ she said with a hint of defiance. ‘Keep your hands away and just watch.’ She left her nub alone in favour of slipping two fingers inside her, her digits no substitute for his thicker, calloused ones, but she moaned soft and low at the small stretch of her walls, the bumpy clasp around her hand. There was a hiss, hands forming into fists at his sides, a slitting of onyx eyes beneath creamy lids, and then a curse as she slid her wet fingers from her cunt and delved downwards, arching up further so he could see her penetrate her own arse delicately, the clasp much tighter around her hand.

‘Since you won’t do it, I’m thinking about it,’ she crooned. ‘Mmm, I was dreaming of it when I bathed, of you tying me down and fucking me. How it would feel to be trapped and filled up, to not be able to make you stop…to not be able to come unless you willed it…ohh…’ She tilted her head back and moaned again, now terribly aroused by her own words, her own touch, and the sight of him gape mouthed and transfixed. It would not take much, a few swirls around her nub and she would release, but as she withdrew from her back entrance to finish it her hand was seized, the fine bones bending in his grasp.

‘Enough, you fucking naughty, infuriating woman,’ he snarled, and she whimpered as her arm was used to drag her up and flip her over in a dizzying move. She wanted to cry out in triumph, but playacting appealed to her greatly, to struggle and protest as if he had caught her unawares instead of being shamelessly willing. He was in so close that their noses bumped, his eyes took her down into the dark and held her pinned as fast as his hard body over hers, his breath hot and spiced with wine and thick with lust. ‘I should split your thighs and fuck you senseless without giving you what you want.’

He didn’t curse much normally, but in bed and riled he had a filthy mouth, and she was now very good at making him riled. ‘Don’t move, and close your eyes,’ he said firmly, and rolled off her, leaving her passively waiting and throbbing between her thighs as her thwarted desire pooled in her womb. When he returned, she peeked to see a long length of black cords that came from the curtains that were held back around the bed, a twisted length of woven silk rope that slipped around her wrists.

When they were taken and pulled over her head she gave a helpless sound, his body crouching over her in a coil of tense muscle, the pulse in his neck fluttering, his loose hair skimming over her face as he paused to nip at her lips, tightening the cord until it dug into her skin. With a gripe of protest she was hauled upwards by her bonds, the loose ends secured to the carved bedpost. There was enough slack that she could move a little, but the muscles in her arms strained when she tested the cords’ strength.

When she looked up to find a blackly satisfied expression on his face, an alluring expanse of white skin and a pretty pink cock she could not touch, it was not difficult to play the captive, to keen and try to back away and clap her legs shut, deadening the throb of want in her greedy cunt, but she used her voice to get through his detached exterior. ‘Am I permitted to come, my king?’ she said, in an innocent, wavering voice.

‘I intend on making you come very hard, my queen,’ he promised, a hand cupping a breast and squeezing tightly. ‘I want you to come so hard you weep with it.’

Her chest felt suddenly compressed, as if she was cornered and confined in some dungeon instead of the relative comfort of a warm nest of pillows. She licked her lips nervily, the image of him eyeing her naked, trussed up form appearing and disappearing as her lashes fluttered. ‘On your knees with you that lovely, round arse in the air,’ he grunted. He was stroking himself now, a sight
that always sent her a little mad. Gods, he was so achingly beautiful, and more than a little intimidating.

The twisting of the rope around her delicate wrists was worsened by being turned on her front, the stretch of her arms above her head meaning she was unable to relax, but pillows were arranged under her to lean on, canting her bottom in the air as desired, her hair smoothed to the side so her back and neck were exposed to the scratch of his mouth, fingers grabbing and pinching sharply at her cheeks and then spreading them open. The rasp of a bristly face over her arse, then open kisses over her cunt, the tip of his tongue tracing a path down the small space between her entrances, and to the nub that was now horribly sore, a soft groan at the taste of her juices filling his mouth.

She quivered, her desperate noises hidden in a velvet pillow under her face as he retracted upwards, firmer this time, his tongue pushing up inside her emphatically, and she arched as far as she could for more friction, the cords cutting into her bones. She was so wet he was bathing in her, she could hear a slurping sound, more raspy groans, hands pulling her wider so he could explore every spot to make her writhe, his whiskers somewhere between a tickle and a searing burn. She was close, so close she could grasp it, the ball of heat in her belly expanding with each careful lap and suck, and even if she wanted it to stop she could do nothing, nothing but mewl and tug uselessly at her bonds until her wrists were raw. ‘Please…’ she sobbed. ‘Oh please, don’t.’

The vibration of a throaty moan around a mouthful of her cunt, fingers clawing her buttocks as he mauled her, until she let out a high, thin cry of warning. The pulse of her flesh on his tongue stirred him to action, flattening his strong, sure hands against her neck and the base of her spine, entering her from above in one deft movement so her first release rippled and ebbed along his thick length. It was so good, so sharp and powerful and acid sweet she felt tears prickle at her eyes, then she growled and gripped as he began to fuck her right through it, drawing out the climax until her walls felt molten, her womb cramping at each thrust.

There was no escape, her head bowed in subservience, her teeth biting and worrying her lips to try and stop the unhinged, vocal noises of protest and pleasure, the tension in her stretched out body reflected in her inner muscles, squeezing tight around him instead of yielding. She could feel every inch pressing down and withdrawing slowly, as if she was being ravaged in truth. ‘So tight,’ he hissed. ‘So tight and hot, it burns…’

His weight was bearing down upon her twisted form, one hand finding her nub and working it in circles, the other grabbing at her tied wrists and using them for leverage as he began to take her in earnest. She went slack in her bonds, letting him drive and dictate, relaxing around his cock as much as she could, but oh, it was so overwhelming she wailed and mewled and gave voice to the shattering bliss, her tears sticking strands of hair to her face so she was blinded.

She was his queen, his wife, and perhaps the mother of his child, and she loved and trusted him so completely she poked and prodded to get under his skin and make him snap, bind her and fuck her like a whore and find release, and give her the same. It was beautiful and frightening, just like he was when his blood ran hot, and all she could do was lie there and take it, all of it, the violent bliss, so closely joined that she could imagine the tortured, conflicted love and aggression on his face though she could see nothing.

When she came again, wailing and jerking in sharp spasms, her loins and belly a sheet of fire, she did weep as he had promised, feeling the surge of raw energy that seized him like a trap and released as he came deep within her. The pulse of her climax was exhausting, felt in the far corners of her body, her fingers and toes, her bulging eyes, her aching joints, tightening her sore muscles around his twitching cock until she whined pathetically through her tears. Then he was withdrawing from her in a flow of hot seed down her thighs, turning her over so he could kiss her in
gratitude, a frown of concern forming quickly when he saw her distress.

‘Don’t worry about me,’ she whispered, her voice rich and slow and cut with sniffles and gasps for air. ‘I’m not hurt, it was just too much, too perfect.’ His eyes were so dilated she could only glimpse a thin ring of brown around his pupils, and so full of love she just melted into the bed beneath her, all the tension fading like mist. ‘I would like to be freed now, so I can hold you, listen to your heart beat and to you talk about something boring and serious so I can calm down.’

His deep pink lips lifted slightly in a weary but amused smile, then firmed into a stern line.

‘Perhaps I should leave you like this all night,’ he mused. ‘Now you nagged and teased me into it, I found I liked it. I liked it very much.’

‘Don’t you bloody dare,’ she shot back with a hint of fire, but she laughed despite herself. ‘Let me go, and I promise not to tease you ever again.’

‘I don’t believe that for a minute.’

Chapter End Notes

I’m delighted to have so many hits, and if people don’t feel moved or are too nervous to comment, I can’t make you do it. However, I am not the only writer on here to get frustrated when people don’t leave feedback. Feedback is the only $$$ we get, and smutting into a void means you don’t actually know whether it’s terrible or not. A simple ‘cool’ or ‘WTF meisie’ is always appreciated. Luckily for me, I do have a lot of readers who do comment, and I love them all.

In short, if you can stir yourself to comment sometimes, that would be sweet. Thanks!
Between two lungs there was released the breath that passed from you to me

_A/N: In this chapter, some girl talk, Jon gets messages from home, politicking and the inevitable smut with complicated feels. The next chapter is the official wedding. After that, I am taking a brief hiatus to write an AU involving a marauding pirate queen and an annoyingly handsome and sexually frustrated naval commander. Thank you for all the comments on the last chapter and the kudos, and hello new readers, I hope I didn’t scare you with spanking and rope play (sorry, but not sorry)._
I shouldn’t imagine Lord Snow will enjoy supping with Lannisters and trying to win them over,’ Missandei ventured. ‘He scowls at the two brothers quite fiercely, though he was friendly with Lord Tyrion when he first arrived on Dragonstone.’

‘Jon will do what needs to be done, even if he hates it,’ she said confidently. ‘He has been out of sorts with Tyrion for some time though, due to my Hand’s misgivings over our relationship.’ Tyrion had obliged her request, finding a supercilious septon from a rich quarter of the city who agreed to marry two unbelievers in exchange for a generous behest, but the assistance came with more commentary on perceptions of the queen marrying a landless bastard with no titles other than those she could bestow.

She had silenced him abruptly, but she knew all too well the importance of appearances, so discussed it with Jon very carefully. He neither wished to have his old title back, or be legitimised and named Lord Stark of Winterfell. ‘I’m not a Stark,’ he said gruffly, and she had left it at that, reading the subtext of his terse reply. She had already bound herself to him for what he was, without caring less what he wasn’t, and mouthy lords and merchants would just have to accept him as she did. She had forbidden Tyrion from raising the subject with her again.

The flare of anger at her musings must have shown plain on her face, as Missandei’s gaze sharpened in concern, and she went to break the moody silence. ‘Lord Snow is not known for his diplomacy,’ she said with a teasing smile. ‘Remember how rude he was when you first met? You were furious.’

‘I was,’ she agreed with her own small smirk. ‘Furious at him, and very annoyed with myself for wanting to kiss that sullen look off his face.’ She was twitching with the girlish urge to confide, though she was generally guarded on personal matters, even with her dearest friend. ‘I have since learned well that he has a very honeyed tongue when he is inclined, which is often.’

There was a peal of surprised laughter, and she gulped at her wine to smother her own. Missandei’s clear brown skin was tinted with a blush, but her reply was candid. ‘That is one of the many things,’ she admitted. ‘The best thing. Such a skill in a man must be treasured. You were right not to let him go, for all of Tyrion’s advice.’

She giggled a little, then spoke in a more serious vein. ‘Much as I love that skill, it is nothing compared to the rest. I gave him everything I had, including a heart I thought was long cold and dead, and I regret nothing. The next time I hear Tyrion or any man muttering about landless bastards, or unruly lords or reckless queens, I will have them thrown in the Dragonpit.’

‘You know I don’t understand this strange Westerosi stigma about bastards,’ Missandei said, shaking her head. ‘Lord Snow is a very noble man. Handsome yes, but also loyal, a true leader and clever, with a good soul. He lets little of himself show, but there is much going on beneath that surface.’ A hint of mischief reappeared in her golden-brown eyes. ‘You tell me nothing, but your guards sometimes talk of the noises you make abed, and wonder what he could possibly be doing to you to make you scream like that.’

‘Oh Gods, no,’ she groaned, snorting into her wine. ‘No more castle gossip, I beg you. It is better that I live in ignorance.’

They had fallen into an exchange of confidences, but appeared it was she that was to do most of the talking. ‘You say you are already wed, your Grace,’ Missandei enquired when she had stopped laughing. ‘When did it happen? And why go through it again in King’s Landing?’

‘For mere show. Vows with no witnesses does not make it official,’ she explained. ‘And I want there to be no doubt in people’s minds that we are wed, for many reasons.’ Her left hand slipped
beneath her robe to palm her flat belly, and she saw her friend’s gaze sharpen at the fidget. ‘Jon took me out riding one day to a place on the south side of the island. There was a weirwood tree in a valley, a symbol of the Old Gods of the North, and we spoke our vows there. There was a hot spring nearby, so afterwards we swam, we made love, and slept wrapped up in each other in a tent. That was my real wedding, but there was no one to witness except the Gods, the trees, the water and the birds.’

Her friend was looking rather misty eyed at the tale, which made her sigh a little herself at the cherished memory. If she was with child, she knew it was made on that day. She remembered well the eerie thrum of power through the soles of her feet and saturating the air, her desperate need to take his seed inside her, and the heedless prayer she made as they came together.

‘So it’s a display neither of you much care about,’ Missandei observed. ‘But still you must make a powerful impression and let the lords and the common people waiting outside see what a handsome, regal pair you make.’ Her tone was firming up. ‘What will you wear? I know the ceremony has the bride being cloaked by the groom in the sigil of his house.’

She frowned a little. ‘That part seems rather silly to me, and I haven’t had time to think about it. Jon has no sigil, so I don’t know what to wear exactly.’

Missandei looked thoughtful. ‘We could give your black sable to the seamstresses to change the lining to red, and you should wear your hair clasp and chain. Both of you need new clothes, and don’t argue. You must look every inch the Dragon Queen, but still a bride. Lord Snow should wear something new as well, if you can persuade him.’

‘He can be persuaded,’ she said serenely. ‘But nothing fancy. He’s not a fancy lad from the south, he should look himself, even if I am a little weary of that cloak.’ A huge yawn shook her, and she put her glass down on the hearth near full. Her stomach was not appreciating the acidic tang of the sour red, and suddenly lying down under a pile of blankets seemed most appealing.

‘I will see to it then, your Grace,’ Missandei said, satisfied, then she added delicately. ‘Still nothing? No blood, or sickness?’

She had confided in her friend about her secret hope and despair, and Missandei was not surprised, she had the same quiet confidence as Jon did about the babe she did not dare to share. Neither of them were there that terrible night when she called down blood magic into her tent to try and save Drogo’s life, then collapsed in a bloody heap under the open sky as her son parted from her body. They hadn’t felt the malevolent finality of the witch’s curse.

‘Nothing of either,’ she said dully. ‘I’m just tired and achy, like I’m coming down with the ague, very grumpy and weepy, and Jon follows me around with those eyes of his anxiously when he’s near. It’s enough to drive me to drink, except I just don’t care for it.’

‘You are still not completely sure, then,’ her friend said rather dubiously.

Her hands were folded in her lap now, and they clenched at the melancholy that flowed through her. ‘I am, and I am not. I can’t let myself believe yet,’ she confessed. ‘If I let myself believe and I bleed tomorrow I could not bear it. There is no worse time to be pregnant than on the brink of a war we could easily lose, but I want it. I want it near as much as I wanted Jon to come back to me after he fell through the ice on that horrible day beyond the Wall.’

Her throat grew close, but she forced out the words, knowing it would ease her for the ears of someone she loved to hear it. ‘I want it more than I want Viserion to be alive again and back with his brothers. Sometimes I want it more than I want to be queen.’ There was a stinging at the
corners of her eyes, so she shook her head and straightened in her chair, reaching for the wine she had forgotten she didn’t enjoy. ‘I must not want, lest I go mad. I will let fate decide for me.’

***

*Just a little nap,* she told herself after a brisk walk on the Keep walls in the fading afternoon light, a breath of fresh cold air and a mingling with the guards, a glimpse of the glittering bay and the city spread out below her like a mess of child’s toy blocks, before she returned to her chamber for a lie down before dinner with lords newly arrived in the city. She kicked off her boots, shimmied out of her leggings, and loosened the annoyingly tight bodice on her indigo gown, and collapsed on the great bed, pulling a blanket over her for comfort though the room was warm enough from the fires kept burning day and night.

She slipped into a fitful doze, beset by disturbing half-dreams that flitted through her consciousness like the blown pages of a picture book. A familiar wall of ice, the beat of a dragon’s wings in the icy dark, not a welcome sound but utterly terrifying. Legions of living soldiers of different garbs and skins and wielding different weapons, spread out behind her horse in an ordered array as they crossed a frozen, dead landscape of skeletal trees and fallow fields and finally the endless sticky ooze of swampland. A great castle ablaze in the drifting snow, her husband raging with cold fury, as she had never seen him do, and then his eyes, his singular eyes going utterly blank and featureless, as if dealt another mortal blow.

She twitched and flailed, wanting to swim out of the endless current, but was not relieved until she heard the firm click of the chamber doors closing, and she jerked awake gratefully, sitting up with disarrayed hair and a half-exposed bosom, blinking a few times before she took in the disquieting sight of an agitated Jon pacing, two unfurled raven scrolls dangling from his fingers. ‘I’m sorry love, you were sleeping,’ he said, his considerate tone quite contradicting his stiff posture and creased brow. She longed for the day when she would not see that look on his face, but it would not be any time soon.

‘That’s quite all right, I wasn’t enjoying my dreams anyway,’ she said, throwing off the blanket to stand up, stretching out the kink in her spine and smoothing her gown of its creases. ‘What news?’ She had not seen him since the morn, when he had grudgingly endured a visitation from Missandei and the tailors, and it appeared his mood had not improved since. *Dark wings, dark words,* she thought, recalling the old saying from her imperfect folklore.

‘News from home,’ he said moodily. ‘Perhaps I shouldn’t bother you with it, but I need to talk to someone, and I need to be honest with you.’ The frown turned to a glower and a muttered oath, and she snatched the scrolls with a churn of misgiving, expecting the worst.

The first scroll was brief and cryptic, the handwriting quite childlike:

*Before you marry Queen Daenerys, there is something very important that you need to know.*

- *Brandon Stark*

She scowled at this confusedly, then unfurled the other, longer scroll, neatly penned:

*My dear brother,*

*We were shocked to hear that not only have you bent the knee to Queen Daenerys, but have also followed her to King’s Landing, and Bran reports you intend to marry her. All of this is folly. The lords got wind of your abdication and your doings in the south and are in uproar. Some have already deserted and returned home to sit out the winter and I can barely cope with the rest. I beg*
you, turn aside and come home immediately before it all falls apart. Let the queen come later if she
wishes to fight with us, but we need you home now.

- Sansa Stark, Lady of Winterfell.

She tried to remain calm about what she had just read, but she felt her temper simmer like a lidded
pot over a fire. ‘My bloody family,’ he muttered darkly. She could only agree.

‘Yes, this really warms the heart,’ she said tartly. ‘I can’t wait to meet your delightful siblings and
unruly pack of lords and freeze my arse off isolated in a tower in Winterfell, fearing the assassins’
blade.’ It eased her to vent, and though it wasn’t wise, she continued. ‘I do not understand your
people. They refused to fight for you when you most needed them. Then they name you their king.
Then they refuse to fight for you again because you dared to make an alliance with a hated
Targaryen who happens to have tens of thousands of troops, huge dragons, and near the entire
nation in her pocket!’

She always tried to look for the good in people, and work to win them over, to do what was right
for all instead of what was right for herself, but she was offended, and struggling to see their
perspective. And hurt, yes hurt that her only source of happiness came with a family and followers
that already hated her before they had even met her.

‘Aye, they’re a pack of ungrateful shits, I did warn you,’ he said with great annoyance. ‘And with
the southern armies now assembling relying on them to fight is not as vital. But my family…
they’re not like the rest, I want you to like them, and they you.’

‘Really?’ she spat. ‘One of them sends you a bizarre note warning you not to wed me, the other
demands you abandon me and come home. Well, are you going to listen?’ Her voice was rising,
and some of the anger in his face was now directed at her.

‘You’re either being bleeding silly, or you’re looking for an excuse to stay behind,’ he snarled
defensively. ‘I know you’ve never been keen to go north, that you’re doing it for duty, and not for
love of the place.’

There was truth there, selfish, shameful truth, and it only made her temper boil over. ‘Do you think
I am here for my amusement?’ she huffed. ‘Do you think I am working hard all day and most
nights to secure our position because I like being exhausted and strung out, and watching you
mope about? This is necessary, and if you’re so anxious to get home to your loving family you can
bloody well bugger off tomorrow, if you wish. I’ve been alone all my life, I can do it again if I
have to.’

To her disgust, tears were threatening, blurring her view of his face, which had gone dangerously
still at her tirade, his stance like a predator about to spring, but he didn’t move. She wiped her hand
furiously across her welling eyes, and unable to stand a moment more she stalked towards the
doors, not caring less that she was half dressed and sniffling and likely to cause much talk around
the Keep if she was seen in this state. She was driven by an irrational hatred that she had not felt in
months, the old loathing of being so vulnerable to him, and yet was laden with despair that love
and bliss were so easily wiped out by their reality.

Her choked sob was audible, she fumbled for the latch with numb fingers, and when she was pulled
back from the doors and spun around she near snarled into his face, her hands thumping uselessly
at his chest in a flurry of violence that was as weak and pathetic as the rest of her. ‘I will not leave
you,’ he hissed angrily. ‘The whole North can fucking revolt, and still I would not leave you.’ His
lips were on her cheek, tasting her tears, and she struggled harder, part of her unwilling to be
soothed, the rest of her desperate for it. ‘If you think I would let anything come between us, then
you don’t know me at all.’

He mouthed the other cheek this time, and she tried to pull back from the scratch of his kisses, but was too tightly held. This wasn’t the solution, neither was storming out to sulk and sob, she didn’t know what was, and out of the two options to yield would give her some comfort, to let the defensive yet beguiling words act as balm on her invisible wounds. ‘I don’t give two shits what any of them think,’ he murmured into her fluttering pulse. ‘You are already mine, and in two days you will be mine again for all to see, and if they don’t like it, they can sod off.’

A deranged laugh escaped her lips, her veering emotions surprising her yet again, but she was relieved at his flat-out stubbornness, his complete unwillingness to be moved by the constant carping of others, even his own brother and sister. ‘I am sorry Dany. I shouldn’t have shown you those stupid messages,’ he added, lifting his head to look at her worriedly. ‘You’re crying again. Gods, I am such an arse.’

‘You were right to show them to me,’ she sniffled. ‘Though perhaps not so bluntly. You never know which side of me you will get lately. I am sorry too. Shrilling at you like a fishwife does not help matters.’

The darkness in his narrowed eyes lightened with a glow of relief. ‘You bit my head off,’ he said wryly. ‘But I still want to kiss you better, if you promise me you will stop weeping.’

There was a desperation to it, like there often was. Time was a torrent sweeping them towards a dread abyss that would end in a complicated victory, or nothing at all, and the constant grind of duty and disapproval was wearing away the foundations they had built on. It was she that moved first, her trapped hands squirming up to grab the sides of his face, fingertips rasping at whiskers, her mouth taking his bottom lip in a practiced suck, so plump and sweet she made a purring sound low in her throat.

He wasted no time probing her with his tongue expertly, as always reminding her of the pleasure of parting her thighs and watching him attend to her more sensitive flesh with such devotion, and she was so preoccupied with that thought she barely noticed the pop and tear of her gown being yanked at hurriedly to strip it from her shoulders, the metal hooks pinging to the marble floor. His hands, his graceful yet careworn hands found her breasts and cupped and squeezed them through the silk of her undertunic, the nipples rising in his palms as the thin fabric was impatiently pushed down.

‘These are bigger, I swear it,’ he said, his dark curly head dipping to look at her grasped between his strong fingers.

‘It’s your lusty imagination,’ she murmured, tugging at his armour, annoyed as usual that his body was barred to her by layers of clothes.

‘I am very familiar with these tits,’ he replied with a knowing glance up into her face, rich and earthy and abstracted. His perfect pink bow of a mouth closed around her left nipple and pulled hard, eliciting a breathy gasp, her other peak pinched repeatedly to give her a subtle flare of pain that sent her soaring towards the plateau of desire she wanted to stay lost on as long as possible.

‘We have time,’ she gasped. ‘Take those damn clothes off and take me to bed and ravage me, until it hurts to sit down at dinner.’ A creasing of straight black brows and a deep groan around her breast made her smile in satisfaction, and then she was helping him between little nibbles and pecks at his lips, the layers of Northern garb stripped and tossed aside carelessly.

Jon always went about armed these days, far from relaxed in the restless, unpredictable city he didn’t much like, and she took great delight in snapping the black and silver swordbelt free of his slim waist, not dropping it but moving away to lay it carefully against a shelf, turning back to find
him down to his shirt and breeches and barefooted. ‘Now you,’ he said. ‘Take that gown off before I rip it off, and get on the bed.’

So it was to be like this, putting herself under his control, and her knees trembled at the prospect, but first she would rebel. She loathed that shirt, that ugly grey linen monstrosity, so she got in close and used all the strength in her arms to tear it down the front, a satisfying rending of cloth and a widening of outraged dark eyes as she leaned in with a smirk and bit his lip sharply, then retreated.

The offending item gaped at his sculpted chest, exposing a vee of milk-white skin and a fading scar, and satisfied, she began to wriggle the gown down her body, then the tunic, keeping her eyes lowered, as if she was shamed by her emerging nakedness, which she never was. Her body was perfect to him, and would remain so even with a big belly and breasts swollen with milk, and as she sunk down on the bed she convulsed slightly at the thought of him suckling at her hard when she was great with child, his intent face hidden in the swells of her mothers’ breasts.

It was enough to stir her to moan when he came to lie down beside her, propped on an elbow and pleasingly bare and hard all over. He had worn his hair loose that day, and she sunk her fingers in its shiny mass of curls to bring him down to her level, her blue eyes meeting his brown, darkening to shadowy pools as he dragged at her lips lazily, showing no inclination to rough her up as she wanted, a hand slipping down her belly to cup between her thighs and rest.

Then it started, the low drawl of eloquent, stirring words that were only heard in the privacy of the bed, accented and glottal, and as arousing as his thumb and forefinger closing around her nub, rubbing the small bundle between them firmly. She gasped and threw her legs wider. ‘On our wedding night, I want you to give yourself to me, all of you,’ he said, pinching at her gently. ‘I have this picture in my mind of you on your knees with your arms tied behind your back, your lovely arse on display, and me deciding which hole to fill first.’

‘Oh fuck…’ she whimpered, her lashes descending to hide from his searching gaze, her lower half writhing when his clever fingers traced the crease between her inner and outer lips repeatedly to make her plumper and wetter. ‘I think I will have your arse, since you love it so…I want to hear that scream you make when I take you there…would you like that?’

She couldn’t find words, she could only nod and whine, growing swiftly very wet under his hand, unable to look at him staring her down for more than a few seconds before throwing her head back on the pillow to get away. She felt his fingers withdraw and press against her lips, and she took them in obediently and sucked, tasting salt and sweet. When he slid them out wetter still, the verbal barrage continued. ‘And then later, when I’ve bathed you, I’ll tie your ankles up, bend you in two and fuck your pretty cunt until you cannot sit down. But you must wait until then, love, it won’t be tonight.’

She cursed bitterly, reeling so much she felt her ears drone with thrumming blood, her lids cracking to meet his eyes as two fingers eased inside her cunt, lifting herself slightly to take them with a small cry, her hand in his hair pulling in reflex. He hardly needed to touch her, all he had to do was keep talking about what he was longing to do to her and she would release, but oh, it felt so good to have that emptiness filled, to feel her inner walls stretch to take him, and she craved more fingers inside her, until there was a hard edge to the pleasure.

His onyx eyes drifted away from hers and he shifted a little so he could look down at her, pink and gleaming with nectar and closed tight around his digits. Another finger was added, the movement a little rougher, a little faster, his thumb working at her engorged nub in counterpoint. His feet planted flat on the covers, and she began to jerk upwards to meet each beckoning movement, feeling the press of his fingertips on that secret place deep on her upper wall that made her come
She resisted, trying to stop the onrush so she could savour it, the harsh, invasive thrust into her slippery cunt, and being spread out on full display and watched avidly as he toyed with her. The hand near her head wormed into her bound hair and pulled sharply to expose her neck to an abrading kiss, a groan vibrating against her pulse. ‘I want you to come, you are so beautiful when you come for me. Let it go, love.’

Her thighs clenched around his hand, a wild keening erupted from her lips. It was quick and violent, a deep fluttering that flowed outwards like water disturbed by a thrown rock, relished but not enough to satisfy fully. She needed to feel her sore, churned flesh rent by his cock, held and rocked deep in her core. She went slack with a shuddering breath, her lids opening to a hazy view of his face hovering inches from hers, eyes warm and swamped with fat pupils. ‘I love you so much,’ she said dreamily, ignoring her initial desire to be twisted and bruised and used. As he said, she should wait for it, hold it in her head and loins so she went through the next two days weak-kneed and perpetually damp with anticipation. ‘Make love to me, then,’ she added, playing with a loose curl between her fingers. ‘I can wait. I want to see your eyes on me now, I want to kiss those pretty lips, but do it nice and hard.’

Jon gave a gust of laughter, eyeing her suspiciously, but fondly. ‘This is not like you, but as you command.’ He reached for her hands, her wrists still marked with a fading line of bruising from when he had bound her and had her the last time, bringing them up over her head to rest on the pillows. Her legs lifted and closed around his hips to guide him in, then rose higher to bend so her heels dug into the cheeks of his arse as he found her entrance and penetrated slowly but firmly, and she groaned in relief at the solid feel of him filling her channel completely.

The friction she needed built from small movements against her womb to long strokes that increased infinitesimally in pace. She mewled and clung on tight with her legs to keep him deep where she wanted, stealing breath from his lungs as she kissed him, then lolling her head against the pillows and crying out, her fragile hands pinned down by his strength so she could not touch him, or herself, she could only trust him to bring her to climax again with the grind of his thickness inside her, the press of his loins against her nub.

She curled her body upwards in an elegant arch, drawing him closer still, her heels now resting at the base of his spine, encouraging him to be harsh with her, and he was too distracted by the heavy, nagging ache in his stones to do anything but fuck her with sharp slaps of his pelvis, the wet sound of her walls sucking and pulling and giving way filling the air with his hoarse groans and growls and her constant keening at the escalating pleasure, the tightening mass in her belly. Her hands were abruptly loosened so she could claw at the shifting muscles under his skin, his hands curling around her throat and face so tight she was losing air.

She opened her eyes with a choking wail, and the circular movements flush against her parted flesh, the compelling dark beneath fluttering lashes, his mouth cutting off the noise she was making caused her release. With a pricking of skin up her belly and breasts, a tightening of her walls around him, she came hard, the wash of warmth engulfing his cock and taking his seed possessively, every drop, her thighs clamping around his narrow hips. He called out her name desperately, growly and muffled against her panting mouth, then fell as if given a blow, crushing her bent body beneath him.

The crazed nerves under her sweaty skin continued to fire as she released the lock of her legs and sunk into the bed, with a happy sigh, her hands finding his head to scratch his scalp until her rumbled and nuzzled at her breasts. Both of them were silent for a long while but for panting breaths, soft touches and lazy pecks, the nasty, hasty exchange of words, and her furious tears
forgiven, but not yet forgotten.

***

They were in a much better mood than they would have been when they arrived at the dinner rather late in proceedings, and the evening was pleasant enough. Several lords from the Stormlands and Crownlands had arrived to meet and inspect their future queen and king, and though some stared at her like she was some pretty but deadly species of animal, others were respectful, the familiar presence of the Lannister brothers and Varys easing proceedings. Jon was at his most dry witted and engaging, and some lords had gracious words about his late father, and expressed relief at the survival of his house and their triumphant return to Winterfell.

The queen’s decision to leave King’s Landing to fight mythical creatures was met with some confusion and scepticism. They had no proof to show, all she had was her strength of will, and the threat of her fiery wrath to persuade them to pledge troops, though they were more comfortable with her request for assistance in keeping the peace in her absence. She was drawing up a list of suitable candidates to sit on a governing council, relying on advice as well as meeting people in person. Lord Selwyn Tarth was one of the guests who was a candidate, Lady Brienne’s unconventional father who had allowed his only daughter to train as a knight, a big, bluff man who greeted his long-lost daughter with a pride and affection that clearly startled the reserved woman.

They retired to bed quite late, and as she awoke to a dim morning of bitter, dank cold she felt more tired and queasy than usual, ignoring the breakfast of eggs and toasted bread in favour of hot herb tea and a plate of fruit, Jon eyeing her across the small dining table as he watched her nibble at the orange segments she usually devoured. After dressing, they were escorted over to the Tower of the Hand for a council meeting, passing idling servants and stray courtiers. They were a source of much gossip, she assumed, along with the rest. The dragons, the foreign troops, the death of Cersei and collapse of the throne room, its mess still filling the main courtyard. An unmarried queen and her lover sharing a bed was juicier fare than even all that.

In the tower, the comfortable home of Jon’s executed father and many fallen Hands before him, she found the small group of their most trusted people present, and the outlier of Ser Jaime, who bowed to her formally and exchanged grudging nods with Jon. In the dead of night when she should have been snuggled against her husband asleep, she had brooded long and hard over the sharp exchange they had before falling into bed to make up, and faced her fears and reluctance. She had made her decision, and would now share it.

‘We have done all we can we here,’ she announced. ‘There is always more to do. We have been fortunate thus far that we have had no news from Eastwatch, but we must make a move. We leave King’s Landing in a week’s time. That should be sufficient for the Dornish to arrive, and the other armies to meet with us in Riverrun, where Lord Tully has returned and has called his remaining banners. We must reach the Neck and progress north before it is too late. I can always scout on Drogon to check progress and encourage the shirkers.’

The wave of sheer relief on Jon’s face made it all worth it, though her worthless stomach churned as if a flood of fear was coursing through her veins. ‘We can send food and supplies north by ship, but the armies must march. We don’t have enough ships for all, and we need to keep a tight rein on some of our more reluctant allies,’ he added, and she gave a small smile at this new display of partnership. ‘Once we get past the Neck, the journey will get harder as the snows will be thick, but we can use the dragons to keep the Kingsroad clear.’

‘I can’t say I am unhappy to be left behind,’ Tyrion drawled. ‘I’m not good at sitting a horse for long periods, and I get quickly lost in snowdrifts.’ He and Varys were to stay in King’s Landing to
preside over the Council, and she had to trust they could manage it all, and they wouldn’t return to revolt and invasion as had occurred in Mereen. There was no one else that she could trust, and the aggravation of leaving with matters unfinished added to her bodily and mental discomfort as she sat at the head of the table and listened to them drone over travel plans and provisions and gold and who was likely to stir up trouble. There was still threat of the Iron Fleet to deal with, unless that weak reed Theon Greyjoy was able to kill his uncle and free his more capable sister.

Although the room was quite cool, she felt a flush of heat across her throat and face, and an alarming lurch in her belly. She swallowed and flattened her hands on the table top and tried to concentrate on Tyrion’s report on collecting the remaining caches of wildfire hidden around the city, but her head was buzzing like an angry beehive. ‘Your Grace, are you quite well?’ Missandei interrupted, getting up from her chair with a loud scrape. Her fingers clawed at the board, and she dropped her head and swallowed again, trying to fight it off.

‘Daenerys!’ she heard her husband exclaim, more grinding of chair legs against the stone floor.

‘I’m sorry, I must leave,’ she got out through her clenched jaw, sweat popping out on her brow, and she got up in a rush and ran, clapping a hand over her lips, out into the hall and through a door that she hoped was a bedchamber with a suitable receptacle. Stumbling across the room to a washstand with a sob of relief she heaved up her scanty breakfast into the empty ewer, until there was nothing left in her but bile, vaguely noting running feet through her retching and gasping, then a babble of voices.

Arms closed around her, strong arms clad in dull brown leather, and she collapsed in a heap, letting herself be picked up like a sickly child and carried to the stripped-down bed. ‘My poor lass. My poor, brave lass, I’m so sorry,’ Jon crooned at her, and she looked up dazedly, her attention snapping back from her inner misery to see the cautious joy in his deep brown eyes.

‘If you smile about this I will thump you,’ she hissed in dire warning, and his mouth twitched.

‘What ails the queen? Is she poisoned?’ Tyrion’s loud voice demanded. She didn’t bother to look at him hovering nearby, she would rather look at her husband and watch him fight the urge to laugh and whoop in triumph. She was quite comfortable held against his chest, his gorget wonderfully cold against her burning cheek, though it was rather undignified.

‘The queen is definitely with child,’ Missandei said with quiet satisfaction. ‘Now, my Lord. I suggest we give the queen and king some privacy. I expect it is still a shock for them both.’

‘But how did it happen? I thought she…and in the middle of a fucking war…’ Her Hand was quite incoherent, clearly caught on the hop, and she smiled weakly when she heard Missandei’s irritable reply.

‘I imagine it happened in the accustomed manner, my Lord. Now let us leave them alone, and you go tell the others some clever lie about the queen eating something that disagreed with her and retiring for the morning.’ There was a muttering and a shuffle of feet, and the door closed blessedly.

‘I feel bloody terrible,’ she admitted. ‘There is nothing left in me, but I’m scared I will throw up again in front of everyone.’ Her stomach still churned a bit, and she wondered with some dread how long this part would last, and whether there was some potion to fix it, but then Jon smiled, a shy, proud smile and a blinking of lashes, as if tears were threatening.

‘Now do you believe me?’ he said with a heave of breath, and she forgot her discomfort and threat to hit him, caught up in seeing his simple happiness, not marred by fear and concern. Her own joy
was more mixed, but realisation was creeping inside her to settle in her overfilled mind, a tiny spark of light, like the being hidden under where his hand was resting in ownership. There was nothing commonplace about if for her. It happened to women every day all over the world, but to her it was a miracle, a gift that she had paid for, and would probably pay for again.

‘I told you that you are magic, Jon Snow,’ she said softly. ‘Yes, I believe you. I always believe you, in the end.’ And at his dry, sweet laugh, she closed her eyes and let herself savour it; her husband, her child, and her throne. It was all hers, if only they could defeat the howling void of cold death that was closing in around them.
The fabric of your flesh, pure as a wedding dress

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A/N: It’s a wedding, it’s tooth rotting fluff, what can you do, but ahh, the smut, hopefully it’s worth sticking around for. The next chapter will be plot-driven, this is mushy stuff and sex mostly. I don’t give warnings on my chapters, have a look at the tags for a refresher, but you all should know what you’re here for mostly. If you need a special lie down afterwards, do remember to come back and leave a comment.

Chapter 19 will be later than usual, because of The Pirate Queen. Thanks for sticking with me for this long, appreciate you all xxx

If you want something canon-ish to read while I’m off pissing about with pirates, I heartily recommend ‘How We Heal’ by my dear internets friend justwanderingneverlost.

She thought herself immune to the feminine fripperies and peacocking that came with weddings. She was already married in her eyes, and this was meant to be officiadmin, to show the realm her choice of partner and king, and to ensure their nascent child was not perceived as a bastard by this strange land with its complex customs and morals.

She had been married before in an ostentatious display of gifts and gorging and casual bloodletting, and it had been a thoroughly traumatic experience. They had weightier matters to concern themselves with than a short ceremony in pretty clothes, a modest dinner and an anticipated long night in bed not sleeping, and until the hour arrived she had only two concerns about the affair; trying to prevent herself being sick in an inappropriate place, and whether the trip to and from the sept would be met with peace and order in the streets.

Rather than a lavish banquet with a hundred guests and bad minstrels and bawdy jokes, she ordered food from the castle stores to be distributed in Flea Bottom, and there had been some jostling and fighting and a few stabbings at the event before a contingent of guards brought the crowd under control. Food was very scarce, and the people were still stirred up by the attack on the city, and their surprise new queen, who had yet to formally take over by being crowned and making her intentions clear. A proclamation was due to be released tomorrow, the people invited to the Dragonpit to hear her speak before their departure north, but today she was preoccupied with turning herself into a bride and trying to keep food in her stomach for the much-needed energy.

The maester’s potion helped, being nothing but a soothing peppermint tincture, and eating dry bread before rising in the morning, a trick Missandei recalled from pregnant slaves from her days in Astapor. As her belly quietened, she was able to eat a proper breakfast and bathe and be attended to, transforming herself from a dishevelled, nauseous woman to a scented siren with perfect hair and oiled skin and manicured nails.

She put aside her cynicism and enjoyed the vanity and fussing, playing the blushing virgin being given over to her male protector, though she and Jon were nothing like the usual trope. She was no virgin, or helpless female, but like any young woman she liked pretty clothes and being admired on occasion, and she was very much anticipating what her husband looked like, awkward but devastatingly handsome, shuffling his booted feet and waiting for her impatiently in a strange southron sept, surrounded by snooty lords and bemused Essosi folk.
She was looking forward to escaping it all and being alone with him even more, mulling over his alluring promises of what he intended for her on their wedding night. Those words had been shaking her out of serious thoughts and tasks on and off since he had uttered them, and she felt that familiar glow in her lower belly as she recalled them again, sitting in a chair patiently while Missandei finished with her hair.

It was an intricate weight of braids surrounding a single long tail decorated with her seven battle bells and dragon pin, and her gown was quite plain in contrast, a sheath of silver silk with a low neckline, a blood red complicated sash criss-crossed between her bosom and hips to add colour and emphasise her still tiny waist. It pleased her to wear a gown that was more like a dress from the east than some cumbersome, trailing confection that she had noticed the court ladies wearing. The day was bright outside and bone cold, but she would be warm enough beneath her sable cloak, and to satisfy her practical nature she wore boots of thin leather and supple suede leggings beneath so she could ride to the sept astride as a true Dothraki woman.

Like her chamber had been at home before their unexpected detour, the royal quarters were a mess of coffers, the sorting and packing of her possessions to take north well underway, though she expected it to be tidy enough when they retired that evening. She wondered with a sudden qualm whether she would ever return here, or to Dragonstone. She would not miss King’s Landing, but her longing for her island home, its windswept moors and encircling ocean, the black and forbidding yet comfortable castle, would follow her north into the icy wilderness of draughty holdfasts, even draughtier tents, and its muttering, resentful folk.

Not for the first time, she frowned over the two messages from Winterfell, particularly the one from Jon’s fey, crippled brother who could allegedly see the past and future, and pondered what it was that compelled him to send those cryptic words. Whatever it was, she could do nothing about it now, and Jon was distinctly uninterested in listening. His reply to the Starks had been terse and factual, and she had added her own carefully worded note to her new kin, resisting the childish urge to add a hint of snark to her greetings.

‘I think we are done here, your Grace,’ Missandei said, stepping back with a pleased nod. She shook herself to banish her usual brooding and smiled gratefully up at her friend. ‘You are as beautiful as you have ever looked, and the others will be waiting downstairs by now.’

She would not enter the sept accompanied by a male guardian, but her closest advisors, and when she went to the altar she would go alone. Surrounded by people all her life, she had always felt alone, forced to draw on her inner resources, her faith in herself, encased in her protective steel shell and dispassionately observing the outside world. But Jon had cracked that shell like an egg and invited himself inside, and to her initial annoyance, then heady delight, steadfastly refused to leave. She would never feel that emptiness and detachment again, so it was fitting to leave her old self behind.

Thanking her friend, she rose, rather dreamy and absentminded as she donned her chain of command and black and crimson cloak and took the many stairs down to the anteroom where Tyrion, Varys, Ser Jorah, Grey Worm and her four chief Bloodriders were waiting. In the morning Varys would depart for Pentos with part of her fleet to liaise with Magister Illyrio and secure food for the hungry citizens. The rest of her ships had already departed to meet them further north with weapons and provisions from Dragonstone. There was now not a single ship spare to defend against the Ironborn should they return to sack the city, but that was another problem to shelve for the day.

The main courtyard was gradually being cleared of the throne room rubble, and the remaining bodies and parts of bodies fished out to be decently buried. She was glad to mount up in a swirl of
silk and furs and ride out with her back to the mess she had wrought, trotting smoothly on her dainty silvery-white mare brought in from the Dothraki camp, not the same beast she had been gifted by her first husband but jarringly similar.

The rest of her friends were on their own mounts, her guards forming columns on either side of the small group. The trip to the sept was short, and being a fine day people were loitering in the streets to gawp respectfully, leery of the Unsullied troops, some women exclaiming over her gown and hair and speculating loud enough to overhear.

‘Is she off to be wed?’ one old dame said.

‘Aye, that pretty bastard king from the North, I heard tell,’ her friend replied. ‘That’ll put some noses out of joint, no doubt.’

‘Heard she sent wayns of food to Flea Bottom and there was a bit of a riot,’ another said disapprovingly.

‘More than a bit. My fool cousin was stabbed in the arm, but he managed to fight the thief off and bring home a sack of flour.’

‘Better than keeping all the food to themselves and having a fancy banquet like King Joffrey, the selfish little shit,’ one man cut in, making her smile a little, pleased that her gesture had some positive effect despite the mayhem.

The sept was a blocky building of white harled stone, seven sided with a copper domed roof and windows of colourful glass representing the Seven Gods, reflecting its affluent neighbourhood. There were more onlookers crowded at the steps, somehow alerted to the prospect of a wedding though no fanfare about the event had been made. As she dismounted and Missandei straightened her clothing, she smiled widely at the people contained by her escort, and there were some calls of blessings amidst the silent staring.

She had little idea of the arrangements for the ceremony, as Missandei had dealt with it all efficiently, but as she reached the open red doors at the top of the flight of steps she heard the liquid, ethereal sound of a harp float into the air, inexplicably bringing a prickle of tears to her eyes, then a high, sweet voice of a woman singing a love poem in High Valyrian, which made it worse.

She paused on the threshold, swallowing the urge to weep, taking in the misted scene of ranks of lords and ladies, the sparser familiar figures of their friends and allies, the septon hovering by the altar in costly robes, and finally Jon.

His guarded stance relaxed when he saw her, his face lighting up and his beautiful, shadowy eyes widening. He was so handsome it was shattering, and her leaping heart took over from the sharp, teary ache behind her eyes. His old cloak was thrown back to display his breeches and tunic of midnight blue, his leather armour shiny with oil, his gorget winking in the light of the ceiling lamps, lithe and lethal and strong, a bit fancy but still himself, his hair neatly subdued in that enticing way that always gave her the urge to tear it loose.

As she began to descend alone to the aisle the singer switched to the common tongue for all to understand, and the persistent urge to cry returned at the flow of words. Somehow her friend had picked a poem that was utterly perfect, though neither she nor her husband had the souls for poetry.

*I am as a spirit who has dwelt
Within his heart of hearts, and I have felt
His feelings, and have thought his thoughts, and known
The inmost converse of his soul, the tone*
Unheard but in the silence of his blood

At the altar, her companions lined up at the foot of the dais with Ser Davos, she stepped forward to meet with Jon face to face, the singer falling silent so the shifting of bodies and odd murmurs filled the echoing space. Her awareness of her surrounds shrunk away. She was expecting a weary look beneath his black brows, a wry twist of his mouth at this southerner nonsense as the septon began to declaim over his Gods, but no. His eyes were earthy, autumnal, brimming with the very same stinging emotion she was trying desperately to quell. She wanted to reach for his hands to hold herself rooted, but had to wait until they were bound together.

‘You will now cloak the bride and bring her under your protection.’

There was an intimacy about it that warmed her through, as if they were alone and he had ordered her to disrobe so he could fondle her at his leisure and then take her as he willed, so she was slow at unfastening the black cloak from her shoulders and letting it fall to the tiles, her eyes full of love and challenge and a need that never weakened her, only gave her strength and purpose. There was a faint wave of sighing from the women in the crowd, either admiring her unusual gown, or sensing the thrumming tension between the pair of them.

The cloak, that familiar warm, heavy mass of fur swathed her tiny figure like the first night he had dared to kiss her and claim her, and then offered it to cover her dignity afterwards. She closed her eyes briefly and drank in the scent of him, a complex mix of musk and leather and pine and warm skin, desire pooling in the bottom of her belly to stay trapped uncomfortably until he got her to himself for the night. Her lids fluttered open, and she composed her face abruptly, lest it was too obvious to the stuffy septon and avid audience. The brown of his irises had darkened to ink, she noted with a small thrill, as he resumed his place before her and took her smaller, softer hands in his.

‘My lords, my ladies, we stand here in the sight of Gods and men to witness the union of man and wife. One flesh, one heart, one soul. Now, and forever.’

The septon’s voice was rolling and practiced, carrying to all corners of the sept, the ancient words more meaningful than his pious mutterings earlier. They were meant to stand side by side as the old man wound the white binding ribbon around their clasped hands, but they were turned inward away from the crowd, exchanging silent words of love and lust and deep satisfaction. Despite the naysayers, the formidable enemies, the endless toil of responsibility, they had found each other, not just as lovers excitedly snatching unobserved moments to frantically couple, but as partners, future rulers, and if fate was kind to her this time, future parents.

A single tear trickled down her cheek, and as the septon released the symbolic binding of their hands and declaimed their titles and confirmed their union for all to hear, she did not even mind that more followed like a gentle fall of rain. She wanted Jon to know that no matter that they had gone through it for show, it was precious and heart-wrenching and triumphant, and she was a silly, weepy girl after all, something he, and nobody else, knew very well.

***

The dining hall was one of the smaller in Maegor’s Holdfast, a normally airy room with windows shuttered against the murky dusk, an opaque sea fog creeping in to swathe the city in an early twilight. Murals of riotous summer flowers were painted on the walls in lieu of the real thing, of which none were to be found in the grip of a long winter, even this far south, the room hot and close from the press of bodies and the smoking braziers.

At the no-nonsense look at her brimming platter from her husband, she managed to tuck away
some food, but kept her drinking to a minimum, unlike some of their guests who were getting decidedly tipsy. The mingling of Dothraki, Unsullied, southerners and northmen led to interesting conversations and attempts at jokes, which she idly listened to as she forked up food and tried not to visibly quiver when she was touched under the table. Jon’s fingers curled and blended with hers at first, quite innocently, but then plucked and traced the crossed over sash that bound her waist, tickling through the silk of her gown. Then less subtle, a heavy palm sliding up her thigh and resting between the fork of her legs, the weight in her loins flickering and heating to a slow burn. At the first opportunity, he would have her out of the dinner and up the stairs, his usual reserve beaten down but stronger urges, and she could not wait.

If it didn’t earn her a barrage of complaints from Tyrion in the morning, she would be tempted to bid them good night right away, but proprieties must be observed. Some rose to approach the dais and offer their formal congratulations, fewer gave rambling, often cheeky toasts, making her modest husband uncomfortable, but still smiling and chuckling at the better ones. Even Qhono got his feet, swaying at little at a surfeit of strong wine from the Arbor, and gave a bloodthirsty tribute to his Khaleesi and new Khal which Missandei translated entire, making the select southern lords who were invited rather uneasy, to her amusement.

Ser Davos followed, the kindly, pragmatic old smuggler who had adopted Jon as his liege lord, then king, and then as his own foster son, speaking a few simple words that made a lump lodge in her throat. ‘He may not be King in the North anymore,’ he said to the room with a wry smile. ‘But he won himself a beautiful warrior queen who is as brave and tough as her dragons, and he’ll be king of the Seven Kingdoms, whether he likes it or not.’

He sat down to warm laughter, and polite smiles from the lords, and Tyrion stumbled to his feet, reeling a little but in full control of his considerable wits and acerbic tongue. She braced herself for what was to come, the hand nestled between her thighs tensing, but her Hand’s toast was restrained, and quite moving. ‘I’ve never believed in love,’ he confessed to the crowd. ‘I’ve always believed love made one weak, and prone to reckless acts and utter stupidity. I once thought my queen felt the same, and there was no danger of her losing her head to some handsome but useless prince that would cause her nothing but grief.’

He paused and gave her a pained smile. The room was silent, listening avidly to the rather personal words. ‘But now I see that love doesn’t always make one weak. It can also make you strong. I’ve never been more pleased to be wrong.’ With that, he gave a little bow, and flourished his goblet. ‘To the future queen and king of the Seven Kingdoms. Long may they reign, and continue to tell their Hand to shut up, when he needs to.’

There was another burst of laughter, and the guests rose to their feet to acknowledge the toast, and she found herself beaming, her usual public caution thrown to the wind. Jon also stood up, eying the smaller figure of Tyrion, his temples creasing in a genuine smile as opposed to the usual resentful frown of late. ‘I thank Lord Tyrion for his optimism, and his tolerance,’ he replied. ‘I know from experience that my wife the queen knows what she wants, and to the hells with anyone who gets in her way.’

She shouldn’t laugh at this very public teasing, but she did regardless, too relaxed and happy to show regal aloofness. Flushing a little, she took a big sip of wine to steady herself as she watched the room settle down to more talking and drinking, a sidelong glance and a jerk of chin from Jon signalling it was a good time to make an exit while no one was watching them closely. She shot Missandei a meaningful look, and her friend nodded, entirely capable of shutting down questions about the missing bride and groom when the guests noticed their absence from the top table. They wanted no intrusive bedding ceremony, no lusty, gawking witnesses to her maidenly surrender. She was no maiden, and they could find their own damn bed.
They were given a silent escort to the royal chambers, and they dismissed the guards for the night with thanks, but the decorous behavior was over as soon as the doors were locked behind them. She was crowded against the gilded oak by the heft of his body, hard yet supple, his lush mouth tasting of red wine as he nipped at her parted lips. ‘Thank the Gods,’ he breathed in relief. ‘I’ve been staring at you in this dress all afternoon and dying to unravel you from it.’ His hands drifted down from her shoulders to palm the sides of her breasts, and she sighed as his fingers hooked into the sash to pull her closer still. ‘You did this on purpose,’ he muttered darkly. ‘You asked for a gown with this binding so I would spend all day thinking of you tied up. What the fuck am I to do with such a wicked wife…’

A bubble of mischief welled up inside her, despite her surging arousal, and his dusky eyes narrowed at her in vexation. ‘You know exactly what to do by now,’ she said lightly. ‘In fact, you already told me… oh yes...’ Her taunting words faded to a stuttering moan as he took the delicate skin of her throat in a sucking bite, the scrape of soft hairs against her pulse enough to silence her, and his clever hands at the base of her spine, picking loose the crimson length of silk and drawing it free from its loops. The kisses on her neck and breasts were hurried and wanting, and she made a crooning noise as he rushed to loosen her gown and seek out her rising nipples.

The fragile silver silk was getting crushed, and she had little protection beneath from the friction of his leg parting hers and bringing her flush against the hard leather of his armour. She had swapped her leggings and boots for stockings and slippers on their return to the castle, and she was bare and damp, her mound still tender from the hot wax that had been applied after her bath to remove every sprouting hair. The neckline of her gown sagged, her breasts popping free, one hand sliding across their soft weight, the other catching her chin to tilt her upwards for a reverent kiss, a delicate merging of lips and tongue.

He was under so many layers there was no way in to find bare white skin with her nails, and she knew then she would not be permitted to touch him until he allowed it. The possession of her mouth deepened, prickling her skin with the rasp of whiskers, her nipples caught between fingertips and pulled until they were reddened and rigid, the churning in her belly weakening her legs so she slumped against the door with a fitful cry.

Then she was up in the air, leaving her slippers behind along with her restraint, writhing and breathing raggedly as he carried her to the bed and held her across his lap. He carefully found every hook down her spine to slip the gown down and off her hips, then was at her breasts like a nursing babe, sucking at her nipples with a mouth that was hot and wet and bristly, his hand rubbing between her thighs through the gossamer silk of her undertunic until the fabric clung and stuck to her slick folds.

Her sounds became desperate, her fingers creeping under the neckline of his blue tunic to the soft nape of his neck and digging in to hold him closer to her breasts, his depthless, dark gaze through a fan of lashes catching her breath and stopping it fast, his milky skin flushed but still a striking contrast to the severe black of his tamed hair. She was the most fortunate woman alive, and oh, what he was going to do to her impatient body was enough to make her slither to the floor and quake and plead.

Freed from the torment of her sensitive nipples at last, she was placed on the edge of the bed gently, and she blinked and looked up to find Jon looming over her, the length of crimson sash in his scarred hands. ‘Take off that shift and stockings. I want you completely bare,’ he said, quiet but firm, and she obeyed, dithering a little to rile him, rolling the stockings and garters down her legs under the veil of her tunic, and then the white garment drawn over her head by inches and thrown to the floor, leaving her all hips and breast and bottom, a glimpse of her naked cunt, pink and glistening, catching his wandering gaze before she turned around to offer her wrists to be bound
The muscles in her arms took the restriction immediately, and she felt unbalanced and very aroused, the slow burn spitting like a fire in a draught when she backed into the touch of his hands on her buttocks, the long ends of her bonds slipping between their cleft. She sensed the vibration of a growl through her flaring skin, and she had perfect faith he would proceed to leave her in ruins. She now had no control, she had given it over along with her trust. ‘Sit down and spread your legs wide for me. I need to taste you first,’ he whispered thickly, and she was thankful to sit as bid, unsteady and aching, leaning back on her trapped hands and opening her sticky thighs to offer her cunt to his eyes and hands and yes, his sweet, skilled mouth.

He was on his knees before her, still immaculately dressed while she was stripped and defenceless, then loud and needy, vocalising her pleasure with hoarse moans and soft cries as he set to work on her, licking her clean of her welling juices with grunts and murmurs but making her wetter still, peeling the sides of her cunt open with his hands so he could move from the top of her gaping slit to the very bottom, then back again, drawing her folds into his mouth and devouring them like prey, not filling her emptiness with his fingers, just his tongue, leaving her tight so he could split her apart later.

The famished suckling and lapping at her swollen flesh became anguish, then a fury of release, causing her to cry wildly and struggle to get away as her cunt rippled and pulsed in his mouth, but he didn’t stop, drinking down the fresh flood of her nectar with a possessive groan, his teeth sharp, tongue probing her throbbing nub until she pleaded. ‘No Jon, stop…ohh I can’t bear it…’

Her loins were so full of firing nerves she spasmed and fell backwards uncomfortably on her bound arms, panting as if she had sprinted up the stairs instead of just sit and be worshipped like the queen she was. There was a trickle of sweat on her flaming face and between her heaving breasts she could not brush away, and she curled on her side, trying to calm down as he relented and stood, the glimpse of him black eyed and wiping the mess from his beard making her twitch. She was inflamed and hot between her legs, as if climaxing had not eased her, and she wondered how many times he would make her come tonight before the fire went out in her.

‘Get on your knees my love, and wait,’ he rasped at her, and she moved to do as she was told, no easy task with her hands trussed, rolling on her front, planting her face and torso flush against the covers and rising on her knees to lift her arse in the air. There was a flurry of movement around her, two pillows tucked under her considerately so she was more comfortable, then a kiss on the small of her back, and he was gone. Unable to see anything, she tracked her husband by sound, growing somewhat agitated as time lengthened like a skein of wool being spun. She heard the click of buckles and the rustle of clothes being shed, boots being dropped, a mysterious fumbling at her dressing table amidst the clutter of bottles and boxes.

She tested the ribbon around her wrists, finding some give in the binding, and she rolled her shoulders to banish the ache. Bare feet across the marble floor make her rise higher and spread her knees further, drawing her arms up so she was on full display. The mattress beneath her bounced, and she tensed as she sensed him kneading behind her. ‘You are so beautiful, my wife,’ he purred. ‘So beautiful like this, I don’t know how I’m going to last.’

She snorted at this admission, then whined as he took a handful of her left cheek and squeezed, now longing to see him naked and cut with muscles, the trail of wispy black hairs leading to his rigid cock, but being blind and bound was enhancing her other senses sharply, the smouldering scent of his skin, the pinching around her open cleft driving her higher. At the hard slap against her buttoc she yelped and throbbed, then bucked in wanton encouragement when he brought his palm down again, and then twice more until her skin burned. ‘That’s all you get. You’re just too lovely
to beat tonight,’ he husked, and at her frustrated noise he laughed low and sweet, his fingertips glancing over her cunt. ‘So wet for me, and as pink as a flower.’

The fingers dabbled, collecting her juices and spreading it over the smaller hole between her cheeks. At her muffled keening, the promising gesture was repeated, and she tensed in anticipation, expecting him to take her there in one slow push she had been imagining at odd, disturbing flashes for two days, but then she felt the drip, drip of oil on her lower back and the trickle down her cleft, then both his tough hands on her, spreading the slickness over her round flesh. She instantly groaned in bliss and gave into it, purring like a tabby cat at the firm grip of his hands kneading her arse.

The fat head of his cock teased her entrance, sliding across her folds and retreating, then moved up to probe the tighter hole she wanted him to fill and test that boundary between pleasure and pain. But first his slippery hands gained purchase on her hips and he sunk himself deep into her cunt, one vicious stroke that pulled her apart deliciously, an accented cursing as the heat of her engulfed his length in a tense clasp. She was held immobilised as he slid within her until she began to soften around him, every movement sending a trail of nerves shooting up her centre to escape her lips in throaty cries, her second climax settling over her quivering skin and tightening its claws. ‘Oh fuck…this is too good,’ he gasped, sliding out completely to plunge in again. ‘Your cunt is so tight and hot I don’t need that tighter arse of yours.’

She growled savagely through the dense haze of pleasure at the prospect of being denied, but knew he wouldn’t be able to resist the temptation of fucking her where it would cause her to mewl in pure distress and come so hard she lost consciousness, and when he withdrew with a wet, sucking sound she knew he was only plucking at the strings of tension in her mind. ‘Tell me if it’s too rough, because I’m not going to hold back this time.’

She sobbed incoherently in response, willing her body to relax, her bound hands flexing to release the cramp in her arms. She was essentially helpless, a willing prisoner with only her voice available to make it stop if it hurt more than she liked, and that was the sting of acid in the bath of sensations and emotions, but she savoured its burn. Her breath whooshed from her lungs at the first breach of her resistance, his cock so slick he was able to sheathe himself completely with no grinding through her clenched muscles. His length was a hot brand inside her, the sweet invasion absorbed with slow inhales and exhales at each penetration, the satisfied grunts he made as he fucked her with little restraint, taking her wails and mewls, her small movements backwards as assent.

That boundary, that razor edge she walked upon was slicing to the bone, her eyes watering, ears roaring like the ocean, but then, oh then she reached the far side, his hand finding her dripping cunt, two fingers plugging her to hold her in place. At her warbling cry and thrashing under his weight he released her hip and caught her hands, using them to take her harder, dragging her back and forth, stretching her arse until she thought she would burst with the swelling pleasure, break apart and crumble to ash.

She didn’t want it to end, but she needed it to as well, it was flaming across every inch of her skin, tying her muscles in knots as taut as the one that held her hands trapped. She lifted her head and howled like a deranged creature, and the friction of his busy hand catching at her nub, the solid girth of his cock forcing her open again and again made the tense strings holding her together snap. Her vision went white, as white as snow, and the climax hit her like a slamming blow, taking her breath and wits.

‘Yes love, yes…that’s it, give in and come for me…’ She gripped and released him with each torturous wave, until she heard him give a grinding, guttural cry and go still, then heave for breath as much as she, withdrawing in a flood of seed and releasing over her cleft, marking her like a beast.
as his fingers relentlessly worked at her, milking every last flutter of her release until she screamed in pure anguish, and was lost into the void.

***

In the end, all her husband had planned for her was a little ambitious. After a long, tiring day and its exhausting welter of emotions, the heavy languor of afterglow inclined them towards curling up together in the destroyed bed, dozing fitfully and waking to talk and sip wine and smile contentedly at each other for making it past the first great obstacle in their path. He had taken her so hard she was pleasingly sore, and very sticky and messy, so at Jon’s suggestion of a bath she readily agreed, settling back to doze again as he rose to go and fill the tub.

When he returned some time later, she woke with some grumbling and an edging away to hide her face in the pillows, but he chuckled and dragged her out from under the covers. ‘Come, your Grace. It’s bad form to sleep on your wedding night, so wake up. I’ve been standing over that tub waiting for the bloody thing to fill for ages.’

She muttered resentfully and crawled into his naked lap, wrapping her arms around his neck. ‘Carry me there and throw me in, then. You’re a strong lad.’

‘And you’re a tiny lass,’ he replied with his sweet smile. ‘But not for much longer. I’m looking forward to seeing you all fat and lazy.’

She huffed at little at this, then gave him a slanted, knowing smile. ‘I wonder if you will still love me then, with a wide arse and a big belly and tits.’

He snorted at her foolishness. ‘I will love all of it, especially the tits.’ His hand found one breast and weighed it in emphasis. ‘They’re quite small now, you see…’

‘Bloody oaf,’ she observed, creasing in a giggle at his quick response. Jon always insisted he was no good with words, but his humour was subtle and sly and more amusing than most men with bolder tongues who thought themselves interesting to all. She loved it, she loved everything about him, so drunk and high on it there was no room in her mind for bitter memories of squabbles and hopeless sadness at their impossible plight. It was rare for a queen to marry the one she chose for herself, so she was allowed one day to revel in it, and she would refuse to stir from their chamber until the full run of hours was over.

In the bath, a square, sunken tub like the one she dearly missed at home, but smaller and meaner, they lay silent for a while in the steamy warmth, parted by mere inches. Her hair was still in its wedding braids to be unravelled later, but his raven curls were falling loose in the damp air, so she reached to unknot it and set it falling, like the first time they had bathed together. ‘If you ever cut your hair off, I shall hit you somewhere where it will most hurt,’ she said bossily, just to make him open his lovely eyes and glower at her. Pleased, she rested her head on his shoulder, her hand skimming over his chest, puckered scars felt under her soft palm.

‘This bathhouse is shit compared to the one on Dragonstone,’ he grumped, glancing around the poky chamber. ‘I miss that place, and you swimming naked in that big pool.’

‘I miss it too, and the rest,’ she sighed. ‘I wonder if we will ever go back one day. I hated it when I first arrived, but once you were there with me, it felt like home.’

An arm encircled her closely, a kiss dropped on her forehead. ‘We’ll go back there, I swear it,’ he said softly. ‘We don’t have to live here. We will think of another way to rule the Seven Kingdoms, a better way, just as you dreamed of. Break the wheel, Daenerys. Live your life with me, and our
children. Let the people rule themselves. If we survive, we deserve that much.’

His tone was serious, and his simple idealism, despite all the hard knocks he had been dealt all his life, didn’t make her cynical, only inspired. But it was too dangerous to hope, to think that far ahead, the next few months were just too daunting. ‘A dream,’ she said lightly. ‘A fine dream, my optimistic Northern lad. Did I tell you that when I heard you were to visit Dragonstone on my invitation I expected some smelly barbarian with a bushy beard clad in sheepskins? How you surprised me.’

‘I expected some haughty, terrifying witch who would throw me to her dragons,’ he said dryly. ‘You were a bit haughty, and scary, but so beautiful I couldn’t stop thinking of you, no matter how pissed off it made me.’

‘You went to bed every night and thought of me,’ she murmured, turning her head to kiss the side of his corded throat. ‘And I did the same, but you were so controlled and reserved about it that when you finally made a move I was utterly shocked.’

‘Not for long,’ I recall,’ he replied with a distinctly smug look. ‘I felt a proper fool, and marked for death, and then you kissed me back, and here we are. I’m a right lucky bastard.’

Her wandering hand grabbed at his chin and turned him to see her eyes. ‘Never use that word to me,’ she said firmly. ‘You are my husband and king.’ To draw the sting from her reaction to that hated label, she took his mouth in an emphatic kiss, watching his enviably long lashes flutter as it deepened. ‘Take me back to bed, Jon Snow, and use me like you promised,’ she sighed when he broke away finally. ‘I’d rather you fuck me all night than sleep.’

His rich brown irises were submerged by a flare of pupils, then his plump mouth quirked in that way that signalled some subtle teasing. ‘I’d rather make love to you slowly and sweetly, until you grow bored and fall asleep,’ he said solemnly, making her well with laughter like water from a spring.

‘That sounds terribly dull,’ she shot back, feigning a yawn. ‘I’m sure you can do better than that. You always do.’

Chapter End Notes

I am as a spirit who has dwelt
Within his heart of hearts, and I have felt
His feelings, and have thought his thoughts, and known
The inmost converse of his soul, the tone
Unheard but in the silence of his blood,
When all the pulses in their multitude
Image the trembling calm of summer seas.
I have unlocked the golden melodies
Of his deep soul, as with a master-key,
And loosened them and bathed myself therein--
Even as an eagle in a thunder-mist
Clothing his wings with lightning.
- Wedded Souls, Percy Bysshe Shelley
But I’m not giving up, I’m just giving in

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

_A/N: Happy Monday (Tuesday here), dusting this off and here we go, let’s get out of King’s Landing and on the road. Hopefully you haven’t forgotten about this long-winded smut fest. I was going vanilla this chapter, but then my ever-reliable imagination did its own thing, so enjoy. Thanks to all my loyal readers and commenters once again, and the Tarts for holding my hand and spanking me with it to get me on my pirate diversion and then back on track again._

_Notes for the curious – At this point, Dany is about 6-7 weeks pregnant, the Wall is still not down (any day now), and Jon knows nothing about his real parents yet, but the two ‘reveal’ events will be dealt with soon._

Every sandy, rubble-strewn corner of the monument to folly was occupied by bodies big and small, in fine cloth or scanty rags, fair faces and plain, all with the same look of enquiry, the fear and restless stirring at the sight of Drogon perched on the edge of the Dragonpit to let her descend in a customary display of gravitas fading soon after the dragon flew off without a roar or growl of menace.

She strode to the dais to join the others gathered there under the black and red banner of House Targaryen, and the white and grey of House Stark, and eyed the crowd evenly as she turned to face them, noting the excited children hoisted on shoulders, the press of the extra curious against the cordon of guards at the foot of the platform.

She had rehearsed several versions of a speech over the last few days, but none seemed entirely appropriate. Despite her experience of rallying people to her cause, she felt a qualm of unease in her unreliable stomach, and twisted her hands in front of her grey battle coat in agitation. The reality was hitting her. These were her people now, whether she was ready or not, and she would need to speak from her heart and hope they would understand at least some of it. She felt a stirring beside her, and she relaxed a little as Jon came to stand with her shoulder to shoulder, though it was more difficult for him to face this many people and responsibilities he had never expected to inherit. She had been born to it, Jon had not.

Missandei stepped forward to the front of the dais and began declaiming titles in a ringing voice. ‘Here stands before you Daenerys Stormborn, of House Targaryen, first of her name. Rightful queen of the Seven Kingdoms. Queen of the Andals, the Rhoynar and the First Men. Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea, the Unburnt, the Breaker of Chains, the Mother of Dragons.’ Then her advisor paused briefly, and added for the first time. ‘And her consort, Jon Snow, of House Stark. Warden of the North, former King in the North and Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch, the White Wolf, and the Commander of the Queen’s Armies.’

The last title was new, decided on careful consultation with her Bloodriders, the Unsullied captains and the new Lord of Casterley Rock. Not one of these proud leaders really understood what they were facing in the North, only Jon did, so there was little display of touchiness. If any were irked, it was well hidden, and it pleased her to bestow a title on her husband that he would accept. Her friend’s clear voice faded into an echo in the pit, the sharp winter air giving the words an edge. No one bowed, but she didn’t expect such a display.
These people would likely never embrace her and love her. She would never be able to step off the platform and into their arms as in Slavers Bay, but they were sufficiently interested to turn up and gape at the dragons, the silver queen and her handsome husband, and the odd ensemble of Lannisters, fierce foreigners and lords from various corners of the south who had arrived in time. Her new council was present, save Lord Manderley and Lady Waynwood who were still at sea, lords and city leaders she hoped could be trusted. Lord Jaime was present, returned to his red and gold armour, his brother the Hand of the Queen standing a little apart, his mobile face creased with apprehension.

She cleared her throat and opened her mouth before the silence became awkward. ‘I know what you have all heard of me, and my father Aerys, the Mad King. I know what you all expected to happen when we came to take the city from the usurper queen. But few died, few were raped or attacked, and little was stolen from you, and I am not my father.’

At her pause for effect, there was a murmur of acknowledgement that encouraged her slightly.

‘Westeros is mine by right of birth, but I don’t come to take it with fire and blood. That is reserved for my enemies, living or dead. I come to earn it, and make this land a better place than my father, or your fathers have left it.’

There was puzzlement on the faces of the listeners, and some scepticism, a shuffling of feet in sand, the cry of a babe.

‘My ancestor, King Aegon the First, conquered this land and built a wheel. A wheel of privilege and greed and brutality that has rolled over people high and humble for hundreds of years. I have come to break that wheel, but I can’t do that until all the threats to the realm are dealt with, and I am afraid the worst threat is yet to come.’

People were muttering now, some looking apprehensive, others very weary. So many years of pointless war between petty kings, ruining the peace and prosperity of the common folk, and it was still not over. She pitied them as much as she pitied herself at weak moments, but at least they would be relatively safe in the south, unless the Night King made it past the Neck, or the Iron Fleet delivered an army of mercenaries to their doorstep. It was so difficult to explain the threat massed at the Wall without any proof, but they had to try, and some explanation was needed why their new queen and king were not crowned in splendour and announcing their reign to the world.

As the noise died down slightly she found a fresh store of words in her mind, drawing on all her incredulity and horror over what she had experienced in the nightmare skirmish beyond the Wall for strength. ‘My husband, the Warden of the North and son of Lord Stark of Winterfell, served for a number of years at the Wall before he was released from his vows,’ she continued, her voice clear and deadly serious. ‘When he came to me on Dragonstone seeking aid, and told me what he had seen and fought in those cold, empty lands, I didn’t believe him. I had to see to know. I have now seen it, and I swear by the blood of the dragon that is in my veins that an army of dead men, a hundred thousand strong at least, marches on the Wall, led by creatures that defy logic. White Walkers, they are called. You may have heard of them in children’s tales, frightening myths and fables.’

At her pause, she found the arena completely silent, bafflement and fascination dampening all restless movement, and she cursed inwardly, wishing they still had the remnants of the wight to display. ‘I understand if you don’t believe me,’ she said in a softer tone. ‘But know this, I had three dragons when I flew to the Wall, and now I have two. Imagine if you will, what creature has the kind of power to bring down one of my sons.’ In some faces closer to the dais, she saw a flare of awareness at her last words, and a deep fear, some looking to the sky to Drogon and Rhaegal
wheeling amidst the faded azure. It had been painful to admit it, bringing a jagged lump to her throat, but it had been wise.

She stepped back two paces, letting her husband take the centre of attention, stiff and uncomfortable before all those pairs of eyes, but majestic enough in his Stark garb with his beautiful sword displayed at his hip, squinting a little into the low winter sun. ‘My queen speaks true,’ Jon said, his voice a low timbre but forceful enough to be heard over the now murmuring crowd. ‘I came across these creatures and the men they raise from the dead when I was just a boy. Since then they have haunted my days and nights, and now they are coming for us all. The Wall was built thousands of years ago not to keep out Wildlings, but to keep out the Walkers and their armies. Now they are so strong the Wall will not stop them, and the North cannot stop them. Only together, the queen’s armies and the armies of Westeros can stop them.’

He spoke with such finality that the noise was dying down, and she felt a thrill of pride as his confidence grew. Whether ten men or a thousand, Jon had a way with people, no matter his ingrained humbleness. Any doubts she might have had in the beginning about whether he was willing to stand with her as a ruler were long gone, and in the difficult weeks ahead he would only prove himself more.

‘I tell you all that the queen risked her life, and the life of her dragons to save me, a near stranger, and my men from the army of the dead when she flew beyond the Wall. Then she pledged her armies to help me in this fight, long before I asked for her hand. She cares about the safety of this realm more than a crown, or a throne that is now in shards and splinters. We asked you here not to ask you to fight with us, hopefully it won’t come to that. We asked you here to give you the truth.’

He let his words ring in the air and die, leaving the floor open. It could turn into a disaster of shouted oaths and grumbles and scuffling, and the guards on the ground straightened and tightened their grip on their weapons, but there was only strained silence, until a few bold souls spoke up.

‘Who will lead us?’ one grey bearded merchant yelled out from the front of the crowd.

‘What about food? There ain’t none to be had!’

‘Who will keep the peace around here if all the armies are in the North?’ a woman cried out. ‘We can’t take no more stealing and stabbing and raping.’

She raised a hand for silence, and from high above there was a warning growl from Drogon as he sensed her sudden strain, and the yelling subsided quickly. ‘Lord Tyrion Lannister is the Hand of the Queen, and will rule a council of lords and city leaders as has been done before,’ she said loudly, ignoring the curses and carping at the Imp’s expense. ‘Food is on its way from Pentos, bought and paid for with the crown’s gold, and the Dornish army will keep the peace in the south.’

Any hostility was swamped by approving noises at the prospect of food arriving, and on impulse she added. ‘And remember, good people, I am entirely capable of flying back to King’s Landing wherever I am at any sign of trouble. Peace and order will be maintained.’ It was said in a reassuring tone, but there was a bite to it. She would not be able to do as such the further north they travelled, the direr the situation became, but the threat was useful to keep the unruly in line. People were looking to the sky again where the dragons drifted protectively, quick to come at the call of her mind, and she noticed Jon giving her a sideways glance of reproof that warmed to fondness.

‘We thank you for coming today to listen, and I promise you all we will return in triumph,’ she said with a confidence that felt false and hollow, despite all her cherished hopes. ‘And when we return, we will begin to build anew, and there will be peace and profit for all that are willing to work with us to create it.’
With a sigh of deep relief, she left it at that, left the crowd to speculate and natter, approve or disapprove, closing her mind to the troubles of King’s Landing for the last time and reluctantly turning her focus to the difficult trek north, and the war for the living versus the dead. She took her king’s arm and they turned away in a swirl of mingled cloaks to leave the dais, and let Tyrion and the lords take over and do what they could with the unruly mob of the hungry, the scared, the malicious and the honest. She would pray, pray pointlessly to the uncaring Gods that if they returned, they would not return to chaos.

***

Since the afternoon they had emerged from the royal chambers following the wedding and bedding, time had not stood still. She was harried and tired, often swaying on her feet at late hours in council meetings, barely seeing Jon except in formal settings, and sunk in apprehension and gloom over their imminent departure. All was made worse by her bouts of sickness, sneaking up to ambush her at odd moments, and not just in the morning.

Many minds and hands were occupied with the gargantuan exercise of moving near a hundred thousand men, horses, provisions, shelter, fodder and weapons a thousand miles north as swiftly as possible, but as queen she felt the full weight of responsibility, and sharing the load with Jon was making her lonely, as he was out at all hours while she was lovingly but sternly ordered to rest up as much as she could. She no longer cared to sleep alone, particularly when beset by night terrors over what was to come, shaking herself from their icy claws in the darkness only to find no husband to hold her and soothe her, his low, earnest voice never lying about what lay ahead but still giving comfort.

They had promised each other the last night in the royal bed doing anything but sleeping, very much needing a lengthy escape into a pleasant haze of repletion, but after her bath and last bout of indulgent preening she sat by the fire alone with an untouched goblet, growing increasingly irritable until exhaustion swamped her and she dragged herself sensibly to bed. All her warmest, most practical clothes and essentials were packed, and no frivolities. They were to travel light and fast, and she would have no use for silken robes and dainty slippers and scented oils in a war camp. Muttering a little at the wasted effort of making herself appealing, she shed her robe and climbed under the covers naked, the sheets warmed by hot bricks in flannel which she pushed away with her feet to make a cosy space.

She dozed on and off, leaving the lamps burning, unwilling to sink further into sleep in case the nightmares returned, hoping Jon would return soon. It was some hours later, when amidst a sludgy dream of half-formed visions that had not yet coalesced to cold terror that she sensed a wonderfully hard and chilly body curled against her back, absorbing her warmth and soft, springy flesh. Though she was now fully awake, she feigned sleep for a while longer, wanting to see where those rough hands smoothing over the dip of her waist and curve of her arse would travel next.

The pores on her skin seemed to prick and thirst for his light touch, her sensitivity heightened from her broken rest, and her near imperceptible quiver gave her away though she stayed silent and limp as a rag doll, her face well hidden by a spill of hair. In her nose she could detect several scents, ale and leather and horse, cold damp air, a hint of soap, and the musky tang of his skin, which always sent her blood thumping a little faster through her veins. Her hair was gathered up in a handful and drawn from her neck, and a kiss was planted there, a gentle tickle of whiskers that lingered over her pulse, as if searching for that surge and flicker of want, a hand now on her breasts, drifting between them indecisively before settling within their crevice.

There was a shifting against her bottom, the cradle of his hips cupping her and giving her the full length of his stirring cock, solid and warm, warmer than the rest of his marble-like skin. He had not
been inside her for near a week, not since he had rolled over her and slipped inside her sore, saturated cunt and fucked her one last time the morning after their wedding. She had been so sated then that it took her some days before she even thought of having him again, but the need for it was now as vital as water and air. She wanted it to last, held in and choked back until every part of her and him was screaming out for it to break like a summer storm, an explosion of light and dark and a torrent of warm rain nourishing the dry, cracked earth.

The kisses on her throat grew deeper, the hand heading south to flatten against her belly where their babe was but a tiny, frail presence, doing nothing yet but making her ill and unpredictable in temper, but that would change soon enough. If she held onto it, she was so small in frame she would swell like a toad, though she had not carried her lost son long enough to experience that discomfort. She did not want to think of what it would be like to still be at war when she was in that state, but fortunately she was nicely distracted by the hand nudging her thighs apart, palming her bare cunt possessively, fingers delicately spreading her lips and tracing the crease between them in slow drags.

He had learned that trick by watching her touch herself, knowing it made her juices well and her nub stand proud to be caught between finger and thumb. She swallowed a moan and stayed at rest, hoping he would keep doing it until she reached that drugged state she wanted to stay suspended in for an age. He was fully erect now, prodding the cleft of her buttocks as if he was thinking of entering her from the rear. In the privacy of their bed, there wasn’t a part of her that he had not mapped or claimed with tenderness or savagery, and the dark heart of her craved the latter. She was no longer shocked or disturbed by it, it was part of her now, and part of him.

Despite her play-acting, she was not fooling her husband. He began to talk even as he fondled her, pretty pillow talk, instead of dull duty and exasperation over whatever had occupied his time that evening. ‘I intend to enjoy the last night in bed with you bare arsed, my queen. Forgive me for being so late.’

She relented and opened her eyes, her mouth lifting at the corners as she rolled her head a little to catch a glimpse of him. His eyes were sooty hollows in the lamplight, his hair a curly mess, slightly damp from outside, or washing, she caught the scent of pine soap again, slightly astringent. ‘I generally sleep naked,’ she said lazily. ‘Except when I bleed, which I won’t be doing for some time.’

‘You won’t be sleeping naked in camp,’ he said, dryly amused. ‘You’ll freeze, my love. And what if we come under attack? I don’t want you running from the tent naked and giving everyone an eyeful.’

‘So sensible,’ she said, her smile widening. ‘Shall I sleep in my clothes like you did at the Wall?’ She lifted her right leg and rubbed her foot against his calf, splitting her thighs to give him better access.

‘Your clothes, a cloak, my cloak. I want you bundled up and kept warm,’ he said, a crease of concern forming between his brows, her hint not taken. The caresses stopped.

‘No Jon,’ she said softly. ‘Not tonight. I forbid you. Stop bloody worrying and just relax. I am tougher than I look, you know that well enough. And if I am tough, you are tougher than Valyrian steel. Our babe will be strong, the cold will not harm us.’ She had to believe that. She had ridden across half of Essos when first with child, but it had been summer then, and she wasn’t at war, though there were other dangers. But no, if he wasn’t allowed to fret, then neither should she.

The frown faded with a flick of his lids, settling at half-mast in that smouldering look that signalled more pleasant thoughts. ‘We will see how long you endure sleeping naked in camp. I suspect one
night,’ he rumbled. ‘And how to keep you quiet when I take you...well, I haven’t figured that out yet.’ His fingers stirred within her folds again, making her jump and breathe a little faster, and she pushed her bottom back into him, enjoying the heavy, hot length pressed so close against her cleft.

‘Mmm...I’m pleased to hear you still plan on fucking me,’ she said with some mischief. ‘You can always clap a hand over my mouth, or I can bite down on a pillow…’

She felt a thrill at the idea of being restrained in such a manner, needing to scream and cry and not being able due to thousands listening outside. The flat of his palm was now rubbing at her nub in lazy circles, and she bent her leg further back, biting at his other hand as it slid over her face and closed over her lips. ‘Aye, my love,’ he purred. ‘Or if I need both hands, I will fill your sweet mouth with my cock, then find something to gag you with so you can moan and wail as much as you like.’

Her groan of response was muffled completely, she raised her hips to take a finger inside her, then a second, already molten and very reactive. Denying herself release was going to be difficult. She would have to take the reins or she would be undone in minutes. She shrugged him off, nipping at his hand once more before pushing it away, and disappeared under the nest of blankets, blinded and suffocated by their weight. Impatient, she pushed them off their entwined bodies, wanting to test herself with what her eyes could see in the half light.

She rose to her knees, positioned side on so he could also see all of her, her hand sliding lovingly over his belly and thick thighs, delving between and parting them slightly so she could cup his stones, tight and high and dusted with inky hair. Under her scrutiny his cock twitched, rigid and lively, the fat tip exposed and flushing darker. She brushed her hair out of the way so she could look up that expanse of snowy skin and slashes of scars and find him watching her, his bottom lip wet from where his tongue had laved it. ‘What are you up to?’ he whispered, despite knowing very well.

‘I want you to deny me,’ she murmured. ‘I want you to keep me on the edge for as long as you can bear it, and if I touch myself, or look about to break, punish me for it.’

Of course, any punishment would only make the torment worse, acknowledged by a flare of his eyes and another flick of his tongue. She had to stay away from that luscious mouth or else she would falter, with his tongue buried in her cunt it was impossible to stand strong. ‘And you will do the same to me,’ he growled. ‘We will see who surrenders first.’

She smiled confidently, her fingers curling around the base of his cock to hold it upright, and she bent and put her curled lips around the tip, swiping her tongue over the slit before swallowing him by inches, willing her throat to relax and not gag, swishing her tongue around to add saliva to ease her path. Her right hand was flat on his belly, and she felt the ridged muscles beneath it bunch, and she pulled back and added more spit so she could get him all in her throat, the stretch of her lips around his girth visible and lewd.

There was a ragged groan so low and desperate she felt it vibrate in her core, and a fistful of her hair was taken to guide her, forcing her to back off for a few moments. She used her tongue and teeth carefully over the head to make him squirm and give her that lovely sound again, then he pushed her down to make her engulf his full length, revelling in a few rough thrusts into her struggling throat, growling in counterpoint to her muffled whines of distress, her eyes watering a little and her loins throbbing in warning at having her mouth used like her cunt.

Her lips were swollen and aggravated when he released her to let her breathe again, and she dragged them down the back of the shaft to reach his stones, very delicately licking and taking small mouthfuls of them until he thrashed and cursed. Her thighs were clamped together to dull the
pulse in her womb, which was uncomfortable but bearable, but she was being most unfair. It was nothing to him to rise from the pillows, scoop up her legs in his powerful arms and even the odds by lifting her across his face, taking the lips of her cunt deep in his mouth and sucking the dew from them with a satisfied grunt.

She jumped near a foot and tried to slither away, panting and whimpering, but his hands dug into the soft flesh of her thighs to hold her captive. She forgot what she was doing to him and rested her face against his thigh, emitting selfish moans as she let herself embrace it. Mercifully he only skimmed around her nub with the tip of his tongue, kinder than she had been to him, but being straddled across his face on display, every bit of her under his avid eyes and pillowy lips and clever tongue was enough to send her edging towards the precipice.

To distract herself, she returned to her task, choking her cry when a single finger dipped in her wetness and slid into her arse by catching the tip of his cock and sucking him down, focusing on what the hard body under hers was telling her with every twitch and quiver and growl. She was determined to make him erupt in her mouth, a flood of sticky seed to savour, and then she could rest in triumph and calm herself until he was ready for her once more. The muscles in her jaw were straining to keep him deep, air rushing through her nose, her lower half now trembling as her arse was stretched by two fingers working past her tight grip, and oh fuck, his tongue had found her nub and was sweeping over it rapidly.

She went still, testing herself to see how much she could take, the darts of pleasure shooting under her skin almost painful in their intensity, the sounds of her travail humming along the hot length in her mouth, and with a flurry of frantic escape she tipped on her side, letting him pop free from her mouth and drawing her shaking legs up against her aching belly. Dear Gods, she was hopeless at this, but the throb in her loins stuttered and slowed out of reach of his hands and mouth, at the grit of her teeth and her deliberate, slow breaths.

‘You can do better than that. I didn’t give you leave to go. Come here.’

His voice was hazy, but tinged with challenge, his arms and torso shifting up to ensnare her and haul her back in a graceless tangle of limbs. She was held facing his feet, grateful she could avoid the dark wells of his eyes drawing her down, but then his hand was fumbling beneath her bottom to position his cock at her entrance, the other hand at her hip to guide her. ‘Spread yourself wider and take my cock, and do it slow,’ he rasped, unable to complete the move without her assistance. Submitting, she leaned forward and shifted her knees to straddle properly, replacing his hand with her own and sinking down on his length, the girth rending her overly sensitive flesh perfectly, too perfect, a gasp and a prickle of sensation washing up her chest and flaming on her face.

She kept going obediently until the tip knocked against the entrance to her womb, a whole body shiver causing her to hunch further, leaving her arse tilted up into his grasp, a clear view of himself buried to the root. ‘Move…ride me,’ he crooned. ‘And don’t touch yourself, or I will slap that pretty arse until it burns.’

With crazed mewls, she took him as bid, deliberately hard on him and hard on herself, lifting and slamming down until the muscles in her belly strained and she felt bruised and churned inside, using the discomfort as her focus to attempt to ignore the pleasure that squirmed and flailed, eager to be freed from the cage it was confined in. Throaty moans and curses taunted her ears, her own cries she tried to still by pressing her lips closed. She was engorged and achy below, and she could not stop her hand skimming up her thigh and pressing over her nub to get some relief, her tiny, blissful sigh earning a sharp slap on her left cheek, then her right.

‘Keep doing that, and you’ll get more,’ he warned her, but her hand lingered, fingers pinching at
the small bundle of nerves in defiance, and to earn more blows on her buttocks until she was at a level of arousal that was almost frightening. She could be the weaker one and yield, let the delicious agony of his cock rocking deep in her cunt, joined with her own fingers strumming herself and the rough spanks to her arse, let it all throw open the cage and release her with a howl, but she could indeed do better.

With all her willpower she let her hand fall away, rising upright to twist and roll above him mercilessly, bathing him in taut heat and slipperiness under she heard him give a guttural cry, then she slithered free again while he was distracted, not rolling on her side but turning about, pushing her hair out of the way to give him a sultry stare. Hells, he was so wrenchedly beautiful like this she felt her overtaxed heart stop, all tense, rippling muscle and mussed raven hair, his lips so plump and pink with rushing blood she wanted to bite them until he bled into her mouth. She felt a savage noise well in her throat, and her nails sank into his moon pale skin to leave carved circles. He was hers, and in that unhinged moment she would have killed anyone, friend or foe, that tried to come between them.

But she would not let him win, and she knew exactly how to make him break. She moved her feet to either side of his torso, shoving his hands away when he tried to encircle her waist. ‘Lie still until you can no longer stand it, and then I will know I have won,’ she purred, watching his teeth sink into his bottom lip to smother a vile oath, his hands clenching and releasing the sheets under his sprawled body as he fought the urge to resume his mastery of her.

Reaching beneath, she took his slippery length between her fingers, balancing on her other hand, and slotted his cock between her tingling cheeks, the head breaching her arse with a protest of inner muscle. She threw her head back and keened, but stubbornly kept going until she had taken it, then an inch further, releasing the grip of her hand and easing down slowly, her keening cut with sharp breaths for air. There was pain, but it was a welcome distraction from the constant nagging urge to come, a different sort of ache to the leaden mass in her belly, and she could control it, bracing herself on her hands and feet and moving only gently until she felt she could handle more.

Her heavy lids fluttered and lifted, and she looked down her body to see her cunt spread open like an exotic bloom at the pressure of his length in her arse, so wet the mess clung to her thighs, and when her gaze travelled further she found him strung tight as a longbow and utterly, satisfyingly wrecked, his eyes so black and wild he appeared as a cornered and wounded beast, a drop of bright blood on his lip where he had bitten himself as she had longed to do earlier.

She knew what she looked like, held aloof and above him like some cruel goddess, yet splayed open and dishevelled like a well-used whore. She knew what she felt like, as tight as a trap and scorching hot inside. She could last like this for a long time, her toes hanging on to the edge of the cliff, braced against the buffeting force of the complex pleasure, but he would not. As she sank down fully at last, the snap of his will breaking was near as audible as his feral snarl, and he moved in a coil of limbs, surging upwards and throwing her on her back so forcefully her head was nearly off the edge of the bed.

Her legs were slung over his shoulders before she could blink, and then it was her turn to burn, his full length buried in her arse and rutting deep, his eyes slits of onyx that pierced into hers, burrowing into her frenzied mind as he burrowed into her secret depths. She was so tense from holding back for so long every thrust was sweet anguish, and she let herself go slack, not fighting it any longer, screaming out as he dropped one leg to find her nub and rub it between his fingers.

‘Fuck, Dany…I’m going to come, I need you to come with me…yield.’

The blood hissing through her veins in a dizzying rush was pooling in her head and in her loins, but
she wailed her denial, hopelessly and pathetically, even as she began to thrash under his weight, her eyes rolling into the back of her head as the storm broke her and swept her off the edge into space, a black, infinite space that held her suspended and shaking like a leaf.

The pulse of release was so consuming she barely heard him howl, barely felt his seed fill her depths in a flow of heat. Utter delirium seized all her limbs, tiny, tickling spasms of pleasure in every muscle, her own cries like those of a madwoman until he fell over her at last and silenced her with a kiss so rich and deep and demanding it wrung the last weak breath from her lungs.

***

In the morning, the bread roll that Jon handed to her to chew at before rising had not done its magic. Weary from lack of sleep and beset with nerves the moment her eyes had opened, her stomach was mutinous, sending her running to the privy closet rather than retch in front of her worried husband. It wasn’t a pretty sight, regardless if he was stoic about it, and she did not want his guilt for waking her in the night spoiling her precious languor from their lengthy coupling.

Once the unpleasant business was over, she drank water dosed with peppermint tincture and her belly stayed quiet through dressing and breakfast and the bustle of servants moving the rest of their belongings to the wayns in the courtyard. The three armies; the Unsullied, Dothraki and the Lannister legions with added ranks of men from the Crownlands and Stormlands were already assembled outside the Gate of the Gods and ready to march.

Also waiting were camp followers, porters, and the lines of cumbersome wayns and carts loaded with provisions, including specially reinforced wagons to hold the highly dangerous jars of wildfire that had been found in a secret cache deep underground. It was Tyrion’s idea to take it, pointing out its usefulness in burning wights, but it made her husband and his generals very anxious, despite being cushioned in barrels of wet sand and drawn on wheels muffled with thick cloth.

In the murky winter dawn, the city smothered by a dense cloud bank from the Narrow Sea, their small group attracted little attention from the scarce citizens as they clattered through the cobbled streets, only the odd shout of ‘Her Grace’ and ‘Gods keep you’ and ‘She’s off’ following in their wake. Outside the gate, her Hand and his assembled council were waiting in the near dark under an open sided tent lit by braziers, their sumptuous court clothes very out of place within the war party of queen and king, advisors and generals clad in warm, practical attire and all bristling with weapons, save herself. She had her sons as her weapons, hidden above the cloud but near enough that she could touch their minds and sense their restlessness and desire to be off and away from the noisy, smelly city where they were reluctantly housed.

Although she didn’t require it, Jon dismounted from his black gelding and offered her a hand to help her down from her silver, the gesture formal yet comforting, and she squeezed his gauntleted hand and smiled just for him before she turned to meet the bowing line of lords and merchants. She eyed them rather sternly, fiercely willing them silently to remain trustworthy in her absence, but then spoke a few gracious words of thanks and farewell, her voice catching on the dry dust stirred up by thousands of feet and hooves impatiently shuffling, waiting for the signal to move.

Her king followed, less practiced in speech but polite enough. ‘We trust you to protect the people and the queen’s interests while we are gone,’ he added to his formal farewell, his tone earnest and blunt. ‘We cannot spare a moment’s worry about the south. Do not fail her, my lords.’

It was unnecessary, like the chivalrous gesture of helping her dismount, but her smile was hard to quell as she watched the council stir and stiffen under his solemn gaze. ‘We will not fail her Grace, or his Grace,’ a patrician voice replied, and Tyrion stepped forward, his face carefully guarded but his green eyes sharp as he regarded her. She offered him a hand and they stepped aside out of
earshot. He deserved a private farewell with her, her loyal, challenging Hand, who had always tried
to guide her towards the right path, though it was rocky and precarious underfoot. Jon followed
them, standing slightly behind her. He also knew Tyrion well, since he was a green boy, and
though their relationship had been fractious of late, both still respected the other.

‘Three things I never expected to see when we embarked for Westeros,’ Tyrion said in an
unreadable voice, any strong feelings hidden away. ‘My queen married, and with child, and riding
off to fight an army of dead men and monsters. Life is full of little surprises.’

‘Not so little,’ she replied dryly. ‘I am sad to leave you, old friend, but I know the city will be in
capable hands. If ravens can find us, keep me informed of any threats. I can easily fly back if
needed while we are south of the Neck.’

‘I hope there will be nothing to trouble you,’ he said in a warmer tone. ‘Long as the food arrives
speedily, the city will quieten down. Ser Bronn and his City Watch and the Dornish army will keep
order in the south, and hopefully Lord Varys’s machinations in Pentos will deter the Golden
Company from paying us a visit.’

‘They have no reason to come now,’ she said calmly. ‘Unless they are hoping that pack of scurvy
pirates will pay their hefty fee.’

‘No, you dealt with that threat rather well by ridding the realm of my sister, your Grace,’ Tyrion
said with a rather painful smile. ‘You rarely fail me. Don’t let me down by coming to grief in the
North. I want you, and his Grace, and your baby home safe and sound, so we can see those foolish
dreams we had over wine in Mereen come to pass.’

There was a glimmer to his eyes, as if he was near to tears, a rare sight indeed. She doubted Tyrion
had cried since he was a sad, stunted boy-child hidden out of sight in Casterley Rock. ‘Old friend,’
she said again, low and gentle. ‘Do not be afraid for me. I will return to you. I would swear it, but I
don’t want to tempt fate. Do your job well, and trust that I was born to this fight, and therefore will
live to see its end.’

It was bravely said, but suddenly she needed the hand on her arm, her husband moving to touch her
in reassurance as he stared down Tyrion silently. ‘Jon Snow,’ her Hand said. ‘The source of all the
surprises. I knew you as a sullen, touchy bastard boy, and now I know you as my king. I shall
continue to resent you for stealing my queen away, but I also respect you highly, and trust you.
Look after her, and her babe. Don’t let her do anything reckless. She does love to scare the shit out
of those who love her best.’

Her husband’s mouth twitched, and there was a tell-tale crease of amusement at his temples. ‘And
I will continue to resent you for advising her not to wed me, but I trust you as well, my Lord,’ he
replied, offering his hand to shake. ‘As I already vowed to you, and the Gods, I will guard the
queen with my life. Promise us you won’t burn this bloody awful city down while we’re gone.’

Tyrion took the offered hand and shook it with a real smile. ‘I will do my best, your Grace. Since
you took the dragons and the wildfire, it should be easy enough to manage. Make sure you put
them to good use up there, and hurry home to us. I will miss your brooding and glowering about
the place, strangely enough.’

Jon snorted at the droll words with a glint of smile, and loosed his hand, and she took his place,
claspning Tyrion’s hand once and disengaging. ‘Have a minute alone with your brother. He is
waiting outside to see you,’ she said through the blockage in her throat. ‘Goodbye, my Lord Hand.’
And with that, she tore her eyes away from his familiar face, turning away with her guts churning
anew.
The presence of Jon beside her was not enough to soothe the dread that laid heavy in her heart, as she left behind all that she had fought for to ride into an uncertain future. Whenever she had gone off to war in the past, she had been certain of victory. There was no such certainty now.

Chapter End Notes

Feedback in the form of comments is appreciated. It means that I update regularly, which I assume is what you want to happen instead of every now and then. To those who bother to comment, I appreciate you so hard xxx
It cries out in the darkest night and breaks in the morning light

A/N: Hello, smut fans. In this chapter, Dany and Jaime get better acquainted, Jon has a surprise, dragon fluff, complicated feels, and a tent. A bridging chapter that is hopefully crowd pleasing. It took a while, but you all showed up on the last chapter, so thank you very much. I need smutty cheerleaders. If anyone is wondering when I’m going to shut the fuck up, I don’t know yet. The ending is still a blur. Smut guarantee maintained, at least until I get to battle stuff. Enjoy, and comments is money x

Dedicated to Allegre17 and LadyMagpie, for your always delightful feedback.

The Crownlands, particularly the swathe of cultivated and sedate farmland surrounding King’s Landing, had been relatively untouched by war. There were neat little villages of bustling smallfolk with stone septs and prosperous mills, whose barns appeared stocked to survive the winter. The Kingsroad was gravelled under foot and hoof, and they passed snug farmhouses and holdfasts still intact and unspoiled by rampaging bands of outlaws and opposing forces.

It would not be the same in the Riverlands she had been told, a blasted landscape of fallow fields, burnt and ransacked homes and castles, and sad shallow graves of rotting, forgotten bones. Only a few great keeps were intact and garrisoned, including the seat of House Tully, a major stop on the trek north to the Neck, ruled by the remaining kin of Lady Stark, a woman she had no good opinion of, based on the snatches of childhood Jon was willing to impart.

She was curious to meet Lord Tully, a reported vainglorious and foolhardy man who had endured years as a prisoner of the Freys before they were all killed by poisoned wine in some bizarre incident, leaving only the womenfolk in charge of the Twins. Riverrun was off their route, but they were to collect more troops there, and Jon had not insisted on the more convenient Twins as a rallying point.

His brother Robb, his Volantene wife, their unborn babe, the best and most loyal lords in the North, and Lady Stark, all murdered at a wedding feast. Though rather contrary to her husband’s pragmatic nature, she could understand why he didn’t want to be hosted in those blood-soaked walls. Her mouth twisted with some bitterness as she recalled the mouthy opinions she had heard recently of her Dothraki barbarians, when there had been many examples of behaviour in this land that was far worse and less honest than the conduct of her adopted people.

She shot the distinguished man beside her a gimlet eye, pondering the machinations of his ruthless family, and wondered why she had invited him to ride with her this afternoon. His famed golden hand had been replaced by a more practical hook, his beard thick and grey, green eyes attentive and not sparking with cynicism, but he was still a bloody Lannister, all fancy in his red and gold armour, and just as impenetrable.

His name was something Jon was never like to forget, for all their grudging companionship lately. War made for strange partnerships, and she was less resentful about her new ally due to her love for Tyrion, and the long-ingrained aim to treat with and befriend those she normally mistrusted. Jaime was respectful to her however, and thus far loyal and reliable. His sister had broken him after years of fierce and destructive devotion, and Lady Brienne was a soothing influence. It had not escaped her notice that they were often in each other’s company, and the formidable lady looked on this sullied knight with love in her big, blue eyes. She hoped he was man enough to see it, and take it, before it was too late.
The new lord of Casterley Rock was droning on about his bannermen and troops, and the reserve that was to meet with them in Riverrun. Since he had seen the wight displayed at the Dragonpit he had never questioned their dread mission north, but the Westerlands lords were like balky mules, similar to the northern lords in that respect, already grumbling about sharing space with the Dothraki and other trivialities, but Jaime had sufficient respect and authority to keep them in line. As an experienced general they needed him, and in their stilted conversations he would occasionally speak of her mother, tiny treasures of memory to warm her, though the wind was cold and the sky as grey as a corpse.

There was a sharp scent in the air that tingled in her nostrils, snow threatening to the north, and the prospect made her huddle deeper in her sable cloak, the lining now swapped for a thick wine coloured wool for extra warmth. ‘When do you expect his Grace to return so I can make a quick exit?’ Jaime enquired, catching her wandering attention.

She straightened in her saddle, a dull cracking in her spine causing a wince. Long hours ahorse were taking some bodily adjustment. ‘I am not sure, my Lord. He disappeared down the column some time ago,’ she replied with a stiff smile.

Impatient at the slow pace of the armies, and duty bound to be seen and available to sort out problems and squabbles, Jon regularly prowled up and down the unwieldy procession of men and beasts and wayns with Ser Davos and Jorah, often absent for hours. She took meetings in the saddle, there being no time to stop and convene until nightfall, and by Gods she was tired already, hoping her usual fortitude would return soon so she could endure the journey. She knew it would get better in a few weeks once the sickness passed, but she needed her old body back now.

‘I thought your worries about his Grace running you through had passed,’ she added lightly.

‘Your husband will never love me, I fear,’ Jaime drawled. ‘Too much to forgive. And the Starks await me in the North, which will be doubly awkward.’

‘It will be,’ she agreed. ‘I myself am rather dreading finally meeting the Starks and their bannermen, I admit. They love the Targaryens not.’

‘We are the children of horrible fathers, as Tyrion likes to say,’ he mused, shooting her a narrow look. ‘But you have done them no harm. You have elevated their brother and king to the highest in the land, and have given him all your resources. And you clearly love him.’

‘It’s a successful military alliance,’ she said coolly, lowering her lids, but Lannister saw her sly look and laughed heartily, his famous charm shining for a moment before he subsided.

‘Your husband is a far better swordsman than I ever was,’ he admitted. ‘Since Ser Bronn has opted to stay behind to lead the City Watch, and loll amidst tits and wine as the world goes to the deepest hell, I lack a good sparring partner. If only his Grace tolerated me enough to agree to practice. With my left hand, I’m not much use here, except for giving orders.’

It was a frank admission that surprised her, and she relaxed a little in his company. ‘His Grace used to train sullen ploughboys and thieves and rapers at Castle Black,’ she told him. ‘If you asked him nicely enough, he may put aside personal feelings and match you without being tempted to have your head.’

‘A man has his pride,’ Jaime shrugged. ‘Often that’s all he has left.’ He shook himself, his smirk flattening. ‘I watched his Grace carve through several men in the throne room like a knife through cake, but unlike other knights I have known he seemed to take little joy in it.’
It was sharply observant, and she paused before responding, wondering whether the direction of the conversation was appropriate, but she eventually replied. ‘His Grace is not a knight, and no, he finds no enjoyment in what he does with such skill, and would be the first to admit it.’

Lannister’s eyes were on her face, half-hidden from the wind by the wide hood of her cloak. ‘A true warrior who doesn’t enjoy killing,’ he pondered. ‘I’ve only known one other man who was similar. Your brother, your Grace. He once told me to always remember that war was not a game, and that every life taken meant other lives ruined, but I didn’t listen.’

‘It appears he didn’t listen either. A terrible war was started over a woman who wasn’t his wife,’ she said acerbically. ‘And because of that war, here we all are, for good or ill.’ Like a small shifting of pebbles that started a rockslide, her splendid brother taking a fancy for a wild northern lass had created a destruction they were all wading through today, and despite the kinder glimpses of Rhaegar she had been granted recently, her opinion of her brother was deeply flawed.

Not needing more dark thoughts to brood over, she gave her companion a brittle smile, hunting for glib words to change the subject, but then she was saved by the rapid thud of hooves on frozen turf, the jingle of tack, a familiar black horse approaching from the right with a small train, including a well wrapped figure on a fat pony. The stiffness in her unwound a little, and she hid her real smile in a fold of her hood at the handsome yet harried sight of Jon.

The column was still advancing down the Kingsroad and spilling over into the fields that flanked the ribbon of gravel, so she pulled at the reins in her hands to direct her horse towards the small group, Jaime sloping off to the left to ride back to where the Lannister legions were placed. Out of sight of everyone other than friends and the stranger on the pony, she let her smile show, and reined in her silver an arm’s length away. ‘Hello love, I’m sorry I was off for so long,’ he said discreetly, his frown smoothing a little. ‘There was trouble with the wagons down the back, a couple of fights to sort out, and I was looking for someone.’

She wanted to reach out and take his gauntleted hand, or even better be lifted onto his horse to ride in his arms for a while, but neither were fitting. It would have to wait until they were entirely alone. ‘It doesn’t matter, I had company. Not the sort of company you welcome,’ she said, and he snorted and flashed her his moody look.

‘I saw,’ he said shortly. ‘What did you talk about?’

‘Sword fighting mostly,’ she said obscurely. ‘Did you find the someone?’

‘Aye, I did, though I’m already regretting it,’ he muttered, then an oddly familiar, strident female voice cut in.

‘Is one of you fine gentlemen going to help me off this bloody beast? My arse is numb.’

She turned her silver at the grouchy words, finding Ser Davos scrambling to the ground to assist the stranger off her pony. Her hood tipped back to reveal a mass of dark hair and bright green eyes, glimmering with ire, and the woman was hastily lifted down by the old smuggler in a swirl of layered woollens. She staggered a little and muttered an oath, then approached her horse. ‘Your Grace,’ Tansy began, smoothing her gown and cloak. ‘That handsome king of yours could persuade a lass to go anywhere, and do anything, so here I am, numb arse and all.’ There was no curtsey, only an assessing look upwards at her rather stunned figure.

‘Lady Tansy,’ she said finally. ‘I am happy to see you, but my husband told me nothing of this. If you prefer, we can send you back to King’s Landing in a wagon.’ She shot a reproving look over her shoulder, her husband looking a little embarrassed, but stubborn. ‘I’m not due for months, you
thoughtful sod, she told him silently, and at the widening of her blue eyes his mulish look only deepened.

‘No, your Grace. I’m pleased to be here, to keep an eye on your health, and the other eye on your pretty lad,’ the midwife said with a cheeky smile. ‘I hope I’m not needed for some time, but his Grace was worried for you, and the Gods only know when you’ll be back in the city. Could be a while, and it’s a bit of an adventure for an old tart.’

There was a snort from Ser Davos, and a shifting behind her, a clearing of throat. ‘The lady agreed to come along for the babe, also for tending the sick and wounded,’ Jon explained. ‘She has a wagon down the back, so it took me a while to hunt her down.’

While she pitied Tansy for being brought along on this march into an icy void of monsters and mayhem, and mildly annoyed at her husband for inconveniencing the woman, her simple pleasure at the thoughtfulness of the gesture was stronger, much stronger. The cold in her bones faded at her rush of giddy warmth, and she turned back to give Jon a crooked smile, hoping he could see her heart in her face.

‘Well, my lady, I am glad you are here,’ she said warmly when she turned back to the woman. ‘I look forward to speaking with you when we are at camp. Are you quite comfortable where you are?’

‘Very comfy, your Grace. I have my own little wagon and plenty of food and blankets, the king’s big savage guards saw to that, though I couldn’t understand a damn word they said when they came to fetch me, had to guess most of it,’ the woman said cheerfully enough, then her green gaze sharpened, taking in her huddled figure and tired face. She had no mirror to hand, but she knew there were dark circles under her eyes, and her skin was pale and drawn. ‘And you, your Grace, are you comfy enough?’

‘As much as can be expected, under the circumstances,’ she replied formally, and gave another brittle smile, saving her fatigue and fear for the privacy of her tent later. ‘Ser Jorah, please escort the lady Tansy back to her wagon and make sure she has all she needs,’ she asked her old friend. ‘And assign her two Dothraki guards and a woman with some of the common tongue, so she has company, and is not molested.’

‘At once, Khaleesi,’ her old bear said, his bright blue eyes not shifting from the same look of dull resignation they had shown for weeks. The sadness in her chest at the sight of him made her switch her eyes impatiently to the waiting woman, a hint of mischief guiding her parting words and earning her a lusty laugh.

‘Since you have gone to so much trouble to be here for me, you have my permission to eye my husband as much as you like.’

***

The woods were a blend of naked, gnarled oak and ash and chestnut, dense thickets of brambles turned a dull red with the frost, the odd bright flash of hawthorn berries and the ruffled breast feathers of a robin foraging in contrast to the greys and muted greens, and the glittering diamonds of thick snow in sunlight.

Weeks ago, on the ship returning from Eastwatch, she had a fanciful daydream of this, bundling Jon Snow on the back of her dragon and escaping it all, but not to more winter, and not for an hour. That dream had been ambitious; eternal summer, pallid skin tinting in the sun, light silks and cottons, nothing to do all day but eat, sleep, fuck, and swim in the ocean, not bundled up in layers
of clothes in an icy glade, duty tugging at the conscience.

They had forgotten the thousands of men marching ever northwards and all their gripes and challenges to depart in flurry of leathery wings and a thundering roar, the Westerosi soldiers shouting and gawping at the sight of the dragons lifting to the skies. The official word was they were scouting the route, and they had followed the road for a while, but it wasn’t long before she was bringing Drogon in to land to snatch some time alone with her sons and her husband.

Drogon and Rhaegal were in a lazy mood, choosing to stay with them in the clearing rather than hunt, the heat of their bodies providing some comfort. She sat between their sprawled, sinuous forms in the melting snow, scratching behind Drogon’s ears the way he especially liked, but it was some time before Jon was bold enough to join her, sitting down carefully close by, as if her calming presence was a shield against any change in aspect towards him. ‘Gods, they’re warm,’ he marvelled, keeping his voice low. ‘I can feel it thawing out my toes. Are you sure they won’t decide to turn on me?’

‘Don’t be silly,’ she soothed. ‘They like you, you know that well enough. Give Rhaegal a scratch, he’s feeling neglected.’ The green dragon had opened one yellow-green eye and was regarding Jon curiously, giving a sleepy grumble. A hand was gingerly extended, landing on the dragon’s snout, far from his razor-sharp jaws.

‘What is he thinking about?’

‘I can’t tell unless they let me in, not exactly,’ she said. ‘But I sense he’s quite at ease, and interested in you. He likes your smell, I think.’

He chuckled, and his gloved fingers dug into the dragon’s hide, scratching firmly enough that Rhaegal twitched in enjoyment. ‘I smell of horse and sweat and muck,’ he said ruefully. ‘And I’m bloody tired. Though the waste of time bothers me, I’m glad we’re setting up a proper camp.’ They had been travelling as swift as possible, most sleeping on the ground or in wagons, only a few small tents thrown up for the higher ranked, but they all needed to rest, so the decision was made to set up in some comfort for a night, regardless of the time and resources it took to achieve.

‘I long for a bath,’ she sighed. ‘I must smell as interesting as you do, my love.’

He left off his scratching and turned, gathering her up and hugging her close to his chest, pressing a kiss to her forehead, a brief flicker of warmth in his velvet brown eyes as he pulled away. ‘You smell as you always do, lass. Flowers and sunlight, and dragons.’

‘A lie, but a poetic one,’ she teased him with a slanted smile, then giggled when Rhaegal lifted his massive head and nudged Jon gently in the back with an irritable rumble. As he turned, he jumped at the rather alarming sight.

‘Seven hells,’ he muttered. ‘What does he want?’

‘Like his mother, he wants more of everything,’ she said dryly. ‘Scratch him behind his ears, and try getting in closer, he won’t harm you.’ It delighted her to watch Jon with her children, his ingrained fear of the beasts warring with awe and intrigue, and she always felt awe herself at her sons’ acceptance of his presence, not mere tolerance, but recognition and even affection. He was not of her blood, but a connection had formed, and it gave her ideas, perhaps ambitious and a bit reckless.

She knew so little of the lore of her house, but she knew only those of Valyrian stock had the magic in their veins to be a dragonrider. She now had two mounts to control, but she couldn’t help
believing that if Viserion had been mounted that tragic day then he would have dodged the ice spear that brought him crashing down. She rose to her feet, brushing snow from the back of her coat. Her husband’s fur clad figure was tiny compared to the towering wall of scales he was leaning into and patting, gentling the dragon as skilfully as he did to her in private, Rhaegal now emitting a contented purr.

‘He sounds like you do when I rub your back,’ he observed, making her giggle.

‘And other parts,’ she ventured, earning her a promising look beneath lowered lids. ‘I want you to try something while Rhaegal is at ease, if you’re willing. Climb up on his back, very carefully. I want to see if he accepts you or not.’

His eyes widened, and his mouth twitched fetchingly. ‘You just want to see me knocked off and flat on my arse in the snow,’ he snorted, but didn’t look scared. Instead, he studied the dragon for a suitable route up the haunch before him, reaching for a handhold tentatively. She knew no one braver than her husband.

‘Go on Jon,’ she said encouragingly. ‘Try it, I promise I won’t laugh.’

She took in a breath when he began to climb, despite her confidence, as Rhaegal had never been mounted before, and the dragon snorted abruptly and lifted his spiky head, shaking it a little so Jon clutched with both hands and flattened like a limpet on a rock. ‘Fuck me,’ he muttered, and she sent a flow of calming thoughts through her son’s fiery mind until he settled grudgingly.

Sensing the body beneath him relax, her man boldly kept climbing until he reached the right spot behind the ruff of spikes, and shifted his bottom in place. She took another heaving breath, the urge to giggle tickling at her throat at the highly dubious look on his face, but he didn’t look ludicrous up there, just annoyingly majestic and alluring., his loose curls ruffling in the stirring breeze.

The powerful muscles beneath his seat bunched, and his eyes flared with alarm. ‘Hells, don’t let him take off on me!’

‘He won’t,’ she called out. ‘He’s just getting used to you up there. Sit for a while, and give him a good scratch. Talk to him a bit, and climb down. We will save that for another day.’

‘Drogon, you can’t be serious,’ he said suspiciously, barely heard over the dragon’s grumblings. Drogon had stirred as well, and was watching the strange sight over her head. A series of pats and digging of strong fingers, an ‘easy there, boy’ and ‘good lad’, made her sigh fondly. He was treating Rhaegal like his pet wolf, and it was surprisingly effective, the dragon’s tension easing, grumbling replaced by a throaty purr that could be felt through the soles of her boots.

After a few minutes of blissful dragon and her husband’s face switching between sweet smiles and wariness, he began to climb down, and she did laugh, a bubble of mirth when he lost his grip and slithered to a graceless heap at her feet. He rose, glaring and brushing off clumps of snow, and picked her up off the ground, giving her arse a swat before he kissed her thoroughly, making her purr herself. His brown irises were the same shade of the remnants of autumn still clinging to the trees, and in the harsh blue-white light of the dell he glowed with beauty.

‘Gods, you’re infuriating,’ she murmured as she broke away. ‘Every other man on the march looks miserable and grubby and scraggy, and you just look more pure and lovely. If I was a man, I’d want to punch you.’

He chuckled and set her down gently. ‘I think some have been thinking about it. The cocky Northern lad with the most beautiful woman in the Kingdoms, and all the rest,’ he replied, his
bashful smile twisting into self-mockery. ‘One day, I’ll wake up, and this will be all a fever dream. I’ll be alone in my bed in Winterfell with my right hand, and a pack of rebellious lords and my sister waiting downstairs in the hall to give me grief.’

She was unwilling to move from her place tucked under his cloak, arms linked around his neck, looking up through her lashes. ‘It’s not a dream, I’m afraid. You are stuck with me, and my beasts.’

His eyes darkened like clouds threatening a squall, a tell-tale crease between his black brows. ‘Aye, I’m stuck with you. Your armies, your dragons, your kingdoms. And your good heart, your laughter, and your body, all of it. You gave it over, and what did you get in return? I gave you nothing except myself, and a pile of trouble, and a baby that is making you tired and sickly.’

‘Jon, please stop,’ she said firmly, silencing the torrent of painful words with a peck to his lips, thinned with self-loathing. ‘My life was a hollow steel shell that I hid inside, before I met you. You were the first thing in my life I took without thinking, and the only thing to give me joy. You gave me your heart, and that is enough for me. Now kiss me, and stop scowling.’ Her tone was light to dull the edge of his mood, but she meant every word. Her husband may prove his worth to her and the world over and over, but proving it to himself was long in coming. Only time, if they were granted it, would kill that bastard boy in him, though he had already died and been reborn.

Her hand slid to rest over his heart, a faint thump beneath layers of wool and leather, but reassuring, and he shook his head once and bent to take her mouth, his kiss soft and subtle, then pressing down with a hint of demand that made her give a happy sound, the flick of his tongue stirring her below, a lazy tingle in her belly. ‘If the children weren’t watching, I’d have you up against the nearest tree. It’s been too long,’ he whispered when she slid away to catch her breath, her face blooming with a blush.

‘It’s too bloody cold for that,’ she said practically, and her dazed eyes pulled away from his intent face reluctantly, finding one yellow eye and one fiery red staring at the pair of them with interest. ‘I see what you mean, my love,’ she said. ‘Later then. After a bath.’

***

A crumbling holdfast of stone scorched black by a recent fire stood sentinel over a sea of well-ordered tents in ochre and grey and red, firepits dug into the frozen soil, fed by a huge central pit dramatically lit by Drogon from above when they drew to a halt that afternoon. She had hopes of finding a keep to be hosted in for the night, but the small castle was gutted, only providing shelter for the royal tent in the courtyard and a few other tents of friends and generals. The stone walls kept out most of the wind, and with four braziers lit and crackling away merrily she was quite cosy in their tent, furs strewn across the canvas floor keeping the draughts at bay.

The bath was the elongated copper tub from her flagship, large enough to lie reclined, the water piping hot and scented with orange blossom essence from Dorne. Missandei had stayed to help her wash her stringy hair with soft soap, then oil it and comb free the tangles. Once it was smooth she piled it on the top of her head in a neat coil, held with a sturdy clasp until it was ready to be braided in the morning, then withdrew to find Grey Worm in her own tent nearby, reminding her queen to eat the meat, pot bread and cheese laid out on the trestle table.

Her stomach had behaved itself all day, and she was actually hungry, her empty belly rumbling at the prospect of food, but first she would lounge in the steaming water and enjoy being clean and warm for the first time in a week. The noise outside was a dull roar of men drinking and eating and busying themselves with tents and weapons and horses, but inside was peaceful, only the drip of water and the crackling of coals in the braziers, casting fleeting shadows on the walls of the tent.
She had not looked at her naked form for some time, so she examined herself idly, mapping with her hands and eyes. Her breasts were decidedly fuller, floating about the surface of the water, the nipples the dusky pink colour they went when she was aroused, the lips of her cunt the same shade, the silvery furze of re-growing hair soft and sparse under her fingertips, but her belly was flat, no sign of the babe clinging to life in her womb. She would not be at ease about her miracle child until she felt it shift and kick, though the thought of going into battle terrified for the safety of her unborn child was a rotten taste in her mouth.

She flinched away from it, trying to root herself in the present, lying buoyant and warm in her bath, waiting for her husband to return, strip off those tiresome clothes and join her. To be on the road was a period of limbo, moving from one set of events to the next, not knowing the news of the realm north or south, just endless trudging, and too much time to think. So tonight, she refused to, her mind voided of anything except animal needs, eating, fucking, and sleeping naked in a soft, warm bed thick with furs, not shivering in a bedroll wrapped in Jon’s cloak for extra warmth, as he had predicted.

Footsteps and a halting exchange of words at the tent flap, Jon struggling with the harsh accents of her peoples’ tongue but gainfully trying. He had picked up as much Dothraki as he could in a short time, the formal tongue from Missandei’s patient teaching added to the colourful curses he had learned from the men. At his request the guards moved away to allow them more privacy, still on watch against intruders, and when the canvas parted he turned to lace the tent flap closed before the cold crept in to disturb her. Within the slap of icy air, she could smell a waft of ale, but when he moved inside to drop his cloak and gloves on a coffer and gaze at her appreciatively, he wasn’t tipsy, merely a little flushed.

‘I knew I’d find you in the bath. You’re a lovely sight in there.’ He went to the trestle, devouring a hunk of warm bread and white cheese and pouring a goblet of watered wine.

‘Who was trying to get you drunk?’ she enquired, picking up the floating cloth and running it between her breasts. At the movement of the cloth, he was distracted from the food and wandered over with the goblet, taking a sip and handing it over solicitously. The liquid was tart and quenching to her dry mouth.

‘Gendry. He’s set up a little forge for repairs and we were gathered around the fire with a cask of ale,’ he said absently, looking down at her with a heavy gaze. ‘I’m minded to pull you out of there now and take you to bed.’

‘You will not. Take those bloody clothes off, and get in,’ she said bossily.

‘There’s not enough room,’ he said, amusement lighting up his shadowy eyes.

She sighed and stretched out, making her breasts bounce. ‘There is, if I sit in your lap. I want your lovely cock in my mouth tonight, so you need to bathe, your Grace.’ With a serene smile she took another sip and put the goblet down on the floor, the boldness of her words causing his eyes to darken. ‘Take it off. I haven’t seen you naked for a week, and you’re getting an eyeful of me, I note.’

‘I am. Those beautiful tits, especially,’ he replied, quite unrepentant. ‘Gods, you’re demanding.’ Annoyingly slow, he toed off his mucky boots first, then unbuckled his sword belt, the slither and flick of black leather catching her wandering gaze, enjoying the mundane yet oddly sensual sight as she always did. The rest of it was strewn on the floor to be dealt with later by a servant, and when he was satisfactorily bare she drew her knees up to create enough space for him to step inside, as pale and lithe as a young willow tree, but cut with bulging muscles which flexed appealingly as he sat down.
They were a tangle of legs, so she shifted to a kneeling position, the cooler air of the tent dusting her with gooseflesh and drawing her nipples taut. A hand drifted to cup a breast. ‘They are definitely bigger now, lass. What are you doing? I thought you were going to sit in my lap so I can fondle these.’

‘Later. I’m going to wash you down first. Lie back and relax, my pretty lad.’ That earned her a slight pout, which she leaned in to kiss away before fishing for the cloth and bar of soap.

As she worked her hands through his hair, then coated him in suds and wiped him down slowly, he closed his eyes and talked over the events of the day, dozy and abstracted, her touch sending him into a trance, the serious flow of words dying as she drifted down the expanse of his belly. Water sloshed and spilled to the floor when she got in close to satisfy the urge to mouth his throat, flicking at the little hollow above his chest with a snaking tongue. His hands found her breasts and kneaded them, but she arched back out of reach to straddle his thighs.

The water she had sluiced over his head had created a tangle of loose, crow-black curls, his eyes now the same shade as her soapy hand found his cock and stroked over it firmly, her small fingers exploring all his sensitive places. Heat bloomed in her core and pricked her skin at the silky, heavy length in her palm, the fan of lashes descending and the little murmur that escaped his plump lips. She added more soap and glided over him in gentle pulls, the foreskin folding back with each movement, until she heard the rumble of a growl in his chest, spied a flash of teeth, a rough hand covering hers to still it.

‘Daenerys,’ he husked. ‘Stand up. Let me see all of you.’

Intrigued, she did as he asked in a deliberate slide of her breasts and belly over his chest and expectant face, finding precarious footing in the tub, the cooling water lapping at her knees. Her lover shifted into a crouch before her, running his hands up the back of her thighs to draw her closer in, then bringing them around to centre her cunt. A bubbling moan escaped her, and she clamped her mouth shut, knowing what was coming and remembering the need for silence.

Droplets trickled down her belly to bead on her mound, a faint gleam of her own wetness visible on her lips. ‘Such a pretty slit,’ he murmured into her jumping flesh, and then his thumbs were inching her apart and his tongue swiping up the peeled open folds. Her knees bowed, her hand grabbing at a shoulder for balance, the thumbs pressing inside her to stretch her delectably, his tongue concentrating on her nub to make it stand proud and swollen until he could suck at it, sending her pleasure soaring.

A cry flew from her lips, so she sealed her noise with her free hand, biting down to smother it. She wobbled as she tried to brace her feet, and he slipped a hand loose to grab her left leg and secure it over her shoulder, leaving her hand free to fist his curls and force him closer in. He ran his tongue and bristly lips from her opening to her apex to feast on her welling juices, then returned to her nub, holding it pinched between finger and thumb and lapping at it roughly. It was so intense it was near to pain, concentrated pleasure stabbing at her guts and fogging her mind, her teeth sinking into the meat of her hand, deft fingers entering her with a cruel thrust and twisting to find that spot he knew well, pushing from inside against where his mouth worked at her mercilessly.

When she came, it was if someone had hit her so hard she was blinded and winded, her weak legs collapsing beneath her, her wail only partially masked by her hand, groans and purrs into her cunt as he clamped his lips around her to relish every flutter. When she took her hand from her mouth there were deep gouges from her teeth visible, and she whimpered and blinked, resting all her weight on Jon as she could no longer feel her feet.

He rose from his position, a stream of water overflowing the bath, and picked her up, stepping out
of the tub and setting her down with a wet kiss to her panting mouth. ‘That was noisy,’ he said lowly, and she growled and nipped at his lower lip, laving her tongue over the bite and tasting the sweet and salt of her cunt. It was her turn to make him cry out, if she could. He was far better at silence than she.

Ignoring the cold that seeped through the floor, she dropped to her knees, curling around his legs like a vine, her nails digging into his bottom. With her hair up, he could see her clearly as she parted her lips and took him down, eschewing a gentle introduction to the heat of her mouth in favour of hollowing her cheeks and pushing forth until her throat protested the intrusion. He was perfectly hard, perfectly thick, tasting of soap and earth and musk, and though she felt the familiar greed in her loins, wanting him held deep in her cunt, she would taste him first.

The groan was raspy and exciting, felt as a vibration rather than a vocalisation, his hands threading in her bound hair to hold her in place to receive his thrusts into her willing throat, and she knew he would not be pulling away this time. Her fingertips skimmed down the cleft of his arse, probing within to make him jump, then settled around his stones, massaging carefully. She drew back, using her tongue and teeth at the tip, her eyes tilted up to watch his responses, his head thrown back in an elegant arch, his lips slack and emitting hissing breaths, all sound trapped in his chest, only the odd grunt or curse audible.

Her tongue slid down him to tease the spot at the root of his cock, firm pokes to make him tighten his grip on her hair, then she caught the tip of him and dived, squeezing her hand around his stones and taking him so fully she feared to choke, increasing the pressure of her cheeks until she heard him give a ripping growl that went on and on until she was rewarded by an explosion of hot seed in her throat. Moaning in contentment, she pulled back to catch the remnants on her tongue, sucking air through her nose as she drank him down, her eyes meeting his as he watched her through slitted lids.

How she loved to serve him, to see that selfish, very male abstraction on his face as she swallowed his cock. Any shyness he had about it had dissipated fast after they became lovers, along with other inhibitions. He took the most satisfaction in mastering her, sending her to madness with total ownership of her body, but at any opportunity she would return the favour, though she hadn’t the real strength or inclination to hold him down and rough him up, saving the odd smack to his very fine backside.

Sated for now, he helped her off the floor and carried her to the bed, an assembled platform with a luxurious feather mattress and multiple blankets and furs. At her request he brought her the robe draped on a chair, a thick black wool lined with grey fur and belted with a wide sash of red silk for a touch of frivolity. She didn’t bother to tie it, leaving her breasts and belly on display, tucking her chilly legs under the covers when he brought over the platter of food and wine jug.

She gorged herself on the meal, filling her empty stomach to hoard the energy, pleased there were no queasy protests, Jon shooting her approving looks as she snatched and munched, quite unladylike. ‘Don’t get sick on me,’ he warned her.

She shrugged. ‘You are quite safe, all is quiet tonight. It will ambush me in the morning, no doubt.’

‘Better save some bread, then,’ he said, taking the near empty platter, and placing it on the floor. She finished the goblet in her hand, swishing the liquid around to clear the food, and handed it over, watching a small frown of concern form on his face as he brooded over something for a moment, then shook it off, a promising curl of his mouth and deepening of his gaze diverting her from wondering about it for long. ‘You know by now what happens to a man after his belly is full,’
he said casually, and she laughed.

‘You either want to sleep, or fuck,’ she observed. ‘Which one will it be, I wonder?’

‘Oh, I think I can manage the latter, if you’re quiet,’ he said, edging under the covers to gather her up. ‘Mmm, you’re so warm, and so soft, and smell so good I could eat you up again,’ he added, nuzzling at her neck. She gave a pleased sigh and melted, though he was chilly from lolling around naked on the bed, the nip in the air not troubling him as usual. ‘My beautiful, wicked, stroppy wife,’ he whispered in her attentive ear. ‘Wicked, and loud. What is a man to do to stop the whole bloody camp hearing you…’

He was looming above her, fumbling with her robe to strip it from her shoulders, a scratch of whiskers dragging from her ear to her nipple, suckling it greedily, pressing his teeth into the small bud. She was still wet from earlier, and she felt a rising throb between her legs, spread wide to hold him against her, the stiffening mass of his cock burrowing into her folds. Though she was exhausted, her vision glassy with it, she wanted him to fill her up, overwhelm her with it, make her break in two like a fragile ornament in his fist.

‘I expect you to fuck me hard, my king, so best think of something,’ she breathed, causing him to look up and smoulder at her through the valley of her breasts. ‘I want to feel the ache in the morning when I mount my horse.’

‘Fuck,’ he mouthed, sinking his teeth into the curve of her left breast. ‘You’re going to drive me mad one day with that filthy mouth of yours.’ A hand fumbled beneath her where her robe was bunched, withdrawing with the sash between his fingers. ‘This will serve to silence you.’ He slid up her to kiss her, a soft catching of her lips, his eyes a mere inch from hers and glowing like the coals in the braziers, then he lifted her head and began to wind the sash around her mouth, several layers of silk gagging her whines and taking her breath, a loose knot tied at the base of her skull.

She could speak only with her eyes, inciting him with their disquiet, not all of it feigned, air rushing through her nose in heaves. The covers were shrugged off his back, exposing her spread open cunt, her hands plucking at the sheets nervily, and his coiled body waiting to pounce, glimmering white but for the rough hair at his groin and thighs, his cock impossibly full and flushed with need. If he bound her hands as well, it would probably be too much of everything at once, though the prospect gave her a dark thrill, but he merely grasped her thighs and pinned her legs back, the plump head of his cock finding her and ramming into her with no preliminaries.

Oh fuck, how she longed for this, to be rent apart, her inner muscles not slack enough to take his length without straining and hurting, feeling helpless and plundered. Her urgent cries were well masked by the gag, so she expressed her pleasure by thrashing like a netted fish under his weight, straining upwards to absorb every harsh thrust to her very limit, her hands flailing before grabbing his hips and finding purchase.

He fucked her so emphatically her teeth worried at the silk in her mouth, her flesh burning at each stroke until she was properly stretched and dripping wet, liquid fire that closed around him and burnt him in turn, and all in tightly controlled silence, what he was sensing shown only in his contorted face and languid, depthless stare.

Her right hand slid to her nub, and she toyed with herself to make the pleasure spike through her core, her cries now filtering past the gag, lids slamming shut at the gorgeous, infuriating sight of him. Her useless legs were dropped, and she hissed as he withdrew from her in a rush, but then he rearranged her lower half side on so her arse was exposed, sliding a knee between hers and penetrating her again, the angle and compression making her feel every vein and ridge of his cock grinding through her walls to her womb.
She could no longer touch herself, but the friction was so complete she didn’t need her fingers. She cowered and sobbed uselessly into the damp gag, hands folded against her breasts, shaking at each slap against her bottom, saddle sore from hours of riding. The tingle on her buttocks was as if he had administered a spanking, and it fought and merged with the agony and ecstasy in every corner of her twisted form. She was so lost in its dark tunnels she was separate from him, turned inwards, every noise she could not make echoing in her mind.

Then he was falling across her, ripping the gag from her mouth, catching the desperate cry from her heart with a kiss as he emptied himself into her rippling channel, the bowing of her spine under his weight nothing at all as the light of release found her and burst behind her eyelids, like the blaze of hot sunlight she ever wished for.
After he was brought back from two days and nights lost to an icy, black void of nothing at all, heaving air through his dead lungs and blood pumping through his blackening veins, sleep had
eluded Jon Snow. Instead of surrendering to it he would pace back and forth, find someone or something to fight, or fret over the new responsibilities he had acquired. Not even a surfeit of drink would fell him. He had confessed to her that he feared that sleep would lead him back to that void, and at his worst moments, that fear was hope.

She did not know all of it, it wasn’t a subject either of them wanted to dwell on. To die from multiple wounds and then be brought back when those who died were supposed to stay dead must have some deeper meaning. More than Jon needing to live again because the manner of his death was so despicable. More than the need to avenge his family, secure the North and take back his home. More than the need to find her, bind himself to her and love her. They were here for a dread purpose they had no real understanding of, and that destiny was too much to think about, along with the challenges, annoyances and lusty joys of everyday life.

It was not until he had found his way to her bed after weeks of squabbling, longing glances, and self-pleasure in their separate chambers, that Jon found rest. On their first night together after they were both well served, he had slept like a babe by her side. She remembered rising early to watch him sleep, so submerged she had admired him for some considerable time before he stirred to take her again. On the ship home from the Wall, he had slept for hours on end while he was ill, and ever since he was comatose near every night while she was often wakeful. She was the one frequently disturbed by dreams so strange and jarring that she would rather wake herself than endure them, but not tonight.

Normally the most quiet and considerate of bed mates, with no twitching and rolling and snoring, she swum to full consciousness to a series of his moans and curses, a thrashing of limbs and dragging of the covers that so disturbed her she struck a flint and lit the oil lamp beside the bed to check on her lover. Despite the dank chill of the chamber sweat beaded on his brow, and his eyes were moving rapidly beneath his creamy lids. The touch of her hand on his face drew a gentler moan, and she considered shaking him awake, but to be yanked abruptly from night terrors was not good for the mind, so she wrapped the musty quilts around her naked form and waited patiently for him to settle, or wake himself up.

Their surroundings didn’t help matters, every cracked and melted block of black, slagged stone soaked with blood and memory, the castle dusty, damp, and haunted, rot and neglect eating away at its tumbled remains. They had the best chamber available, likely the one Tywin Lannister had once inhabited, his cold, bony arse occupying the same bed, but even it was ripe with decay and discomfort.

The handful of half-mad servants that were left to Harrenhal following its cast of ruthless inhabitants during the war were lazy and resentful, and their desultory cleaning and fussing at the arrival of the uncrowned queen and king of Westeros could not banish the atmosphere that gnawed at every friend and ally that found accommodation within its walls. The castle had an evil name, and many of their party had personal, painful memories of its curse.

For her, it was the sight of the massive pile of stone melted to collapsed towers and walls by Aegon’s dragon, and the painful half-remembered tale of the tournament of the False Spring that started the final death throes of her house. For Jaime, Brienne, and young Gendry it was likely their previous sojourns as captives. For Jon it was the drunken castellan telling him his dead brother Robb and Lady Stark had passed its gates during the war to find a mountain of murdered northmen, a fragment of the bitter past he did not need to hear. It was no wonder that people looked tense and hollow eyed, and that nightmares floated in the poisonous air to be drawn within and disturb the most solid of sleepers.

Though they needed a rest from the march and the opportunity to receive messages from the realm,
and take advantage of the excellent bathhouse, she was as eager to get back on the road as Jon was. They had made good time by pushing themselves hard, but Winterfell was still so very far away, a fact that laid heavy in her husband’s mind. The bulk of the army were ordered to keep moving, only the king and queen’s inner circle and the generals opting to stay for two nights and recoup before catching up with the rest, with some Dothraki to stand guard.

After a bath, a meal, and generous amounts of ale, she had expected her husband to embrace oblivion as she had at an early hour. But here she was, sitting up in bed at the hour of the wolf, watching him fight monsters in his sleep. When his fluttering eyelashes finally opened, his eyes black and blank before they found her, she heaved in relief and managed a smile. He sat up, throwing back the tangled covers and shaking his head to clear the night fog. She had been contemplating that map of scars on his chest and belly for months, and now knew they would never fade. Her own scars were internal.

‘I’m sorry, lass, I woke you with all my wriggling about,’ he mumbled, rubbing the back of his hand across his eyes. ‘Gods, I am glad to escape all that. My heart is leaping like I’ve run a mile, and my throat is dry as dust.’ He turned and fumbled on the bedside table for the clay cup of water there, and drunk thirstily. She took it when he was done, and finished the drink herself, settling back down in the crook of his arm when she had disposed of the empty cup, her cheek pressed against the hard muscle of his shoulder.

‘What was it?’ she probed carefully. ‘I’ve never seen you dream like that, it’s usually me that gets lost in nightmares and wakes you with my flailing.’

‘Aye, and then you never want to talk about it afters,’ he said ruefully. ‘Do you think I want to? It was bloody scary nonsense, like I’d eaten something bad, or drunk of the poppy.’ At the spill of her hair, the press of her bosom against his side, his free hand began to roam, smoothing her loose locks as if petting a horse, then finding its way to cup a breast.

‘None of that,’ she murmured. ‘Tell me what you saw first, then you can grope me.’ She nipped at his throat playfully, but she was determined to find out, to compare what disturbed his rest with her own fractured visions. The lamp created a circle of golden light around the canopied bed, but beyond was inky darkness, the fireplace down to a few burning embers, like fiery dragon eyes in the gloom.

His low, husky voice was hesitant, the words dragged out of his throat by inches. ‘I saw the Wall, glistening blue and white under the light of the moon. I was standing before it as I used to do, looking up at its height, glad it was there but hating that I was bound to it forever more. Then I heard the beat of wings in the dark, and I was afraid. So afraid I thought I would choke on it. I drew my sword, but then the fear consumed me and I turned to run like a coward.’

_The dragon in the dark_, she thought, with a lurch in her guts. _The dragon that came not as a friend, but a foe_. They had shared the same dream, and it still made little sense. Her sons were only foes to their enemies, and there were no other dragons, except her lost one. The fire and sorcery that made her children hatch from stone and come to life, breathe and fly and think surely could not be twisted to be used against them, even at the hands of the Night King. The part of her brain where that prospect had lain deeply buried for months screamed out in warning when she nudged it, so she reeled away quickly.

‘Our sons are nothing for you to fear,’ she said lightly. ‘What else did you see? It is better to spit it out than brood on it, my love.’

He shifted a little under her weight, moulding her closer to his side, breasts and belly and thighs yielding to muscle and bone. ‘A load of jumbled pictures. Green fire, red fire, blue fire so bright I
could feel it burning in my eye sockets. You, collapsed in a heap on the floor, hugging yourself as if in terrible pain, that was the worst…and him. Always him, and me.’ He paused, a ragged breath shaking her along with the blunt words that dropped like stones down a well. ‘We are alone on a field of ice. I lift my sword to strike him down, but my arm is heavy, and my fingers numb, legs like lead. There is sweat in my face that’s frozen solid. I can’t see. I can’t move fast enough. I can’t…’

The rush of panic bubbled in her stomach, and she fought it fiercely, swallowed it down and hunted for the right words to ease them both. ‘You are not alone,’ she said sternly. ‘You will not face him alone. You have me, and our sons, and the glass and blades and fighters to wield them. You have a huge army at your back and all our wits and cunning. We have the light, and light always banishes darkness in the end. We have to believe that, or we will perish.’

She lifted her head to catch his eyes, fathomless and always compelling, drawing her down to wallow in fear along with him, but then she saw a rising warmth as he absorbed her forbidding expression. ‘When you get that look on your face, our enemies days are surely numbered, even that merciless blue fucker,’ he said wryly, trying on a small, sad smile and wearing it for a moment. Highly relieved, she rewarded it with a kiss, sweet and careful, a comforting slide that deepened when his cushiony lips parted to a hint of tongue.

She broke away with a shuddery sigh, her gently plundered mouth tingling nicely. ‘Enough of my mess of a head,’ he said gruffly, then his smile returned. ‘I regret we went to bed without my lovely wife being serviced well, how remiss of me.’

She laughed softly, pleased at the change in subject. Dissecting their terrible night visions would achieve nothing, whereas teasing and love making would send them back to sleep in better spirits. ‘You make it sound like a terrible chore,’ she pouted. ‘But it’s not necessary. I am quite content for you to hold me. You can make plans for that in the morn.’ She bent and kissed the line between his straight brows. ‘I will remind you, of course.’

‘Of course,’ he echoed, his mouth quirking prettily before it sought hers again in demand. It appeared that plans were being made for now, his strength lifting her easily and bringing her across his chest. Despite her demurral she felt her pulse leap and thrum, and her hips circled above him in search of friction between her straddled thighs, his kisses interrupted with murmurs of enjoyment and little nips at her neck. They were a tangle of hair, silver and black, hands finding her arse and shifting her downwards so she felt his hardening cock slide against her cunt, still closed and quiescent, but the current of need that flowed between their bodies would change that quickly.

‘I don’t care about the hour, I want you,’ he rumbled. ‘I need to be in you, I need to feel you close and hot around me, to hear you moan and know you are right here, and I am here with you.’ There was a lingering flicker of fear to the enticing words that made her heart still with pain, and she poised above him, her blue eyes so close to his she could see the line of his black pupils swamping the autumn brown.

‘Go on, then, my king,’ she said, yielding with a sigh. ‘Have me. Make me feel it too.’

A hand moved from her bottom to find her, the furled petals of her mound opened with a drag of fingertips, finding only a slight welling of nectar. If he entered her now it would hurt more than she would enjoy, but his thumb circling her nub made her body respond in a rush of nerves, and she slid up slightly to offer her nipples to his mouth. The sight of him pulling at her as if starved, the rasp of teeth followed by the subtle pressure of lips and tongue was enough to push her onwards, his thumb sliding easily in her arousal, a single finger probing and entering her channel.

Despite the glow of warmth that crept up her belly to heat her face, she shivered as the cold of the
room sunk into her bare back, and he fumbled for the quilts to cover her up. ‘I need to keep you warm,’ she heard him whisper beneath the tent of fabric, the dark engulfing them both so she could only see him through touch and scent, and once again she cursed at the restrictions of coupling with her very beautiful husband in the cold and dark of winter.

She longed to lay him down in the long grass of a sunny field one day, stripped bare to the sun, and thoroughly enjoy the sight of him hard and eager beneath her weight. She had many things to look forward to at the end of all this, the frivolous and meaningful, but the sudden picture of her northern lad at her tender mercy, white and vulnerable under the hot sunlight, was one she would pin in her mind, to dwell on at the bad moments, of which many were to come.

She smiled into the curve of his neck before the subtle workings of his fingers set her alight with a muffled moan, and feeling wet enough to take his cock inside her she purred into his ear. ‘Fuck me now, when I am nice and tight, I love that feeling when it hurts to take you.’

‘I know you do. That face you make…it has been in my thoughts from the very first, making an animal of me,’ the disembodied voice purred into her fall of hair. ‘Along with your scent, your breasts, your hair spilling over me, all the noises you make…some days, I never want to leave your bed. The world can wait until I’ve had my fill of you.’

She didn’t believe it of her dutiful lover, but her childish delight at the confession curled her toes and tightened her fingers in his messy hair, tilting his head to bare his milk-white throat to her teeth. Another finger slid into her cunt, testing her readiness, and at her groan and the pulse around his hand she was rolled over on her back, his body shielding her from the bite in the air, warm and supple after hours abed. A battered hand cupped her cheek, and she opened her eyes to see no fear or melancholy in his face, only love, pure and elemental, the dangerous edge to it lurking in the depths of his inky eyes.

Positioning himself on his knees, he took her hands and pinned them to the sheets, nosing up the space between her heavier breasts, lashes and whiskers grazing a path to her mouth. Her legs wrapped around his waist and she took him down, down into the addictive trap of her cunt, crying out in sweet pain at the first forceful thrust straight to her womb, no longer dry and empty, but full of his child, the symbol of all her agonising hopes for the world that awaited them beyond the chasm of nightmares.

***

No one was supposed to watch, but she was the queen so she went where she willed, a girlish thrill at the opportunity to see Jon fight a once legendary swordsman speeding her up staircases and down hallways until she found an open window that overlooked the Godswood, shaking off any offered escort with evasive replies. It was a dull afternoon, the sky like a sheet of pitted steel overhead, the barren trees and sombre pines of the enclosed woods an equally dismal scene of muted browns and greens. The bustle in the castle courtyard of men and servants was barely audible from her perch, the sprawling keep so enormous that their modest party was quite lost in its stone jaws.

She had donned her northern-style gown of blue wool and soft fur lined slippers that morning to play the lady for a change, her black travelling cloak hiding her bright dress and hair, turning her into a small shadow in the long gallery where she lurked to eye the men below. Two Dothraki were guarding the gate to the Godswood, of no concern to Lord Lannister given they could only talk among their own people about his lack of prowess. It was the confidence of his men he was concerned about, and they were miles away, trudging towards an uncertain welcome at Riverrun.

The two men, dark and fair, both lean and elegant in build but flexing with muscle under their
shirts, circled each other warily, the blonde near a head taller than her husband but clumsier in technique. When he still had his right hand, Jaime must have been a fine sight to see in combat, but now he was no better than a well-trained squire, with flashes of remembered brilliance. She pitied him for being so grotesquely unmanned, but wondered whether he would be with them today if it had not happened. There were three Valyrian steel blades in their possession, and despite Jon’s justified dislike of Lord Jaime he saw the sense in ensuring there were fighters worthy of them. He had agreed to match Lannister in discreet practice bouts where possible, with Lady Brienne stepping in at other times, as the woman was also very skilled at arms.

The awkward relationship between the two warriors made for an aggressive air to proceedings, their movements abrupt and vicious, with much glowering when either was forced to reel backwards out of range, mostly Jaime. It must have been a struggle with his ingrained loftiness, to ask for help and then find himself easily overcome by the bastard boy he had once mocked, but she liked him a little more for having the stones to do it.

They had both scorned practice swords to wield their wicked sharp blades, the real threat of injury adding to a tension so thick she could taste it, her eyes moving rapidly to track them across the withered grass, the beat of her heart skipping and speeding at the sight of her husband lightly clad, leaping over roots and stones as sure as a young deer as Ser Jaime wrestled with his clumsy hand and older, stiffer limbs.

‘If you weren’t my king I’d keep going until I cut the legs out from under you,’ the lord said, his eyes narrowed in vexation as Jon spun away from his latest thrust at his vulnerable mid-section.

‘I’d like to see you try it, my lord, but I haven’t got all bloody day,’ her husband growled. ‘Stop thinking with your right and think with your left. You keep lifting that stump like there’s a sword in it.’ He leaped forward, gripping Longclaw with both hands, and Jaime raised his sword to block it, the ring and screech of the blades making her wince, and the lord’s strength gave way, his sword scraping down the length of her husbands with a hideous sound before he slumped.

‘You need more strength in that arm,’ Jon said. ‘When they hit you with those ice blades of theirs, they hit hard. If you don’t withstand it, you’ll be a dead Lannister.’ His mouth twisted as if the prospect pleased him, and she swallowed a laugh that would give her away, but Jon gave the man space to right himself.

‘My little brother would grieve at least, though he shares your enthusiasm for dead Lannisters,’ Jaime said acidly, shaking out his hand to rid himself of a cramp, then shifting into a ready position. ‘I’m going to come at you again, I’ll try not to add another scar to that pretty face, in case our queen roasts me for it.’ There was a scowl at the jibe, and the older man went after him without pause, nimbler this time, more power behind his sword, gradually pushing Jon backwards into the cover of the trees, the din of their swords drowning out their gasps and curses.

‘Come on, boy, try and push me back,’ Jaime said unwisely, and she held her breath as she glimpsed the wave of anger cross her husband’s face, their swords meeting in a mighty clash, both staring each other down like a lion and a wolf in the forest before Jon twisted his wrist violently, knocking the sword from Jaime’s hand and sending him spinning backwards out of range of the point of Longclaw.

‘Don’t call me boy, Kingslayer,’ he hissed. ‘Pick up that fancy sword and try that again.’

As the blonde man scrambled for his blade and rose to meet another attack that sent them dancing closer to her window, her heart leapt to her throat, disquiet at the now crackling tension fighting with a wanton enjoyment of her husband thoroughly riled, quick and deadly and focused, testing his partners very limits as he often did to her in private. The distinction between fighting and
fucking was blurred for any man, and now she saw it, and felt it condense and lie heavy and achy in her loins.

As she watched the sweat mould his shirt to his rippling back, his eyes as black as his falling curls, she let out a warbling moan, not loud enough to overhear but somehow drawing his gaze away from his panting, flailing foe to look up to her window, catching her prying. His onyx eyes narrowed, his plump lips curling as if in a snarl, and through a cord of silent thought strung between their minds she knew what he was thinking of, and he the same. She turned on her heel and walked quickly away from the scene, knowing it would not be long until he hunted her down.

She headed to the distant bedchamber, then swore when she recalled Missandei had ordered a gang of servants in there to clean it properly, so she ducked into the council chamber instead, a dim room of plain stone walls hung with redundant banners, furnished with a serviceable oak board cluttered with maps and new raven scrolls she had yet to attend to. She dithered, fingering the messages sealed with blobs of multi-coloured wax, too distracted by her irrational desire to open and read them. She eyed the silver jug of wine instead, but then dismissed it, remembering the midwife’s advice to go easy on the drink for the sake of the babe. The room was chill, the fire only recently lit, but she removed her cloak, skin feverish from the kindling in her belly.

There was a heavy iron bolt on the door, and when Jon slipped inside he drew it across with a thump, striding across the stone flags in his mud splattered boots, sweat sheened and rumpled of hair, clad only in his shirt and breeches. She tried to edge away around the other side of the table, to entice as well as escape the dark look on his face, but he caught her easily. The shock of his cold, clammy skin against her chest as he pulled her close made her gasp, the scent of him ripe and musky, his mouth crashing down on hers with bared teeth.

She whimpered like a maiden in distress as she was plundered with tongue and lips, a hand slipping from her back to scoop her breasts out of her gown, her nipples tightening in the cold and caught between his fingers. She felt her legs go weak, a fluttering in her chest and beneath her heavy skirts, where she was bare but for wool stockings to her knees. She had always despised smallclothes and never wore them, which made her very accessible when not wearing her usual leggings, and her husband knew this well. He would have her skirts bunched and his thick cock inside her before she could blink, making her cry and struggle until she adjusted.

She supposed she should be indignant, her gown and hair thoroughly messed, her scented skin mauled and merged with his sweaty flesh, tense and damp from exertion and icy water from a quick wash, but she had no dignity when it came to this, so besotted with the taste and feel of him taking charge of her she would let out no ladylike protests at being had like a convenient whore. Slowly she was being backed into the wall, a puff of dry dust from a banner in her nose as she was pressed against the bumpy stone beneath, her skirts rolled to her waist so he could palm her between her legs. ‘Open for me,’ he grunted from between her breasts, held together in his free hand and raised to his scratchy mouth in a spill of round flesh, her nipples the colour of wine from the pull of his lips.

She parted her thighs obligingly, arching against the stone when he delved within to find her molten. ‘Gods, you’re so wet for me already,’ he breathed. ‘Thank fuck, if I’m not inside you in moments I’ll be back downstairs to beat that smug fucker into the dirt.’

Wicked laughter bubbled from her, causing the famished expression on his face to falter with a flicker of a smile. ‘I’d like to see that,’ she purred. ‘But I think its wiser to take it out on your wife.’

She slid her arms around his neck for balance, kisses raining on her face, her throat, his teeth finding the spot above her pulse and gripping her sharply as he fumbled with his breeches. She felt
it rigid and weighty against her mound, and she whined in pure need as if it had been weeks instead of half a day. There was enough light in the chamber that his eyes glowed with colour, chestnut brown and soft and vulnerable, then narrowing to dark slits as he picked her up and brought her down on his cock.

The breath was knocked out of her with a hissing expiration, her walls parting with a wrench and grind of merged flesh, steel and slippery sheath. She tore at his hair, clawed at his back, the sight of his face ceasing with his pleasure disappearing behind her slamming lids. Not caring about noise, she cried out, needing to express the complex sensations, being invaded and bruised with each deep jab, his grip on her thighs pinching, her back forced into the cold stone beneath layers of gown and tattered banner. Her neck ached where he had marked her for all to see, her back ached, her split open cunt ached and resisted and then sucked and pulled to seat him fully inside her, the pleasure overcoming the pain but so sharp it was like being stabbed through.

Slowly her jaw unclenched and her head lolled against the wall, a throaty moan rising and falling with each roll of his hips, his face leaving a red blush of aggravated skin on her breasts as he scraped his beard over her peaks. Time had slowed to a trickle despite the frantic pace. No matter what faced them there was always this, somewhere in a parallel world they would always be here, two bodies frail and strong, light and dark, fire and ice.

He was murmuring something filthy into her ear, about the tightness and sweetness of her cunt, so she countered, shameless and lewd, praising the size of his cock inside her, goading him to take her harder and punish her with it. The flattening of her body against the wall eased off, a teasing twist of his swollen mouth at her growl of annoyance when he withdrew from her clasp. ‘Don’t worry, my greedy wife. I’m not finished,’ he husked. ‘I want you face down on that table with your skirts lifted. Show me that pretty, plump arse.’

On trembling legs, she moved to obey, very glad the door was locked fast and the tower empty, as he was going to make her scream before the end. She lay down on her front, her skirts layered over her, bare arse exposed to the chill, and spread her thighs as wide as she could, her toes to the floor, his fingertips exploring the cleft of her buttocks before dipping into her heat. Her skin flared under his scrutiny, and she keened as his finger and thumb caught her nub and rubbed and pulled. There was a crack and a sting of a slap on her left cheek, then at her lusty moan he rewarded her with another. Her hands clawed at the scrubbed oak of the table as he administered another blow, her arse lifting with the pulsing in her loins. ‘Mmm, how you love that, naughty lass,’ he growled. ‘I don’t know whether to keep spanking you until you come, or fuck you raw.’

She solved his dilemma by moving her arms behind her back, bringing her hands together and offering her wrists in an echo of their wedding night, and she smiled in triumph when she heard him groan at the sight of her submission. He took them, holding the delicate bones in a tight grip of his right hand, positioning the head of his cock and yanking her backwards to receive it. Her forehead knocked against the table at the force of it, every blow reaching her womb a luscious discipline, another slap against the side of her bottom, which bucked so high to take the assault her toes left the floor.

All too soon she felt her lower half clench and release in rippling waves, and she wailed in protest at her too eager body betraying her, but he wasn’t yet done, continuing to fuck her through the waves of orgasm, the bones in her wrists bending in his fist, every lunge making an obscene squelching sound she was so wet and loosened. She was drawn up off the board in an arch of trembling limbs and smothering fabric, one final thrust releasing thick spurts of fluid in her depths, ragged moans into her hair, heaving breaths mouthed against her throat.
With a sigh of repletion, she fell forward to embrace the cool oak beneath her, squashed pleasantly by his body joining hers, static shocks of receding pleasure flowing through her core. ‘Bloody hell. Now I can sleep tonight,’ he panted, smoothing away tendrils to place a cool kiss against her burning cheek. ‘You soothed this savage beast. I think I would have gutted him if I hadn’t sensed you watching and decided to come after you instead.’

‘Feminine wisdom,’ she said languidly. ‘Though I knew it would serve my own selfish ends. I do love seeing you fight, my pretty lad, and you would have beat him bloody even when he had his right hand.’

‘Aye, I would,’ he snorted dismissively. ‘The arrogant sod. But we need him, so make sure you’re about next time, to ensure I’m not tempted.’

‘I consider it my wifely duty to distract you,’ she said, and he shook her with his laughter, her smile curling at her rush of love at the sweet sound.

‘I wouldn’t have it any other way, Daenerys Snow.’

***

The settee was threadbare but comfortable, the silk brocade worn in spots and shredded, a sad remnant of some forgotten lady’s solar, occupied again by a gaggle of women. She was slumped in her seat, absorbing the heat of the crackling fire, the lamps lit against the gathering dusk casting halos of light around her companions. Missandei was frowning over a quill and parchment, composing one of her lists. Tansy was wielding ivory knitting needles, a tiny, delicate sock forming at their ends.

The midwife’s wild hair was drawn in a sensible topknot above her broad face, green eyes darting from her work to spark at her lazy queen. ‘I see your wolf lad bit you a good one, your Grace,’ she observed, staring at the purple weal on her throat. ‘I wondered where you disappeared to this afternoon.’

‘Wolf lad,’ she repeated with a smile. ‘Is that any way to speak of your king?’ The woman chuckled, charming and unrepentant, so she indulged her just a little. ‘I rather like that, my lady. He has a wolf companion home in Winterfell. A massive white direwolf with red eyes. I can’t wait to meet him, and see what he makes of my dragons.’

‘He will be as bold as his sire, no doubt,’ Tansy said, her face alight with mischief. ‘I’m minded to knit his Grace a hat to protect that curly head of his from the cold up north, after I’ve finished the clothes for the babe.’

There was a shocked giggle from Missandei, and she giggled herself, quite at ease with the midwife’s rowdy talk by now. ‘Are you trying to shame me for my neglect of my husband?’ she said idly, supressing another unhinged laugh at the thought of Jon’s reaction if presented with a hat from his greatest admirer.

‘Not at all, your Grace,’ the woman replied warmly. ‘I doubt anyone thought to teach you to knit and sew and cook like a goodwife. You were born to be a queen.’

‘I was born into poverty and peril,’ she said frankly. ‘It would have been nice to have a boring childhood, with a mother who tried to turn me into a proper lady, but I am what my life made me.’ Wistful sadness filled her suddenly, and her hand went to her belly as she wondered what kind of life her child would have, if it was granted it.
The midwife’s clever eyes followed the move closely, her tone softening. ‘Two more weeks and you’ll begin to swell. Then I can do an examination to check all is well. How is the puking?’

‘Much better, thank the Gods. My appetite has returned, and the fatigue has lessened.’

‘You best warn his Grace about your other appetites in a few weeks,’ Tansy replied with a renewed smirk. ‘You will wear him down to a stump, the lust in you will be so strong, and I’ve heard tell the fucking is more enjoyable too.’

She felt a blush splash her cheekbones, and she could not contain her mirth, bursting with it along with Missandei. ‘Neither of us will have time for any of that, I expect, but I thank you for the warning,’ she said when she recovered. ‘I don’t remember it with my first child, but I was never at ease with my first husband. I had to be taught how to please him to tame him. I was so young, so unwilling, though I grew to love him in the end.’

The woman’s eyes brimmed with sympathy, but her words were blunt. ‘Thank the Mother you got a second chance at a good man. Most women get stuck with the same wicked, useless bastard for life.’

‘And you, my lady? No wicked bastards in your past?’ she enquired, curious to know more about this feisty woman. She had hips broad enough to birth half a dozen, but there was no sign of a husband or child.

‘I could never put up with a man longer than a few nights abed,’ she shrugged, her knitting needles clicking away as she chatted. ‘I pick and choose, but the choosing gets harder as we get older and uglier.’

She snorted at this, as Tansy was a handsome armful with big eyes and big teats, the grey streaks in her hair and laugh lines adding wisdom, not wear. ‘Surely one of the men in the armies will take your fancy? Not my husband, I might add,’ she said, and the woman smiled and tilted her head, considering.

‘I wouldn’t dare presume, your Grace. I quite like the look of that Ser Jorah. Seems a steady, reliable sort, and quite dashing for an old fellow, although he always looks miserable all the time. Is every lord of the north a moody sod?’

‘We will find out soon enough,’ she said, renewed dread at the prospect of the sullen lot of reluctant allies assembled at Winterfell flattening her tone. The lords were likely in a worse temper following the message sent to the northern houses ordering them to return to join the queen’s armies or be branded deserters. It had not been her whim, but Jon’s, who had no patience left after the message from his sister. It was likely some of them had opted to squat at home in rebellion, to be picked off one by one, either by the dead, or their retribution.

As if the direction of her thoughts was a summons, the door to the solar was flung open, the convivial atmosphere shattered by the noise, the waft of cold air from the hall, and the sight of Jon with his eyes blank with shock, his face so haunted and drained it was grey-white. She immediately stood, her hand reaching for her throat, which had clogged with sudden panic. He advanced towards her, ignoring the other women, his brow so furrowed he looked twenty years older, movements oddly leaden.

‘Ladies, can you please leave us,’ she said quietly. The women got up and left without comment, Missandei closing the door with an apprehensive glance at her frozen figure, and her gaze returned to Jon reluctantly soon as they were gone. The child inside her mind begged and pleaded for time to wind back like the hands of her timepiece, so she didn’t have to hear of whatever horror was to
‘The Wall is down,’ he said hoarsely. ‘My brother Bran saw it in a vision. The Wall is down and we are still hundreds of miles away from where we need to be.’

‘What…how is that possible?’ she said stupidly, her tongue clumsy and furred as the spit dried up in her mouth, and instead of easing her into the devastating news, her husband glowered and thrust a crumpled scroll into her hands.

‘From Sam Tarly,’ he grunted, then took in her trembling figure, the hand clawing at her throat. ‘You best sit down to read it.’

She sunk back onto the settee, smoothing the message over her knee while he prowled the room restlessly, peering at the neat but crowded writing that filled the strip of parchment.

_Jon,_

_I’m sending the raven to Harrenhal as we received the news you were leaving King’s Landing. I pray this finds you. This is the worst news I can give you, but I must. The Wall is down at Eastwatch, the dead pouring through. Your brother saw it in his greenseeing, and such was his terror I believe him. He said it was dragonfire, but blue fire, not red. I don’t understand how, but we immediately got word to the northern keeps to evacuate south or by ship, and I hope they listen. There is no news from your men at the Wall. Hurry, my old friend, do what you can to get here before it’s too late._

_Sam_

She felt as if she had been kicked in the belly with an iron boot, hunching over with a wheeze when the realisation flooded her mind. The wheeze turned to a cry from her mother’s heart, still and dead, the snatches of bitter memory flowing behind her eyes, cruel and clear. Her son Viserion pierced by a spear, screeching in anguish and falling, falling, crashing and sinking beneath the ice. She wanted to weep, to rage, to tear her hair and clothes, but like that terrible day beyond the Wall, she was locked down, strangling on her trapped agony and rocking like a madwoman.

And there was no comfort for her, no arms around her and soft kisses and crooned words of sympathy, only her husband bristling with anger and impotence, glaring at her as if he blamed her for this calamity. He did not have to spit it out, she knew what he was thinking. If she hadn’t insisted on taking King’s Landing they would be at Winterfell by now, readying for the final fight, and now they were useless, eight hundred miles or more away. She couldn’t deal with it, the sickening guilt along with her dead heart and scattered wits.

‘Leave me,’ she whispered faintly, forcing out the words through her closed throat. ‘I know you hate me right now, so go. Leave me alone to mourn my child. Come to me when you can stand to look on me again.’

Instead of spluttered denials, grabbing her and shaking her out of it, getting on his knees to gather her up, make it right, forgive her and help her mourn, or even shouting at her to draw the poison from the wound, he turned on his heel with a vile curse, fumbling for the latch and slamming the door behind him. She was left alone once again, her curled up body falling to the floor in a useless heap, her mind a fathomless void of terror and grief.
Breathing slow and deep, concentrating on the inhale and exhale, struggling to empty her head of its clamouring thoughts, she reassembled her steel shell piece by piece. But it was transparent; cruel, complicated reality beating against its surface like black moths around a lamp, hairline cracks and chinks letting agony seep through to churn her guts until she darted for the nearest privy and retched up nothing but air and bile.

Returning to her bedchamber, she splashed water on her face and composed herself, her anguish settling to a droning numbness. When she found her voice, she called out for an anxiously hovering Missandei and asked her to assemble their inner circle for a meeting in the council chamber as soon as everyone could be unearthed from the bowels of the castle. Someone needed to break the ill news, and it would not be Jon, off somewhere struggling with himself as much as she.

She should not have sent him away, but she was a fox with its leg caught in a trap, cornered and snapping, mortally wounded by the law of unintended consequences that had started a chain of events that ended with this. Her choices, his choices, their love and lust for each other clashing with the duty that made them earthbound and tore them in two, when all she wanted now was to be free of it all, no hard decisions that always seemed to be the wrong ones.

The tears she could not shed were dammed behind her eyes, heavy and hazy as she entered the chamber, the scene of her afternoon diversion, now full of apprehensive faces, brown and white, weathered and youthful, friends and allies. She delivered the news as bluntly as her husband when they were all seated, incapable of finding diplomatic words to dance around it.

‘We have received a raven from Winterfell. The dragon I lost beyond the Wall when the mission to capture the wight went awry has been turned himself. The Wall is down at Eastwatch and the dead advance on the North.’ Her voice was toneless, and she hoped nothing would show in her face or posture that relayed her utter despair. ‘We must move the armies as swift as can be managed to reach the North before it is too late.’

She folded her shaking hands in a firm clasp, watching faces empty of life, furrows in brows appear, mouths gape, heard a murmuring of curses, Qhono swearing in his own tongue when Missandei swiftly translated. She left a pause to allow people to react, but they were all too stunned to offer anything useful. ‘The best approach is for us to split the armies and send every man mounted ahead of those afoot and the wayns, to reach the Neck by the fastest route,’ she went on.

‘The supply ships should have reached White Harbour by now and begun unloading for transport upriver. Is that your estimation, Ser Davos?’
The old man stirred from his visible slump, his bewildered look sharpening at her query. ‘Aye, your Grace. The king’s men he brought south from Winterfell should have it in hand. But what of his Grace? Should he not be here?’

‘His Grace is elsewhere for now,’ she said coolly. ‘I am sure you can confirm orders with your Commander when he returns, but this news could not wait for my husband to deliver it.’ Her temper, ever eager to fire up when under stress, bubbled beneath her shell at the perhaps unwitting assumption that she was incapable of directing her armies without a man’s input. At her sharp stare, the smuggler looked cowed.

‘The Seven save us all, the useless pricks.’ Jaime swore, coming to life at last. ‘We all knew this would happen eventually, we just didn’t know the how.’ He hunched, as if a cold chill had crept down the back of his tunic.

Brienne spoke up from Lannister’s side, her stunned face forming into sympathy. ‘I am so sorry, your Grace. We have all seen you with the dragons, we know they are your children.’ At the kind words, she turned away, bringing a hand to her eyes to quell her tears lest they burst.

‘Will you ride on ahead with the Dothraki?’ Jaime said more gently. ‘That will be a punishing pace. I only wish more of my men were mounted.’

‘Tomorrow I will leave for the North to scout.’ she said distantly, resuming her queenly posture with an effort. ‘More than anything, we need to know what is happening up there. We don’t know how old the message is. Matters could have worsened since.’

The room burst into a chorus of mouthy protests.

‘Your Grace, you can’t go up there alone, without your armies!’ Lady Brienne said indignantly. ‘After what happened beyond the Wall?’

‘Khaleesi, give me leave to come with you.’ Jorah said desperately. ‘Even if you don’t engage the enemy, the North is too dangerous for you alone.’

‘You can’t possibly be thinking of going without Jon!’ Davos spluttered.

‘I only wish my brother were here. He would have many clever and persuasive words to stop this madness,’ Jaime said boldly. ‘You know what they think of you up there. You told me yourself.’

‘Khaleesi should ride with her armies, ride like this iron land was Dothraki Sea,’ Qhono cut in, the tallest and most formidable figure at the table. ‘Ride fast and fight these ice demons with all her strength, and leave a mountain of burnt bones.’ He thumped his fist on the board in emphasis, glaring at her, and before anyone else could pipe up she raised her hand for silence.

‘I need all of you to lead the armies safely north and be on watch for trouble within and without,’ she said quietly, deliberately avoiding the sore subject of Jon. ‘I am not so foolish that I would try and engage the enemy alone, not this time. I will fly to Winterfell to get news and help where I can. I don’t expect the Starks would harm me. We are bound by blood now, whether they like it or not.’

Davos and Brienne relaxed slightly and nodded, but the others looked dubious. ‘The Starks likely not, but the rest of that rebellious lot? An arrow, a blade in the dark…you must be careful with yourself,’ Jaime blurted. ‘If we lose you, forgive me your Grace but we are all fucked.’

‘Lord Lannister is right,’ Jorah said worriedly. ‘I have warned you of this before, and now with your dragon turned…they will not understand, Khaleesi. They will blame you.’
‘The queen needs armour,’ Davos muttered to himself. ‘I’ve been thinking on it for a while. Perhaps Gendry can find something in the stores. Ser Jorah is right, some madman with a longbow and a grudge, and…’ His wise old eyes glanced at her belly, and he stuttered to discreet silence.

‘If dragon will take me, I will go with my queen,’ Grey Worm growled. ‘Let any man look at you with hate, and I will end his life, and swiftly.’

There was a rumble of agreement around the table, more men stirring to talk her down, make offers to protect her. ‘Enough!’ she spat. ‘Someone must go, and that is me. I can be there in a day or two, and I will not linger. My place is here, but we must have news, and ensure those who can evacuate south. You all know what my role is. I am your queen, but I am also here to fly and fight, and help, even if people would rather spit in my eye than take it.’

The taut strings which held her together like a mummer’s puppet threatened to snap, and she reached for the edge of the table to steady herself against the rush of adrenaline pumping through her, quickly followed by a throat full of bile. ‘You have my orders, and his Grace will be here soon to confirm them.’

They were her parting words, as she could endure no more without faltering in front of their fretting, fussing faces, hoping they were true. She had not let herself think of Jon since she had brought herself under control, not wanting to be entangled in that black snarl of emotion roiling in her mind. She blamed herself for the Wall falling and being so far away from where they needed to be to make their stand, but if she let herself, she would also blame him.

Wherever he was, standing on the castle walls staring into the pitiless night, or locked away drinking, or writing messages home, she did not want to face him, to see the love gone from his eyes and only resentment and obligation left. There was no untwining the knots that bound them together now, but they could chafe and cut into her and drive her mad, as mad as her father.

Near running from the chamber in a pathetic attempt to escape her own brain as well as the rumblings of fear and disapproval, she felt dry sobs well in her throat, the shell around her losing form and strength as she hunted for privacy, and find it in herself to face this hellish reality.

***

She was unable to settle, constantly pacing and fiddling, picking at her trailing sleeves and her too tight bodice, clapping her wrists to dull the ache from her jittery pulses, fingering the items of warm clothes Missandei was unpacking to get her to focus on something mundane. And cold, so cold her bones were encased in ice, as if she was already deep in the North atop Drogon, the wind burrowing through her lonely, frail figure, the saviour and sinner. Standing close to the fireplace did nothing to thaw her, so she guessed it was the shock, her inner fire subdued to a mere flicker, the fire that had brought her through every danger and disaster.

She managed some polite words and feigned interest when Brienne brought her some items from the armoury, a dead northron squire’s grey leather tunic of thick heft, lined with metal plating between the inner and outer skin, quilted black breeches and gambeson that would swallow her up, but would serve with multiple layers beneath. It was kindly meant, and more likely to protect her than her usual battle dress. She had not forgotten the Blackwater Rush, her vulnerability once she was without Drogon’s protection, bloody Lannister again trying to end her with a reckless charge, another crime she was forced to set aside.

Her loyal friend failed to persuade her to eat the meal set out for her, or lie down and rest, her movements becoming more agitated as Jon failed to appear, but her suggestion of a bath was seized upon, hoping that scalding hot water would banish the winter from her aching body. She had
Missandei brush and braid her hair into a sensible coronet for the morning’s journey, and then set off in her black wool robe and slippers, the red sash wrapped around her waist giving an ugly twist of memory to her mouth. She wished her anger would spark, turn her into a screaming termagant to vent some of the choking pressure. Anything was better than this, the endless spiral of dread thoughts that coiled in her like a venomous snake eating itself.

There were three square tubs in the Harrenhal bathhouse, fed by a massive boiler system in the cellars that dated from the castle’s construction. With guards at the door to ward off interruptions she shed her robe and stepped into the hottest bath, the wash of prickly heat flushing her a rosy pink, comforting on a superficial level but doing little to settle her head. She dunked down in the centre of the pool then floated, closing her eyes and seeing ice and rocks, the swarming dead and a fountain of red dragon blood spilling on the white and grey landscape. She nudged it away with a struggle to replace it with an image of red and gold flames, an inferno consuming a field of rotten bones, the sun rising sluggishly over a broken horizon to bathe her in radiant light.

By inches she calmed, but then the tears began to leak down her face, mingling with the beaded sweat and steam. She had not felt this powerless for a long time, not since she was a girl, so she wept like that lost orphan she thought long gone, praying to all the cruel and useless Gods of the wide world for a little light, to bring her fortitude rushing back to stiffen her spine and clench her jaw, and stop her crying.

The slosh and drip of water, the roaring of the boilers beneath the marble floor, her gasping and sniffling masked his steps, her filmed eyes catching sight of him hovering at the edge of the pool, his angular face resolute and closed but his dark eyes so full of sorrow the panic churned and filtered through her veins anew.

‘Please don’t,’ she whimpered. ‘I have endured as much as I can stand tonight, and I won’t have my memories sullied by fighting with you here. If you have things to say to me at last, it can wait until I’m out of the bath. Just go!’ Her voice was shrill, her temper finally ready to explode at the sight of his big, sad, captivating eyes, at the stubborn silence, firmly held by his soft lips thinned to a line of misery. Her aggravating, beautiful lover with his pure heart, his shoulders so burdened by conflicting cares that were now hers to share, his smiles so rare she hoarded them like jewels. She wanted to snarl at him to sod off so she could lick her wounds some more, but he wouldn’t.

There were no cold words of resentment to confirm what she assumed earlier, just melancholy and fear as consuming as her own, flickering across his stillness as he wrestled with whatever dark thoughts that had sent him running from her, and won. ‘I will not go,’ he whispered at last, a thread of words, but as strong as steel. ‘Scream at me if you like, call me an arse, hit me, I deserve it, but you will not send me away again, and I will not run like a coward from the mess in my head.’

Her eyes broke away from his with a vile oath, and she suddenly noticed he was barefoot, and as his fingers jerked at the laces of that ratty old gambeson she hated she growled and swam away as if to climb out the other side of the pool, but she didn’t. She clung to the side of the tub, the marble edge cutting into her arms. The water was far too hot for him, but he bravely got in to follow her, his hissing expiration at the shock of it drowned out by splashing as he swam across to grab her. She considered putting up a fight, but she was as limp as a broken doll, settling across his lap and immediately hiding her teary face in the curve of his neck. She would let him talk, whether it soothed or scraped her raw, she would be a woman and not a bloody girl.

‘I know what you thought when I brought you the news,’ he began in a low rumble. ‘You thought I was angry with you for not being where we have to be because of King’s Landing, and I was, for a bit. I’m so scared for my family and people I am sick with it, but most of all I was angry at myself.’
He swallowed so hard she was jostled, and she lifted her head to see it all unfold in his expressive eyes, his words clipped and laced with guilt. ‘I was the fool who went up there ill prepared, with a death wish as you told me, because I didn’t fucking care about myself enough, and I was hoping to impress you like a bloody braggart. You asked me not to go on that mission, and I did anyway, and now your son is the enemy’s greatest weapon, because you came to save me. Because you felt it your duty, and because you loved me.’

She couldn’t let that lie, there was truth in it, but there were also her own hard truths. ‘It was my choice to go, and I would do it all again if I needed to. You weren’t to know what would happen up there, I didn’t know. Just was we didn’t know when and how the Wall would fall.’ She took a shuddering breath, her hands sliding up to grip the sides of his face so he couldn’t evade her. ‘It was fate that brought you to me, and fate that took my son and turned him against us. We are trapped in a destiny neither of us want or understand. If it hadn’t happened this way, it would have in another way. I will not blame you, and I will try not to blame myself, if you will do the same.’

How to fight their way out of that destiny, there was still no answer, only a helpless fury that she refused to be grounded by any longer. In his arms, seeing all that possessive, painful love in his earthy eyes was bringing a creeping energy to her heavy limbs, was banishing the agony of that moment in the solar to a far corner of her brain to hopefully wither, and not grow malignant. If there was no answer, there was comfort in kissing away the sad, hard line of his lips until they were plump and relaxed under hers, a little sigh and shift under clinging body as he yielded.

‘I will never hurt you again, I swear it,’ he said thickly as she pulled away, his eyes blinking away a welling of tears. ‘I felt like the world’s greatest shit, and when I got to the council meeting after you left Davos looked like to punch me for it, and Jorah of course. My poor lass, you thought you could carry on, but they all saw how you were.’

She winced at that, as she had hoped it was hidden well enough from the others, but she managed a frail smile to reassure him. ‘Ser Davos is very gallant,’ she said lightly. ‘He sent me some armour from the stores. He thought of it before you did.’

‘Aye, he has shamed me,’ he said moodily, making her smile strengthen. ‘But he doesn’t know how bloody stubborn you are. You are rather attached to your battle clothes, but they won’t serve if an arrow finds you, my queen.’ A hand at her waist slid to the soft expanse of her belly, then skimmed over her breasts to rest over her heart. ‘You will wear that armour under your fur coat, and if anyone tries at you when you’re on the ground I will be there to cut him in two. What made you think you would be going without me, you damn silly woman?’

The answer was so muddled it wasn’t worth explaining, and she didn’t need his guilt if she confessed that when he walked out on her she had felt so alone she had fallen back on her old self, solo and isolated, despite his child in her womb and her weak woman’s heart that she had given over to him forever.

She wrapped her fingers in his crow-black hair, curled tightly in the steamy air of the bath, and nuzzled his neck, a few little nips of his flushed skin to renew her ownership. Roaming hands settled on her bottom, drawing her closer in. ‘I know you are anxious to get to Winterfell. We can leave tonight if you wish,’ she offered, trying to return their focus to serious matters, though the prospect of a long winter night in swift flight make her shiver violently.

‘I want to get there now,’ he said, exhausted and hollow. ‘But no. You are with child, and you’ve had a bad shock. I won’t let you push yourself that hard. And besides…’ A hand found her chin, lifting it so he could show her his lustrous, heavy lidded eyes full of promise. ‘I would like one last night in a warm bed, caring for my wife, before it all goes to the deepest hell.’
When they returned to the unappealing bedchamber, still dank and gloomy despite the roaring fireplace and fresh linens on the creaky oak bed, a perpetual shiver settled into her bones, her teeth chattering, feet scuttling to the hearth to warm herself as best she could. As she sat on the faded Myrish rug to hold her hands close to the flames she felt a heavy weight of fur drop over her back, and she pulled his cloak around her gratefully, sniffing leather and musky male, hiding within its comfort until nothing was visible except her face. ‘I’ll get some heat and light in here, you look like a frozen waif on a doorstep,’ Jon said worriedly, and went to the door to call for a servant impatiently.

She did not stir as chastened castlefolk scuttled in and out, her husband giving the servants a glower of regal displeasure as braziers were hauled in and lamps lit, and when it was done, he locked the door behind them with some muttering about shit castles and lazy southron sods. The room was ablaze with golden light, every shadow banished, and the three iron braziers flared with extra warmth. A smile of relief was dragged out of her, earning a look of approval and an offered hand to help her up. ‘Come on now, lass. Let’s get you to bed. There’s hot bricks in there, and I want to hold you.’

‘I hate feeling like this, so weak and useless,’ she said abruptly, not moving from her undignified spot, and he snorted fondly, his attentive gaze softening before he hauled her to her feet, his cloak left in a heap on the floor.

‘I know you do, but at least I get to spoil you a bit when you are like this, all soft and needy.’

‘You are always spoiling me, every chance you get,’ she said tenderly, her weak eyes prickling with fresh tears, but she hid them from him by sinking into his arms, clingy and horribly vulnerable, both the most fortunate and unfortunate woman alive as he picked her up and carried her to the bed, sliding her beneath the blankets with a kiss on her forehead before moving away to inspect the food laid out on the small table.

She felt a faint stirring of her usual admiration of his elegant body, fluid and enticing even in his old clothes, his hair loose, tilted black brows signalling a frown as he picked up the platter and brought it to her. ‘I am not hungry,’ she protested as he set it down and perched on the edge of the bed, his frown deepening.

‘I know you’re not, but you need to eat for the babe,’ he coaxed. ‘Choke it down, and try not to sick it up afters.’

He selected a slice of rye bread, some cold chicken, a hunk of yellow cheese, folding the bread into a sandwich and offering it to her. She took it and nibbled cautiously, every morsel dry and unpalatable, but she ate it all to please him. Then an autumn apple, still tart and sweet, cut into segments and held to her mouth as if she was an invalid, which should have been annoying but somehow only soothing, the touch of his fingers on her lips after she swallowed each piece stirring her to dart out her tongue and lick the juice from them, bringing a small smile to his solemn face.

A pretty iced cake made with increasingly scarce lemons she ate with some relish, then she refused the rest, watching him polish it off with little enjoyment, eating for fuel only, like it was some unappetising slop served in camp. Wine was poured, and he drunk that thirstily while she sipped at hers, dearly wanting to get as drunk as Tyrion but mindful of the midwife’s advice.

‘The generals are leaving early tomorrow as I ordered?’ she finally said when the platter was gone and Jon was back to lie next her, toying with an unravelling tendril of her hair, his right hand flexing and releasing, a sure sign of stress.
‘Aye, they will catch up with the armies on the march and lead the riders straight to Moat Cailin,’ he said. ‘Qhono has maps, but he will have to get one of the young Dothraki who can read to help him. Lannister and Grey Worm will stay with their armies as they’re mostly afoot, but they will push them hard. I sent a raven to Lord Edmure to tell him to get the reserve moving. The wayns will have to lag behind.’

Satisfied somewhat, she relaxed into the crook of his arm, considering whether to continue with business, or find forgetfulness in soft, loving words and touches, but duty pulled at her with its heavy paws. ‘What are we going to do?’ she said, her tone dull with the pain that squeezed at her throat. Viserion wasn’t her son anymore, and she had to keep that fixed in her mind, as the dread day would come soon when she would have to see him, rotting and dead but animated by a monstrous evil she could not fathom. She would have to see him, and then kill him.

His brow was so furrowed Jon looked aged, giving her a glimpse of what he would be like if they lived that long, with silver strands in his midnight hair and the weathering of hard years on his handsome face. A deep sigh spilled from his lips, but his gaze was determined, his eyes smouldering black coals. ‘We have two dragons and the enemy has one. We best go ahead with your mad scheme to get me on Rhaegal, if he doesn’t take a bite out of my arse first.’

She actually laughed, a limp gasp that nevertheless made his eyes crinkle at the corners. ‘I love you, my brave Jon Snow,’ she smiled, turning her head to nose at his beard and leave a kiss. ‘And worry not, the only dragon who will bite your arse is your wife.’

It was a lame attempt at levity that worked, a smile glinted at her, shy and sad, so she dropped more kisses on his face, his proud, straight nose, the silver scar bisecting his eye, until his arm tightened around her, his lips catching her wandering ones delicately, just a slight scrape of whiskers and a flick of tongue that sent her fallow heart beating at last.

Her hand tangled in knotty curls at the base of his skull, and she gently loosened them so they slid between her fingers like silk. ‘You wear your hair down more these days,’ she murmured when he freed her mouth, his lids creamy half-moons as he regarded her steadily.

‘It keeps my ears warm,’ he said gruffly. ‘And you said you liked it.’

‘I do, as do others,’ she said, her lips curling in faint mischief. ‘Lady Tansy is threatening to knit you a nice hat to protect your pretty head.’ At his decidedly grumpy look, she laughed harder this time, a fall of giggles that surprised her, and lifted a corner of the black pall over her spirits.

‘Because I know you are mine, my love,’ she said serenely. ‘And I am yours.’ She had the bruises and bites to prove it, and his scent imprinted in her skin, the touch of his hands rough and tender, the overload of all her senses when he was nestled deep inside her. If she had nothing left at the end, if all her hopes and ambitions crumbled to ash, then at least she would die with the knowledge she had been well served and well loved, before she knew and felt nothing.

Her one bright moment grew dim, and she slumped, his brows lowering as he absorbed her renewed despair. ‘No Dany, please don’t. To hear you laugh made me feel better,’ he said, dragging her so close she got lost in his shadowy eyes, her own blinking to hold back more weeping. ‘I want to make you happy, at least for an hour.’ He kissed her downturned mouth. ‘I’m not done spoiling you just yet. Take that robe off and lie with me.’

The chamber was now heated enough that she could lie naked with only her feet tucked under the
thrown back covers, curled in repose with a hard body at her back, her bottom cradled by his hips, hands drifting over her carefully, exploring every familiar curve and line, the weight of a breast, the furze of silver hair surrounding the lips of her cunt, the inside of her thighs indented by the pads of his fingers parting them so he could cup her mound. ‘I love it when its stripped bare, all pink and slippery in my mouth,’ he whispered into her ear. ‘But it’s probably best to let the hair grow out to keep you warm down there.’

She snorted at this and wriggled her arse against his sleepy cock, which she didn’t expect much of since he had already had her that day, and terror and worry did little for a man’s desire. Her own desire was a subdued tingle in her loins, but it was pleasant just to be held and caressed, to be rolled over on her front and have his strong, sure hands work at the tension trapped in her neck and down her spine, gasps of discomfort merging to enjoyment as he kneaded her muscles carefully, his hands splashed with a little almond oil he had found in an open coffer.

She sniffed the subtle scent of it, a flood of cherished memories of its previous use making her squirm against the sheets. She was beginning to feel drugged and floaty, the poison emptying from her in a slow trickle, and so warm from the heat of the fires and the firmness of his hands she could imagine they were in that endless summer of escape she stupidly hoped for, even now. He was now digging into the small of her back, still stiff from long days in the saddle, and she moaned in bliss, a shifting as he straddled her legs. ‘Such a tempting, round arse you’ve got,’ he said, his voice as rich as honey. ‘It’s no wonder I often have the urge to smack it.’

He liked to do more than that, from the number of times he had taken her from behind, in one entrance or the other, she guessed it gave him the greatest pleasure to have her bottom lifted to receive him, her head bowed and her hands tied or grabbing the covers, or busy between her thighs to heighten the sensations he ripped from her, and much as she loved to look on him as he fucked her, she felt the same. Her exhausted mind had retreated down a familiar path of raw, heedless lust, her only outlet other than crying and screaming at the unfairness of all of it. And Jon knew her, he knew that it would ease her, allow her to snatch a few hours rest before they had to call the dragons down and leave to survey the wreckage.

She was an indolent wife, being served devotedly and thus far giving nothing back, murmuring incoherent noises as his hands took handfuls of her buttocks and rubbed oil in slow circles, but she was already thinking ahead to what she might do for him. She could let him control her utterly, give and take as he willed, her cunt or her arse or both, and she the submissive, or she could assert herself, try to snatch back some of the power that had left her that day, draw strength from it, shallow and fleeting, but better than nothing.

Despite her doubts, he wanted her, evident by the gravel in his voice, the weight of his cock glancing against her cleft, his fingers straying to dip into her folds, finding her liquid, and she mewled softly and spread herself to allow his hand to reach her nub, catching it with a rough drag of his thumb, two fingers easing inside and curling. She was tight from distress that hadn’t entirely dissipated, so the pleasure spiked quickly, her arse lifting with every wriggle and splay of his fingers to work her inner muscles. She panted and sunk her hands into the pillows, lifting clear of the bed to offer herself, the dark path followed to the inevitable conclusion.

‘Mmm yes, my queen. I want you to come…I want you to come for me and then sleep,’ he rumbled, her nub now free of its sheath and circled closely as he fucked her with three fingers, the slick sound heard over her heaving breaths. With a helpless cry, her hips rolling with the ripples of release, she rode out her abrupt climax, her cunt clamping around his hand, eliciting a growl of satisfaction at her obedience, slithering up her quivering form so he could kiss her and croon nonsense love words, his fingers still in her wringing out every last flutter.
His hand slipped from her in a trail of juices across her thigh, and instead of following her receding climax into rest she stirred under him, rolling him away from her with an abrupt shrug. As he settled on his back his eyes flicked at her, dark with apprehension, but then smouldered as she climbed on top of him. ‘I was hoping you would go to sleep,’ he said ruefully, his lovely lips and pale skin flushed from the heat and his own arousal, deliciously evident beneath the fork of her legs.

‘Not until I’ve had you in every way,’ she said significantly.

‘I’m not going to say no to a beautiful, bare arsed wife bossing me around,’ he snorted, his tongue laving his lower lip enticingly. ‘Go on, then. We will see how long you can stick at it.’

She sniffed haughtily, then searched for her tangled robe on the bed, drawing out the length of red silk from the belt loops, trailing it across his sculpted belly to tickle him before taking one hand, moving his arm about his head, then the other. He looked rather disconcerted, which made her smile in triumph, and she acted before he could grumble, her breasts hanging over his face as a distraction as she looped the silk around his wrists in a tight knot, then slipped the long ends through the carved railings of the headboard to secure him.

‘Here you will stay, until I’m done with you and set you loose to take your revenge,’ she purred, sitting back out of reach of his bristly mouth on her nipples, admiring her handiwork, her beautiful man naked and hard, the red sash a vivid contrast to the milk white of his skin and the raven black of his curls spilled across the bleached linen pillows.

Although she wanted to snatch and grope and claw in ownership and leave her mark on him, her touch was deliberately slow and delicate, the tips of her fingers, the brush of her lips and lashes, travelling from his brow downwards, her tongue dipping into his mouth and then removed before he could devour her lips, flicking over the hollow of his throat then circling each nipple, a scrape of teeth across the tiny buds to make him jump. Every nasty, unhealed slash on his torso she kissed as if her love would make them vanish, the thump of his heart increasing in pace as she slid lower, her breasts closing around his cock and pushed together with her forearms so the soft envelope of flesh stirred him to groan and strain a little in his bonds.

There was now nothing in her head except the sense of him, taste and scent and warm, quivering skin. She slipped lower, the flat of her tongue following the dusky trail of hair to his groin, her hands inching his thighs apart so she could kiss him there, nipping sharply at tough muscle, one hand closing around his stones, weighing and stroking. When her mouth drew closer to her goal her fingers slipped down between the cheeks of his arse, experimenting to see his reaction, just glancing over his hidden place until he made a shocked noise and bucked. Backing off, she settled for kneading his bottom with both hands until his legs shifted wider beneath her crouch, her mouth not engulfing but her tongue swiping up his length in a lazy lick.

The sweet anguish of being at a lover’s mercy was very familiar to her now, so she gave him the same treatment, her tongue and lips exploring him leisurely, seeking out the spots most like to make him groan and struggle, her left hand latched onto his hip to hold him down as she lapped and nuzzled and finally sucked, first a mouthful of his stones, dragging a curse out of him as he watched her with glittering black eyes, then a bigger mouthful of his cock, her cheeks pulling taut around him as she took him down, deliberately scratching the length of him with her teeth, enough to make him hiss but not enough to hurt.

She was excited by the sight of him pulling at the bonds around his wrists as his body rolled to meet her accommodating throat, the sash drawing tighter. He could probably rip free of them easily enough and was merely indulging her whim, but the playacting was causing a throb in her loins and
nectar to stick to her thighs, her body now kneeling with her legs pressed close to hold herself back from sitting on his cock to ride him ragged. She used her breasts again, letting him slip from her mouth and holding his cock between them, her head bent to lap at the inflamed head teasingly, catching a dribble of fluid from the slit that she savoured.

She should fill her mouth and let him come so he could sleep sated and forgetful, but she was a selfish whore, always needing more, and she was so roused her considerate side was silent. She crawled up him, all tense muscle and bone, not stopping to kiss him but straddling his face shamelessly, hooking a hand to the headboard and opening herself, sobbing her relief when her fiery flesh was pulled into his mouth hungrily. She settled herself comfortably, directing him to where she needed him most, the skin of her belly and breasts tightening, pulsing red behind her eyelids as her nub was sucked and poked and rolled with consummate skill.

Her hand left the headboard and twined in his, her frail bones grinding in his trapped grasp, and she threw her head back and wailed, letting herself go in a series of wild jerks against his mouth as he brought about her second orgasm with a furious lapping, teeth and mobile lips forming a seal over her to drink it down. Her legs twitching, her cunt thoroughly mauled, she fell backwards, dragging her hand free of his with effort, whimpering softly at the sight of his beard and reddened lips sheened with her dew, his lashes a languid flutter over his dazed eyes. ‘You are driving me mad, Daenerys,’ he husked. ‘I am about to burst. Have pity and let me out so I can fuck you.’

She eyed him coolly and shook her head once, a demanding queen despite her visible tremble, the craving to let him loose on her to see what he would do to make her shatter. ‘I am not done yet,’ she said, fighting a smirk when she saw him scowl. ‘You look so delectable tied up I’m going to enjoy it a little longer.’

‘Fuck…wait until I get my hands on you, wife.’

‘I will enjoy the consequences as well,’ she said wickedly. ‘Lie completely still and watch me take you.’ She fumbled in the rumpled sheets for the bottle of oil, popping the cork and pouring a little on her palm, then sliding down his torso to curl her hand around his swollen length, smoothing the oil from root to tip in a tight glide that made him moan and strain upwards disobediently. She didn’t need it as she was utterly soaked, but it felt deliciously different to sink down on him with ease, big and hard as granite but silken with oil, buried entire and pressed against her womb, every nerve ending in her cunt tingling as she writhed on him and mewled like a cat in heat.

He tossed his head against the pillows, his teeth sinking into his lip sharply, the cords of his pale throat flexing along with his trapped fists. ‘So fucking good,’ he groaned. ‘Ride me, ohhh Gods, just like that…’

She had planted her feet and moved into a squat, her knees parted widely so he could see her cunt stretched around him lifting and falling, every knock against her womb sending a jolt of sensation through her. There was a tearing sound as the sash around his wrists yielding to his restless struggling beneath her, the slippery channel of her cunt only tormenting, not enough to bring him to the threshold. She moved slowly, savouring the pleasure that washed over her and cleansed her of every bitter and fearful thought, wishing she could stay like this, that everything else was an awful dream and this was her only reality.

His hips began to drive from the mattress in search of more friction, and she stilled to receive each lunge, hitting her harder, making her gasp for more, the lure of his savagery becoming very tempting. ‘Let me go, my love,’ he growled at her. ‘I know how you need it.’ Shaking her head in denial, she fell forward, grabbing onto his shoulders and kicking her feet behind her so she was on her knees, bringing herself down hard on his cock to prove a point, bending to bite his lips
viciously, his ink black eyes locking with hers and battling until she slumped with her strenuous effort and gave in, but her surrender would be well rewarded.

Once she had hurriedly picked the knots on his bonds to let him go, she was tipped over on her back, her legs bent backwards over her torso, arranged to receive his cock, her arse lifted and her feet touching the headboard. The first thrust was so intense her eyes stung with an acid sweet burst of sensation, then she cried and braced herself as he began to fuck her in harsh, deep jabs, somehow giving the addictive feel of being forced though she was liquid and well broken in. He drew it out like a spool of silk, the relentless movements never slowing but going on and on, her cries a savage expression of the pressure, filled so deep it was as if he was trying to lose himself inside her and never come out.

She clung to the headboard as if bound hand and foot, her bottom lifting higher in invitation, and the sight of him pulling loose and pushing past her swollen lips to sheathe himself again caused her to clench around him to hold him locked. Each movement became a hammering blow, until she could no longer absorb it, the weight of him bearing down on her, her tender cunt molten and plundered, her womb holding a dense mass of pleasure that needed to vent, but had no outlet.

‘Come love, just one more,’ he crooned. ‘I know you can.’ She looked up at him dazedly, taking in the animal enjoyment in his face, his black pools travelling over her bent, pliant body, her cunt like the blown petals of a rose, the distress in her face, and he made a low, savage sound. ‘Touch yourself,’ he urged her roughly. ‘Like you showed me, or I will keep going until you cannot walk…can’t come until you do.’

It did not take much, a few drags of her fingers around her nub and all her inner muscles bunched, the pleasure releasing with her throaty scream, licks of flame that coated her shivering skin like the fires she had walked through, not scorching and blistering, but embracing her like armour. Every joint in her body slackened as if a key had unlocked her, falling limp and then clinging to him, bringing him down to gasp into her parted lips as he came with her.

Their foreheads were pressed, their eyes not screwed closed but wide and naked, two lost souls, lonely and struggling, brought together at the worst possible time, and suffering for it. Two stubborn souls that refused to let anything break them.
I can never leave the past behind

A/N: In this chapter, bad weather on the way to Winterfell forces Jon and Dany to stop for the night at Greywater Watch, home of Howland Reed, who knows something. A stroppy alternative take on what is commonly known as 'the reveal' (I hate that label by the way), I did my best. I expected it to be tricky and it bloody well was, so let me know what you think.

Thanks to the Tarts for putting up with my grumblings and mutterings this week, I am really annoying and super salty, so my gratitude xxx

It was possible to fly to Winterfell in a single day, but a biting wind howling straight from the north slowed their journey, the clammy charcoal clouds swirling around the dragons and coating any extremity not protected by huddling close to each other or Drogon’s hide. Then the snow began to blow from every direction, the swirling white flakes sticking to hair and faces and gumming eyes closed. It was so disorientating she felt lost in an eternal grey twilight, so cold every joint was seized up in her body, and before the grey could darken to ink when the short day ended she signalled Drogon to drop down below the cap of snow clouds so they could check their location via the straight arrow of the Kingsroad.

The landscape below was a flat expanse of festering swamp, grey pools and rivulets of slack water weaved through with low growing plants and islets of grey and green and dull purple, the snow settling on its bleakness in a thin crust. It took some searching before the road was found again, an elevated stone causeway devoid of movement. The shriek of the wind dropped a little so she could hear Jon speak urgently into her ear, his voice muffled by the ache in her head. ‘We can’t stay up here all night, we will freeze in this bloody blizzard! We need to look for shelter. Keep close to the road, I will try and find my bannerman’s keep. If we can’t find it, then we will have to go on to Moat Cailin.’

She should remain strong and insist on pushing on, but either option was better than this frozen hell, so she slowed Drogon’s pace with a spear of thought so the terrain below was easier to scout, Rhaegal drawing up to the right a wing’s breadth away, snow falling and hissing steam on his green hide, his discontented grumble echoed in a vibration beneath their seats as Drogon agreed. It was near dark when Jon spotted it and gave a shout, a halo of golden light surrounding a low, long hall of mud brick and thatch on an island encircled by tall flaxes and rushes, neat outbuildings and sheep pens taking up all available space.

A humpback bridge of planks joined the compound to an island that was empty of buildings, so they came into land on its cramped expanse of turf, the flurry of mud and growls and thumping of massive bodies met by shrill shrieks from the smallfolk who were outside to see their arrival. After stretching clumsy limbs and brushing off hunks of collected snow and ice, they crossed the bridge to find the keep island deserted but for a few faces peeping out windows and doorways. She was nonplussed at the lack of welcome, but eventually a small, lithe woman strode forth, with long, dark curls and the practical dress and easy grace of a fighter.

The lady knew Jon by sight, though he had never met her, and it wasn’t until they were inside and led to a crackling fire that the woman began to talk freely. She was offered a comfy chair, a cup of mulled wine was pushed into her deadened hands, nervous looking servants ordered to bring food and ready the best chamber for their use. The great hall was spare and unfussy, white painted plaster walls hung with furs to keep out the draughts, the great fire peat bricks that burned blessedly hot.
Much as what was said between her husband and Lady Reed made little sense to her. She was so concentrated on thawing out, and the names and places and odd tales seemed like a fever dream, much the same as the nightmares that troubled Jon back in Harrenhal. Infinitely weary, and damn uncomfortable in her many layers of clothes under her white fur battle coat, she squirmed in her chair, fought the urge to yawn and shook herself, trying to catch the meaning in the exchange of words.

‘You took my brother, a crippled defenceless boy fleeing from his home, took him to the most dangerous place in the world,’ Jon said. ‘And you say you were sent by your father to protect him?’

‘Bran wanted to go,’ she replied, stirring on her feet. ‘He had to go, he said. He had to learn to see past and present and future so he could help you. My brother Jojen died up there, Hodor died, but I lived to take him home to you.’ At Jon’s glowering look, the young woman straightened, her voice strengthening. ‘He saw you at Craster’s Keep and turned away. Then he saw you again through the trees, and then when he was stronger, through his own thoughts. He saw you die at the hands of your brothers. He saw you live again. He saw you win back Winterfell. He saw you become King in the North, and he saw you leave for Dragonstone. He probably saw much else, but he didn’t tell me everything.’

‘Aye, I know what he can see,’ Jon growled. ‘I have had ravens from him, none of them good.’ He shivered as with a sudden ague, and drifted closer to the fire to banish it. Her eyes followed him anxiously, her tongue leaden and still. ‘The Wall is down, and we are travelling north to Winterfell ahead of our armies to get news.’

‘I know,’ the woman said softly. ‘My father saw it. He also has visions, the green dreams. They are a curse of my house, disturbing but hazy and unreliable. Your brother is the one with the real power.’

It was her turn to shiver, the cold kiss of death travelling down her spine. She wanted to get up and take her husband’s arm and soothe him, bury her face in his furs and hold him, his agitation was growing by leaps and bounds. ‘My father is unwell,’ Meera went on. ‘He has had the green dreams a lot in the last few weeks, and it saps his strength. But he wants to speak to you both after dinner.’

Jon’s dark gaze flicked to her seated figure at last, and the vexed look in his face softened. ‘My wife the queen is tired and cold to the bone,’ he said, his spiked tone replaced by an attempt at manners. ‘We would appreciate the hospitality of your home. A meal, a warm bed, a change of clothes. After that, I would be honoured to meet with Lord Reed, who was such a good friend to my father.’

Meera finally turned her attention to her erstwhile queen, and she dipped in a bow. She rose to her feet to acknowledge the formal gesture. ‘It is an honour to meet Queen Daenerys Targaryen at last,’ the young woman said. ‘We have heard much of you, even buried here in the Neck. I and my people are grateful you have come to help us in this fight, even if we are rather scared of your dragons.’

She managed a gracious smile. ‘I thank you for your hospitality Lady Reed. Please inform your folk that the dragons will not harm them if they stay clear. We would appreciate a beast or two for their supper if you can spare them.’ Her sons would be hungry, and she had seen nothing sizeable they could hunt in the swamps.

‘I suppose we can drive some sheep across the bridge,’ Meera ventured. ‘I will do it myself, I’d like a closer look at the dragons. I never thought I would see such a sight in my life, they will be talking about it around here for months.’ A little smile broke across her solemn face. ‘We heard you took King’s Landing, and many rejoiced to hear of Cersei’s end. That won you some admirers,
though the folk here have long memories about the rebellion. We lost many people in the battles.’

The lady paused, as if regretting her words. ‘My father was so sickened by the war that he has not
stirred from the keep since his return twenty-three years ago, not even when Robb Stark called his
banners.’

She was not offended, but from behind Meera’s slight figure she saw Jon stiffen at the mention of
Robb. She was aware his murdered brother had been on her husband’s mind lately, having
travelled through the same places he had once sought to win. ‘Likely the extra troops would have
done my brother no good, my lady,’ he said suddenly, with some bitterness. ‘He was brought down
by treachery because he dared to choose his own wife. He went south when perhaps he shouldn’t
have. Some in the North will say the same of me, no doubt.’

‘Not in my hearing, they won’t.’ she said firmly, shooting him a fiery look, and his twisted
expression eased a little, his mouth quirking reluctantly. ‘We have no time for musings about what
went before,’ she went on, deliberately brisk to prevent more brooding. ‘We must be away at first
light to find out what is happening up there.’ She turned back to Meera and offered her a gloved
hand to take, which the young woman did, shaking it like a man, her dark eyes warm and curious.
‘I thank you again, Lady Reed. A bed and a bath and dinner for ourselves and the dragons would
be most welcome.’

***

Once its inhabitants had gotten over their initial awe at the king and queen descending from above
unannounced, the hospitality of Greywater Watch proved very pleasant. The past was the past, and
in their current predicament it did the people of the North no good to dwell on it. She hoped she
would find this philosophy in Winterfell, as Jon was in such a mood he had no tolerance for any
slights and mutterings concerning his wife and queen. She would need to be the one to provide the
smooth persuasion, the careful diplomacy, as he would likely snarl at anyone who looked at her
askance.

The servants and attendants of the keep were quick and cheerfully informal, showing them to a
cosy bedchamber with a huge peat fire and an inviting bed heaped with quilts, and bringing
comfortable clothes to relax in so they could shed their heavy armour and outer layers. Then they
were shown to an unexpected luxury, a tiny bathing chamber where water was thrown over hot
rocks to create a dense, cloying steam that warmed her to her marrow. She had seen such sweat
lodges in the colder capitals of Essos, but never expected to find one in the barren wastes of the
North.

Half an hour in the sticky heat left her languid and somewhat contented, Jon dozing next to her on
the bench, too wiped out to do anything about his naked wife other than tuck her into the crook of
his arm and kiss her forehead on occasion, their silence only peaceful, not borne of reserve and
resentment from the previous day’s dramas. After sluicing herself with cold water and drying off,
she donned the borrowed gown of thick creamy wool over her leggings and boots, the wide bands
of colourful embroidery around the low neckline and sleeves hinting that it was a highborn lady’s
garment.

Dressed in a dark grey felted wool tunic that was less fancy, her husband looked tired but
somewhat eased, shadowy thumbprints under his brown eyes and his wet hair scraped back giving
him a severe look. His mouth softened when he took in her fine lady’s gown, and he offered her his
arm solicitously to escort her to the hall.

Mercifully, she hadn’t had the urge to vomit all day despite her considerable physical strain, and
her stomach griped only for food. The local fare was strange but tasty enough, and instead of wine
there was mead with a syrupy taste and a strong kick that she drank sparingly. Meera and Jon continued to talk quietly, avoiding the unanswerable questions. There was no sign of Lord Reed at the high table, merely household men at arms and their wives, all looking at her with frank interest, some bolder souls asking questions about King’s Landing, the dragons, and her armies which she answered patiently. Clearly these people were not of the same ilk as the sullen mob that awaited them at Winterfell, or perhaps her dread was unfounded.

‘Is your father not joining us for dinner, my lady?’ she enquired of Meera. The young woman looked up, a bleakness in her eyes that pained her to witness.

‘My father is easily tired by crowds of people,’ she said. ‘He is taking dinner in his study, and is expecting you once you have finished your meal.’

‘And your mother, she is not with you?’ she said delicately. Usually there was a chatelaine of Westerosi keeps, a bustling woman who brought both order and softness into bare boned fortresses, but there was no one apart from this girl, who seemed more at home with bow and knife than counting candles and planning dinners.

‘My mother died when I was ten. A stillbirth,’ Meera said briefly. ‘There was just me, and my brother and father. Now there is just me.’

‘I am so sorry,’ she said, ignoring the dart of fear that lodged in her heart at the mention of the stillbirth, a brief internal struggle that she hoped wasn’t evident. Her hand itched to cup her belly, but she would find nothing there to reassure her yet. The conversation moved into the safer territory of small talk, and she found her mind drifting to Meera’s mention of her father’s vision. She shifted restlessly, needing to know the details of what her son had wrought, no matter how much it sickened her. It appeared the news of the Wall was not common knowledge, as it was never mentioned by their dinner companions.

Eventually Meera rose and escorted the pair of them to her father’s study, and left them at the door with another boyish bow. Inside, they found a middle-aged man with greying mousy hair who rose politely from his desk at their entrance, studying them so closely she felt uncomfortable, a sad smile flickering on his ashen face. Courtesies were exchanged, and she was graciously offered the only spare chair in the small wood-panelled room, Jon moving to stand behind her protectively.

‘Lady Meera says you saw the Wall fall in a vision, my lord. What can you tell us?’ her husband said abruptly once the frail man settled.

The lord began to talk, snatches of horrifying words. A tormented shrieking, a burst of blue fire, men running and screaming and falling, the dead pouring through the breach like a grey avalanche. She felt the hand on her shoulder tighten enough to hurt, and under her calm surface her soul flailed and sobbed at the agony of her son, transformed into a monster forced to wreak havoc for the enemy. She dearly hoped that his death was a true death, and he knew nothing.

‘None survived, do you think?’ Jon said hoarsely.

‘The vision was just snatches, I did not see all,’ Howland said dully. ‘I saw men run west along the Wall as it fell. Perhaps others got out by sea. I hope your armies reach the North as quick as can be managed, or all is lost. I hear you have over a hundred thousand, including the Lannister legions.’ He pulled a wry face at this, then went on, his voice less wavering. ‘I would offer my own men, but I am wondering if it is best to hold them here in case the North must be abandoned. Winterfell is a strong keep, but it has no retreat point if the defences are breached. You are surrounded by open country.’
‘Aye, the Neck is a choke point,’ her husband mused. ‘And the dead cannot swim. My father told me that in times of war the people of the Neck could flood the swamps to keep out the enemy.’ The men pondered over this eventuality, speaking over her head as if she was invisible, but she didn’t mind, her thoughts were with her son, wondering how he would be used against them, and how he could be stopped.

The strategy talk then died away, and she looked up to find Lord Reed’s faded eyes studying her closely once more. ‘I remember your father all too well, your Grace,’ he said. ‘I also remember your beautiful mother, and Prince Rhaegar. I am glad to see you resemble them in looks and nature rather than your dread sire.’

‘I thought my brother Rhaegar was hated in the North,’ she said, her voice distant, masking her puzzlement.

‘Oh, he is, by those who only know the common tale of his doings that sparked Robert Baratheon’s great rebellion,’ the man replied carefully, his gaze darting to Jon. ‘I asked you both here not to speak of war, but a personal matter.’ A nervous cough shook him, and he fumbled for a clay cup and drank deep before continuing.

‘Jon Snow, I last saw my friend Lord Stark when you were a boy of eight,’ he said. ‘He made me swear an oath, to tell you the truth if he died before he could tell you when you were grown. It was not safe to tell you when you were a child. No one knew except him, and me. Everyone else was dead. Not even Lady Catelyn knew.’

‘Knew what?’ her husband said rudely, moving out from behind her to stare the man down. ‘Whatever the truth is, my lord, I am not sure that I need to know it now.’

The man did not respond to this denial, but continued stubbornly, his eyes evasive. ‘Believe me, your Grace, this is difficult for me to tell, especially now when you are happily wed to the Dragon Queen, and have a war to fight that will need all your strength and wits. But an oath is an oath, and this may be important for the great battle for the dawn, so I must say it.’

A sudden dread sank its claws into her shoulders like an icy wight, and her hand went to her throat, her gaze switching between her husband’s irked face and Lord Reed’s opaque one, the man’s voice becoming dreamy and abstract again. ‘I was there the day you were born. I stayed below, nursing a wound I had gained fighting off the Kingsguard that surrounded the tower in Dorne where the wolf maid was sequestered. I was dizzy with the heat and in terrible pain, but I remember Ned coming down the stairs with blood on his hands and a babe in his arms, trying not to sob with his grief. The baby was you, your Grace. The wolf maid your mother, Lyanna Stark.’

He swallowed visibly, flicking his dead eyes to her. The constriction in her throat tightened, and she rose to her feet as if to get away from what was dawning on her. She slid her gaze to her husband, but he only looked confused. ‘My father is Ned Stark,’ he snapped. ‘How can my mother be Aunt Lyanna?’

‘Your father is Rhaegar Targaryen,’ the lord said, determined but flinching at the angry, dark stare he was under. ‘The common tale believed by all is that he abducted and raped Lyanna, but it was not true. They loved each other, and they ran away together, and after his defeat on the Trident we hurried south in what we thought was a rescue, only to find her dying in childbirth. Ned Stark claimed you as his to protect you at your mother’s bidding, as he knew Robert would have had you killed if he found out, along with the rest of the Targaryens if he could catch them. He had run mad with pride and jealousy, plunging the Kingdoms into a bloody war that was blamed on your true father.’
She was so shocked she swayed on her feet, but her own reaction was nothing compared to her husband. His face was wiped free of all emotion, perfectly blank, his eyes a black void. A shudder crept up his spine, breaking his stillness. She did not know what to do, she did not know what to think. She hovered, useless and reeling, resentment boiling in her brain. She hated the past, she hated the present, she hated this fey harbinger of doom and ruin who had destroyed Jon with a few words, and most of all she hated that look on her lover’s face, as if he had been dealt a death blow in the back.

She had no idea what was going on in his mind, but her woman’s heart cried out in pure agony at the prospect of repudiation. It did not matter to her whether he was her blood, when it sunk in she would have rejoiced in it, but she knew this land by now. She knew what the people thought of shared blood mingling. She had heard the disdain and hatred directed at the Lannister siblings. When the ice broke, and Jon began to think again, he would turn away from her. He would shudder when she touched him, and she would be alone again.

Her panic escalated, all she could think of was rejection, there was no room for logic or love to bring her down from the unstable ledge she walked upon, contemplating the abyss. She was ashamed of herself for being a coward, but she had to get out. The wooden walls were closing in on her, the silent men were a dire threat, her guts were churning and she could not get air to her lungs. She did what Jon had done to her in Harrenhal when he could no longer stand the sight of her, she bolted for the door, fumbled for the latch and ran, her sobs following her down dark, chilly hallways like a persistent ghost as she searched frantically for a bolthole to hide in.

***

She had lost sense of time and place, she was huddled by the fire, hands reaching for the flames and watching them flow around them like water in a brook, reassured by the mild tingle of power she drew from the gesture. Tiredness dragged her down and held her in the hard chair, despite the inviting bed that was a few steps away. She would find no rest there, so she would stay with her element, her only companion through many troubles. Her mind was a rat’s nest of warring thoughts, her heart a fist of cold agony under her breast.

When the door banged open, she flinched with nerves, her eyes sliding warily to her husband. She did not know how long it was since she ran, a minute, an hour, but he was here, her brave Jon Snow, ready to face her though he was likely still rocked to his foundations. Putting aside the bald fact that she was his aunt, his very identity was tied up with being a son of the North, and his noble father who wasn’t. She had to conquer her own fear and pain and reach out, and if she was pushed away, she must endure it, but she saw only hurt in his expressive eyes, adding guilt to the mess in her head.

‘Why did you walk out?’ he said abruptly, fidgeting as she faced him, tear streaked and shrinking. She opted for honesty, though it would leave her defenceless.

‘I didn’t want to see your disgust,’ she sniffled. ‘It was a selfish, pathetic thing to do, and I am sorry, but I just couldn’t look at you and see that. I can’t imagine how you must feel right now, so I assumed the worst.’

His fists clenched at his sides, and there was a flicker of strong emotion that was indecipherable in his beloved face, but he spoke, low and urgent. ‘I don’t want to explain it. I wish I could knock myself out to stop the noise in my head, but I will say to you if that is what you are crying about, then stop it,’ he growled. ‘I don’t give a shit for what some will say about us. Aye, they will talk if they find out, but they won’t fucking find out.’

Despite his reassuring words, she noted he did not come closer to her. Instead, he prowled across
the floor, his muscles coiled under his dull tunic as if ready to hit something, anything, and then he blurted. ‘Why in Seven hells do I need to learn this now?’

‘I don’t know,’ she said wearily. ‘I don’t know what bloody use it is. My only thought is that now we know why you have a connection with the dragons, and that may be vital, given what faces us.’ She wanted to tell him how she felt, utterly stunned that her lover was her family by more than just marriage, when she had gone through her adult life so alone. Her sense of self was also challenged, she didn’t know whether to be overjoyed or miserable, it all depended on how Jon would take it. Thus far, it was not good. Hurt had turned to anger, not directed at her but the world at large.

‘You are furious about this,’ she ventured. ‘Tell me what you are thinking. You promised me that you would not run from me again.’

‘Aye, I did, and then you ran,’ he reminded her sharply, his endless back and forth finally stilling in the middle of the woven mat by the bed. The silence drew out like a bowstring, and then he spoke. ‘I think of my father, who I worshipped, who I wanted to be, whose approval I craved…he lied to me. He lied to me my whole fucking life, and then he let me throw away my life at the Wall when I was near a man grown, and did nothing to stop me.’ The bitter words were thick and heavily accented as they always were when he was upset, spilling from his thin, hard mouth in jerky bursts.

‘He knew you lived, and your brother. Why didn’t he send me to you? Why didn’t he trust me with the truth? I have so many questions I will never get answers for, and it’s driving me mad. So, the last thing on my fucking mind is you being my aunt.’ His snarling tone softened, his pain-filled, dusky gaze lingering over her upturned face. ‘I don’t know who I am anymore, but you know who you are, you’ve always known.’

‘I am the blood of the dragon,’ she said calmly. ‘And I have been scorned and hated and hunted for it. I spent my childhood on the run from assassins, living on charity, with a brother who was an unstable weakling who beat me and bullied me. If you had been sent to us, you would have been in danger too. Lord Stark did the right thing keeping you safe at Winterfell, and ignorant. He gave you a home, and a family. I didn’t have that, only a name.’

She was trying to talk him down from his towering anger, but she was equally puzzled by Stark’s motives. Surely Jon should have been told when he made the hasty decision to join the Watch. Her blood could have died up there with an axe in his head from a Wildling, or ripped apart by a wight, and then she would have never known him and loved him. She would not be carrying his miracle child, and she would not be here now, having this hideous confrontation, with acid in her throat that made her voice hoarse and cracked.

He stirred from his distant spot at last. His eyes were so black and wild she flinched again when he approached her chair, but then his facade crumbled, his righteous fury dropping away to leave only anguish and confusion. ‘Home,’ he said sadly. ‘Winterfell is not my home, it never was. The only home I have ever had is with you.’

Her spluttered protests died when he sank to his knees at her feet, the movement leaden and awkward, his usual fluid grace had deserted him. Like a child seeking comfort his dark head was buried in her lap, strong arms wrapping around her waist as an anchor. Her hands twitched at her sides as she considered what to do next. She could keep talking, remind him that his family was still his family, and that he would feel better when he reached home tomorrow and saw his brother and sisters at last, but there was a matter more urgent than soothing, adult words that would likely fall on deaf ears at this moment.

If she didn’t reach out to him and reclaim him as hers, then he could slip through her fingers, become a dutiful partner and not her passionate lover. The burden of the news, what spiteful people
would say if they learned, the hatred his people already felt for her house, added to the immense pressure they were under, it could all act as a cruel wedge between bodies that were so attuned and in desperate need of each other. Nothing had changed for her, and she had to make sure of the same for him.

She stroked his raven curls, so unlike her silver tresses, and yanked his head up to look at him steadily and objectively, her hands moving to cup the sides of his face. Naked and vulnerable, his eyes partially veiled behind long lashes, he didn’t move as she took him in carefully, recalling her own reflection in many mirrors, and her scrawny, nervy brother Viserys, whose frequent tantrums and unquiet mind had marred his Targaryen looks. Her other brother was reportedly the most handsome man in the Kingdoms, but she had never seen him, only this secret son.

To her, he was Jon Snow, her beautiful and rather battered husband, with his gruff manners, practical clothes, and raspy Northern burr, who was awfully good at killing but hated his skill. Apart from the angular shape of his face, his plump, sensual mouth and a body that was lean rather than brawny, there was nothing of her family in him. His eyes were the rich brown of autumn, his hair emphatically black, his face guarded and solemn when his eloquent eyes did not betray his thoughts. But she knew it was no lie, she sensed it in the deepest part of herself, a quiet whisper in her ear, an echo in the blood, the intensity of her desire that had clashed with her detached, pragmatic nature, and won.

‘Blood of my blood,’ she said in awe, blinking at a rush of savage ownership that flowed through her suddenly, an angry predator snarling protectively over a wounded mate, a giddy freefall into dark, turbid thoughts of what she would do to keep him by her side. With a shuddering gasp, she dipped her head and took his mouth in a harsh kiss, not caring less if he decided to push her away, she had to try.

When his succulent lips opened for her and nipped at hers with a tiny expiration of air, she could have wept with relief, thanked all the Gods that rarely listened to her pleas. She held the tears back by sheer force of will, losing herself quickly in the intoxicating scrape of whiskers and teeth, the invasion of his tongue, a wet drag through her mouth that was answered by a throbbing under her heavy skirts, the kiss sweeter and hotter from what she now knew in her mind as well as her secret self.

His skin, which had felt cold and stiff as a corpse under her palms, bloomed with warmth, his calloused hands trailing up her back to grasp her neck, and he moved upward in a close slide against her belly and breasts, so her legs enclosed him in an embrace of irritating gown and yielding flesh. There were too many layers, and she gave a little whine of impatience, squeezing her knees to bring him flush against her hidden body. She wanted him close, so close their skin merged into one, until all she could see and sense was him. She wanted to hold him like a babe at her breast, until he became a beast and tore her in two.

Scratchy tunic, wool undershirt, another shirt of linen, and then finally her hands found the sculpted ridges and lines of his back, her nails tracing the dip of his spine as he sucked at her throat, forming a seal with his lips to leave his mark, then glancing over the curve of a breast, fingers finding the laces at her back and plucking to loosen the gown from her shoulders. It was cramped and uncomfortable in the chair, but a breast was popped free from her bodice, creamy white and tipped with a taut rosy bud which he pulled hungrily into his mouth, cruel enough to make her shudder.

The purse of his pretty lips around her, the spidery half-moons of his lashes, the work-worn scarred hands of a warrior squeezing her spilling breasts, she squirmed under the blessed weight of him and clawed and panted as if he was already buried to the root inside her cunt. ‘Daenerys,’ he purred as
he looked up from his attentions. ‘I swear by all the Gods that I would rather die than deny myself you, deny myself this. Don’t ever be afraid of me again. I am yours, and you are mine.’

‘Good,’ she breathed, closing her eyes to fight back a fresh sting of tears. ‘Or I’d likely kill you myself.’ There was a wry snort, and when she peeked at him the corner of his swollen mouth twitched, just a little. ‘Take me to bed and conquer me, show me you mean it.’ They could ponder and dissect what they had learnt and what it meant, and likely they would in snatched moments between chaos and death and grief, but not now. It would not help them.

She was drawn out of the chair to stand before the fire, his hurried hands clumsy and uncaring with the laces of her gown, the ribbons of her shift, throwing unwanted garments to the floor as he peeled away each layer until she was a bare armful of tits and arse against his frustratingly clothed body, her mouth worrying at the milky curve of his throat, her hand knotted in his hair, undecided whether to set it loose or leave it tied. ‘Lie down on the bed love, let me look at you before I taste you,’ he murmured into her ear, and she sighed, her hand dipping under his tunic to stroke his ready cock through the leather of his breeches before she did as she was told.

She swayed to the bed and crawled up the nubbly linen covers with her bottom on display before she turned and settled against the pillows, parting her thighs to reveal her cunt, still furled and neat but with a gleam of nectar. She caught the juices with her fingers and smeared it over her nub as she handled herself lazily, watching him undress, too slow for her liking, a subtle writhing and a low moan as the throb in her loins ebbed and flowed.

Naked and hard and as unashamed as she, he settled at her tiny feet, taking one in hand to kiss it, then the other. ‘Put a pillow under your hips and spread yourself, I want you open for me.’

She snatched a pillow and positioned it under her body so she was elevated, her legs falling open to expose herself, helped by the slide of her fingertips downwards to part her folds and the cheeks of her arse. Hands and lips traced a path up her left calf, then her inner thigh, biting kisses on both creases between her thighs and groin to draw out soft murmurs, the tickle of whiskers and nip of teeth a gentle torment.

‘Lover,’ he husked, placing an open kiss over her nub before shifting upwards.

‘Mother.’ The painful word was muffled in the soft rise of her belly, her hands moving to hold him trapped there for a brief moment before he travelled further, the word hissed into her left breast.

‘Wife.’

She felt a sob catch in her throat, but she looked at him bravely as he hovered over her face, a tiny space of defence between her dry, prickly eyes and his soft yet shattering ones, stripping her soul as bare as he had stripped her body. She hadn’t felt as such for some time, but now she did; unworthy, calculating, selfish, her dark heart not good enough for his pure one, the taint of her blood now shared with him whether he liked it or not. But there was nothing but love in those earthy eyes, and she had to take it, and give everything she had back.

‘Queen,’ he whispered, dropping a final kiss on her brow, and before she could start weeping at this beautiful litany, a coda of wicked words distracted her, making her shake with a weak laugh, her first of the day.

‘Not three times this time, my greedy lass,’ he warned her in his gravelly voice. ‘Only once. You will control yourself and hold back. I want you to come so hard you see stars, but you will give me all of you first.’
‘Mmm, and if I fail?’ she replied, wriggling sinuously under the solid weight of him, his cock digging pleasantly into her belly.

‘You will be punished.’

‘I am not afraid of that,’ she shrugged, a little smile flickering to lure him on. ‘But as you will.’ She was determined to make him laugh, and make his eyes to go blank and black with desire instead of confused misery. A corner of his mouth lifted again, and she moved to kiss it, then he was gone, retracing his steps to where he began between her quivering thighs, thrown so wide her riding muscles were visible beneath their softness. He used both his hands and mouth, his tongue flicking delicately from the top of her slit and gradually downwards, bathing in her wetness, so much of it she was mildly ashamed at the mess she was already in.

Her lids quickly closed as she fell into a battle with the pleasure, trying to fend it off lest it consume her as thoroughly as he consumed her slippery flesh, her hands gripping the covers and her legs moving restlessly, soft moans and gasps filling the silence with the slick sound of his tongue and appreciative noises. A single finger moved inside her, glancing over that intense spot he had discovered very quickly, making her moans deepen, then replaced by his tongue pushing into her cunt in lusty probings while the finger teased her back entrance. The mild twinge as it penetrated her arse made her buck upwards, his bearded face buried in her folds so completely she felt the itch.

He was preparing her, very slowly and carefully, not teasing her to heighten her distress, one digit then two working her muscles and ensuring she was ready when he finally entered her. The prospect caused her to mewl and thrash, neatly caught by the demand of her body to let it go in a howl. She clenched her jaw, took fistfuls of quilts to hold it in, his tongue slipping out of her to swipe up her centre and flatten over her nub, flicking it firmly, then breathing on it to fire her nerves, alternating between the two as his fingers stretched her arse, then sucking it, humming into a mouthful of her cunt until she cried out and bowed off the nest of pillows.

It was too much, she could not fend it off, and when his free hand pulled her outer lips further apart to trace the seam she begged. ‘No…oh no Jon, stop. I can’t hold it, it’s too good…ahh…’ Her self-control with this treatment was never good, but this time every touch was testing her, and she doubted she would stay the distance. With one final circle trailed around her nub, he moved at the urging of her hands in his hair, and suddenly they were face to face again. She darted her tongue out to clean the dew from his lips, dusky pink and so lush she nibbled at them.

There was a deep ache in her womb as her body protested the interruption, an ache that could only be soothed by his perfect length within her. Distracted by her kiss and already pressed against her centre, she lifted her knee, took him in hand and guided him into her cunt, arching upwards to force him past her tense walls. His eyes flew open and then creased into slits, a groan caught by her hungry mouth as she gripped him, wet and warm and then fluttering as her orgasm broke without warning. She sobbed and locked her thighs around his hips to let it flow along his length, so damn good she didn’t care that she had failed so soon.

Jon went completely still, his hands encircling her exposed throat, pressing down slightly as he watched her come. ‘Fuck, you are so naughty,’ he purred when she finally slackened and rested as the ripples died away.

‘What will you do to punish me?’ she said drowsily, the girth of his cock holding her open making her oversensitive. When he shifted slightly, she hitched a breath.

‘I will make slow, boring love to you until you beg me to stop it,’ he said solemnly, another hint of smile as she huffed, then laughed.
The pressure on her throat and the tugs on her braided hair, the hard planes of his body, his lips nipping at hers, and Gods help her, his lustrous, inky eyes drinking her in, the tiny maddening movements inside her. Time eluded her once more, she was in a waking dream she had no control over, her moans and small cries lazy and muted, her hands smoothing over the flexing muscles of his back, the roundness of his arse as if the shape of him was new and exciting instead of familiar.

Sneakily she increased the depth and grind with a shifting of her legs so he was nudging against her womb, and she was so saturated and loose she went further, drawing her legs back over herself to earn that addictive sense of being plundered. The noise he made in response was near a snarl, and his hands scooted under her shoulders for better leverage so he obliged her with a taste of the aggression she sought. At her rising cry, her nails marking his back in furrows, he crooned into her thudding pulse. ‘I need you. I need all of you.’

His cock stood proud, ridged and heavy, red tipped and sheened with her juices, but as he sat back on his haunches, he gave her a sultry, considering look and spat copiously into his palm, and there was something so shocking and filthy about the gesture she shuddered. Much as she had loved to hold him tight and rock him as he loved with reverence, she wanted the sting and the burn of contrast, to finish it with her body twisted and forced open, keening and struggling until he broke her in.

He didn’t turn her over and bring her to her knees before him in submission, he needed to see her face. The spit was rubbed over her back entrance as she lay passively, the pillow shifted so she was better positioned to receive him, her right leg lifted and held up, and all the while he was staring her down, making her look at him and suffer for it, alluring and spare and complex, the weight of the world on his strong shoulders but nothing on his mind but fucking her until she cried mercy.

It hurt, oh it hurt, a great heaving sob expelled and a defensive curl of limbs, but surrendering to it and letting it flow to every extremity and then fade away was a strange ecstasy she relished. He reclaimed her every time he took her like this, confronting her with the intimacy of his fingers and cock taking her where she strained and resisted.

His dazed eyes left her face and lingered over where they were joined, his fingers toying within her folds, filling her abandoned cunt so he could feel the slide of his length in her arse. She was mewling and sobbing, frightening pleasure flaring over her sweaty skin, seeing the dark behind her lids swirl and pulse as she squeezed her eyes shut at a sharper, deeper thrust. She flattened her foot against his shoulder and opened herself wider, inviting him to fall into a series of harsh lunges, bottoming out with each movement, the three fingers plugged in her gaping cunt equally rough and urgent.

The pressure was building within, her skin engorged with pumping blood and tingling nerves, her trapped writhings against the rumpled linens, her desperate sounds, and the tightening of her muscles around his cock to the point of pain made him grunt and rut within her like a savage. She wailed, on the point of pleading for it to end, when it swallowed her in its sharp jaws, a deep clenching in her loins, arms and legs spasming, her teeth bringing the taste of blood to her lips as she tried and failed to absorb the power of it.

The sound he made as he came, the pulse lost in the violence of her climax, was long and low and helpless, the glimpse of his face lost to fleeting oblivion utterly lovely and utterly jarring. He came and came, dropping down to catch her throat with his teeth and smother his grunts as his hips jerked and he filled her with warm seed. She lay there and took the punishment, tender and raw, her legs folded around his slim waist and her hands in his riot of loosened curls. When he finally lay in repose against her breasts, seeking out her heartbeat, his flushed cheeks and glittering eyes and well chewed mouth made her smile in primal satisfaction.
Though her body needed respite, she would not be parted from him. She would find something to tie him to the bed with again, if needed. No prowling the chilly corridors, no seeking out the haze of ale and wine, he would stay right here with her and listen to their shared blood hiss and thrum through their merged flesh.

After a while, he softened enough to slip free without her discomfort, the stickiness of his seed on her inner thighs a marking she cherished. His rumpled head moved further down to rest on her belly. He kissed her navel, then pressed his ear against her to listen. ‘When will she kick and move about, do you think?’

She sighed wistfully, not knowing whether it was happy or sad. ‘Perhaps a month, six weeks. Tansy said as I am so small, I will feel the babe sooner than most.’

Jon was quiet, visibly thinking over something difficult. ‘I guess it’s quite likely she will have your hair and eyes then.’

‘I don’t know,’ she said carefully. ‘Maybe so. Does that bother you, my love?’

‘No, I like it,’ he said, his eyes flicking up at her in reassurance, warm and a little sly. ‘I want a stroppy girl with silver hair, who will push stupid boys into the mud, climb up Drogon’s hide without fear and try to steal my sword.’

She felt cautious joy well in her overtaxed heart, and she smiled to counter the sting in the corner of her eyes. ‘I want a surly boy with black, curly hair and big, pretty eyes who will do the very same,’ she told him, throwing caution to the wind, and he smiled sweetly, lighting up his ever-serious face and creasing his temples.

‘Perhaps we have one of each in there,’ he mused, dropping another kiss on the soft mound beneath his cheek.

‘I bloody well hope not,’ she said with a horror only half feigned, and finally, he laughed.
Time goes quicker between the two of us

A/N: So, we finally make it to Winterfell. It’s been done so much I was dreading it, but I’m doing my own thing so hopefully it’s interesting. Some fun design elements borrowed from the books here. Reminder, this is a romance, not an intricately plotted War for the Dawn fic. If you are looking for that, go read Ozymandian or Love on the Brain. There will be enough detail so it drives the ‘plot’ and isn’t moronic, but if you’re looking for endless chapters of war making doing etc, you won’t find it here.

Since I have had some visits from what appears to be fanboy trolls, this chapter is dedicated to the lovely male readers who come here to enjoy themselves, not have a hate-wank and a bitch about
Daenerys and dreadful women writers. I’m all about special lie downs, but opinions about my gender politics and who should rule the bedroom and elsewhere, I’m not interested beyond calling you a douche and laughing at your comments with my husband. My fic, my rules.

My beautiful new moodboard provided by Justwanderingneverlost, the sweetest fangirl in the world.

The dry, dusty scent of old, cracked leather, paper and ink in neatly ordered books and scrolls and folios, the peaceful quorking and fussing of ravens in their rookery, the dance of red and gold flames in the fireplace, the hiss and bubble of hot water through the pipes buried in the walls like lead arteries carrying life to dead stone. She stretched out with her senses, which she could swear were heightened by her pregnancy, especially the senses of touch and smell; the scrape of a calloused hand over her throat, the tickle of whiskers on her pulse, the clawing of ragged nails in a handful of soft flesh, the scent of musk and pine overladen with a salt tang of sweat. Her blood thrummed a little as her mind wandered, calming by inches as she hid her inner self from the circle of gloomy, wary, abstracted faces.

There was no cheer at Winterfell, only and harried, frightened, and resentful folk. The only personage that seemed glad to meet her had been the enormous furry beast that now lay curled at her feet, doing a splendid job of keeping her legs warm and shedding white hairs all over her quilted breeches. Occasionally Ghost would lift his head and sniff her belly, his eyes glowing rubies, strange but beautiful. He was so huge he nearly reached her shoulder, his jaws so powerful he could have her leg off in one snap of teeth, but he liked the way she smelled evidently, possibly because the mark of Jon was all over her, plus the intriguing aroma of dragon.

It was a fortunate she was wearing her squire’s garb, or she would be a ruin of fur and slobber, but it was good to have one ally in this place other than her preoccupied husband, currently scowling blackly and traversing the narrow strip of floor between table and bookshelves as his brother spoke in a monotone, snatches of words pulled from a mind lost in visions and barely tethered to reality, or registering the siblings that loved him as people. They were merely pieces in a deadly game they seemed unlikely to win.

She didn’t blame them, the Starks. They were in the path of a tidal wave of death, their brother had been long from home, and she was a stranger and a Targaryen and the cause of his absence in the south, and now Jon had returned unexpectedly on dragonback with his new wife and minus the army of a hundred thousand men he wasn’t much use to them except as a recipient of bad news and complaints. The Tarly lad she fully expected to be cool to her, as she had burned his father and brother to ash and bone, but he had been polite at least. The two Stark girls had been barely that, the younger one so quiet and still and assessing she found her quite intimidating, the older one with eyes like chips of ice and armoured in distant courtesy, a lady to the bone and very like her mother as Jon had described her.

Brand had greeted her in a thready voice and taken her hand, and the jolt she had felt had thoroughly spooked her, as if he had read all her past and present and thoughts and urges in a heartbeat and taken them inside his extraordinary mind to ponder at his leisure. Of the events to the north he seemed to have full knowledge, which her husband has now struggling to process and determine the best course of action. Thus far, she was keeping silent. It was politic to play the wife rather than queen until the Starks and their lords and armies grew used to her presence.

They crowded the great hall downstairs, the various towers of the keep and the snowy fields between the walls and the Winter Town. Not only lords and levees but a steadily growing trickle of
half-frozen, terrorised folk evacuating south by foot and horse and cart as the news of the Wall’s fall spread by raven and word of mouth. An unmanned Last Hearth was gone, the Karhold could be next, and those who were not quick enough were surely swallowed up in the maw of the dead army, but not the men of the Watch and Jon’s Wilding friends. The only good news was that some had escaped from Eastwatch by running atop the Wall to Castle Black, which was untouched. They would be here in a matter of days, evacuees that could fight, unlike most.

‘Time,’ Jon muttered, coming to a halt finally and gripping the edge of the table. ‘We need to buy ourselves more time until our armies arrive, but how I haven’t a clue.’ His dark gaze flicked to her and Ghost, sharp as dragonglass, then his thinned mouth relaxed a little at her calm look, which was entirely feigned. She was churning with sick nerves inside, but to show him her fear would not help him.

The boy in the wheeled chair looked at her consideringly with his eyes of Stark grey. He did not resemble Jon, none of them did. Not for the first time she wondered what Lyanna Stark looked like. A beauty no doubt, with midnight hair and rich brown eyes that she passed to her son, and small and graceful, as her brother was reportedly a tall man. ‘You know who you are,’ Bran said, shifting his stare to his erstwhile brother. ‘I thought I would be the one to tell you, but Lord Reed was there the day you were born.’

There was a flash of confusion in the faces of Arya and Sansa, but Sam blushed and looked to the horn of breakfast ale in his pudgy hand. Jon straightened, his eyes veiling as he took in his brother’s neutral face. ‘Aye, I know the truth,’ he growled. ‘And it doesn’t make a bloody difference to anything, except to mess with my mind. If you have an inkling as to why I need to know now, then speak.’

The greenseer did not answer that, only declaimed what he had been denied revealing and yanking the uneven ground from under her husband, making the Stark girls gasp and blanch, and Tarly squirm uncomfortably. ‘You don’t know all of it,’ he said dreamily. ‘They were married, you see. He set aside his wife to marry your mother Lyanna. She named you Aegon Targaryen before she died. Your wife is not the rightful heir to the Iron Throne, you are.’

When her husband was truly angry, he greatly resembled a cornered wolf, shoulders hunched, hackles raised, his lip curled in a snarl, eyes full of predatory fury. To her gratification, the impact of the words knocking every bit of air out of her lungs and making her treacherous guts lurch, she watched Jon bristle and snap out a torrent of words, sharply accented with the tones of the North, as if his voice was a slap in the face to the truth.

‘My wife is queen of the Seven Kingdoms by right of conquest and achievement. My wife is my queen, and I her king, the king she chose. All I want is to win this fight and then rest. She will rule, and I will be by her side. Blood or not, heir or not.’ He heaved a deep breath, fists clenching as he tried to master his anger, glittering eyes sweeping the room to look for dissent. His sisters only looked stunned, Bran as calm as a frozen pond, Tarly eying his friend with deep worry, then those black eyes settled on her again, his voice dropping further.

‘Our child will be queen, or king, or whatever they want to be when we are gone, so it hardly matters. All that matters is winning. Help me to do that, my brother, and I will hear no more about the bloody past.’ The control over his temper faltered, his voice taking on a dangerous tone and directed at all. ‘This does not get out. No one must know beyond this room, we have enough fucking trouble with that lot downstairs. We need everyone to rally behind us, not argue over who gets to rule over a mountain of bones at the end.’

Tired of remaining passive and wrestling control over her reeling mind, she extricated herself from
the wolf’s bulk and rose to her feet, moving to her husband’s side and taking his hand in reassurance. She eyed the circle of faces coolly, a brazen Targaryen, but it appeared that the ladies were more perplexed than anything else. ‘You’re not our brother?’ Arya said simply, her wary face showing true sadness.

‘I will always be a brother to all of you,’ Jon said stubbornly, but his hand squeezed hers tightly. She was pleased to hear him say it, he needed to feel at home and loved by his family to give him strength, the news of their shared blood was too soon, too nebulous, too heavy with history for him to take his name and own it.

‘Aunt Lyanna,’ Sansa said suddenly, her brow clearing. ‘And Rhaegar Targaryen. That is why father never told you. The old king hated the Targaryens and hunted them like rats.’ Her pale blue eyes went to the pair of them together, wide and stunned. If anyone would be scandalised, it would be this gently reared lady, but she didn’t flinch. As Jon had said, there were more important matters at stake. ‘Your Grace,’ the girl said in a warmer tone. ‘You are with child? Forgive me, this is all rather a lot to take in at once.’ She shot her younger brother a disapproving look, but Bran was turned inward again, exhausted at the drama he had caused.

‘I am so blessed, yes. Though sometimes I wonder if it is a curse,’ she replied candidly. ‘I am near to three months, and looking forward to not feeling sick near every morn.’

She had not had much opportunity to take stock of herself. The rest of the trip north she had functioned on sheer will, centring herself in the heat of Drogon’s body and his fiery mind to counter the chill, then falling into bed in a borrowed bedgown and sleeping for ten hours, then dressing again in her travel clothes for this morning’s meeting. She had nothing else to wear, except for the gown the Reeds had put in a satchel along with provisions for the journey. When she awoke in the guest tower, she had felt the physicality of the child for the first time, a small weight in her womb as she rolled over to bury her face in Jon’s pillow. Soon she would start to swell, thrilling and worrying them both.

An arm crept around her waist. In front of his family and best friend, he clearly didn’t care about displays of ownership, so she would do the same. She reached for his left hand, linking her fingers with his. She wanted these people to like her, to see her as a woman as well as a figurehead pretending she was strong and brave and knew all the answers. Lady Stark’s face was solemn. ‘You intend to fight despite being with child?’ she said carefully. ‘And Jon, you will allow this?’

‘Gods forbid I would ever tell Daenerys not to go into battle,’ he said dryly, but then he sighed deeply. ‘We have no choice. We need the dragons, and they only answer to her.’ The hand at her waist flattened against her gambeson, and when she turned her head she saw his brow creased in a dozen furrows.

An abstract voice drifted into the conversation from the wheeled chair, Bran returning to reality. ‘Perhaps you needed to know about your blood for the dragons,’ he said. ‘Two are stronger than one. Kill the dead one, and the enemy is afoot again, and much weakened. It will give us a chance.’

She shuddered at the thought of it; the screeches, the claws, the black and red blood, her precious children, her lover, the babe in her belly, either of them falling through the sky like a star to hit the ground and die or live on broken, but she swallowed bile and tightened her jaw, her tone brisk. ‘The thought has been on my mind, Lord Stark, even before we knew. We must make the time to practice.’

The mask of Arya Stark twitched, a hint of a girlish smile there. ‘I want to watch this,’ she said gleefully.
'You will not,' Jon replied with firmness. ‘It’s nerve wracking enough without you sneaking out to spy on me and laugh, little sister.’

At that, there was a gust of mirth around the table, weak and lame, but better than nothing. ‘I’d like to watch as well,’ Sam said. ‘From a safe distance.’ He shook his head, dawning wonder on his kindly face. ‘You were Lord Commander, then King in the North, and now king of Westeros with a wife, a baby on the way and two dragons. I can’t bloody keep up with you. My head is spinning like I drunk a barrel of that terrible ale at Castle Black.’

Her husband gave a grudging laugh. ‘Believe me Sam, my head is spinning too,’ he said, then he shook himself. ‘I am not king,’ he grumped, flicking his eyes to his placid brother. ‘And my wife will not call herself queen of this realm until all our enemies are defeated. So, we best get on with it.’

***

The sewing room at Winterfell was a feminine haven, large windows to obtain maximum light from the frail northern sun, the babble and roar of men working and sparring and arguing banished to a distant rumble, chests of serviceable cloth and furs thrown open, and a broad table for cutting and piecing together garments. There were flowering vines embroidered on hangings that hid the grey stone walls, and a cheerful fireplace with a carved mantelpiece decorated with more northern flora. ‘This room was my mother’s,’ Sansa explained. ‘It’s one of the rooms the Boltons didn’t ruin.’

She was quite out of place there in her scruffy boy’s attire with attentive wolf in tow, and Arya prowled about, bored and restless, armed and dressed as a lad more convincingly than herself. Gods, she missed her clothes, her travelling collection of oils and creams and brushes and combs, and she longed for a bath, not a quick wash in a tin tub. Jon had promised to show her the hot pools when he had the time spare, she would take soap and cloth and soft soap for her hair and scrub herself raw, and never mind about catching cold climbing in and out.

Lady Stark by contrast was a picture of sombre but ladylike elegance, leaning over a pile of furs on the table and studying them critically. She intended to make Jon a coat, as his old cloak was impractical for both fighting and on dragonback. Despite her distant aspect and her tendency to challenge her brother at every step, she was caring when it counted the most. From what she had heard the young woman had been through horrors to get where she was today, the Lady of Winterfell, and if it made her chilly and closed off, it was no surprise.

She was perched on a stool at the end of the cutting table, penning raven messages to send south to King’s Landing and Greywater Watch. The Reeds were on the lookout for the outriders of their armies on their gruelling journey north, and there was nowhere else secure to send the message on the direct route that was likely to reach the generals. She allowed herself a moment of fretting, hoping there were no squabbles or treachery among the odd alliance, but it would do her no good, so she told herself off silently before resuming her message to Tyrion.

‘I heard you killed Cersei,’ a voice said from behind her, and she jumped a little as she turned to acknowledge the presence. Arya moved as quiet as a cat, and her grey eyes missed little.

‘I did indeed,’ she replied, judging a satisfied smile was warranted. ‘I brought the throne room crashing down on her head. She was a knife at our backs I should have disposed of much sooner, but my advisors counselled caution.’

The girl’s face was unreadable. ‘She was on my list. I was on my way to kill her when I heard Jon had taken back Winterfell, and turned around on the Kingsroad.’
She studied Arya carefully, knowing that this list was not a damaged child’s fancy. The girl handled herself like an assassin, detached and watchful, quick as an adder and potentially lethal. If she took a dislike to her beloved brother’s new wife, she could be ended swiftly, just as the direwolf was a contained threat. She suspected Arya would be harder to win over than Ghost.

‘Would that you had killed her, and saved me the inconvenience, but I am glad for your family’s sake you decided to come home instead.’ This earned her a small smile, and she wondered how many foes were still left on that list. She understood the thirst for vengeance all too well, she had learned to tame it and channel it to ambition, but Arya clearly had taken another path.

Slightly uncomfortable, she fidgeted on her stool, and leaned down to pet Ghost between his ears. ‘I hope Tyrion Lannister is not on your list, as he is my Hand of the Queen.’

‘No, he’s not,’ Arya shrugged. ‘Sansa says he was kind to her, and he killed another on my list, Lord Tywin. Some say he killed Joffrey too.’

Starks and Lannisters, mortal enemies in a fearsome tangle of blood and hate since the day Jaime had pushed Bran out of a tower window to hide his secret, it was enough to give her a thumping headache. ‘That item on your list is a mystery, Tyrion swore to me he didn’t do it.’

‘Olenna Tyrell,’ Sansa said quietly, looking up from her cutting, a pair of shears in her delicate hand. ‘She is the only one who could have done it. She took a stone from my necklace at the wedding feast, the necklace of poison provided by Littlefinger.’

She could now add the Tyrells to the tangle. If she managed to persuade the two sisters to tell her everything that had happened to them in the last few years, it would take many days. Both she and Jon had not yet reminded them that Lord Jaime was on his way north with his army. Since they had recently dispatched Petyr Baelish for his crimes, they would likely want to do the same to Jaime. It was a good idea to change the subject. She smiled at Arya carefully. ‘Jon told me you trained in Braavos. The House of Black and White?’

The girl gave her a strange look, then her mask resumed. ‘How do you know about that?’

She dug her fingers into Ghost’s fur, finding an itchy spot that made him grumble in appreciation. She had expected a restful hour in the sewing room getting to know the Stark sisters and pretending to be a decorous lady, but she was now embroiled in a conversation concerning murder and savage justice, every probing a trap for her unwary self. She felt sad for them, knowing it had been a long time since they were able to be carefree young girls, but she hadn’t had much chance to be one either.

‘I grew up in Braavos, until my guardian died and we were forced to flee,’ she said. ‘I know the city very well, and I still remember my old home. A house with a red door and a lemon tree outside. When I close my eyes and picture it, I can still smell the blossoms. In my worst moments, I imagined myself there. It wasn’t really a home, but it was the only one I ever had.’

She still didn’t have a home. Even Dragonstone, which she had grown to love, seemed such a distant prospect now, even if they won through. She doubted they would have time to rest and hide from the world with their child. Not on her ancestral island, and not on her deserted summer isle of her selfish fancies. She would have to carve out a home wherever she and Jon were, perhaps even here, a prospect that did not thrill her though she was slowly adjusting. It was too cold and bleak, she was like an exotic bloom taken out of the glass gardens to wither in a stone alcove.

Arya was still staring at her as if she could read her thoughts like the flow of ink on a page. ‘You love my brother,’ she stated. ‘You love him more than you love the throne, or a crown at the end of
all of this. You love him so much you would kill for him. He is your home.’ Stunned and slightly embarrassed by the personal nature of her observations, she nodded once, and to her surprise, the girl smiled widely. ‘Then I think I like you, your Grace, even if you killed Cersei when I wanted to. After Joffrey, she was next on my list.’

‘There are plenty more enemies for you to kill,’ she replied with a cautious smile in return. ‘A hundred thousand at least. I hope you are ready. I hope we are all ready, when they come.’

They were not ready now, and though she knew they would not answer her pleas, she eased herself by saying a silent prayer to all the Gods of the world that would listen. *Please, not now. A little more time, or we have no chance.*

***

An awkward dinner in the great hall, where she sported her borrowed gown and hair that had been tightly bound by a clumsy maidservant to hide the fact it was in dire need of a wash. She was as quiet and watchful as young Arya, the diplomatic wife, cushioned by Starks, Ghost and her protective husband, whose lowered brows and clipped words signalled no nonsense and carping. She made stilted conversation over a meagre meal with the lords that were loyal enough to remain at Winterfell, which was most of them, aside from the Manderleys who were in White Harbour and King’s Landing on orders, and the dissenting traitor Lord Glover, sulking at Deepwood Motte. He would be left to rot there, either to be routed out when the war was done, or die screaming at the hands of the dead.

Some of the Glover men had defected and opted to stay on, and they hardly needed the rest if her armies moved fast enough. They had received a raven from Lord Harroway’s Town confirming all was well and the push up to the Neck had begun. The provisions from Dragonstone had arrived by barge, as the White Knife had not yet frozen, and every man had been armed with a crude blade and spear of dragonglass and the castle stores replenished, which had soothed the ruffled feathers of some of the northerners. But still, they eyed her suspiciously and said little to her directly, particularly the tiny figure of Lady Mormont, who had eyes like flint, a tongue like a whip and a view of the world that was astonishingly cynical for a girl of twelve.

Exhausted from smiling politely and holding her tongue, she sighed inwardly in relief as she and Jon excused themselves when the meal was over and jugs of fresh Dornish Red from the south were brought out for the drinkers. They returned to the guest tower to don outside clothes and collect towels and soaps and other items, and trudged down the many stairs and across the courtyard to the Godswood, leaving Ghost to hold the gate once the nervous guards were dismissed. She did not want the dragons loose outside the castle walls, so they were lodged in the woods, and so far, the local people had been too afraid to even peek through the gate to look at them.

‘Tomorrow morning, we will fly,’ she said firmly, glancing up at her man. The snow was softly falling from a sky that was an eerie grey-white from a full moon above the clouds, she could see his eyes narrow in a wince, pretty white flakes in his unbound hair. The cold was bitter, so she tucked herself into his side, wondering how she would bear to strip naked to bathe. There was a grumble from the sheltered spot under the soldier pines, and Ghost lifted his head and sniffed suspiciously at the scent of fire and smoke.

‘All right,’ Jon said softly. ‘We will make time and sneak off for a bit, but I meant what I said about no one watching.’ He kissed her forehead lightly, the first kiss she had received all day, he had been up before she woke and she had hardly seen him alone since. They began to walk deeper into the woods, boots crunching through six inches of packed snow. The heart tree loomed before
them, massive and gnarled and ancient, blood and bones with a sad face contemplating the ages. It sent an atavistic shiver down her spine, but she shrugged it off.

‘You would have married me under that tree if you hadn’t been so impatient,’ she said archly, and he smiled slyly, despite the heavy load of cares he had laboured under from dawn to dusk.

‘There was no chance of waiting that long. I had to have you before you came to your senses,’ he rumbled. In the strange light, his tired face was a half-moon of shadow, his body loose gaited and seemingly unaffected by the chill, though he wore only a gambeson under his cloak, a dark blue and well worn, but fetching.

She turned and slipped a gloved hand under his furs, resting it over his heart. ‘I like this one much better than that old brown thing. Can we burn it finally?’

He snorted and ducked his head, a smile winking at her. ‘You are still my demanding wife, despite being politic at dinner,’ he observed. ‘But to please you, then yes. Toss it in the fire.’

At this small, frivolous victory, she smiled wickedly to earn herself another kiss on the corner of her mouth, then she was guided to the opposite end of the Godswood from the slumbering dragons. There were four natural pools steaming thickly among spindly birch trees, overlooked by an open structure with a roof to keep out the snow and rain, flanked by steel torches planted into the ground. ‘Did you ever bathe here in the depths of winter?’ she asked as she stepped inside the shed to disrobe reluctantly.

‘Aye, don’t worry. The water is very hot in the third pool, if you hunker down you’ll be fine, love,’ he said. ‘Let’s get you undressed. I haven’t seen you naked for days. When I’m finally abed you’re always asleep wrapped up in that ugly bedrobe.’

She laughed at the at the cheeky dig, and moved to the slat bench and toed off her boots and began removing her bottom half under the protection of her borrowed cloak. ‘I am following your advice and keeping warm,’ she sniffed. ‘Besides, you can always rip it off me.’

‘Tonight is the first night I’ve had any energy to think of it, but I promise I won’t rest until I’ve had my fill of you,’ he said promisingly, already down to his shirt and breeches. Bravely she stood and shed her cloak and the rest and faced him bare arsed, gasping as the cold hit her skin and tightened it with gooseflesh from head to toe. She thought it wasn’t an alluring sight, with her teeth now chattering to boot, but Jon froze, his eyes smouldering embers in the torchlight. ‘Come here, wife.’

Glad to get closer so she could shield herself in his more resilient body, she did as bid, but he held her at arm’s length, swallowing visibly before a hand drifted across her breasts, drawn tight with rigid, rosy nipples, then down her torso to rest on her belly, which curved gently between her hipbones. ‘I see it, it’s there. The babe,’ he said hoarsely. ‘Your belly is curved, just a little, and your breasts are round, your nipples darker…Gods, you’re so beautiful.’

Then she was crushed against his chest, clung to like a raft on a merciless ocean, the cold sinking into her marrow only a vague discomfort. She kissed him hungrily to soothe them both, to banish the wave of fear that threatened to rise and choke her at the worry in his shadowy eyes, to turn the strong emotion that gripped him from protectiveness to desire, though her eyes were prickly and threatening to leak. All their hope was signified by the life in her small, frail body.

Languid sips at his luscious, yielding mouth, and she heard a growl to match her sigh, a swelling against her belly, warm and lively and sizeable despite the unkind elements. ‘Cold,’ she murmured into his lips. ‘Very cold. Take your fat wife to the pool if you can lift her, before I shatter to pieces.’
‘Mmm, nicely fat,’ he purred, his hands kneading her buttocks with familiarity. ‘Just the way I like her.’ She snorted and batted her hands against his chest in mock outrage, and with a chuckle he picked her up in an armful and dropped her neatly into the pool, the scorching heat of the bubbling water making her groan in pure bliss, her feet finding the gravel bottom and curling in reaction.

She was unravelling her hair and dropping the pins onto a flat stone when he joined her, bringing the items she had forgotten, slipping into the water bravely but cursing immediately. It was extremely hot, hotter than any bathhouse, and his pearly skin flushed a dull red as he dunked under, curls pulling straight in the water so the inky mass was plastered to his shoulders. She admired him with a feline smirk of ownership, then set to work on her hair, which would take forever to dry but needed tending.

Suds drifted across the surface with wind-blown red and brown leaves when she was done, and she swam through the swirling flotsam to where Jon was sitting, deep in thought. There could be any number of horrible things he was thinking on, so she crawled into his lap and nuzzled his neck until he relaxed and held her, his hooded eyes opening to a fathomless black in the tricky light before he took the soap from her and covered his hands with it to wash her down. It felt so good to have his touch, gentle and somewhat ticklish, she was silent aside from the odd giggle or murmur, her own soapy hands working at his stiff neck, then exploring other places until he was nipping at her mouth, then a bristly trail down her throat to her breasts.

Despite the obvious weight in his soul, he still wanted her, and she would give him sweet release before prodding him to talk about it, though the logistics of taking him in her body submerged in water were difficult. The hand on her bottom moved, fingertips parting her cleft and sliding up and down within, teasing the reactive skin around her back entrance, and at this bold move she tilted her head back in a lusty moan, a dozen heated memories of past couplings flicking through her mind. The mouth wrapped around her right nipple tightened, and she felt the delicious pull shoot down her belly to add to the empty ache in her cunt, then fingers opened her folds, hot water seeping inside her, circles drawn around her nub. She ignited so quickly her nails scored his back at the shock of it.

She hadn’t longed for it in the last few days, too tired and worried to drift into sinful thoughts, but now she needed it, she needed it so badly she wondered if this was the beginnings of what the midwife had warned her about. When the fingers teasing her arse slid down and plugged her cunt with ease she cried out and jerked to take them entire, not enough but something, and she slipped a hand between their merged bodies to handle his heavy cock, her strokes tight and slow, the round tip exposed by her rough movements. It was unwise to try it in the water, but she was tempted to sheath him to the root, for the ache was becoming unbearable.

‘Fuck, Dany,’ he gasped, distracted from his attention to her breasts. ‘What has gotten into you?’

She did not reply for a long while, merely moaned and wriggled on his buried hand, not letting up on her pulls at his length until he began to roll her nub between finger and thumb. ‘Ohh…I need to come, make me come…I need you,’ she whined, hiding her face in his shoulder and sinking teeth into the muscle.

‘All right love, I’ve got you,’ he husked into a tangle of wet hair. ‘Hold on to me, I need to be in you.’ Groaning in relief, she wrapped herself around him like a clinging vine, and as she was drawn out of the warmth of the pool the heat in their bodies condensed as steam, and she did not feel the bite of the freezing air, or the stray snowflakes falling and hissing on her bare back. He held her close, perched on the edge of the pool, freeing a hand to spit on it then gliding it over his length, then fumbling to position himself at her entrance. With a pained sob she braced herself on his shoulders and took him in her, so thick and hot and invasive she struggled for breath.
Her focus turned inward, only the sense of the darkest eyes, wet curls in her fist, pillowy lips that dragged at hers and grunted in satisfaction, pink and soft and addictive. She held him deep and rocked, her legs wrapped tightly around his waist, every jolt of sensation in her cunt bringing her closer to climax as he was nestled against her womb, the pleasure thrumming under her skin and protecting her from the sting of winter. ‘Come for me…you’re so tight and sweet around me…so good…’ he rasped, uneven and undone, passive yet perfect under her sinuous movements.

She went for it, letting herself fall into a climax that swelled and broke, travelling up her centre to escape in a savage cry, half helpless, half triumphant, and even as she was coming he thought of her comfort, dropping them down into the embrace of the water and holding her as she spasmed around him and bit him ragged, unfulfilled but groaning as if she had just served him well.

Resting at last, she blinked away the red fog and kissed the circle of teeth marks on his pale throat. ‘Do not fear, my king, you will get your turn,’ she panted. ‘But I quite fancy the idea of making you wait for it.’

He made a huffy, frustrated noise, but his reply was rich and dark and delightfully wicked. ‘And I will enjoy making you pay for it.’

A gleam of inky eyes, a dart of tongue on his lip, an arch of hips to stir her sore, throbbing flesh deeply, and she quivered in expectation, her thirst for him only a little slaked.

***

By the time they had combed out hair of snarls and knots, dried off and dressed, the lust had receded somewhat, but there was a line of grumpiness between her husband’s black brows, and when she took his arm on the way back to the gate and told him where she wanted to go next the frown deepened. ‘Seven hells, Dany. My stones are aching and you want to go exploring?’ he said wearily, but she only smiled serenely. Shaking his head, he swept her quickly across the courtyard, his handsome wolf companion trotting behind them to ward off gawkers, until he sloped off after an interesting scent.

Jon took her up a back staircase, along an open gallery, and into a hallway lit by sporadic torches that flared as they passed in a swirl of cloaks in search of another stairway to the rooms on the top floor. There was no one around, but the small room had been used recently, as the bed was made up with blankets and furs, the fireplace stocked with logs and a box of tinder and flint. As Jon crouched on his haunches to get a fire lit, she wandered the room, running her hand over the granite blocks to feel the heat from the buried pipes, faint but enough to dull the nip in the air.

She nosed in a closet to find it empty, then knelt to open an oak coffer. His childhood room held no trace of him, he had been gone for so long, but in the coffer she found pieces of young Jon. A practice sword of wood, a book of tales of brave knights and vile villains, some of them her kin, their kin, another book of childish scrawls and sketches of birds and animals that made her smile mistily, and a pile of folded tunics and shirts that looked too small for his well-muscled frame.

She was being rudely inquisitive perhaps, but he didn’t stop her, merely paced the small space, and poked at the fire to make it spit and dance. The silence was peaceful, almost drowsy as the room heated up. ‘You were happy here, and yet unhappy,’ she said at last. The now disordered coffer had helped her to see it; a surly boy, the cuckoo in the nest, keeping out of sight of an unkind Lady Stark, but romping and fighting and laughing with brothers and sisters who cared not that he was a bastard, and watched over by Lord Stark, a brave and noble man, who was perhaps too close mouthed for too long.

‘Aye, she constantly reminded me that it was not my place, and I would lie awake at nights
wondering where that place was, and where my real mother was, but my brothers and sisters made up for it. And Lord Stark... he was a good man, he cared for me, I knew it well.’ His voice was gruff, and when she turned she found him poised by the window, his cloak discarded, a lithe shadow in blue and brown. The perplexed and hurt look in his eyes had returned.

She had not asked him how he felt now he knew the full truth, that all that torment and scorn of his bastard name was for nothing, except to teach him to be prickly, wary, but empathetic and self-effacing to a fault. Good traits in a king, but the self-loathing that went with it, how she resented all the players involved in the tale of his life that had made him suffer it. ‘I am glad you still see them as your brothers and sisters,’ she said gently. ‘But you are not the bastard of Winterfell anymore. How do you feel about that?’

A pained sigh, a fidget of damp hair out of his eyes, which grew veiled. ‘I don’t feel any different, aside from confused. I talked to Sam about what he knows from the records in the Citadel, and I am still confused.’ She felt the same, her brother’s motives were as unknown to her as his person. She couldn’t imagine either of her very different, but equally possessive husbands setting her aside for another wife, but she hesitated to speculate over it with Jon, not now, it was clearly too uncomfortable.

‘How do you feel about this rightful heir nonsense?’ he said abruptly, and it was her turn to squirm. She rose from the floor, leaving her cloak behind as the room now felt hot and close, and she hunted for words that sprung from the truth and not from touchy pride.

‘Being the rightful queen and restoring the glory of my house was all I had for so long,’ she said hesitantly, folding her hands over her precious belly. ‘But now I have so much more, and I know that if we survive it hardly matters, because we will do it together. And that is better than either of us being stuck with the shit job alone.’

‘Kings and queens, ruling and royal blood,’ he said softly, the glow of love that rose in his eyes banishing the closed expression on his face. ‘I don’t give a fuck. All I see is a pretty lass with messed up hair, dressed as a boy, with my baby inside her. All I am is a lucky bastard who managed to win her by sheer luck.’

She sniffed haughtily to deny the lump in her throat. ‘Luck, my arse. It was by being stubborn and rude and demanding, and handsome and distracting, and finally very, very bold, thank the useless Gods.’

Three long strides and she was gathered up, a laugh still on his lips as he kissed her, his hands cupping her face, the ardent lover taking her mouth, tongue darting inside to signal his interrupted desire, then his hands yanking at her gambeson, the laces plucked loose easily, as she hadn’t dressed properly, fully expecting to be stripped and ravaged. ‘I love you, Gods I love you so much…’

‘I want you to fuck me on that bed,’ she breathed heavily as he let her come up for air. ‘I want you to have me and then I want to sleep there in your arms.’ There was something territorial about it that was perhaps unbecoming, but that was how she felt about Jon. He was his singular self and she would change nothing of who he was inside, but he was hers, and the emotional turmoil of the last few days, the alien surroundings, the threat of imminent death, all of it made that animal urge very powerful.

Once she had struggled out of her many layers of clothes between abrading kisses and she was naked in his arms, half giddy with the speed of it, she slithered out of his grasp with a lure of a smile and a flick of hair over one shoulder. He frowned at her sudden escape, but as she mounted the bed on her knees facing the stone wall with her breasts flush against the furs and her arse
presented, he cursed, his voice thick and low. ‘Fucking beautiful, look at you, so pink and wet for me.’ Her buttocks were smoothed with warm hands, then pulled apart to expose her cleft, dabbling fingertips, then a tongue swiping between her holes and inside her cunt, probing her without warning.

She keened and lifted her arse higher, chasing friction, the famished, hurried suckling and lapping to make her wet enough to take his cock, unable to wait and draw it out in a slow torment. She had taken her pleasure and now it was his turn to take his, but she knew he would not give her his seed until she was right there with him. His fingers pulled her further apart, the rasp of whiskers against her delicate folds adding to her travail, her loins throbbing in anticipation of the first harsh thrust, her mewling and trembling urging him further, until he bathed in her welling juices and she grabbed at the end of the mattress to brace herself.

She gave a thwarted cry when his mouth was removed, the rustle and thump of clothes hitting the floor, a fumbling and another curse, then he was grasping her hips, one booted foot up on the bed, the feel of his leather breeches against the back of her thighs. Then she was shunted forward, sobbing under her mass of hair, the luscious stretch of her walls, the burn of his full length in her cunt, a snarl, then an ecstatic groan of a burden being dropped and forgotten.

She was so taut around his driving thrusts her cries were loud and sharp, but he did not go easy on her, fucking her deep and cruel, increasing the pace until her teeth bit into a mouthful of furs and her forehead pressed against the wall. A hand curled in her loose hair to draw her backwards, the tug on her scalp pain to counter the pleasure, a hand cradling her belly, the smacks against her bottom, her throatier moans and words of encouragement. ‘Take me…hurt me…take what you need.’

Her legs were shaking now, her spine was protesting her contorted position, but she surrendered to it, a receptacle for focused aggression, nothing but a body drenched in warring sensations, swept down a dark river that twisted and turned and then finally sent her falling, falling into a pool of heat like the magical place in the woods. Her wail came from the bottom of her lungs and smothered in the furs, her knees bowed and he had to grab her arse to hold her up to finish it, sobbing then growling savagely as her cunt grabbed hold of him in strong pulses, drawing every drop of seed into her depths.

He shook nearly as badly as herself, holding her pinned until he was drained and boneless, collapsing over her and making her gripe at the weight and her head squashed against the stone. To her relief she was lifted tenderly and their joined bodies fitted lengthways on the bed, his cock twitching in her clasp, his sweaty chest moulded to her back, a flushed face against the curve of her neck. She made a happy sound and settled in his arms, her eyelids already drooping. It was comfortable enough in the room, but with some strategic shifting and wriggling about a fur coverlet was drawn over her. The space was cramped, but she loved to be held like this, safe with all her senses attuned to Jon.

‘My fourteen-year-old self could never imagine what just went on in this bed,’ he murmured, and she gave an earthy laugh.

‘How fortunate I am that your imagination has improved vastly since then, Jon Snow,’ she said, freeing a hand to run across his flank. He still had his boots and breeches on. ‘Take that off and tuck us in. I will have my wish and sleep here tonight.’

‘There is a nice big bed in the guest tower fit for a queen,’ he pointed out, his husky voice indulgent. ‘You’re a strange woman sometimes.’

‘Pregnant fancies,’ she said languidly. ‘That, and I cannot be bothered to get dressed again and
face the cold.’

‘All right then, stroppy one,’ he mouthed into her ear. ‘Mind you don’t kick me out in the night to sleep on the rug.’

‘If you hold me tight you will be quite safe. Hold me, and make sure I dream only of you, and not of what we must face in the morning.’
Although I was burning, you're the only light

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A/N: Sorry for those expecting an update of The Pirate Queen this week, I had momentum here and nice smut ideas, so Pirates will be next. In this chapter dragon practice, some old friends arrive, and a midnight visitation of the best kind. I have noticed the A03 Jonerys tag and comments in general are quiet at the moment, which is discouraging, so thank you to everyone who did show up last update and if you’re worried about writer sulks, I will not shut up until I get to the end of this. Cheers, dear readers.

The words were slippery and elusive on his tongue, the sharp consonants and rounded vowels spilling out in a clumsy tangle, distorted with the gruff tones of the North. His brow furrowed in the glaring sunlight thrown up from the fields of white surrounding them, and he tried again, going through each Valyrian word over and over until they were understandable at least to her ears.

‘Sōvegon,’ he repeated patiently, and she smiled encouragingly.

‘You can also say “sōves”, it works just as well.’

‘Bē, Ilagon, Geptot, Paktot.’

Up and down, left and right. Most of those movements were relayed by the body, the digging of knees and the twist of torso, but she thought he should use the instruction words to start with, until he became more accustomed to his seat and his mount’s movements.

‘Tegon’

If they were ever separated and he needed to land in a hurry, he would need that word, though she never had to use it. She never had to use any of them with Drogon due to their mental connection, except the last.

‘Dracarys,’ he said with a wry smile. ‘Best be careful with that one.’ The word was her invention, she had taught it to her sons when they were babies, and she hoped it would work from his mouth as well.

‘What was it that you said to me in the Dragonpit that day?’ he said, taking her gloved hand, and glancing up intently.

‘Nykeā zaldrīzes iksos daor nykeā buzdari,’ she said clearly. ‘A dragon is not a slave.’

‘What a mouthful,’ he mused. ‘But I like it, it rolls from your lips like poetry. I pray that it is the truth, and your lost one is giving that fucking blue bastard a bloody hard time.’

She smiled weakly at this acid humour, despite the familiar stab of pain in her heart. She had pondered at length why it had taken so long for the Wall to be brought down by the enemy, and why he hadn’t flown Viserion straight to Winterfell to kill them all. Perhaps the ancient epithet was indeed the truth, she had always known her sons gave her control over them out of love, and not because they were beasts of burden, or docile pets.
She did not yet feel comfortable enough to quiz Brandon Stark about it, or the very clever and well-read Samwell Tarly. After tackling the subject of his father and brother and their deaths at her hands one afternoon on finding him alone in the library, their conversations had been polite but stilted, but she expected her husband’s dearest friend had a wealth of untapped knowledge from his studies at the Citadel. If only he would relax around her enough to talk freely.

Leaving their responsibilities and the ever-edgy atmosphere of Winterfell in their wake, she and Jon had mounted Drogon and flown out of the Godswood and due north that morning, Rhaegal following closely behind. The sun was high enough in the sky to survey the snow-clad landscape beneath the dragon’s wings. The grey ribbon of the Kingsroad was empty, stretching north through the humped shapes of the ocean of trees known as the Wolfswood. There was no sign of refugees heading south, so they landed in an empty field to the west of the road to begin the lesson, well wrapped against the cold in multiple layers and fur coats. Her husband’s finished coat reached to his knees, a dark grey wolf fur belted by his usual black and silver sword belt. He looked very fine to her, so fine she planted a possessive kiss on his chilly lips before pulling him closer to his waiting dragon.

He dragged his feet a little as he followed, and she snorted in a burst of amusement. ‘No one is around to see you fall off, and you better not. The ground is a long way when you’re up there in the blue.’

When she glanced backward, he didn’t look apprehensive. He was deep in thought, his dark eyes searching her face. ‘When you first rode Drogon, you were in the fighting pit in Mereen under attack. How did he know to come? And how did you know it was safe to mount him and make your escape?’

‘My thoughts,’ she reminded him. ‘I threw my thoughts to the air, desperate for a way out, and he heard me. When he came closer, I could feel him in my mind, like a banked fire behind my eyes. After that, the connection was there, though I often struggled to make him do what I asked of him.’ It was the call of blood to blood, magic long forgotten by her kin but still ready to spark, but Jon Snow knew nothing of the spells of old Valyria, the innate skill of dragon riding. She knew little herself, but she at least had been born into it.

She took the gauntleted hand in hers and drew him next to Rhaegal’s bulk, an iridescent green and gold in the cold light, steaming slightly as the air soaked into his scaly armour. The dragon sniffed and snorted as Jon approached, opening an eye to regard him. He had made sure to visit the Godswood each day for a few minutes, and sit with the dragon and talk with him in a one-sided conversation, get him used to the sound of his voice and his scent so he was less likely to balk when he tried to mount him again. She had absented herself, as he needed to get Rhaegal accustomed without her calming presence. Thus far it had worked, and no attempts had been made to nip at him or growl irascibly.

‘Hello there, handsome lad,’ her husband murmured, reaching to scratch behind his ears, eliciting a sonorous purr of enjoyment. The dragon was at ease, a pile of sinuous limbs in the fast-melting snow, though Drogon was moving impatiently behind him, as always wanting to be free and adrift in the sky, not chained to the earth.

‘I want you to try it,’ she said softly, so not to disturb the peaceful interaction. ‘Empty your mind until you see nothing but a void, and try to sense him through the darkness.’

Jon shot her a dubious look, then closed his eyes, a furrow of concentration flickering on his brow, his hand flattening against the dragon’s head. The silence drew out for a full minute, and the dragons were still, as if listening intently. She held her breath, then exhaled when he broke away
with a rapid blinking, clearing the fog from his brain. ‘Something was there,’ he said with caution. ‘A spark, tiny and flickering, like a taper in a draught. I could feel something hot and heavy behind my lids, a presence, but no words, only a sense.’

‘It’s a start,’ she said with some surprise. ‘Better than nothing.’ She straightened, the wet snow sinking unpleasantly into her boots and nipping at her toes. ‘Mount up, and let us see if Rhaegal will follow Drogon with you on his back. Try to watch what I do.’

He huffed a nervous breath, shoulders hunching, then began to climb, nimbler this time, so she left him without further fretting and mounted her own beast in a swift scramble. When she settled behind the ruff of neck spikes and looked over to Rhaegal, Jon was seated, his eyes wide as his hands reached for a secure grip. Despite the seriousness of his face, he looked like an awed boy atop his first grown up horse, except the horse was vast and temperamental, and breathed deadly fire. He didn’t have to try the words, merely follow her, but she felt a qualm of fear that something would go amiss.

Drogon shifted and grumbled loudly beneath her, and she closed her eyes and sent her hook out to connect with his mind, but spoke the word loudly so Jon could hear.

‘Sōvegon’

Her son bounded forward, snow flying, ice crystals hitting her face as he gained momentum and launched like an arrow into the sky, wings flapping furiously in a steep climb. She heard a loud cursing behind her over the flurry of sounds, the echo of scrambling and wings beating, and she prayed to the fates that he would hold on tight. She turned straight north, intending to scout up the road at a low elevation as she demonstrated various movements that matched the words she had taught him, digging her knees in deep and throwing her insignificant weight into the dragon’s body to get him to move.

Rhaegal drew level beside them, as she had urged Drogon to go slow, and she turned her head warily to find her husband clinging to the spikes grimly but a smile splitting his face, eyes slitted closed with the wind and the creases at his temples. She released some tension in a gleeful laugh, perhaps unwisely, as when she banked left and Jon tried to follow his legs knocked loose and he nearly lost his grip, his smile replaced with a face full of terror. He didn’t have her to hold fast to this time, and it was taking him a bit to adjust. Cursing with worry, she dropped lower, so he wouldn’t have far to fall, the snow there to cushion the impact.

She shot repeated nervous glances in his direction, but Jon had settled, his knees finding better purchase, his body becoming more attune and shifting fluidly with the dragon’s wing beats and leaning forward to reduce the drag of the wind, Rhaegal showing no inclination to buck him off, thank the Gods. Eventually she relaxed enough to pay attention to the monotonous landscape, no scrap of life beyond a huge murder of crows flying south, and a small flock of elk to the east which Drogon turned to eye hungrily, marking them as prey for later.

The road wound on and on, becoming rougher and hidden with drifting snowbanks, empty until she spotted moving dots in the distance, black and grey, all mounted before a mob of folk afoot. She was about to ask Drogon to lift so not to frighten the approaching people, but then Jon began to shout into the whistling wind, gesturing frantically to land. The woods crowded the road, but there was a long strip of fallow ground to the east, a tight space but enough for the dragons to skid to a halt.

Drogon alighted as easy as an eagle on a branch, clumps of snow erupting around them and hissing when they hit his fiery body, but there was a crashing behind them that sent her slithering to the ground as fast as possible, broken branches, piles of disordered snow and frozen earth, an
exceedingly grumpy growl from Rhaegal that gave her the wild urge to laugh, his snaky head shaking in disgust. A figure staggered out of the mess caked in white, dull eyed with shock, then flushing crimson when he saw her watching. Before he could grumble at her mirth, she heard shouting and screaming from the road, horses running amok, and much swearing.

Brushing off the worst of the snow Jon headed in that direction, climbing up to the uneven strip of gravel and striding forward to the bend in the road where the evacuees were piled up, likely cowering in fear. She followed at a more sedate pace, sending her thoughts to her sons, asking them to lie quiet and still and not frighten the people further. There was a bellow that was strangely familiar, a babble of excited voices, and when she rounded the corner she found a mob of men surrounding her husband, thumping him on the back, a huge, red-bearded fellow picking him up off the ground in a bear hug.

‘I could brain you with my axe for scaring the shit out of me!’ he was shouting, a wide beam amidst his shaggy face as he loosened his grip. Finding his feet, her man laughed, seemingly forgetting his inelegant landing at the welcome sight of his old friend. ‘The last thing I heard you were in the stinking south getting married!’

At her approach, some of the men drew back respectfully, leaving a small, thin-faced man in black leather and fur and Tormund taking her in with appreciative eyes. ‘Tormund, I believe you know my wife, her Grace Daenerys Targaryen,’ her husband said, still smiling. ‘Your Grace, this is Edd Tollet, Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch.’

The small man bobbed his head, his narrow eyes flicking between Jon and herself, looking rather stupefied. ‘When I heard you were marrying the queen I didn’t bloody believe it. I hear lots of strange things of late, seen a few too, but this requires a drink or ten to think over.’ He shook his greasy head, then thumped Jon on the back. ‘Well done lad, she’s a beauty, and has fucking big dragons. They’ll be handy, given what just happened to my fucking Wall.’ His eyes landed on her face, her visible amusement impossible to quell. ‘Er, beg pardon, your Grace. I don’t spend much time around queens, or women in general.’

‘That’s quite all right, Lord Commander,’ she said graciously. ‘I am glad to see you in one piece, Tormund as well.’

The men of the Watch and surviving Wildlings had wandered off to catch the horses and calm the tail of smallfolk at the rear, but another man stepped forward with a smooth bow and a cultured voice which gave her a sick qualm of memory of that terrible day at Eastwatch. ‘Your Grace, queen Daenerys. I owe you my last life, I am at your service always.’

‘Lord Beric Dondarrion, I am also relieved to see you with us,’ she said faintly, offering her hand, knowing he would bow over it, despite his eyepatch and disreputable appearance. All the men looked ragged, starved and haunted, despite their friendly, enthusiastic greetings. They needed food, warm beds and likely gallons of strong drink before they could tell their dread tales. She took back her hand and returned to Jon, smiling up at Tormund.

‘Did my eyes deceive me, or did you let that handsome fool ride your dragon?’ he said eagerly, then he turned to Jon. ‘Her landing was much better than yours, you bloody oaf.’

‘Aye well, that was my first time, and you had to be around to see it,’ Jon muttered, and his friend gave a bark of laughter, then sobered.

‘You’ll have to get better than that to bring down that...thing,’ he said, his blue eyes growing dim, then he shook his bright head, his brave smile returning in a glint of surprisingly good teeth. ‘Luckily you have a wife now to sort you out, thank the Old Gods. I thought that small pecker of
yours was going to drop off one day, if you didn’t get around to using it."

She smothered a giggle in her gloved hand, her husband’s flushed face growing pinker, hunting for suitably queenly words before it dissolved into a contest of friendly insults. ‘All of you must be tired and hungry,’ she said, shooting Tormund a quelling look. ‘We will fly the dragons out so you can go on your way without the smallfolk being frightened. Are they evacuees from Last Hearth?’

‘Aye, your Grace, we met them on the road. A lame bunch, women and children and the old, mostly. How they got out before the dead swamped the keep, I haven’t a clue.’ Lord Tollett frowned. ‘We saw no wights on the way, they’re all to the east, sweeping up recruits as they go, no doubt.’

‘Edd, how many men have you got?’ Jon said abruptly, his smile fading to sternness.

‘About seventy all told, and the men of the Shadow Tower should be close behind us. No point in guarding the Wall now,’ the Commander shrugged. ‘How many men do you have at Winterfell?’

‘Twelve thousand, and the spearwives that didn’t go to Eastwatch,’ Jon replied, hunching his shoulders, then he straightened to deliver the good news. ‘And a hundred thousand more, marching north as we speak. Dothraki, Unsullied, the Lannister legions, and a few thousand other southerners.’

‘That’s more like it,’ Tormund growled. ‘Now we stand a chance. Let’s hope those dead fuckers piss about a bit longer chasing helpless folk down in the east before they come after us.’

***

By virtue of hot bricks at the foot of the bed, a mountain of blankets and furs and the itchy grey woollen bedrobe that swamped her swelling figure, she had a blissful pocket of warmth to slumber within, the lamps still burning and the fireplace glowing as her eyelids drooped and she slid under, empty oblivion taking her without flashes of night terrors to make her thrash and call out.

She was alone as she rarely was these days, surrounded by her new kin, her reluctant new subjects, and tongue-tied servants, strangers all but for her abstracted husband, who she had left in the great hall to drink to the survival of his old brothers and friends who had escaped the wreckage of the Wall. Like most women, she didn’t care to sit around and watch a pack of men get drunk and rowdy, though their nervy japes and gallows humour were very amusing, countering the doleful mood of the few others present.

She was tired, her child a conscious weight in her belly, though still invisible when clothed, her limbs aching from hard exercise, floundering across snowy fields and then riding energetically to demonstrate the necessary moves in an exaggerated fashion to her husband. Something so instinctual was difficult to teach to another, and she could only hope that tiny flicker of flame in the dark recesses of his mind would become a true connection between himself and Rhaegal, but like her moment of desperation in the fighting pit long ago and far away, perhaps Jon needed panic and urgency to make it jump and spit and flare.

It was the hour of the wolf when she sensed the envelope of peaceful warmth around her slack form disturbed by a waft of cold air, colder hands, a shifting of heavy fabrics and furs, a scratch of bristles on her inner thighs as the hated bedrobe was pushed up to her waist. She gave a little squawk of protest, lids fluttering to find the bedside lamps still guttering, but the answering chuckle, deep and fogged with ale, made her smile, thinking of previous occasions when she had been woken in such a manner.
'You have the tightest, sweetest cunt,' he purred, somewhere underneath all those layers, and she snorted and spread her legs obligingly. She needed her sleep, but needed him more, the Gods knew it could be the last chance to lose themselves in each other, the fight for the living was growing closer.

She had acquired a few more feminine fripperies thanks to Sansa fossicking among cupboards and sending a servant to the pedlar in the Winter Town, so she was slathered with a cream scented with gillyflowers to soften her skin, and had tended to her pubic hair with a tiny pair of scissors. Having gotten used to being bare, she disliked the feel and look of it, so had trimmed the wispy regrowth back to a mere furze with shameless vanity, and it was immediately discovered with creeping fingers and soft, generous lips.

Another pleased purr, the robe pushed up to her neck, hands encircling her opening to pull the naked folds apart, a flick of tongue up the seam to make her moan and struggle beneath his crouched, chilly form, annoyingly invisible to her eager eyes, but it was damn cold as usual, so she didn’t shrug off the covers just yet. The robe was smothering her face, so she wriggled out of it deftly and tossed it aside, leaving her naked in the cocoon of the covers, traversed by wandering, ticklish hands as his mouth gently explored her, as if he had all the time in the world to make her ignite.

There was no point in feigning sleep, her twitches and moans gave her away, so her hands found his hair, intent on unravelling it and wrapping the curls around her fingers to guide him where she willed. He was in a teasing mood, pausing to nip at the flesh of her thighs, tracing the shape of her folds from top to bottom several times until she whined and pushed his face into her in demand. His tongue dipped into her with ease as she was already wet for him, then satisfied with tasting her arousal, a little groan in his throat, he relented and began to bathe her nub in slow licks with the flat of his tongue.

In the cosy dark, drowsy and very comfortable, the pleasure was felt in every subtle movement, even in the pull of his hands holding her wide open, the abrasion of the pricklier hair above his lips, the vibration of his grunts. It wasn’t the heavy ache of needing to come, not yet, just a tingling that sent her skin pulling tight and her limbs shifting restlessly, her fingers carding the mess of curls in her hands.

Her husband was a very giving lover, and even when using her body hard and making her submit to dark impulse he thought of her satisfaction before his own, unless she insisted otherwise. She pictured the straining, striated muscles of his abdomen, the delectable creases that pointed to his pretty cock, framed by thighs that bunched with more muscle. He was exquisitely made, enough to send her crazed even after months of sharing her bed, and suddenly her mouth watered. The urge to touch him and pleasure him, and take his thick, musky length in her throat was too strong to remain pliant and indolent until he inevitably made her come.

‘I want you in my mouth,’ she crooned. ‘Get up here, Jon Snow, and let me take my turn.’

‘No, I won’t,’ a muffled voice said mutinously, then she jumped as his teeth closed carefully around her nub. ‘Mmm, you taste too good.’

His tongue poked at her until she cried out, the slow burn about to transform to selfish need. ‘Ahh love,’ she whined. ‘Turn about then, lie above me so I can taste you while you taste me.’ She had straddled his face many times, but she had never served him while beneath him, and was intrigued by the novelty. She freed his hair from her grasp and shuffled up against the pillows. The covers lifted and she saw quizzical brows and shadowy eyes, lips puffy and pink and wet with her mess, the silvery glint of an old scar. ‘Indulge me,’ she said simply, and his mouth pursed, brows tilting
in a smoulder as he focused on her lips, parted in wanton invitation.

Despite a surfeit of drink, his flushed cheeks, the tendency to chuckle at nothing, and rather clumsy movements as he rose and turned to face her hidden feet and bury his face back between her legs, he was not unmanned, quite the contrary. She had the added delight of having his beautifully curved bottom in her hands and vision as well as his lovely cock, ready to be engulfed in her mouth, and she couldn’t resist giving his arse a sharp nip before twisting her head to chase the head of him and take him down.

At this angle she couldn’t fit all of him in, so she concentrated her efforts on laving the tip, using the pressure of her lips and the scrape of her teeth to make him twitch and growl into a mouthful of her cunt, and soon she needed to withdraw and use her hand on him when his assault on her soaked flesh became too distracting. She resisted the pulls on her lips, the repeated flicks at her nub, muffling her cries by sucking his stones into her mouth, which made him jerk forwards to escape her with a strangled sound, then settle with a drawn-out moan when she caressed him gently, careful not to hurt him.

She took handfuls of his buttocks to hold him down and take as much of his cock as she could, tense and full under her slippery tongue. She hummed in satisfaction, her teeth sinking in a little as his fingertips dabbled at her back entrance in warning, then penetrated to give her lazy pleasure a keen edge. She parted her thighs wider like the eager whore she was for him. No one knew her as she was at this moment, not even past lovers, and certainly not friends, allies or enemies. Her regal mask, all the trappings of a famous name, destiny and duty forgotten. She was only a lewd, writhing girl, dripping nectar on the sheets, aching with want from head to toe, serving and being served, bowing off the feather mattress with a choked cry as the tension in her loins snapped and she released into his greedy mouth, her own mouth crammed full of him and contracting along with her empty cunt.

He didn’t spill his essence, but she tasted a hint of his salt as he wriggled free with a curse, leaving her gasping and jostled soundly until he turned to face her, wiping his beard clean before wrapping her shaking legs around his hips and entering her in one swift, relentless plunge. Yelping at the shock of being filled so abruptly her flailing hands dragged him down for a slippery kiss, knowing by his deep, deliberate thrusts this was going to take some time, until she was either begging for it to end, or clawing his back to red ribbons.

She arched her spine to offer up her breasts, dimly wondering how long it would be until her belly got in the way and he could no longer fuck her like this, pressed so close their skins stuck fast and her softer, smaller body yielded to the hardness of his torso as well as the satisfying girth filling her cunt, stretching her until he moved within her too easily and she felt the need to lift her hips to notch him against her full womb and make it ache sweetly with the pressure.

A mouth wrapped around a nipple, suckling harshly, then dropping a kiss on her panting mouth and curling with a smile, dark earthy eyes full of love and glassy with too much drink, raven curls falling around her face like a ragged curtain. He slowed and stopped entirely, holding their babe between their fused bodies, drinking her in so intensely it was too much to bear without flinching, that old haunting feeling of wonder over what she had done to deserve such a man, and then the moment passed with a naughty twist to his mouth, a throaty mouthful of words filling her ears. ‘There is no one around to hear you, so make all the noise you need. I want to hear you wailing.’

She whimpered and instinctively reached behind her to brace her hands on the headboard, knowing he was going to be rough with her, her cunt throbbing around him in anticipation, lips caught in her teeth as her legs were gathered up, bending her double, not resting on his shoulders but tucked against his chest, her ankles crossed in the contorted position. He looked very pleased with himself
as the first withdrawal and thrust was met with a loud cry and bulging eyes, then he was distracted, his focus narrowing to the mutual pleasure of the new angle, grinding against her upper wall with each hammer blow, making her experience every inch anew.

His tongue flicked at his bottom lip and his smoky eyes were veiled by spidery lashes, her name a gravelly caress, coupled with filthy words that matched her own. She longed to grab his face and silence him with a kiss, but she was twisted in a knot, trapped as neatly as if he had bound her hand and foot like on their wedding night. Her spine protested and her bent legs joined in, but it was nothing compared to the agonising bliss at every slap against her loins. It was just out of reach, the second implosion of the swirling mass in the pit of her belly, the solid length of his cock pulling her apart and setting her womb cramping in protest, her eyes stinging, voice cracking in a stream of helpless wails as he desired of her.

It was torment, but she savoured it for as long as she could, balancing on the frail rope strung over the void, until he urged her to touch herself. Her shaking hand slipped within the narrow space and caught her nub in jerky movements, her spine arching further to urge him deeper still, rutting within her until she dissolved into a cloud of raw sensations, her eyes flying open, blind and unknowing, then the sight of him stiffening, his face twisting savagely at the lure and stroke of her rippling climax inviting him to let go and fill her up with all he had, spurts of seed lost inside the turmoil of her body releasing again and again until she felt drugged and drained.

She was quick to uncoil her legs and lie flat under his body following her down to rest, but then she didn’t move for a long while, only toying with his mussed hair with numb fingers, content to hold him inside her well used channel until he softened and slipped free. She thought she heard a gentle snore, and when she smoothed curls away from his face she snorted indulgently to find him dozing, every worry line smoothed, boyish and vulnerable despite fucking her like the skilled warrior he was. His dead weight was mildly uncomfortable, and she yawned widely, the interrupted sleep felt in every part of her now, but she cradled him to her breasts like a slumbering child, a fierce woman-ache tugging at her heart.

At last he woke with a gasp and a grumble, sheepish eyes looking up at her softly smiling face, and he rose up to kiss her brow before tipping sideways off her and tucking into her side, tugging at a loose strand of hair from her night braid and smiling sweetly in return.

‘I thought you’d thump me for coming to bed drunk and waking you up to ravage you.’

‘I haven’t thumped you once for waking me up,’ she said dryly, turning on her side so they were face to face. ‘The day will come though, my tipsy lad. How did you escape your rowdy friends?’

‘They were pissed enough to go in search of women who aren’t too choosy over who they will take to bed,’ he rumbled, his mouth curled at the corners. ‘I said I had my own very choosy woman, and I’d best find her bed before she came after me with her dragons.’

She tried a stern look, but her creeping smile gave away her amusement. ‘I am that fearsome,’ she said easily. ‘And they are your dragons now too, by blood and marriage. You did well today. I know you were scared shitless beneath that heroic surface.’

‘I nearly fell off twice lass, and that landing was entertaining to everyone but me,’ he grumped, then smiled shyly. ‘It was amazing, a gift. A bloody terrifying gift, but thank you.’

It wasn’t for play, though she was delighted he had enjoyed himself in the end. She didn’t need to remind him of the seriousness, the urgency. When he wasn’t in bed with her, he went through his days and nights hunched under all the responsibility he had to shoulder, including his secret blood and all that it might mean. This too was a gift, an hour of two bodies communing, using love and
lust to bring strength to the rest of it. Obligation, the care of thousands, nay, millions of people, could keep a noble man or woman staggering onwards to the bitter end, but this, this made their steps purposeful, their minds sharpen. She would not shatter the moment with her hidden fears, now caught in her throat like choking smoke.

‘I am not sure I can walk after all this, let alone ride, you would probably shame me if we were to fly now,’ she said, pushing away the ever-present dread, and he smirked proudly, his onyx eyes glinting with a hint of wickedness that pleased her. This was a side of her solemn, subtle lover no one else had the privilege to see.

‘I would like to try out lots of things before you get too fat and lazy to do them,’ he said casually, and she laughed. She assumed they had tried most variations, but clearly he had been doing some more of his quietly inventive thinking.

‘On my knees, on my side, sitting astride you…you won’t be deprived,’ she said, her voice sleepy but rich with promise. ‘And neither will I. I will wear you down to a stub, as the midwife assured me.’

‘There’s no time for any of that,’ he said in the dour, disapproving tones of a Stark, and she giggled and smacked him lightly on the shoulder.

At his teasing chuckle, a slice of white teeth amidst lips plump and reddened from her kisses, she reached for him, pressing her forehead against his, trembling at the mixed emotions welling in her chest. It was so hard to find moments of lightness amidst the gathering dark, and it would get harder still. She would keep trying to make him smile and be his support, though the thought of their leaderless armies of mismatched Westerosi and Essosi men heading north made her fret and itch to return to where she belonged, not drifting around Winterfell at a loose end. Cold logic directed her towards returning to the march and leaving Jon behind to organise the smaller northern forces as best he could, but she couldn’t stand the thought of it.

‘What are you brooding over now?’ he said, immediately wise to her glum thoughts. ‘Your mind is working away, and you look so sad all of a sudden.’

She swallowed, forcing the dutiful words out in a rush. ‘Your family need you. Your men need you. Our armies need me to rally them and drive them onwards as fast as possible, and prevent any quarrels arising. Though it makes me sick at heart, perhaps the right thing to do is for me to leave this place and return to the march. To scout the enemy’s movements on my own is too perilous, and I am not wanted here as a leader of men.’ She was in a difficult position. Without her generals and advisors at her back, and wary of offending people who were ever-ready to mistrust her, she did not feel empowered to join in with planning the defence of the North. The futility was not a comfortable state of being.

Her lover’s scowl was forbidding. ‘They’re bloody ungrateful shits, the lot of them, even with that whinger Glover gone, and good riddance to the troublemaker,’ he snarled, then his mouth formed in a mulish line. ‘No, my queen. The right thing to do is to stay together, and there is little I can do here either.’ He paused and sighed heavily, shaking her with the depth of it. ‘I don’t have enough men to take the fight north. We are just sitting here like stupid sheep in a pen waiting for the fight to come to us, and hoping the southern legions make it here fast enough.’

His voice was rising with frustration, and he sat up suddenly against the bolsters, and she followed, dragging a fur up to her neck to protect her from the creeping cold. ‘People are fleeing south hoping we can save them all, and we can do nothing. Two strongholds have likely been melted to slag by the Night King’s dragon, and more men turned, and we can do nothing. Dany, when you go, I will go with you. They won’t like it, but this lot don’t like anything we do.’
She gave a faltering laugh, and snuggled into the offered crook of his arm, tucking her face into the curve of his neck and laying a kiss there. ‘Let us give it a few more days,’ she said quietly. ‘Perhaps your brother will give us news of the enemy that will make our path clearer. But we both know our duty.’

The kiss did not soothe him, his eyes were wide and dark with worry as they sought hers, a hand slipping to palm her gently protruding belly under the covers. ‘But the babe…what if…I could not forgive myself if something happened and I wasn’t there for you.’

‘What can you do for me that the midwife can’t, if something goes amiss?’ she said practically. The sickness had nearly petered out, and there had been no sign of blood or cramps, but given her history and what the war would demand of her body and mind, losing the child was a possibility that was in the back of both their minds, but she wouldn’t think of it, and she wouldn’t let Jon think of it. ‘Much as I want to stay abed with you and the babe, and pretend that none of this exists, we must do what is right for everyone, including the ungrateful shits. It that means parting from you, then I will do it.’

Chapter End Notes

With this update, this fic just moved into the Top 20 Jonerys fics on the tag (by kudos). Thank you so much, a small triumph, but it's a big deal to me to get there xxx
Be careful of the curse that falls on young lovers

Chapter Notes

I thought I should do another recap since 13 chapters have gone by since I did the last one and a lot of interesting, wildly canon divergent shit has happened (what is canon though? We know nothing about Season 8, nothing, tight lipped fuckers).

After finding out about Cersei’s betrayal, Daenerys decided to attack King’s Landing before heading north. During the attack, the throne room was destroyed by Drogon, killing the actual Mad Queen in the process. Dany opts not to formally take the throne until after the Night King is defeated. A council is appointed to govern the south, with Tyrion to lead it. Dany and Jon find out they’re pregnant, they get married in a sept to make it official, make a big announcement to the general public, and start leading their armies north. The armies consist of Dany’s legions, the Lannister army, and a few divisions rounded up from the south.

On the way north, they get the news the Wall has fallen. Dany and Jon fall out about it, then quickly make up because no time for excessive angst. The armies are sent north leaderless while they fly up to Winterfell to get news and do what they can to prepare. On the way they stop at Greywater Watch, and Howland Reed drops the bomb about Jon’s parentage. He’s rattled as hell about it and angry about being lied to his whole life, but his wife being his aunt is a non-issue, and later the ‘true heir’ thing is received with similar impatience. At Winterfell, the Starks are a bit hostile, the lords worse, so Dany keeps it low key. Jon starts dragon lessons, the Watch and Tormund show up, people are fleeing south and crowding Winterfell. An unmanned Last Hearth has fallen, the Karhold is next.

The southern armies are racing north, and are reaching the Neck, but it looks like they will get there too late. Dany is considering flying back to join them as she feels useless at Winterfell. And there we are. Oh, and there was a lot of smut during proceedings, but that may get harder to achieve as we go to war. Thanks for reading people. 82 thousand hits, what the fuck…I never expected to get this far.

_______________________________

A/N: I will keep this short given all the rambling above. Welcome back, I read some of this to my husband and got his excitable seal of approval. I will be concentrating on this for the foreseeable apart from a diversion to do a Pentos-set one shot for Dream of Spring Week. Enjoy, it’s long, but hopefully engrossing. Comments appreciated highly, I know you’re all bored in the off-season but I’m trying to keep you amused through the power of smut (and plot, there is some…)

It was her first council meeting with the lords of the North and the Vale, attending as queen though they had not bent the knee and she had not insisted, deeming it politic to leave the niceties to a less fraught time. Arrayed in a gown of mulberry wool that had belonged to Catelyn Stark and been hastily altered to fit her, her hair neatly braided, her chain of command across her chest, she sat at the head of the table like a cyasse piece, flanked by Sansa and Arya. Tormund sat close by, eyeing
the grumbling lords as if fighting the urge to crack a few skulls, Edd Tollet also there to add the odd blunt interjection.

Jon and Bran were expected, but Sam Tarly arrived panting and fretful to report they were in the Godwood and would arrive later. Puzzled, she snapped out a few words to convene the discussion, which dragged interminably without her husband to crack the whip. After endless gripes over lack of food and space for the troops and evacuees, she grew weary and stood to answer, interrupting Lord Hornwood’s outraged report of a gelding of one of his men by a feisty spearwife who did not appreciate his attentions.

An idea had been forming in her mind after visiting the sprawling camps of smallfolk and Wildlings with the Stark girls, and now she would assert herself and share it. ‘My lords, I have had past experience of this, trying to fight a war in Slaver’s Bay with a horde of sick, weak and frightened people getting in the way of things,’ she said firmly. ‘Those people can’t fight, they can only die and become the enemy. We have barges sitting idle, the river is not yet frozen. Why not send these people south to White Harbour? If the Manderleys can’t house them, my ships are in port to take them to Dragonstone to wait out the war in safety.’

There were some grudging nods, and surprisingly the stone-faced Lady Mormont spoke in support. ‘Anyone who can’t wield a blade, a bow or spear is useless to us,’ she said, her dark button eyes flashing around the crowded table. ‘I say the southern queen is right. Round them up and ship them off before they become too many.’

The Umber boy eyed her nervously, his little face drained and lined with grief over what had happened to his home. Some of his surviving folk were camped outside the walls, but as he began to speak in a reedy voice the stentorian tones of Lord Royce interrupted. His two thousand knights were much needed, but he liked her little and trusted her less. ‘I have heard the Targaryen queen’s island is held by her savage Dothraki. I would not attest to the safety of your smallfolk, my lords.’

What an idiot, she thought, clenching her jaw and speaking coolly. ‘The savages that are the wives and parents of the same army riding north to save your hide, Lord Royce.’

There was a bark of laughter from Tormund, a disdainful look from Arya, but Lord Cerwyn stirred from his nest of furs and butted in, his rabbity face hostile. ‘Should we trust the queen that crucified hundreds of lords in Mereen, leaving them to rot in the sun? Whose mad father murdered Lord Rickard and his son before the very throne she sought to win? Who…’

‘That is enough!’ Sansa said sternly, standing up in a rush. ‘I am the Lady of Winterfell and she is your queen, and my sister. You will not rake over coals long dead in this meeting. We are here to plan, so plan, or hold your silence.’

She was grateful for the support, and the curb on the strong urge to erupt in a torrent of acid words at their mulishness and ingratitude. Lady Stark was cold eyed and bristling with indignation, her younger sister staring Lord Cerwyn down, twirling a curved blade between her palms, the brightness of Valyrian steel caching her eye.

‘Fucking southron idiots,’ Tormund growled. ‘The dead march on us, the queen brings you a huge army and two fire breathing dragons and all you can do is bitch and whine like old women.’

There was a wave of indignation at this, a fumbling for weapons, so her voice cracked, emphatic and steely. ‘It is my wish, and the king’s wish, that our people are led to safety, and they will be safe on Dragonstone. That is my final word. The only ones left at Winterfell in two days’ time should be those who can fight for us. Lady Sansa, will you see to it?’
The red headed girl nodded graciously. ‘At once, your Grace. May I suggest we re-convene when my brothers are free?’

‘I agree, my lady,’ she said with relief. ‘Thank you for your time, my lords. You may leave us.’

A scraping of chairs, some resentful mutterings, a familiar thump on the shoulder from Tormund, some closing words from Sansa, and she was left alone. She sat down in a graceless slump, looking up to find Sam Tarly shuffling to the door, a pile of books in his arms. ‘Lord Tarly, I would speak with you,’ she said quietly. She had already endured unpleasantness this morning, she may as well continue.

The fiasco of a meeting, her sense of powerlessness without her husband exerting his quiet authority, her constant wondering about the morale of her progressing armies, all of it was hardening her resolve to take her sons and leave this place, though Jon tested that resolve constantly. For months they have been wrapped up in each other, regardless of whatever demands swirled around them, and the prospect of leaving him gave her a sick, vertiginous feeling, as if she was balancing on the broken edge of the Wall and contemplating seven hundred feet of abyss. But she was a queen, and she had the unenviable job to do, and it seemed she could not do it here.

Shaking her head, she focused on Tarly hovering awkwardly by the table. ‘I’m not a lord, your Grace. I am a man of the Watch,’ he said, then frowned. ‘But I guess the Watch doesn’t exist anymore, so I am not sure what I am.’

‘Have a seat, my lord,’ she said kindly. ‘The Watch are brave men, and we need all of you that are left to us, but perhaps when this is all over you’d like to take your lady and baby home and be Lord Tarly of Horn Hill? I am sure your mother and sister would be thrilled to have you back.’ If they defeated the dead, there would be no need for a Wall, or men to man it, and seeing Sam take his rightful place would assuage some of her discomfort over her executions of his father and brother, the latter especially.

The stocky man in black took a seat, studying his ink-stained hands rather than look at her. ‘What can I do for you, your Grace? It is the baby?’ At her start of surprise, he blushed a little. ‘Jon told me, he’s proud, and so worried.’

‘I wish he wouldn’t worry. The baby is fine. The sickness is gone, and I am quite well,’ she said frankly, but moved on briskly from the personal subject. ‘Jon tells me you are the cleverest man he knows, and that you left the Citadel with books that can help us. I wanted to ask you about wights, and dragons. I need you to help me understand what has become of my son, so we can find a way to kill him.’ His evasive eyes sharpened at her words, his round face full of unease. ‘I have seen them. I know how to kill them, but what are they?’

‘The dead,’ he said flatly. ‘The dead of any creature of any use to him in his war against the living. People, giants, bears, horses, even mammoths. Animated by magic, his magic. They don’t eat, they don’t sleep, they live again only to follow orders and kill, rotting away slowly. They don’t talk, only scream and growl and bite. Not even the old books know whether they actually think.’

‘A dragon is not a beast of burden, or a person. A dragon is also magic, fire made flesh. How can his magic turn my son, and how much control does the Night King have over him?’

She was likely arguing uselessly against his litany of horror, but she refused to believe her son was easily tamed, dead or not. She knew her children, she remembered the struggle she had gone through to bind them to her, to speak to their minds, and the blood of Old Valyria was strong in her. The monster had no such connection other than ruthless dominance and a will of iron, and iron cold enough could grow brittle, and snap.
‘They don’t have much time for magic and myth in the Citadel, your Grace, which is why I left,’ Sam said ruefully. ‘The magic of dragons and the magic of the Night King are day and night, fire and ice. They are adversaries. Perhaps the magic of your son fights against his control, even in death. Maybe that is why we are all still alive, and he hasn’t flown straight here to kill his greatest foes, being Jon and yourself. Perhaps the fight is already weakening your son, and you can both bring him down, like in the dragon duels of old. We need that dragon destroyed. It slows the enemy and gives us a chance.’

It was pure speculation, aligned with her own hopeless musings, but there was a deep disquiet in her guts. She had come to Westeros to take back her birthright and set the country to rights, not to be the saviour of humanity. She did not feel equal to the task, and despite his stoicism she knew Jon didn’t feel equal to it either. The enemy knew them now, knew they had sworn to bring his end, he could likely sense they were both here waiting with a paltry army and two dragons, one of which was ridden by a novice.

Sam kept speaking, imparting what little he knew of the Long Night, then stuttered to a halt when he caught on to her abstraction. The selfish, childish part of her wanted to gather up her husband and flee a few hundred miles south. Winterfell was the centre of the target, and it would be soon, too soon, all thanks to her stubborn insistence in taking King’s Landing first. Her enemies in the south were routed, but it hardly mattered if they were all going to die here. As she had said on the ship when she sat at the bedside of her half-dead lover, she had to see to know. It appeared she had to keep seeing it, and choking on the bitterness of her choices.

The silence between them was borne of deep thought, not awkwardness, she could nearly hear it, his mind ticking away like her timepiece. ‘I will do some more reading, your Grace. I haven’t been looking into the subject of dragons,’ Sam said at last, and she was about to reply when she finally took notice of the rising hubbub from down in the main courtyard; a great stirring of men, the ring of steel, horses neighing and stamping divots in the crusted snow. Troops were moving out in a tearing hurry, going by the bellowed orders.

Her heart sank to her boots, and she got up to dash to the nearest window. Heavy horse, bearing men in armour with blue and white banners. ‘Is Lord Royce so offended by his queen’s presence he’s opted to defect?’ she wondered aloud, her tone rather acerbic to cover her flaring nerves.

She heard a wry snort behind her. ‘Even Royce isn’t that stupid, for all that he’s a pompous old git.’

There was a thunk of boots taking the tower stairs at a run, smaller feet behind, Jon and his shadow. Whenever Arya wasn’t following her around, partly to ward off anyone with malign intentions, and partly because she had a thousand questions, she followed her brother, hungry for the sight of him after so many years, and also bored of placidly waiting like sheep to the slaughter. They bore the same wide-eyed expression that made them look quite alike as they burst through the door, their graceful warrior bodies thrumming with tension. The greenseer must have thrown his mind far and wide this day, using the weirwood as a conduit.

‘You have sent Lord Royce off on a mission,’ she guessed. ‘What is the news?’

‘The Karhold,’ Jon said curtly. ‘Lady Karstark obeyed the raven message and got as many people out on fishing boats as she could. She is leading the rest west. The castle is surrounded and she is being pursued by an advance party. She doesn’t know she is being chased, but Bran saw it. If we don’t reach them in time they will be massacred. Two walkers, and over a thousand wights.’

‘Royce won’t reach them in time, even riding hard,’ she said, moving away from the window to pace out her agitation. Here it was, the dead were still many leagues away and yet too close. She
felt the shameful urge to flee again, an itch across her shoulder blades that made her hunch, a hand going to her belly under her heavy skirts, but then she forced her spine as straight as an arrow and eyed her husband calmly, pretending not to see the worry in his deep brown eyes. He knew that look on her face.

‘Then we must fly north to help them escape. Let us go, you can practice along the way.’

***

The buffeting wind in her face, the grumblings and snarls of her sons as they communed in flight, smelling battle ahead, the curses and prayers of her passengers clinging on doggedly, all of it was peaceful compared to the clamour of their hurried departure from Winterfell. The heavy horse disappearing in a cloud of icy dirt, Sansa and the more cooperative lords riding out to address the evacuees, Jon rounding up doughty fighters who were willing to chance a ride on dragonback, interspersed with Arya arguing with her grouchy brother up and down staircases and even through the chamber door as they were dressing and arming.

‘Poisoning Freys with wine and cutting a few throats doesn’t mean you can fight the dead,’ Jon growled at his equally stubborn sister. ‘Aye, you’re a good fighter, but you’re a tiny lass. They will squash you flat.’

‘Your wife is also a tiny lass,’ Arya shot back, mimicking his dour tones. ‘And I don’t see you locking her up in a tower.’

‘Don’t think that I haven’t considered it,’ her husband muttered darkly. ‘Besides, she fights in the air, not on the ground. You’re not bloody going. Stay here and help your sister with the smallfolk.’

She took no part in it, compressing her lips at the urge to laugh at their back and forth. Arya had finally worn him down at the last minute and was now sitting behind her, as lively as a squirrel at the thrill of the ride and making loud comments on her brother’s riding prowess. Jon was alone, they couldn’t experiment with Rhaegal carrying passengers so soon, and despite the audience he was taking the opportunity to practice, barking the Valyrian words and throwing his body into the dragon to get him to bank and swoop.

He was doing better, but it was difficult to watch him with all she was trying to process, as well as the sickening anxiety that had her innards in turmoil. She had never been so uneasy going into battle before, but she knew what lay ahead. She had to protect her sons at all costs, it would take all her skill to split her mind between defence and attack, there would be little energy to spare worrying about Jon, she had to trust his nascent skill, and the Gods, if they were watching.

The weather was fine and clear, but there were rolling, ominous clouds to the north and east, the wind so keen her face felt like a mask of frost, the monotonous landscape of pines and bare oaks and birch and beech, and white, a blanket of it to the horizon, boring and bleak and hostile. Her mind was in the south, puzzling over Bran’s other news; a great battle on a sunlit sea, red and black sails, the fiery heart of the Lord of Light and the Greyjoy Kraken. She and Jon had no chance to discuss what it meant, good news or bad, but the warring fleets were now as one, descending upon a ramshackle port which Arya identified as Saltpans.

Who was the victor, she did not know, but an image flashed into her mind of the striking red priestess who had visited her on Dragonstone, advised her to summon Jon Snow, and mysteriously vanished. A benefactor, she still thought, even if Jon had sworn to hang her if she ever returned to the North. She had also burned many people alive in a cause she thought was right, though it ever haunted her, and how could she hate the woman who had brought her lover to her doorstep? But she could do or say nothing about it now, it was a conundrum for another day. Gods, she needed to
stop her mind wandering like a houseless spirit, and focus.

The babble from her passengers died down as the clouds swallowed them whole, the light dimming to dusk, beads of icy snow hitting exposed skin in a painful, erratic blizzard. She dropped down below the belly of the clouds to sight the Kingsroad, looking for the crossroad that led to the Karhold and the sign of fleeing figures afoot and ahorse. The hastily cobbled together plan was to warn the people to run for it, drop off the fighters to act as a rearguard, and then set the army of wights and the surrounding forest alight until nothing crawled out except the two walkers, who were immune to fire. Jon would dismount and kill them, with Tormund and Beric as back up, if the timing worked as it should. Her warrior husband could dispatch one, but not two of the monsters at once, and she had no skill at arms.

She was so tense with worry she was an ice statue atop her fiery mount, so cold and clenched she would likely snap in half if someone tried to pluck her off. She shook out her limbs one by one to keep her seat, and emptied her head, groping for the symbiosis between herself and her sons. Drogon she could sense strong and clear, earning an affectionate rumble in response, but Rhaegal was muddled, as if she was sharing the bond with another. It was a very peculiar sensation, and she flicked her gaze to her right to see Jon’s eyes were closed in fierce concentration, then the other presence was gone, and Rhaegal gave a low growl when she caressed his mind, as if annoyed by the intrusion.

The ragged column of people screamed and bolted down the road when the dragons came swooping into to view, some scattering into the enveloping woods to die, but as she brought Drogon in to land as quick as possible, her passengers tumbling to the ground, two men dashed after them, bellowing at them to turn back and keep running towards the Kingsroad. She launched straight upwards in a bone shaking bound, paying no more attention to the chaos below, following Jon east into the dense grey murk, smelling them now, a clammy stench of a dead rat rotting in a basement, the funk of spoiled root vegetables in a sack.

Sounds began to penetrate the fog, the clink of rusty arms, mindless snarls and mutters, the dragging steps of the lame. At the first sight of shambling grey figures in the gloom she banked in a tight curve to the south, the wind whistling in her ears in a high shriek, Jon copying the move clumsily from the north, and she screamed out the glorious command at the top of her lungs. ‘Dracarys! Dracarys!’

The savage call was echoed in deeper tones, and then the dragons erupted in a stream of beautiful, bright, hot flame, their snaky necks tilted down as they flew to create a boiling cauldron of red and orange, dead bodies flying, old pines and bare boughs combusting like dry tinder, and the heat, the stirring, soothing heat filling her body like an onrushing orgasm, the taste of blood and flesh and life on her tongue.

She kept Drogon moving in an endless circle, Jon letting Rhaegal have his head and circle in the opposite direction, the firestorm so towering and enormous the walkers within were invisible and unable to sight and throw their ice spears at the enraged dragons. The fire was spreading out across the wooded valley in a shapeless mass, leaving nothing within able to withstand it. Screaming in triumph she dragged her mount upwards into the melting clouds, sighing in relief when she sighted her husband following, clinging to his beast like a limpet and shouting incoherently, alive and intact though he appeared to have lost control of his mount.

She flew back westward, dropping down and searching for the road. Tormund and Beric were sprinting east, and she brought Drogon into a fast, skidding landing, throwing her thoughts into Rhaegal’s overexcited mind, pleading with him to follow. The stony roadway was filled with the crouched bodies of her snarling sons, the flanking trees knocked and splintered from their abrupt
landings. She watched her lover slide off the steaming flank of Rhaegal and roll into a ball as he hit the ground, and then he was up and gone, running towards his waiting friends, bristling with dragonglass weapons, axe and blades, Longclaw withdrawn from its sheath in a gleam of glittering silver, winking at her before the three brave men disappeared around the bend.

Swallowing a surge of bile she shook her head, throwing a plea to the fates. She could not chance staying on the ground to see who emerged the victor, the dragons were too vulnerable and the firestorm was creeping closer, a wall of flames encircling her and dipping everything in golden light like a summer sunrise. She sent a dart of urgent thought to her weary sons, asking them to lift to the safety of the sky, Rhaegal launching in a violent flapping of green and gold wings, obediently heading west to wait her return.

Then it was Drogon’s turn, her now fluid and energised body throwing him into a tight arc, and then a rapid, controlled hovering movement, drifting above the road like an eagle riding an updraft. She was taking a huge risk, but she could not fly away from the scene until her husband emerged. The roar and crackle of the fires, the hiss of melting snow, the tricky light and billowing smoke meant she could sense nothing of the fight, though her burning eyes searched, her ears strained, her heart raced and skipped.

And then she heard it faintly, a long, feral, gravel-toned howl of exaltation, thick with catching breaths, and she felt the aftershock thrum though the swirling air, a shattering screech of cold magic protesting as it was smashed to a thousand pieces. Her breath escaped in sobs, tears of relief spilled down her cheeks, and she buried her face in Drogon’s hide, wondering how she was going to live through more of this. How many more battles would she be forced to view from the sky as her lover risked himself to save them all, and how it would destroy her if the day came when he did not stumble out of the fire to collapse in her waiting arms.

***

The tower house was an odd place, rising grey and grim over the sterile, fathomless woods, like the prison of a fair maiden from the old stories, but inhabited by a placid, fresh-faced woman of middle years with flaming red hair that instantly drew Tormund’s eye. The woman known as Merryn seemed to take in her stride the Wildling’s lascivious interest, and the crowd of frightened and excited folk that descended upon her on a lonely winter night, not to mention the hovering dragons.

The evacuees were exhausted and frostbitten, so had been directed to the nearest shelter on the Kingsroad, filling every shed and cow byre and space in the tower, glad for the shelter and rest. She was thankful herself, not fancying a long ride back to Winterfell in the dark, content to sit by the fire with a horn of ale and listen to the men talk over the skirmish and make black-humoured jests, calming themselves with plenty of drink. Her hand was entwined with her husband’s, hidden in his lap, not letting go of him even to pick at her plate of food.

His usual reserve in front of others was absent, too wound up and relieved as she was, his arm around her waist, a bristly mouth nosing at the curve of her neck, causing her lids to lower and her cheeks to flush at the tickle of his breath. It was the third time, his mouth brushing a kiss against her pulse, when Tormund noticed and guffawed. ‘If I was you, Snow, I’d take your fearsome, beautiful wife to bed. You’re making the poor lass squirm, and I’m pissed off and frustrated just looking at you. Go on then, bugger off.’

The solemn Lady Karstark looked shocked at this ribaldry, but their host laughed heartily, and she hid her own giggle in her ale. It was dark and rich, tasting of malt and fruit, almost a meal in itself, and very strong.

‘You keep giving me advice on women like I still need it,’ Jon said, a glint of smile amidst his
shaggy beard. His hair was an eldritch mop, there was a cut on his cheek and smears of ash elsewhere, he looked entirely disreputable and very alluring. She looked no better in her squire’s gamesbon and breeches, smoky and begrimed. She hoped there was a bed spare, and water to wash, somewhere private where this indiscreet yearning could be properly dealt with.

‘They can have my chamber, I’ve sent a servant to see to it,’ Merryn said cheerfully. ‘It’s seen little action since my shit of a husband took off to White Harbour. I don’t get much company. I’ll sit up all night with these fine gentlemen and see how many of them I can drink under the table.’

There was a round of masculine approval at this, a slamming of cups, Tormund grinning from ear to ear. ‘Kissed by fire,’ he said dreamily. ‘A fine armful of a woman too. I’ll take you on, lass.’ The woman laughed again, glowing with delight. It appeared there were two types of women in the North; sombre, disapproving ladies, or hardy individualists like Arya, currently devouring a heaped plate of food with no manners, and this brassy, hospitable woman.

When her husband had fled south, where they had a trading warehouse for the furs they dealt in, Merryn had elected to stay on with her servants and tenants, but likely she would see sense and evacuate now the dead were drawing closer. Despite the sparseness of the tower, there were touches of wealth and comfort, and the small hall was so warm from the fires, the press of bodies and the furs everywhere keeping out the draughts she was beginning to feel drowsy.

There was nothing to be celebrating, they had merely dispatched a thousand out of a multitude, but they all clutched at the small victory, drawing strength from it. Even Jon, who knew better than anyone that today was meaningless. At a boisterous toast to the dragon queen and king, she found her smile again, standing to bow graciously, pleased at the approving looks from the Northerners present. It was good to feel useful at last, and it was better to see these touchy people thawing a little towards her.

Downing her ale to the dregs, she spoke words of thanks to their host and withdrew, shooting Jon a meaningful look as she left the hall, answered with a widening of deep, dark eyes and a fetching pout. He would not make her wait long, it was a current in the air, a tingle down the back of her neck as she mounted the winding stairs.

The round bedchamber was bright and cosy, the walls painted a cheery yellow, fur hangings and furniture cunningly curved to fit, including a wide bed with multiple quilts, a robe and slippers laid out, too big for her as usual but most welcome. She stripped and washed with warm water and honey scented soap, then sat down at the dressing table, its mirror fine enough to see her reflection clearly. Her hair was matted and dusted with ash, so she unravelled the braids, setting to work with brush and comb and water, and a flask of lavender oil that was provided. The kindly woman had taken one look at her unexpected guest and thought of everything she needed.

Her hair was a moonlit river of silver down her shoulders, near reaching her waist, her face clean but displaying circles of strain beneath her blue eyes. She ran a hand under her robe, feeling her breasts, heavy and firm, a swelling belly, a shallow rise detectable only to herself and Jon. Her haunches were heavier too, her bottom growing plumper as her husband had lustily noted. At just over three months, she was rather surprised at how rapidly her body was changing. Perhaps it was twins.

She was still exploring herself when the door opened, a searching gaze catching her in the act and narrowing with appreciation at the languid, half naked woman admiring herself in the mirror, the doorbolt sliding shut with an emphatic clunk. She smiled at him slowly, her eyes sweeping from mucky boots to unruly inky curls. His coat and sword belt were stashed downstairs, but he still wore his skirted armour over his gamboeson. He was rarely seen without it.
He stalked towards her as if ready to sweep her off her feet, but she raised a hand to stop him. ‘Take that old thing off before you ravage me.’ She needed to feel his hard body against her, soothe herself with the thump of his heart and the hiss of his blood, and with that armour in the way she would quickly become irritated.

‘I’m not stupid enough to argue with my warrior wife,’ he teased her lightly. ‘If you promise to stay right there. You’re such a beautiful sight that I want to…’

‘You want to come over here and mess me up,’ she purred, guessing his intentions. ‘Well hurry up then. I’ve been pining for you for hours.’

He couldn’t move fast enough, wrestling with buckles and shedding armour and boots while she sat decorously and waited, the curves of her breasts nestled in the furred robe, a twinge between her thighs that led her to slide a hand under the voluminous garment and cup her mound, lightly furred with hair but petal soft, quiescent but not for long. He would make it all go away, the horror she had witnessed and helped vanquish, and the horrors to come.

It was perilous to believe Jon could do anything, but after what she had seen today it was so tempting to surrender to it, as much of a lure as surrendering her body to his control. She wanted him to expend all that jittery tension that had him in knots, use her body like an eager camp follower ready to service a conqueror, and then she would use him. He had ridden his dragon to war like one of their ancient forbears, and then hit the ground and dispatched ice forged monsters like a grim Northerner made of granite, as tough as the bones of the earth but with fire in his veins.

She was already growing soft and slick when he seized her, the stool knocked away and her robe tugged loose so she was bare arsed in his arms, her neck twisted so he could kiss her feverishly, his lips cold and chapped but his tongue silky and wet, hands roaming her breasts and belly and buttocks. She watched them move over her in the mirror, her nakedness crushed against gambeson and breeches, the scent of blood and smoke and the undertones of musk and leather that were uniquely him. At the sight of him biting into her neck to hold her squirming body still she let out an urgent sound, and he growled into her flesh. ‘Love, I can’t wait. I need to feel you squeezed tight around me, I need to hurt you.’

She shivered and let her head loll like a drooping flower, her bubbling moan of assent, the push of her bottom against his loins, all of it signalled submission. Items on the dresser were swept to the floor, she was spun around and placed on the edge, the mirror an icy shock against her back, her legs pulled apart, one hoisted over a blue-clad shoulder as he knelt to taste her. Despite his black desire to tear her in two he made sure she was dripping wet before taking his cock, delving deep with his tongue, worshipping her with his mouth. Such a delectable sight on his knees with his face buried in her cunt, looking up her undulating form with eyes transforming from velvety brown to black shadows, so black they matched the hair in her fists, the feathery brows smoothed by her fingertips.

Her throaty moans broke with a warbling cry. ‘I’m ready…I am ready for you. Take me hard.’ He didn’t pick her up and carry her to the bed. Entranced by the novelty of their reflection he flipped her around, guiding her feet to the floor and her arse in the air. Her arms rested on the dresser top, breasts pressed between them, her rigid nipples pinched, hair gathered up to spill to one side. She watched him in the glass, running his hands over her buttocks and then lifting an arm to spank her sharply.

She yelped in surprise, then braced herself for the second blow, the burn of the slap felt in a different manner in her cunt, a throb of want that only intensified as more slaps were administered on her raised bottom. Her mouth sealed shut to hold in her cries, in case someone could hear from
the chamber below, hoping the noise from the hall would mask the distinctive sounds of a woman being spanked and utterly enjoying it. ‘That’s for thinking of leaving me,’ she heard him mutter, and she whined in mock outrage, her cunt an emptiness needing to be crammed full of him, right now.

He let her be at last, fumbling at his clothes to free his cock, so engorged it jutted straight from his body, and something about the position she was in gave her a faint qualm of old memory, but he was crooning at her sweetly, a low, raspy voice, a look of utter devotion on his face. An entirely different man, a different age, a man she loved completely and trusted with every part of her being. And it felt so exquisite to be taken harshly by this man, the grind past resisting muscles, the pulsing ache of her cunt adjusting to his deep strokes to open her fully, the slick sounds of her juices easing his path, pain and pleasure so intense and shattering her breath caught and struggled in her lungs and her eyes watered.

She tried to keep them open, watching him grasp her hips and plunge into her repeatedly, disordered clothes and a grubby face creased in concentration, trying to hold back from erupting inside her too quick. Her climax was still far away, she did not need it yet, revelling in the role of being used roughly, wanting him to slake himself and knowing he would make sure she found satisfaction in the end. But after their first few hurried couplings months ago, he had always exerted perfect control over himself, reflecting his years of self-denial. He withdrew from her with a shuddering gasp, his length an angry red and glistening, and picked her up in a griping armful. She bit his lip sharply at the loss of him inside her, and he grunted and dropped her on the bed in a tangle of hair and arms and legs, and when he shed the rest of his clothes and joined her she wouldn’t let him resume control. She rose and pushed him flat on the quilts, forking her legs over him to hold him down, smirking at gaining the upper hand. She loved to see him lying beneath her, pure white skin brutally slashed and scarred, every muscle visible and shifting beneath, his mouth opening to take a nipple and pull on it like a famished babe, her bright hair mingling with his dark, his thick cock engulfed in her sweltering core by slow, shifting movements until he was notched at her womb.

‘Good girl, ride my cock,’ he groaned. ‘Mmm love, just like that.’ His hands on her haunches to guide her rocking and twisting, her torso in a backward arc, palms flat on his strong thighs. She held him so deep she could feel the soft weight of his stones pressed between her cleft. She freed a hand to touch them, and then the ring of her cunt stretched around his girth, keening in her throat at the pleasure, not the dizzy rush of being driven hard but a gradual thickening in her loins, a lapping surge through her limbs, her head full of light and air and little else.

She spread her knees so he could see her wrapped around him, lifting and falling, every nudge at her limit making her moan in appreciation. A hand rested on her rounded stomach, the reverence in his face as he gazed up at her just too much to bear. She closed her eyes to it, guiding the hand down to catch and rub her nub between his fingers.

She cried out as she sensed it ignite like the forest exploding in the firestorm. She was felled, squeezing his hips tightly between her thighs as she lost herself to it, sipping at his soft, scratchy mouth, her frenzied noises muffled by kisses as she spasmed around his cock, a grip like steel on her hips as he drove up from the bed in fluid, hammering thrusts until he shuddered from head to toe and burst inside her.

His movements grew erratic as he peaked and subsided, his seed spilling from her tender flesh as she continued to gasp and flutter like it would never end. There would be bruises in her flesh, a red rash on her plundered mouth, her cunt would ache with the memory of his assaults in the morning. She bit him to leave her mark as well, the pretty curve of his milky throat, sucking the skin to leave
a purple contusion as he rolled under her to stir his cock in her sore flesh. ‘So bloody naughty,’ he grumbled at her. ‘How am I going to hide that from my men?’

She lifted her head, pushing loose strands of hair from her face so she could admire him, his eyes hazy and black as pitch, lips red and swollen with rushing blood. His touch drifted over her back, deceptively gentle, then rested on her bottom, a hand lifting to swat her at her answer. ‘Perhaps I want everyone to know you are mine, and show your loud friend what a splendid lover you are.’

His laughter shook her, and as always, she was delighted to earn it. ‘There hasn’t been a lot of time to be a lover,’ he mused. ‘And it will only get more difficult, my demanding wife. When this is all over, I swear I will make up for it.’

Her happiness dimmed a little as her worries threatened to spill from their tightly locked box. When this was over, would they still be the same, and would they still be alive?

‘Do tell me how exactly you will atone for it,’ she said playfully, slamming the box shut, and he snorted and swatted her arse again. She pressed her forehead against his, watching him hesitate. ‘Go on, Jon Snow, tell me. I need something to look forward to.’ She enjoyed it when he had these little moments of his old self, bashful and awkward with a bold woman trying to prise wickedness from his restrained nature. It was there, she knew it well.

‘All right then,’ he rumbled, considering carefully, then the promising words fell from his mouth, eloquent and eliciting a fresh wave of desire in her sated body. ‘I think I shall lock you in a tower so you don’t give me any grey hairs for at least a week. Then I will feed you and bathe you and take you in every way that pleases me. Your mouth, your cunt, and your arse, over and over until you’re a quivering wreck and have no desire to do anything but lie about in my arms and tell me stories.’

She didn’t know whether to kiss him or burst out laughing, so she did both. ‘I’ve decided you’re quite wicked after all, despite being such a nice, no nonsense Northern lad,’ she murmured, dropping another kiss on the upturned corner of his sweet mouth. ‘How I love you. I will hold you to all that, one day, when this is all over. I pray that it is soon, though there is no one to grant our prayers.’
In the dark I can hear your heartbeat, I try to find the sound

A/N: Hmm, remember this? Excitement or crickets, what will it be...

I haven’t read many War for the Dawn fics, but I didn’t want to attempt another Battle for Winterfell scenario. This is my plan for dealing with the Night King, I hope its sufficiently different to entertain. There is a time jump here for reasons. Your feedback is much appreciated. I do have something for Dream of Spring week, which I will post on the last day (my birthday weirdly). It’s a sequel to Wall without giving away the rest of the plot (um...there’s some), and will be from Jon’s POV since we don’t hear from him in this narrative.

Thanks for reading, and thank you to my friends the Discerning Tarts, purveyors of the Dream of Spring event. If you’re a writer or digital artist, I hope you’re playing. If you’re a consumer, I hope you’re commenting and leaving notes. We need events like this to alleviate boredom and prevent catfights erupting, so please enjoy it.

***

It was midnight in the Godswood, the snow clouds an iron-grey cap over the gnarled, aged trees, dim shadows of the soldier pines showing black not green, the ground a sheet of pure white that swallowed her boots, the only spots of colour the blood red leaves that framed the three figures under the sad-faced tree. The greenseer had not slept in two days, had barely moved from his spot, his gloved hands pressed against the corpse-like bark, his Stark eyes rolled back to a matching shade.

They had been hauled from their bed by a frantic rapping at the door, had hastily donned whatever clothes were within reach, dazed and frowsy and clinging to each other for support, knowing the news would be bad, that the shaky foundations beneath them were about to crumble to rubble. He kept them waiting, wandering in his fugue state, flying through past, present and the tenuous future as the snow fell and settled on their hair, brown, silver, and black.

The dead white eyes finally shifted, and the greenseer blinked, his voice serene while the listeners twitched and thrummed with tension, ground teeth and flexed fists. ‘Earth, water, air and fire,’ Bran said. ‘Red fire, blue fire, green fire. To save the North, we must go south. If we make our stand here, we will all die, and the world will come to ruin.’

***

Another lonely eyrie, another hopeless vigil, the cold like a knife against her cheek, the view equally bleak and empty, noisome swampland in the place of the Haunted Forest, the space between the islets of flax and sedge and purple moss widening with each day as the Crannogmen worked in the muck and foulness to turn the narrowest part of the Neck into a sheet of water, brackish enough to resist freezing without sorcery. Earth was moved or submerged, water swelled and deepened, pots of wildfire were strung out like deadly green jewels to be set alight from the air.

The four elements that made the world as it was, brought into play so the dead could not pass, only the monsters that made them, and their toughest, most valiant warriors would be waiting to bring their screeching end. Bran had seen it, Lord Reed had dreamed it, the red priests had glimpsed it in their night fires, which burned for a lengthening span as the days shrunk smaller. She had to trust in magic now, though she buried herself in the practicalities of it all, closing her anxiety over her husband behind a heavy oak door as she flew between the Twins, the encampment in the downs
above the swamps, Greywater Watch, and this miserable ruin; three towers astride the Kingsroad, so uncomfortable that even her stoic Unsullied looked unhappy to be garrisoned there.

Her banners hung limp from their standards, the red and black faded in the low, fogged light of a dying sun, her dry eyes peered into the murk, ever searching for the banner of a grey wolf on an ice-white field, a line of men in dull, serviceable shades of dun and charcoal and black, a white wolf the size of a pony loping ahead, his garnet eyes looking to the dragons wheeling overhead, waiting as impatiently as their mother. She hoped she appeared calm enough to those that manned the fortress, though when she took a hurried look in the mirror that morning the circles under her eyes were lilac shadows, lines bracketing her mouth, lips bloodless, her hair dull and gaze blank.

House Stark was once again in pieces. Arya was with her brother, and the other brother had come with her, the trip south on dragonback giving Bran the only flash of real emotion she had seen on his expressionless face, a boyish grin as he was carefully helped down from his precarious seat. Sansa had gone to White Harbour to lead the evacuees to safety, and Winterfell was abandoned to its ghosts. If the enemy could not decipher their reckless strategy he would arrive to find no one living to add to his legions.

She had no news for two weeks, she could only move forward with plans forged by sorcery and hope. Hope that one day soon she would be here to see Jon leading the remains of the Northern army south, alive and whole and likely not at all happy about it. Where her heart used to be there was a knot of pain that would only be undone by the sight of him, glowering at the shit world and consumed by guilt at fleeing to make their stand not amidst the old bones of his childhood home, but far to the south, on the border between the soft lands and the hard, and Gods help them all if they could not hold fast against the onslaught.

The roof of the most intact tower was of thick slate, with a chest high wall of battlements offering a circular view to the four winds. Tired of looking north, she paced to look south, seeing a reassuring sea of tents on the downs, ochre and grey, the red of the fire god who was apparently their ally, the deeper crimson of the Lannister army. More men were held in reserve at the Twins, and her people who did not need to be stationed in camp, and Bran was at Greywater Watch, communing with Lord Reed in dreams. Her sons drifted in and out of the fog, calling to each other in their secret language that even she did not know. She had tried to persuade Rhaegal to say with his rider, but her sons would not be parted from each other, regardless of the sundering of their parents.

How she pined, in that closed part of herself, how she needed her heart back where it belonged so she could keep going, one faltering step after another to the glow of sunlight at the bitter end, the scent of green, growing things in her nose, the swell of her child a round mass under her hands, her lover’s rare smile flickering as he bent to croon in her ear. ‘It is over, we lived through it, now we rest. I’m taking you to bed for a week and shall keep you there, and to the hells with the mess.’

She would protest, mindful of her duty, but it would be desultory. Sleep eluded her beyond a few hours before the nightmares invaded her consciousness, and she didn’t have the energy or inclination to put her mind to better use and bring herself to a weak climax by her own hand. Her body and soul were feeling the strain beyond dulling her looks, and the midwife and Missandei clucked and fussed at her. She was nearing four months, her belly growing despite her complete lack of appetite. She had not yet submitted to an examination, afraid of what might be found, wanting to hold on to the delusion that all was well on that front at least.

Adding to her load was the challenge of keeping people working together who despised each other. The kindly Ser Davos had sworn to kill the Lady Melisandre, the Riverrun people hated both the Freys and the Lannisters, most distrusted Lord Jaime for valid reasons, and her Dothraki intimidated most with their ways. She did not have to concern herself with the Ironborn, newly
under the control of the victorious Greyjoy siblings. They had sailed their fleet north to get as many people out of White Harbour as they could, which was a relief as no one liked them either.

She prayed that their plans would save all their lives, at the sacrifice of a few thousand Northerners who weren’t holed up in Barrowtown or White Harbour, or had escaped by sea. It would haunt her for the rest of her days, such as they were, but if they stood fast at Winterfell the ugly truth was they would have lost, at the cost of millions. When she had flown south with Bran strapped to her back she had found her outriders only just reaching Moat Cailin, and it was a long way between here and the granite heart of the North. The law of unintended consequences was in this her greatest foe.

Though it was pointless, she threw out her prayers to the sky, to the four elements, the four winds, that the dead had not come before Jon arranged his forces then made his escape, leaving the men of the Watch and the remaining Wilding chieftains in charge in case the host of the dead split to chase after more live bodies at the two hold points. She prayed he moved fast and light, that any attack at his rear was a feint that could be easily vanquished. If she was forced to do this without him, she would see it through, but the fire in her blood would be cold ash.

There was a grind and clang of the roof trapdoor lifting, and she hunched her shoulders under her coat, resenting the intrusion instantly. There was a hot, spicy scent from behind her, and Drogon growled and swooped closer to the tower, his wings a massive leathery arch across the lowering clouds. The dragons acted strangely around the Red Woman and her cohorts, both attracted and repelled by their conjured fire.

‘He will come soon, your Grace,’ the woman said, her voice exotic and supple. ‘I have seen it in my fires. A battle in a howling blizzard, men falling and getting up again, but the king hacking through the swarming wights and out the other side. Him and his wolf.’

The empty space in her chest fluttered in panic, but her reply was cool. ‘Visions and magic are like a blade without a hilt. They are either useless or cut you to the bone.’ She turned on her heel and saw red; red hair, red cloak, a red gown that was far too thin to withstand the weather, the woman herself felt red. ‘And yet I must trust in them rather than what I can see and hear and touch.’

‘You brought magic into the world from your husband’s funeral pyre, for what are dragons if not magic?’ the Red Woman said, gesturing to the disturbed air, the figures of red and black, green and gold circling closely. ‘You and your king were born to lead this fight. If you trust nothing else, trust in that.’

‘That is why you brought us together,’ she replied, her tone still expressionless but a mess of emotions boiling under the surface. ‘For strategy. Never mind that I wanted him, and he wanted me. We were two lonely, near broken people, leaders thrust into leadership whether we truly wanted it or not. Love and lust were not supposed to be part of that perhaps.’ It would be so much easier if they weren’t, but blood spoke to blood, and attraction was a powerful intoxicant, especially for lonely souls looking for home.

The priestess gave her a feline, knowing smile. ‘No woman could look on Jon Snow for long and not want him in her bed, and the same applies to Daenerys Stormborn. We are born to make light and life, to love and hate, to feel passion and pain, even great leaders with much to shoulder. The agony you feel now, there is much joy to counter it, I think.’

‘There is,’ she said briefly, dropping her gaze from the blue eyes which studied her closely. Talking to this woman was like becoming lost in a maze, she managed to pull words from her lips she rarely spoke to others to navigate her way out, but she sealed her mouth, turning back to the north, peering uselessly again. ‘He will not be pleased to see you, my lady. No matter that you
have returned to help us. My husband is a man of his word, and stubborn with it.’

‘I am meant to die here, my queen. Not at the end of a rope, but in the service of my Lord,’ the woman said, moving up beside her in a waft of red and giving her a sidelong glance. ‘Besides, I think you would try to prevent it.’

‘I do not condone what you did to that poor Baratheon girl,’ she said sternly. ‘But you gave Jon his life back. You brought him to me. I am not an ungrateful woman, but do not think I won’t burn you alive if you suggest giving any more people to the fires in your God’s service. I am trying to save lives, not destroy them.’

‘I was wrong,’ the witch said quietly, honest regret on her usually calculating face. ‘I thought it was in service of my Lord, to win the war against the darkness, but I didn’t see true. As you say, visions are a blade without a hilt.’ She shook herself, as if she felt the bite of the wind at last, then her keen eyes sharpened. ‘I see movement ahead, your Grace.’

Just then, Rhaegal gave a deep roar and arced above the tower in a buffeting sweep of hair and loose clothing, heading north. She cast her mental hook to the sky, calling down Drogon before he could take off after his brother, chasing his sudden excitement. She was a giddy girl, but she could not stand here another hour waiting to fill her eyes with the gloriously handsome, reassuring sight of him, likely battered, filthy and very grumpy, but alive and all hers. The priestess gave her another of her feline smiles and retreated, and a grumbling Drogon arrived, his deft claws gripping the battlements, wings spread like a falcon on a frail branch for balance.

Not even thinking of the dangerous drop to the spongy earth below the tower she clambered up to her seat, gripping with her hands and knees. ‘Sōvegon!’ she yelled, and settled into the dragon’s shifting muscles, diving off the edge and flattening against his scorching, comforting bulk as he arrowed after Rhaegal. She had a task to fulfil if the time was right, very final but necessary if the enemy was sending forth advance parties; severing the north from the south. It had been Lannister’s idea, borne of Tyrion’s musings over possible uses for wildfire back in King’s Landing, and the greenseers and fire priests had helped build on the plan so their choke point would eventually become a sheet of perpetual flame when the dead arrived, as beautiful and consuming as the skirmish in the Wolfswood, and hopefully as successful.

The dragon cut through the hostile north wind, heading for the host of men ahorse, some straggling behind on foot, the streaming banners putting on a brave show but the depleted armies of the North and the Vale were ragged around the edges and drooping with exhaustion. The big bay horse in front drew to a halt, and a small figure in grey sprung to the ground, the rest of the men sawing at reins to calm spooked mounts as she brought Drogon down in a tight spiral, Rhaegal taking a playful pass over their ducking heads to eye his rider with pleased grumbles. Her smile was wide and unsuited to the solemnity of the occasion, but hells it felt good on her face.

As soon as Drogon found purchase on the causeway she was off, near tipping into the swamp in her haste. She tried to slow her steps and approach with dignity, but the striding figure, the answering smile amidst a black beard that had gotten shaggier in her absence, it was too tempting as usual. He looked drained and grimy, there was a nasty cut on his forehead clotted with dried blood, his brown eyes were haunted, but he was here. ‘Dany,’ he rasped. ‘Thank the Gods.’

Ignoring the mob behind him, and the looming dragon filling the road, he picked her up and kissed her like a milkmaid or bar wench, his lips cold and scratchy but sweet, so sweet. ‘Jon, oh I was so worried, I was going mad,’ she babbled, grabbing the sides of his face. ‘The Red Woman said there was a battle in the snow, and…’

‘Ssh love,’ he whispered. ‘We lost some men, but we fought our way out. I want to go to bed and
sleep for a week with you keeping me warm, but I doubt I will get to.’

‘At least a night, then,’ she said weakly as he gently put her down. ‘I will take you back to the Twins, unless you want to stay in camp?’

‘The Twins,’ he scowled. ‘What in the Seven Hells are you doing there?’

‘Baths, and fires, a warm bed and fussing, doting women,’ she promised him. ‘It’s quite pleasant since your sister paid her visit.’

Jon gave a gruff laugh, his smile flickering again. ‘I’d best keep her away from there, in case she’s minded to finish the job,’ he said. ‘I will see my brother, and see to my men. Then I will let you lure me with a hot bath and bed, and you.’ He pressed her to him briefly, the compact, strong length of him beneath layers of fur and wool and leather so welcome she made a happy noise in her throat, but then she recalled her other purpose.

‘There is a plan of Lord Jaime’s we can execute now, if you think it is needed.’ Quickly she outlined it, the deadly arsenal beneath their boots. His lined brow furrowed deeper, these days there was no trace of boy in him at all. He looked thirty four, not twenty four. His name day had passed in her absence, likely not even marked beyond some confused thoughts over the mother and father he had never known, and the uncle that hid them from him, giving him a home and safety but also a bastard name he still bore to all but a few.

‘You have been busy, lass,’ he said shortly. ‘Now is not the time to set the fires, but we’d all sleep better if the causeway was cut. The Night King is sending out advance forces all over the place, and the one we encountered could be close behind. Best blow it now, and give up the North as lost.’ The wave of sadness and shame separated their bodies at last, guilt once again roiled in her stomach and set it in sickening cramps, but she ignored it. Regret was useless to her now, so she tightened her jaw and met his eyes with determination.

‘I think you should do it. It is ultimately your decision as Warden of the North, and it would be practice for later.’

She returned to Drogon and climbed up quickly, lifting to sky to circle in wait, watching her man close his eyes and coax his dragon down to land in Drogon’s place, his men milling around and gawking in evident wonder, a grimy faced Arya looking envious, Ghost freezing as if sensing the stream of thought between his sire and his new familiar.

The line of knights and Northmen passed beneath their wings and into the safety of Moat Cailin, leaving the road empty and forlorn, no sign of refugees in the distance. Whoever was left alive up there would be trapped like a bee in a bottle. There were two long poles sunk into the swamp, marking the cache of wildfire beneath the ancient causeway. She spiralled higher to leave a clear space for Jon to swoop down and across, shouting his command to the dragon. A line of liquid fire spat from Rhaegal’s maw, aimed at the road, neatly bisecting it between the markers as if the communication between beast and rider was as clear as spoken words.

The hardy stone erupted in a rumble that grew to a roar, great chunks of flying rubble and dust and poisonous green fire and smoke, leaving a gaping hole twenty feet wide once the flames shuddered and settled to reveal the damage. She heard a string of amazed curses cut with riled up growls from Rhaegal, the dragon hauled up out of the reach of the emerald flames and flying debris that spat and splashed into the surrounding mire, fainter shouts from the spectators watching from the castle. She turned her own dragon back to the broken stronghold, the glow of childish pleasure at the damage banishing her everlasting personal guilt at the loss of the North, at least for a while.
Given the Frey reputation for treachery, it was wise to occupy the twin castles and surrounds with a menacing show of force. The Riverlands troops, a fierce cohort of scowling Dothraki riders that had the castle women both intrigued and cowed, as well as the rearguard of wayn drivers, camp followers and the Dothraki women who had elected to support their menfolk. The dragons stayed close by, occasionally raiding the rich Frey herds for sheep and cattle.

As there were no men left of age, Lord Tully was the de-facto Lord of the Crossing, and he and Lady Roslin assured a stiff yet gracious welcome. But still, it was exceedingly awkward for a son of House Stark to enter the keep and taste the ceremonial bread and salt, knowing of the despicable treachery and murder in the recent past. One night of comfort and they would return to the war camp, bathed and rested and any wounds seen to. Aside from the cut on his face, Jon seemed to be favouring his left side as if he’d taken a hard blow to the ribs, and he moved slower than usual, weighed down with fatigue.

As quick as could be politely done, she made her apologies and hustled Jon up the stairs to his chambers, away from the great hall and its foul memories. ‘I don’t see any doting women,’ he muttered. ‘Only a bunch of gloomy, weasel faced Freys who look like to spit on us if they weren’t so frightened of my wife.’

‘You have me,’ she said fondly, twitching with a smile, moulding herself into his good side as they traversed the hallway. ‘And your greatest admirer. I’ll get Tansy to have a look at your ribs, you’re trying to disguise it but I can see you’re nursing your left side.’

‘You will not,’ he said with a quelling look, and her smile widened, his pout softening involuntarily in response.

‘Do you trust the castle maester with your person? Besides, I will be there to make sure she doesn’t have a sneaky grope of your more interesting parts.’

‘I am fine. Fine enough to take you to bed and ravish you,’ he huffed, but then cursed when she pressed a hand carefully against a tender spot. She arched a brow, and he snorted. ‘Aye, maybe I’m a bit sore at that. But what of you? Has the midwife taken a look at you yet?’

‘I haven’t had the time,’ she replied, dropping her eyes, but she couldn’t evade him.

‘Before we leave, you must let her examine you, love,’ he said firmly, his hand finding her belly. ‘You’re swelling like a ripe peach. You haven’t bled, or felt any pain? Has the babe moved yet?’

‘No, but I am afraid nonetheless,’ she confessed. ‘It’s hard for me to think of life at present, or the future. All that lies ahead is death and cold and darkness.’

Jon looked so utterly lost at this, she instantly regretted her moment of weakness, but now he was here, the locked store of useless, crippling emotions wanted to break open and spill its mess everywhere. He grabbed her drooping chin, his eyes heavy with sorrow that was long ingrained, the same big, sad eyes that had hurt her and intrigued her all those months ago, when life still felt full of promise, a simple straight path to victory.

‘Please don’t, Dany. I can’t bear it. I can stand everything else, but not your despair.’ The words were soft, pleading, she felt a prickle of tears in response, and she shook off his grasp and walked away, squaring her shoulders as she tried to retrieve her spirits.

She was glad to reach the guest chamber and its distractions, and nodding to the flanking Dothraki
at the door she entered to find Missandei and Tansy seated before the fire, a pile of knitting in the midwife’s generous lap, food and wine set out on a table for her arrival. The chamber was very cosy, the winter night banished behind thick curtains and elaborate tapestries. There was a gap-toothed grin at the sight of them, a sketchy curtsey that sent a half-finished baby garment tumbling to the floor.

‘Oh, thank the Mother your lovely lad is back, your Grace!’ she exclaimed. ‘Maybe you will smile again and get some bloody rest once he’s seen you right. You look like a wraith, and the king looks no better.’ She planted her hands on her hips and eyed a hovering Jon. ‘Dirty, knackered and bashed about,’ she observed bluntly. ‘I’ll see to getting a bath up here and fetch my medicine box. Sit you down, your Grace. I’ll get your gear off and take a look at you.’

She bustled off before Jon could deny her, and he muttered under his breath and collapsed on a settee, downing two cups of mulled wine in quick succession while they greeted Missandei and discussed with her the logistics of moving to the camp at Moat Cailin in the morning. Her friend took her coat and boots, and made her sit and rest herself with a cup to fortify her, though she was tempted to drink the whole jug. Instead, she watched her husband doze and the maidservants haul in her copper tub and urns of steaming water on a small cart.

The bath was filled, the last of her scented oils were added, and the midwife returned and nagged Jon out of his clothes in increments once Missandei and the servants had discreetly withdrawn. He tried to hang on to his undershirt, shaking his head, but Tansy tutted. ‘I can’t doctor you unless you take that off, your Grace.’ He glowered at her, but it had no effect, she stared him down with her sharp green eyes until he finally relinquished it. The woman sucked in a shocked breath at the map of old scars that were unveiled. ‘By the Warrior, someone had a good go at carving you up, lad. I hope you killed the bloody bastards, or I will, if I get my hands on them.’

Her hand hovered over his death mark tentatively, her clever gaze clouding with puzzlement, then snapping with real anger, Jon managed a twisted smile. ‘That is what my wife said, more or less.’ He gestured to the massive purple-black bruise on his abdomen. ‘Hammer blow, I don’t think there is much you can do, my lady.’

‘We’ll see. I’ve got a salve for bruises and strains that’s wicked strong, it works a treat. We’ll bind you up in the morning if I find any breaks. You’re in dire need of a bath first, and a good old cuddle methinks.’

Her husband snorted, his sleepy lashes not quite hiding the growing amusement in his eyes. ‘If you would be so kind as to see to my wife in the morn as well, my lady.’

‘About time,’ the woman huffed, shooting her queen a vexed look. ‘Her Grace has been neglecting herself as much as you.’ Her small fingers pressed at various spots, making Jon swear and jump. ‘Gods, you’ve got muscles I never knew existed under this mess, my fine lad.’

She hid a laugh in her cup, enjoying the flush of pink on her man’s too white face. Without any further lusty commentary, the midwife declared she’d found two cracked ribs, and then cleaned and stitched the cut on his forehead, her patient downing more wine to deaden the sensation of the needle. When she was done, she left a pot on the table. ‘I’ll let your wife rub that in after your bath. I wouldn’t want her to feed me to one of her beasts for getting my hands all over you.’

With that, she left with an earthy laugh, a sweep of green skirts and a scent of fragrant herbs and wool. Jon finally relaxed, falling on the food, wolfing it down as quickly as Ghost with a haunch of elk. The direwolf had been left in camp, greatly intriguing her bloodriders and causing the Lannister troops to make themselves scarce as he silently paced their rows of tents, sniffing suspiciously. ‘I wish I had a hundred of Ghost,’ her husband had said. ‘He went after the wights
and ripped dozens of them to shreds.’ It was all he would say of the battle, and she wouldn’t press him unless he was minded to un-burden himself.

Remaining clothes were shed, the copper tub crowded with two weary bodies. She helped to wash him, which she took quiet enjoyment in doing, and then she was held in his lap, fondled and petted with soapy hands as she laid back into him carefully, resting her head on his shoulder. She felt drowsy, almost drunk with contentment as he reacquainted himself with her, breasts and belly and cunt, fingers toying within her folds as if he was thinking about taking it further, but lacked the energy. She didn’t want to break the spell, but she had to. ‘What did your brother say to you?’ she said cautiously.

A heavy sigh shook her, followed by a hiss of discomfort. ‘Bran said we must not let Viserion past the Neck. That we need to fly north to bring him down. He sees the dragon in his mind, lame and faltering, rotting away with great holes in his wings and hide, but the Night King drives him on. Diminished, weakened, but all our plans will be fucked if he reaches us, and further south.’

Her dread and grief was as a series of hard lumps in her gullet, a vise around her heart tightening with each beat. Her beautiful children, the living and the dead, the child nestled in her womb, the lover that held her and touched her as if she was the most precious thing on earth. She swallowed them, hunting for brave words. ‘Will it kill the enemy, when we bring him down?’ She said when, not if. She wouldn’t show him her uncertainty.

‘I doubt we will be that lucky,’ Jon said dully. ‘But we can hope it slows him down some. I want this over and done, my love. We need to even the odds.’

She shifted slightly so she could plant a kiss on his cheek. ‘You best take me to bed and hold me then, if we leave tomorrow. I don’t think you’re capable of anything more.’

His voice lowered to a rumble. ‘We will see. There is nothing I want more right now than to lose myself inside you. The heat of you, so tight and slick…the sounds you make, your curves so soft, your hair like a veil of moonlight…I missed you so badly, though I barely had time to think.’

The fingers stirred within her flesh, pressing either side of her nub, rolling it until she gasped. Pretty words, pretty distracting words, a whiskery kiss behind her ear. Her hair was unbound from its braid, tangling around his throat and trailing in the opaque water, and he buried his face in it to inhale her as she wriggled from his ministrations below. ‘Mmm, that sounds wonderful, but you can lie back and be a lazy lover for a change, and let me do all the work.’

The bed covers were a midnight blue velvet threaded with silver, and her lover looked very beautiful laid out on them, despite his fair skin being mottled and marred, attracting a kiss for each wound old and new before she crawled up him, careful not to bear weight on his left side as she dipped to take lazy yet hungry drags at his lips. She opened hers to accept his tongue, his breath giving her renewed life. She kissed him with open eyes, though her creeping arousal made her languid and overcome, imprinting his face in her mind, eyes the shade of turning leaves, the rest a dramatic study of black brows, pearly skin stretched over chiselled bones, and a wild beard that was soft, not wiry under her fingertips.

Hands kneaded her back, making her purr, then her bottom, and there was something so maddening about the ripe yield of his lips she groaned and nipped at them like a vixen, earning herself a slap across her behind. She was straddling his leg, grinding against it as she grew plump and wet, and she slid a hand down to discover his slumbering cock had woken up, weighty and thick and as pretty and silken as his mouth. The selfless thing to do would be to offer her own mouth to be fucked, filled with his cock in deep jabs until he spilled in the back of her throat then fell into a healing sleep, but she knew it would not transpire as such. Sure enough, as she headed south in a
slither of lips and tongue over quivering flesh he halted her.

‘Not like that. Spread yourself across my face, I want to taste you.’

She had not taken the time to have her hair stripped, deeming it a frivolous concern, but she wished she had, so he could lap and suckle and devour every bit of her, making those desperate little noises that sharpened her pleasure. She manoeuvred gingerly so not to jostle him, positioning her knees on the pillows, her cunt and buttocks parted, tongue and fingers delving and igniting her instantly. She stifled a cry by closing her mouth around the fat tip of his cock, working it several times to expose the head before descending to swallow him whole, humming at the scent and heat of him.

She imagined his cock elsewhere, rocked deep to open her fully as she balled herself under him, or slowly penetrating her arse as he held her imprisoned lest she quail before the anguish became sweet. All the ways he had taken her, and would still, if they ever made it to that place of peace and isolation. She savoured her wanton thoughts even as she used the heat and pull of her mouth on his length, her flicking, swirling tongue, even as she wriggled on his face for more; more friction in the right spots, more fingers added to the taut clasp of her channel, moaning loudly despite her occupied throat. Determined, she dived to take him entire, the gagging well worth his ragged groans of appreciation.

Backing off to snatch air and give her tortured throat a rest, she nuzzled at his stones, taking one then the other into her mouth delicately, nails digging into his thighs as three fingers stretched her lewdly. As the tip of his tongue poked at her exposed nub repeatedly she knew she was lost long before he, the climax a tightening band across her belly that snapped. She wailed at the abruptness of it, completely forgetting her task, the ripples of release tunnelling through her veins and prickling her pores. He lapped and pulled at her as a new welling of nectar filled his mouth, and eventually it became too intense. She drew up her legs defensively to escape, and he growled at her.

‘You taste so good to me when you come like that. Fuck, you’re so red and wet and open I want to throw you on your knees and fuck you until you weep.’

He shifted under her as if to make good the very appealing threat, but she remembered he was in no state to exert himself. ‘No, you won’t, my king. Lie back and rest. I have you.’ She guessed he wanted to see her cunt taking him in her, to fondle her bottom while he contemplated what it felt like to enter her from the rear; the resistance, the satisfaction of mastery, her eventual surrender that ended in a release so blinding she was near comatose in his arms afterwards. If he rose up and took her as such, she would submit, but it was better for to him to lie passive and be served. She had been granted her release, so she would give until he filled her with his seed.

She held his cock upright under her, angling and settling in one movement, leaning forward and widening her knees, opening her cheeks like a clever whore so he could see everything. With her free hand she cradled her curved belly, sensing the tip of him hard against her womb as she writhed and he bowed under her with a drawn-out moan. Facing his feet, she couldn’t see his pleasure, but she could hear it, feel in the hardness of him wrenching her open with every fluid lift and fall. A thumb explored the fused place where he disappeared into her, collecting wetness, then eased into her arse, teasing then sliding deep, withdrawing then pushing into the tiny opening until he elicited a shuddering under her skin, the ache in her loins from taking him deep becoming torment for her.

He began to move her, holding her hips so the angle and stroke was to his satisfaction, and she relaxed into his control, using only her weight to assist, the grip on her haunches a bruising pinch, his cock twitching inside her a signal. With her name dragged from his lungs he bucked under her
and spilled quickly, spurts that she drew into herself, squeezing her muscles around him to milk every drop, curses cut with gasps, a fluttering pulse under her balancing hand on his thigh as his heart raced with it.

She moaned in bliss though her own satisfaction was out of reach, and she tipped forward, suddenly drained though she had not ridden him hard. It had been a long, mostly gruelling day, she needed sleep, if only the cramp of a denied second orgasm would recede quickly and let her find it. His spent cock slipped out of her as she moved, dripping more wetness down her thighs. She nipped at a hairy calf, and he squeezed a buttock in retaliation. ‘It was too good, You didn’t come twice like I wanted you to,’ he said, his voice so rough it was a vibration through her centre.

‘Come here, my queen. I have what you need.’

She muttered her demurrals, but she was hauled backwards so she was within easy reach. She propped herself on all fours to spare him more discomfort, but then she was the one whimpering and wincing, the raw, sticky mess of her cunt probed with two then three fingers, curling up, thrusting harshly enough to add pain to pleasure. She surrendered to the invasion, knowing it would take little. Just the thought of him watching her being rent by his hand was enough to send her spinning towards the welcoming void, let alone the feel of her cunt yielding to him, the slick sounds of their mingled juices coating his fingers. He found it, the buried spot, hitting it with each penetration until she clamped her legs together and howled, her climax ripping her in two, hot sparks coursing down her spine to her mind, her limbs going instantly weak and wobbly. ‘Good girl, that’s my girl,’ he crooned at her, only withdrawing when the last pulse stuttered and died.

She tipped sideways and huddled, hidden by her hair, a sated slut in a veil of moonlight that was threaded through his hands, twisted and stroked. Horribly, the bile of rising fear was in her throat as the distraction of bodily contentment receded too fast, but she had to turn and face Jon with one of her masks, which she rarely wore around him. Pretending to be as brave as she looked to the world, as brave as him. She had always held a festering sore of her old girlhood weakness, regardless of how much she tried to heal it, and that sore was now a growing canker on her soul. She knew why.

Now she had everything to lose, not just the name of a near dead royal house, a birthright that had meant little to her until it became her identity. Her thoughts of earlier, the exchange of words with the witch, came back to her to fill her with doubt. Duty and destiny were easier to bear when you were an empty vessel, not filled with a child, and fractured by love. It was what it was, and she would not change it, so she sat up, turned and smiled down at his glassy, inky eyes, his flushed, slack lips that invited a reassuring kiss, and settled into the crook of his arm once the covers were carefully extracted from beneath him and pulled over their bodies.

Jon was silent, but not dozing, his mind was working, perhaps fighting off his own fears he rarely voiced. ‘I know you’re afraid,’ he said at last. ‘You try to hide it, but I see it in the back of your eyes. There is no shame in fear, Daenerys. I know you’re brave and strong. The warrior woman I dreamed of and thought I would never deserve, I know you. I need you to believe it too.’

‘What happens to you, when you go into battle? What do you do with all that fear and doubt?’ she burst out. ‘I have never felt it before, and Gods I hate it…I know you feel it, I see it too.’

There was a long pause, then his face pressed into her hair, a shaky breath, a whispered confession. ‘I am not a lover, a husband, or a father. I become nothing, nothing at all. Just an animal with wits and a sword. I become death. That’s what we need to be, together. So we can live. Because I want to live now, when I didn’t care before. You made me care, Dany, and it makes being nothing so much harder.’
I must become a lion hearted girl, ready for a fight

A/N: Hey there, after various adventures in smut I’m back with a fucked up back and a long chapter. A lot of canon fics get left unfinished, and I’m starting to see why (momentum slackens, people stop showing up, mind starts wandering to other ideas), but I really want to see this finished at last. In this update, Dany gets confirmation, Jaime figures something out, suitably wicked tent smut, and a dread mission north.
It had been so long she had forgotten what it was like to stay fixed in time and space instead of hurrying from place to place, living out of coffers or relying on handouts and improvisations to keep decent and relatively regal, and now she was on the move again. She was not tied to places and possessions, but she admitted to herself she was tired of it now, more than tired, watching all her things packed hastily away to ride off to another battle, perhaps her last.

She sat swathed in her black, fur-lined robe, reading over raven scrolls as Missandei oversaw proceedings, Jon over in the window seat, tending to his sword and stolidly ignoring the bustle. She could smell him from over here, the salve she had smeared on his bruises very strong, goose grease and camphor and strange herbs that made him turn up his nose and grumble at length.

‘I smell like a goose that’s been hung too long,’ he had muttered as she fussed with linen bandages to support his ribs, winding them tight and securing them with brass pins, and she laughed and took an experimental sniff.

‘Like a stuffed goose,’ she said, her mouth quirking to earn a kiss and a grope under her robe before she slipped away, handing him his shirt when she heard a servant knock timidly. After that, she sat out of the way and caught up on the news of the realm, her battle clothes of leggings, wool undertunic, overtrousers, wool undercoat with a lining of thin steel plating front and back, and her white fur coat brushed and laid out to don after the midwife’s visit.

All was quiet in King’s Landing aside from the odd riot over scarce food before the grain ships from Pentos arrived, much to her relief, and Tyrion sounded rather bored and plaintive. Bored was good, at least there was no stirring treachery at her back. The Golden Company had been contacted in the Disputed Lands by emissaries of Illiryo Mopatis and warned off, and the Volantene fleet had swept upon the Ironborn on the Stepstones and destroyed them fortuitously, the Greyjoy boy joining in the fight to rescue his worthy sister and kill his uncle.

No threats abroad or to the south to worry her, and their luck on that front was a blessing and hopefully an omen. Today or tomorrow, they had to go and find her crippled slave of a son, and give him mercy and even the odds, no matter her private terror and grief. She eyed her husband, cool and distant and sunk in heavy thoughts, and wondered whether he would be a help or a hindrance. He rode well enough for a novice, but his ability to swoop and snatch and claw and bite and dodge bolts of flame while keeping his seat was uncertain. Her heart sunk to her slippered feet.

Fortunately the midwife arrived before she could brood further, shooing the servants out of the chamber and then proceeding to do the same to her king. ‘Take that bloody great sword and do that elsewhere, your Grace,’ she said briskly. ‘We’ve got women’s business here, and I don’t want you hovering around distracting me and the queen while we’re at it.’

Jon rose from the bench, eying the squat, bosomy woman, both wary and stubborn. ‘I want to be here for my wife,’ he said simply, and Tansy gave him a fond smile.

‘And that’s sweet of you, but it’s an unpleasant business of poking and prodding,’ she said in a kinder tone. ‘I’ll call you in when we’re done. Now scoot, before I find a broom to chase you with.’

The cheeky threat worked, he creased in a chuckle, shaking his head and retreating in good order, pulling his gambeson over his head and arming up before giving her one of his deep, dark looks.
and closing the door behind him, already moving better than he had the previous night. ‘As tough as old boots, your lad,’ the midwife said approvingly, setting her box down on the bed. ‘Some good loving and a good night’s rest and he’s right as rain.’

‘Most of the time, yes,’ she replied, rising from the settee and reluctantly approaching the bed. She didn’t relish the idea of poking and prodding. The Dothraki midwives had not done as such with her first pregnancy, they were more focused on good omens for a son. ‘Should I lie down?’

‘Have you washed your parts?’ the woman said bluntly. ‘I can guess he’s been inside you more than once.’ She flushed a little, and nodded. In fact, it had only been once, Jon had been too exhausted for any more. ‘Well, go to the privy and piss in this jar,’ Tansy went on, handing over a small glass receptacle. ‘I need to take a look. It doesn’t tell you much, but it can be useful.’

The tricky business done, she returned and handed it over, watching curiously as the midwife examined it closely, dipped a clear crystal in it, and even tasted it. ‘Healthy enough, no blood, no sweetness, no clouding,’ she said at last. ‘Now take that robe off and let’s have a proper look at you.’

She laid down and parted her legs, trying not to blush at being bare arsed in front of a near stranger, and endured it all, gentle at first, just measuring her pulse, handling her breasts and asking no-nonsense questions. A strange item was produced from a velvet bag, a metal disk attached to hollow reed tubes that Tansy plugged in her ears. ‘This item is from Myr, where they seem to specialise in strange inventions,’ the woman explained. ‘It can pick up heartbeats much easier than a rolled tube of parchment. It was brought to me by a merchant whose wife I saved from childbed fever.’

The disk was placed over her heart, her lungs, and finally the swell of her belly, the midwife frowning in concentration, struggling to hear. She looked puzzled when she rose and removed the contraption from her ears. ‘I’m going to have a feel inside you, now this will be uncomfortable and I’m sorry for that, but I need to check everything’s sitting right.’

It was indeed unpleasant, having fingers that were neither hers nor her lovers inside her, very deep, prodding at the entrance of her womb, the other hand pressing down on the swelling, trying to feel something. She was only four months despite her size, she doubted much could be deciphered. Finally the hand withdrew, the woman wiping her greased hand on a clean linen. ‘The entrance is sealed up tight, and I can feel something inside you, but it’s a bit strange. I need to take another listen. Lie completely still and hold your breath.’

She felt a qualm of sick terror at the words, thinking of the witch’s words long ago, about the monster she had brought forth, with scales and the wings of a bat. Lies, malevolent lies she had thought, but perhaps it was the truth. She tensed as Tansy bent to listen again, the room so silent you could hear a pin drop, and then the woman’s brow cleared and she stood up in a rush, she was smiling. ‘I’m going to find the king, your Grace. Put your robe back on.’

Jon must have been lurking out in the hallway as she just had time to sit up, collect herself and re-tie her robe over her nakedness when the door burst open. ‘What is it, my lady, is my wife all right?’ he husband said urgently, stalking across the room to gather her up. She tucked herself into his side despite the audience, more than a little rattled.

The midwife’s voice was calm, and very pleased. ‘Stop glaring lad, I wanted to get you so you could hear as well. The queen is as healthy as a horse, if a little underfed, and if my ears and hands don’t deceive me, the poor tiny lass is going to give you twins.’ At their sharp intakes of breath and bulging eyes, her mischievous green gaze snapped with amusement at the pair of them. ‘You best get this monster war over and done, my king, as she’s going to get fucking huge, and likely bloody
When she heard the choked sound Jon made, she didn’t think of her own shock. ‘My lady, I thank you, but could you give us a moment alone please,’ she said quietly. The woman gave her a nod, her gaze softening, and withdrew without comment. When the door was safely closed, she sank onto the edge of the bed, guiding him down with her. He would not like to be seen weeping, so she laid his head on her breast, stroking his loose curls patiently, a few tears dropping on her skin, strong shoulders shaking. She did not know whether it was joy, despair, or both, but she had to stop it before she wept herself.

‘I don’t know why you’re crying,’ she said at last through a distinct sniffle. ‘It’s not you that has to give birth to two of them.’

A crazed laugh sounded against her flesh, then he lifted his head, a hand wiping across his face rapidly to hide the evidence, but he managed a sad, downturned smile at her. His liquid eyes were too terrible and beautiful to look at, so she fidgeted, smoothing curls off his sticky cheeks, her lids lowered for defence, but his thick, catching voice wounded her nonetheless.

‘Surely the Gods are not so cruel that they would give me everything I never knew I needed, only to take it all away from me.’

***

‘Take an hour to think about your babes, then lock them away in the back of your mind, and don’t think about it again until all this is over,’ were the midwife’s wise parting words. ‘But for the Mother’s sake, don’t you fall off that bloody grumpy beast.’

She had thought about that terrible fate more than once since she had found out she was with child, but she would not dwell on it. Instead, she departed for camp on Drogon, riding her mount as fluid and effortless as she always did, despite the bump between her and the dragon’s hide, determined not to falter and freeze, knowing Jon would not be able to help himself, and would worry in his quiet way for the both of them.

On arriving at camp, it was easy to lock it away, multiple personages clamouring for their attention, grumbles and disputes and shortages, Jon pulled in one direction and she another, Ghost trailing at her heels so closely she would often turn and nearly trip over his furry bulk, curling his upper lip in a silent growl at anyone he took a dislike to. The camp was well ordered, but with limited space on the downlands it was very crowded, and the stinks, detritus and squabbles of tens of thousands of men from differing races and places were inevitable. It was bone cold and grey, the dreary wind from the north a constant reminder, but it was still warmer than Winterfell, and the snow was a mere dirty crust on the mud and dead grass.

The black command tent was a scarce haven of comfort, its smoking braziers of coals cutting the chill and the platform bed inviting her to lie down for a snatched half hour to nap, but all too soon it was crammed with generals and advisors for a council meeting. The red priests had sent the High Priestess Kinvara instead of Melisandre, and all the men were uneasy and entranced in her presence, a woman so stunning that even Jon looked at her twice when he arrived in a dramatic swirl of falling snow through the tent flap.

The meeting at first covered mundane matters, then fell into a heated debate on the best placement of troops and fighters in the confined space of Moat Cailin and the causeway when the dead finally came, the two difficult subjects of the dead dragon and the role of the fire priests carefully evaded by practical minds who led the discussion. Spears and shields in the vanguard, valuable swordsmen with Valyrian steel and dragonglass behind, trebuchets firing burning pitch on the
towers or mounted on barges in the swamps, the Dothraki stationed in the downlands to sweep down if any of the dead broke through.

Thinning their sheer numbers relied heavily on keeping the fire break burning despite weather and cold magic, and when the preliminary discussion on troop placement faded to approving nods the High Priestess stepped forward from the shadows, drawing all eyes. ‘Earth, water, air and fire,’ she intoned. ‘The greatest of these is fire. The Lord of Light gives us control over his element, at great cost and effort. We will draw on all our strength to keep the fire burning high and bright so few dead can pass, but fire will not stop the enemy and his brothers.’

Uneasy twitching flowed around the table of men, Quono puzzling over the words in the common tongue as Missandei wasn’t there to translate, Davos eyeing the priestess suspiciously through lowered grizzled brows. ‘We are grateful you are here, and for any assistance you can give us,’ Jon said carefully. ‘Even if that assistance may seem like sorcery, for what choice do we have?’

It was a reminder to himself and the others, and elicited some shuffling and an amused smile from Kinvara. ‘His Grace is gracious, though he denies the magic that is in himself and in his wife, the Bride of Fire,’ she said enigmatically, turning to the end of the table where she sat. ‘Mother of Dragons, Mother of Monsters, Bride of Fire, the fire is mine. Remember those words, my queen, when you fly north to kill the dead one.’

The intonation of words from the distant past were so unnerving her heart leapt beneath her armoured coat, Jon flinching, a hint of fear in his shadowy eyes making her fight to quell her own, but a fretful voice saved them both, Davos butting in. ‘Fly north again, what for? Which dead one out of tens of bloody buggering thousands? His Grace just barely escaped from there and the queen is in no condition to go battling…’ At her sharp glance, the stolid old man flushed and stuttered to a halt. There was a deep, familiar sigh from her husband.

‘We are flying north to kill the wight dragon. If we do not, then all of this strategy will be for nothing. We hope to leave today, though it grows late.’ There was an angry muttering from around the table, a glare from Grey Worm, even Lannister looked deeply troubled. ‘Aye, I know you all have opinions on the matter, but again we have no choice, so there is no point in discussing this.’

There was still more muttering, some overly concerned glances in her direction, as if all knew what was concealed under her layers of clothes, she rose to her feet in response and folded her hands over her belly. ‘My lords, my friends, this is what I am fated to do. The dragon must die if we are to stand a chance, so I do not wish to debate it either. Unless you have other matters you need to discuss, I call the meeting closed.’

She moved her hands to lie flat on the table, staring them down until they looked away, pleased her words were listened to rather than grumbled over as in the North. One by one they bowed and left, leaving her alone, her husband departing as well after hurrying to whisper in her ear that he must convene with the Northern and Vale survivors immediately. She craved a cup of wine to settle her nerves, just a small one, feeling weighed down by a dozen fears like anchors, when the tent flap stirred again, and she caught a flash of red and gold through her lowered lids.

‘Your Grace, I crave audience,’ Lord Jaime said, bowing in a courtly flourish she was not used to.

She gestured to a nearby chair. ‘Bring the wine jug and pour us two cups,’ she said, curious as to why he was seeking her out so soon after the meeting. Watching him struggle with his good hand and hook to do as bid, she got up and helped him briskly. He looked tired and greyer than even a month ago, thick beard shaggy and unkempt.

Usually quite adept at disguising his thoughts, his Lannister eyes probed her over the rim of his
silver goblet after he settled in his chair, sad and worried. ‘I feel that as Tyrion isn’t here, I should speak with his voice, though you will never love me as you love him, and for good reason,’ he said quietly. ‘If we lose you, and his Grace, all of us are surely fucked. Is there not another way you could do this? A ballista, like the one that brought you down on the Blackwater perhaps.’

‘We don’t have one to hand,’ she said dryly. ‘My dragons destroyed both of them, and even if we had one, if it failed in this place we would most definitely be fucked as you say. No, my lord. This is the only way. Two riders versus one. Brandon Stark reports the wight dragon is rotting and crippled.’

Jaime flinched at the mention of Bran, who he had not yet made peace with, but then his brow furrowed with his usual cynicism. ‘And how does Jon Snow of House Stark, not a Targaryen, have the skill of dragon riding? My father forced me to sit through many lessons of history and lore as a child, and I remember that only those of the blood of Old Valyria can bond with a dragon.’

‘That’s not for me to explain, and it is most forward of you to ask,’ she said discreetly, taking a deep sip of her wine and nearly choking. It was firewine from Essos, and it hit her empty stomach like a punch. Lannister was thinking so hard it flowed across his face like the written word, then his green eyes widened in realisation. ‘Whatever it is you are thinking of, now is not the time to speak of it,’ she said quickly, raising a hand in warning.

He had been there of course, he knew all the players in the rebellion and he had played his own part, bringing an end to her father with a sword to the back. He knew her brother Rhaegar, he knew Lord Stark, his wild sister Lyanna, the Usurper, all of them, but Jon would not thank her from bringing it out in the open. He needed to hear the tale from someone who was there to see it one day soon, but not now.

Lannister opened his mouth several times like a gaping fish, but then he brought himself under control with the assistance of more wine. ‘My brother is going to shit himself,’ he muttered into his goblet, then he shook his head. ‘You know that everyone in this camp is aware that you are with child,’ he said directly. ‘Dare I suggest that you do your best to take care of yourself? My brother would surely strangle me if he knew I was letting you fly off to kill a dead dragon with the heir to the throne in your belly.’

‘I’m not thinking about it, and neither should anyone else. We should all be focusing on the task at hand, defeating the dead so we can all go home,’ she said firmly, knowing how futile it was, but he nodded silently, a look of admiration replacing the wary concern.

She was spared any more awkward questions when there was a patter of feet outside, then Ghost pushed through the tent flap, pausing at the sight of Lannister, hackles raised near instantly. The direwolf was quickly followed by Arya, another person not exactly fond of Lord Jaime, although likely Jon had warned her off cutting his throat just yet. Lannister rose and bowed, skirting around the pair glowering at him with ill intent, and departed hastily.

Arya shrugged and removed her hand from the hilt of her dagger, and went to the wine jug, pouring a cup before speaking. ‘Gendry wants to borrow a dragon,’ she said casually, as if borrowing one of her sons was a commonplace thing.

She raised a brow in response. ‘And why does he want to borrow a dragon exactly?’

‘Everyone knows you are pregnant,’ the girl said directly, taking another swig like the firewine was water. ‘They’re all talking about it. Gendry has been wondering if there is something he can do to make sure you don’t fall off in battle. He’s working on it, but he needs a dragon to try it out. Will you come and help him? He’s a bit scared of you, because of his father being King Robert and all,
so he asked me to ask you.’

‘If I blamed people for their father’s sins I would need to blame myself,’ she said, both annoyed at
the gossip and glad of the distraction. ‘A dragon rider shouldn’t fear falling, but it may benefit your
brother, and ease his fears. What is it exactly?’ She had nearly fallen from Drogon when he was
shot down on the Blackwater Rush, and she still remembered the terrifying freefall, the desperate
scrabbling to regain her seat. Jon would have plummeted to his doom in the same situation, so the
idea had merit.

‘A fancy saddle with long girth straps and different stirrups for a better seat,’ Arya replied. ‘He
needs to fit it, so he needs the dragons to take measurements. He’s been quietly working on it since
you came back.’

She pictured a timid Gendry standing with paper and ink at a safe distance while she tried to keep
her irascible sons still enough to endure being measured, and laughed aloud, glad of the burst of
foolishness. ‘Let’s go then. I am intrigued, and grateful for his chivalry.’

***

She was a long time at the forge, which was set apart from the camp near a patch of straggling
woodland that was rapidly being denuded for fuel to supplement the peat bricks the camp survived
upon. Gendry, Arya and Sam Tarly kept her until twilight fell, the latter muttering about Valyrian
steel and wanting dragonfire for an experiment. As Jon had not come to find her she guessed the
day was a washout, and they would not be flying north until the morn, complete with improvised
saddles.

Once the dragons were measured, her boots and the hem of her new coat and hands growing
mucky as she lent her assistance as best she could as the blacksmith could not get near the pair of
them, she coaxed Drogon to send a bolt of liquid fire at a crucible where ingots of steel and
dragonglass were combined. After that, she set her grumpy sons loose in search of dinner, and took
the long, muddy trek back to the tent with two Bloodriders and Ghost in tow, highly sceptical that
the experiment would work. The steel of her motherland was forged with spells, they had no spells,
only the raw ingredients.

When she reached the tent and dismissed her escort, giving Ghost a good scratch, she entered to
find a very pleasant surprise, extra braziers burning away merrily and a large tin tub of steaming
water set between them, and her husband looking pleased with himself, half-dressed in a clean shirt
and breeches. As her bathtub was currently in a wagon on its way from the Twins with most of her
possessions, she was not expecting to get clean anytime soon. She went over to Jon, grabbed a
handful of damp hair and kissed him in gratitude. ‘Where on earth did you find this?’

He gave her a smug look through his lashes as she stepped away to offload her clothes before the
water cooled. ‘I sent Quono’s wives in search of one. They found it in the tent of some fat,
perfumed Westerlands lord, and he wasn’t inclined to argue with them borrowing it when they
flashed their weapons at him.’

She laughed, eased by the carefree bubble of mirth in her chest, making his rare smile broaden.
Carelessly she dropped boots, trousers, layers and layers until she was bare arsed and the subject of
lazy scrutiny as she moved about, then stepped into the tub with a sigh of bliss. He lolled on the
bed with a cup of wine, obviously waiting for her, she felt the anticipation coil in her belly, below
the small bump in her soapy hands. Whatever he had been thinking of, it was more pleasant than
flying off to battle in the morning, so she would do the same.

She took the bar of lavender soap and cleansed herself thoroughly between her thighs and buttocks,
wanting all of herself available to what he had in mind, the flesh around her fingers already growing plump and sensitive. Her hair was still in its tight, formal battle braids, she lacked only the bells which she would ask Jon to add in the morning. The water was so hot she was tempted to soak for longer to rid herself of the perpetual chill, but the bed with its furs and hot bricks and attentive lover would be better for body and spirit.

‘How are your men?’ she enquired dutifully as she rubbed the sponge over her limbs. There was a vexed grunt in response.

‘Royce is so shaken by the skirmish he’s no use to anyone,’ Jon replied. ‘I think he didn’t believe me at all, until he saw with his own eyes. I’m minded to send him out foraging and scouting to the south. The rest are all right, though they all call me traitor behind my back. Even now they’ve seen the dead, they still don’t understand. Tormund wants to crack some skulls for me, but I sent him off with a skin of mead to keep him quiet.’

‘We would have been slaughtered at Winterfell, all of us,’ she reminded them both. ‘And we got as many people out as we could. We knew that some would die no matter what path we took.’

‘Aye, we did,’ he sighed. ‘Let’s not talk about it, love. There is not a damn thing we can do about it in any case, and I’m relying on you to distract me tonight. Finish up there and come lie with me.’

At his voice lowering to a rumble, she looked over her shoulder to find him lying against the pillows, his unlaced shirt showing more than a hint of chest, still mottled purple from the hammer blow, but arresting nonetheless. She dropped the sponge and gave him a quelling stare. ‘What about your ribs?’

‘Fuck my ribs,’ he said, delightfully crude. ‘Dry off and come here.’

She was still beaded with rivulets of bathwater when she wriggled beneath the furs with him, a cosy nest of warmth in the dark, rough hands scooping her up and a tongue swiping between her breasts, tracing a trail of droplets then diverting to a rigid nipple, circling before it was sucked into his scratchy mouth. She made a purring noise and wriggled beneath him, a cage of arms and legs, springy curls dragging across her bosom. The tenderness in her breasts was gone, but the sensitivity was still there, tingling with each pull of his teeth.

Her whole body felt alight with nerves, her overfull mind emptying like a glass with a hairline crack, she would ignite like a pot of wildfire, and likely make the same amount of noise if she wasn’t careful. She clapped a hand over her mouth until he rose and removed it to silence her with a deep, stirring kiss, the probe of his tongue matched by the nudge of his cock against the seam of her lower lips. She was wet enough to take him now, but not enough for him.

He checked her, freeing a breast to palm her belly then the smaller mound of her cunt, a featherlight touch to open her and delve within, then he slithered downwards until he was nothing but a lump beneath the covers, firm hands and tickling hair and finally a ravenous mouth lapping at her, nipping her, sipping from her with a pleased murmur. Her pinned thighs started to twitch at the immediate pleasure of it, and she fumbled for a pillow to hold over her face to cut her moans, small and whimpering to start with, then throaty and rich as he really set to work.

There were guards outside, tents were jammed in cheek by jowl, feet constantly trudged past, voices were evident through the layered canvas, it would take all her self-control not to scream, especially when he taunted her with glottal whispers. ‘You taste like summer, so hot and sweet… shh love, try to be silent, or I will need to gag you again…’

Her lower half quivered, heavy and flushed, he had her nub imprisoned between two fingers,
teasing it with rapid jabs. She was going to erupt and she didn’t want to, not yet. ‘Ohh…come up here and silence me,’ she whined through a mouthful of linen, arching up to attempt to buck him off. He was quick, not caring for his injury, right in her face and knocking the pillow away to replace it with his slippery lips and tongue, hooking a leg with an arm and entering her. Shallow, unsatisfying thrusts which she ended by digging her heels into his arse and bringing him flush against her parted flesh.

He flinched and gave a hiss of pain as the snap of his hips jarred his sore spots, followed by an ecstatic groan. She was very tight around him despite being well used to taking his cock abruptly, the sweet burn making it difficult to stop crying out through his kisses, his eyes half an inch from hers, pitchy and lost. She eased back into the mattress, letting him dictate the movements, every roll of his body into hers keeping her perfectly balanced on the plateau.

The abrasion of his beard across her cheek, his flushed face now hiding in her neck, teeth sinking to subdue her, a rough hand sealing her mouth to silence. Normally cool to the touch, the muscles of his back rippled under her grasp, slick with sweat and as warm as her soft, springy curves giving way to his hard planes and angles. There was a hitch in his breath as if pain was still marring his pleasure, so she squirmed and closed her thighs around his hips. ‘Mmph…turn over, let me take you.’

There was a frustrated noise, a crease in his brow as he lifted up and rolled them over gingerly, his length still sheathed inside her. She knew he wanted to fuck her until she begged for mercy, his possessive mood evident to her now, and Gods she needed it, but he was hurting himself. Better if she satisfied the darkness in him without injuring him further. She kissed the stubborn line she loved and circled her hips above him, holding him deep, and he sighed and relaxed with a flutter of spidery lashes, his pretty lips engorged and rosy and tempting a sharp nip. ‘I will be very quiet,’ she whispered into him. ‘Try and do the same.’

At his dismissive grunt, she smiled in challenge, rocking him against her womb in sharp movements until she wrenched a husky growl out of him, and then she proceeded to do much worse, sealing her mouth tight as she rose up to a squat, shucking off the furs that were no longer needed. She slid up and down with ease, she would need no oil for this, but she dribbled spit into her hand as shameless as he, ink black eyes watching her every move as she paused to rub it over her back entrance. ‘Fuck Dany,’ he rasped. ‘You mean to make me bite my tongue in two.’

She lifted off him, keeping her silence, her lids lowered, grasping his glistening cock in one hand and spreading her cheeks with the other. She breached herself with the head, a mewl of pain escaping her with an expiration of breath, and she could do no more, falling forward to shudder in his arms, slipping down another inch. A hand flattened against the small of her back, gentling her then guiding her downwards a little further, her cry caught in his mouth.

‘That hurts, doesn’t it, love.’

‘It always hurts, but then it feels so good,’ she gasped. ‘Make me take it all.’

Her skin crawled, her spine tensed, he was too thick, too much, crooning at her then snarling in his cored throat as he impaled her fully, but then it began, the careening pleasure that pulsed through every nerve in waves as she adjusted, leaking nectar from her empty cunt, bracing her hands on either side of his rumpled head so she could smother her frantic noise in his lips. He made little, helpless sounds as he gently moved her over him, the tighter grip of her arse unravelling him as sure as herself.

Feeling broken in at last, she rose up with her knees spread, on full display as she handled herself and writhed to engulf him to the root. He reached the limit of his subtle silence, growling savagely
and straining upwards as if dying to tip her over and bend her to take a harsh assault. She felt stripped bare and vulnerable by the overwhelming sensations, the wanton pleasure she took from it all, her cunt split like a peach, dripping and dusky pink under her strumming fingers.

Her lover was a beautiful ruin with wild, stormy eyes, biting his lip to smother his groans and grunts, while she was mute aside from her ragged breathing. He reached the limit of his endurance the moment she buried her fingers inside herself and began to come with a rapid flutter around her own hand and his cock, her eyes bulging, a scream rising and cut off with a desperate struggle. He sat up without flinching, locking his hands around her haunches and holding her trapped, her hands beating against his marred chest in futile protest.

His rapid, relentless thrusts upward into her arse drew it out until she had to bite down on his shoulder to hold it back, the fight against wailing adding to the torment of her climax, tears trickling from her eyes as pleasure and pain and frustration warred in her mind. Saving her from a mental and physical meltdown, he came at last, the carnal, rasping sound of his release sounding through her core, the teeth marks she left on him an oval of punctures that nearly drew blood.

The burn of his seed filling her made her want to crawl away on hands and knees and lick her wounds, but he had her in his grasp and would not let her retreat. Kisses on her face, in the sweaty valley of her breasts, hiding there in a spill of raven hair twined in her trembling fingers, so she took it all, what she had drawn out of him, and herself.

***

Jon left her, dozy and replete and savouring the ache of the aftermath, washing and dressing and quickly returning with a plate of food which he coaxed her into finishing. He undressed again and held her, cradling their babes in his work-worn hands as they talked over the events of the day until she dropped into a dreamless sleep. They woke long before dawn and she insisted on re-binding his ribs, then they dressed and armed up and met Gendry at the forge, fitting the saddles with some effort and then departing for Greywater Watch.

They knew they would find Bran waiting in the dark under the stunted Weirwood tree, low and strangled and gnarled but as old and hale as the giant trees further north. Not sleeping, not eating, turning hollow cheeked with fatigue, threads of grey in his boy’s mop of hair, his companion in dreams Lord Reed wrapped in furs, a silent sentinel swaying on his feet.

‘Who is he?’ Jon began, and his brother stirred in his chair, his white eyes flipping back to grey.

‘He was a Stark. One of the first. The children of the forest turned him with a blade of dragonglass to the heart. Their magic is deep, and as old as the bones of the earth, but they could not withstand the world of men without help.’

‘What does he want?’

‘To kill us all. That what he was made for, it is his only purpose. I cannot yet pierce his mind to find out what else may be there.’

Her husband looked deeply troubled, pacing a path in the thickening snowfall. Her hand twisted at the collar of her undercoat, fruitlessly trying to get air, trying to find the fire within her to listen with detachment. The fire is mine.

‘How do we kill him?’ Jon burst out, spinning to a halt under a bone-white branch. He didn’t look strong to her at that moment, he looked like the boy he once was, confused and defenceless against the cruelty and treachery of the world. It was all too easy to close her eyes and picture him dead in
the snow, leaking blood in red tendrils, so she stiffened her spine and gave him a calm look, the face of a mother, the face of a queen.

‘Ice and fire,’ Bran said in his dreamy, absent tone. ‘I saw your father in the dragonglass cave, standing in front of the murals you showed the queen. He knew it was his destiny, if not his, then his children. He saw it in his dreams, in the flames, the war to end all wars. He loved your mother, but it was fated. The magic in your blood, the magic in the woman you love. I can’t tell you the how, I can’t see it, only that you must. Together.’

Her lover’s steadfast shoulders slumped, so she broke the spell of the questions and answers and went to him and held him, giving him the strength and warmth of her smaller body, ripe with life. The fire was in her now, when she lowered her lids she could see it, red and orange and gold, flickering and swirling in an updraft.

‘Where is he now?’ was her question.

They found the edge of the storm first, a blue-white fog that crept across the barren, ice-locked land, dimming the dawn to twilight, so cold it sunk into the bottom of her lungs and made her choke for air. She leaned into the body of her mount for extra warmth, the flat saddle supporting her, her feet hooked in metal stirrups securely, a long spear of dragonglass strapped to her back in a holster, its shaft of lightweight wood so she could lift and wield it.

Rhaegal kept pace at Drogon’s left flank as the fog began to ooze around them, both dragons sniffing and shaking their heads in distress, then growling sonorously when they caught a scent. *Find him, my sons, find your brother, then end his bondage,* she repeated through the tether of shared thoughts, catching a glimpse of Jon with his eyes closed, using the same conduit to plead with his mount. She felt the eerie presence of his mind in the ether, fierce and determined, no fear left in him. He had become nothing but an instrument of death, and she would be the same, no matter the dread roiling in her guts.

They were somewhere near Barrowtown, which was under siege from the dead, but she could see nothing of the battle below, only the ice fog that seared the passages of her lungs and stripped the skin from her cheeks, flashes of static lightning in the maelstrom, the snarling dragons and her love, her destiny, lying near flat on his mount as Rhaegal began to dive. He wasn’t good enough to attack in mid-air, not yet, he would be the bait, and she the warrior she was born to be, not with a blade, but as the mother of monsters.

‘Nykeā zaldrīzes iksos daor nykeā buzdari!’ she shouted in defiance, emptying herself of everything but the thrum of hot blood in her veins, the hotter fire in her mind, a vessel of fury and instinct as she sliced through the freezing clouds. She heard a piercing shriek below her, closer to the invisible ground, the raging beat of wings, a terrible cold stench that sent her sons hissing and diving to find it frantically, the tether of her thoughts stretching to follow and maintain control.

There was a burst of blue flame which Drogon twisted to dodge easily, his massive body coiling under her, razor claws flexing, Rhaegal howling frantically and banking in a low arc under her, searching for the source of the unnatural fire, shooting a stream of bright flame as a lure. The fog was so disorientating that she knew neither up nor down, and she let Drogon have his head, sensing his pure fury as he called through the opaque air. Rhaegal bellowed in response in their secret language, but the dead one only shrieked like a soul in torment.

He may have been unnaturally strong and fast once, as the traumatised witnesses from the Wall had described, but now he was a hulk, his flight erratic and faltering, bones protruding through holes in his hide, his cream and gold colouring replaced by grey ash, blue fire eternally spitting from his maw. She saw him, the creature who had taken her son and made him a monster in truth,
glaring at her with the same implacable hatred, but then she ignored him and held on with all her might as Drogon dived and spun in mid-air, his claws snatching at Viserion’s underbelly and raking furrows of oozing black blood.

Somewhere above Rhaegal was erupting with balls of fire, spiralling and slapping with his tail in a taunt, but she could not pay attention to that either. She could not think about her lover holding on tight and cursing and praying, and dear Gods she hoped he was not thinking of her. The dead dragon screeched as Drogon snapped at his tail and whip-cracked him around, his shredded wings flapping frantically to get away. A stream of blue flame passed a foot from her head, she cried out in shock at the icy breath of it and flattened further, hooking her heels into the stirrups as Drogon let go and plummeted downwards, disappearing into the clouds for respite and shaking under her in revulsion.

*Once more, my son, my beautiful son, I know you can do it*, she pleaded with him, and a great sigh sounded through her bones, turning to a feral, unrestrained roar as he burst out of the murk and hit the side of his foe with a jarring impact, knocking the screaming wight dragon further towards where the ground should be. More bolts of flame passed over her head, then a crunch of jaws finding purchase as they spiralled down in an embrace, down, down, the hard ground waiting to meet them, then a horrible sound of tearing flesh, a high, thin screech that deadened her ears.

She knew they were going to hit the ground, and her saddle would not protect her from the impact, the world was a chaos of hideous sounds, flailing legs and wings and snapping teeth, choking fog and the reek of death, a bolt of lightning so bright she was blinded. She ground her teeth and braced herself, praying to the heedless Gods to protect her babes as they fell, then Drogon wrenched away with a snarl of triumph and a rain of sluggish blood, an eruption of snow and dirt and a mighty thud as one dragon fell, and the other escaped.

But it was not the end, not for the dead. Broken, crippled, but still spitting fire and crawling, still suffering. She was heedless, reckless, not even thinking of the enemy and where he might be, whether he was waiting with another ice spear to secure another mount. ‘Tegon!’ she shouted in a cracked voice, the whistle of the incessant wind only a dull hiss in her ears, her eyes still struggling to make sense of her surroundings. From above her, she heard Rhaegal call out plaintively, and Drogon answered, the green dragon dipping below the fading fog, and she sobbed in relief when she sighted Jon still grimly clinging on.

Drogon swooped over the humpy ground of snow and rocks until he found a blasted crater in the snow, Viserion lying on his back, one wing ripped away, no sign of the Night King in the wreckage. The dragon’s blue eyes were open, he spotted them and shot a stream of ice fire in their direction, boiling yet cold, Drogon escaping a direct hit by jinking sideways. She felt bruised and broken by all the violent movement and terror, but she had to find the strength to dismount, take her spear and end it, this tale of unintended consequences that started with lust and love and bravado and good hearts, and ended in this barren waste.

‘Dany, Dany no!’ she heard a hoarse cry from behind her as she slithered down the side of Drogon’s heaving hide, falling as limp as a rag doll in the thick snow. He had landed behind them, trying to stop her mother’s folly, the pad of his feet running as she rose and staggered towards the crater, sliding her spear from its sheath on her back and using it as a crutch. She had told Jon how she had earned one of her titles, but he didn’t believe it enough to stand aside and let her do it, so she picked up the pace, jumping down into the hollow where the dragon lay, prone but deadly. Every part of her dragged with exhaustion and grief, but she would do her duty.

She heard the hiss of a sword being drawn, a snarl from her exhausted mount, a lick of orange flame that lit up the heart wrenching scene. There was nothing left in him of her beautiful,
affectionate son, he was a shell animated by evil, so she approached from the side without tears, raising the spear with both hands, and the shattered beast snaked his head around and screeched a final time.

A corona of blue flame formed around her as she sunk the spear through rotting flesh and bone with a mother’s strength, not feeling the cold bite of the fire, because the fire was hers.
And when you kiss me I am happy enough to die

A/N: So you guys liked my dragon fight. Thank you so much, I was nervous as hell about pulling that off. This is a shortish interlude chapter, the next chapter will be at least some of the main battle. Soon this fic will be over and I can move on to other things after a cry and a sulk. This has been a huge chunk of my life since last November when there was a power cut at home and I decided to sit down and write cave sex.

Appreciation for all you readers, lurkers, and commenters, especially those who have been here since the beginning. You’ll help me get to the end. Dedicated to Ashleyfanfic, who is my sister in back misery, except way worse. Get well soon darling, hug your neck (carefully).

The cold of the tomb encased her skin, her pores stinging with the pain of it, like she had been dunked in the lake beyond the Wall and rolled in a snowdrift a dozen times to wrap her in a coat of solid ice, so very cold the marrow of her bones ached. But she wasn’t dead, and this wasn’t the afterlife, whether the blackness of nothing Jon had described, the fluffy clouds and peaceful serenity of the heaven the Faith of the Seven believed in, or the fiery paradise where the Lord of Light made his home.

There was too much cursing to start with, a stream of vile and inventive words and clumsy, jostling movements. Whoever had her was running across the uneven ground full tilt, and then snarling and grumbling, the blessed scorching heat of a dragons hide as she was gently seated, held in the circle of strong arms, a heart beating so fast she could feel it through the layers of clothes and frost. ‘Come on lad, get us gone. Sōvegon!’ a deep voice shouted through the ringing in her ears, and then the safety of the sky, wind buffeting her face, bunching muscles between her numb legs, but still her crusted eyes would not open.

Somehow knowing they were out of immediate danger, she slipped into a sludgy semi-consciousness, her surroundings not registering though noise and light and chaos seeped through in flashes. The comforting arms were gone, she was passed to others in a flurry of hurried words, and then there was nothing until she woke with a heave of air and a cry of distress, wrapped in blankets and furs, the shape of hot bricks at her feet and sides, her hands flailing to grasp her belly under rough wool, still a small but reassuring mound.

Instead of cold she was burning hot, flushed and feverish under a weight of covers, her eyelids struggling to open when she sensed people hovering. In the distance, she could hear crashes and crackling flames and screams and shouts, but the chamber she was in was dim and quiet, lit by candle sconces on either side of the bed. There were two faces; the craggy, kindly face of a maester with a long chain of metal links and robes of winter grey, and a haughty, predatory face of a towering lady in black, her silver streaked hair wound under a complicated headdress that made her even taller.

‘Jon,’ she muttered hazily, her tongue thick and furred. ‘Where is Jon…where am I?’ She struggled to sit up, and the maester moved forward anxiously, raising a hand.

‘Your Grace, don’t try and rise. You came to us unconscious and very chilled, you need to rest for your babes and keep warm,’ the man said firmly. ‘You are in Barrowtown. Your husband the king is outside joining the fight to drive back the dead, but he needed to get you inside as quickly as possible.’
She swallowed a ragged sob of pure relief her babes were still with her, and then the stately woman spoke, her voice without a shred of human warmth. ‘Your husband has taken your beasts and is clearing the vermin away from the town walls with fire, and not a moment too soon.’ She looked like a carrion crow, the way she perched at her bedside and looked down her long nose. Despite the maester’s advice, she shifted against the pillows, elevating slightly to eye the woman coolly, some of her self-possession returning. ‘You are at the keep of House Dustin, or what is left of it.’

‘House Dustin,’ she repeated, frowning as she groped for coherent words, as elusive as dust motes. ‘Sworn to House Stark, but I did not see you at Winterfell, my lady, nor heard mention of you from his Grace.’ She shifted up further, and the maester stirred uneasily, helping her to settle with gentle hands and then offering her a steaming cup. Spirits, lemon, and honey, she drunk it down and smiled at him gratefully before returning her gaze to the lady, poorly concealed contempt in her dark, deep set eyes.

‘My sons and husband are dead, my men largely lost in the Battle of the Bastards, fighting on the wrong side. Your bastard king is no Stark, and I have little left to offer,’ the woman said bitterly. ‘All I wanted was to be left in peace, but first the refugees found us, eating us out of house and home, then a legion of troops led by Wildling scum and Watch deserters, and at last the dead came. The dead let loose by your dragon.’

She blinked at the stream of harsh words, but did not bridle. Clearly this woman was a malcontent, and she had met many of those. She would not look for gratitude though she had been treated with care, likely because the woman was afraid of her dragons. ‘The dragon we just brought down to save your town, and the demon who rode him,’ she said calmly. ‘And his Grace is every bit a Stark, despite his name.’ It was true, despite his spare beauty, his lean gracefulness, his bond with her sons, the dark, fiery core of his soul that she knew and loved, her husband was more a Stark than of her house. His upbringing was stronger than the blood of the father he never knew.

‘No true Stark would swear to House Targaryen, let alone marry one,’ the lady said icily, and she fought the strong urge to roll her eyes. The maester turned and stared at his mistress wearily, as if used to her rantings. It was stupid and pointless to dig over long dead bones when a fight for life was going on around the city walls, but it wasn’t the first time she had encountered such attitudes up here and it would not be the last.

She was hurting, the horror of what she had been forced to do to end her lost child was sickening her stomach, worry over Jon was starting to gnaw at her like a famished rat. Two dragons, one rider, and Walkers without the walls, perhaps armed with their deadly spears. Her reply was impatient and tinged with menace. ‘House Targaryen has returned to this realm to help save it, and will remember its friends and its enemies, when this is all over.’ The maester blinked and shifted nervously in a swirl of robes, but Lady Dustin was unmoved.

‘I am thankful for your hospitality under such straitened circumstances,’ she went on with more than a little sarcasm. ‘But if you would grant me a moment alone with the maester, my lady, then I would like to rest. I am very tired.’ It was a lie, she was increasingly alert, quivering with frustration that a battle was going on outside without her assistance, but she wanted the woman out of her sight.

The lady sketched a desultory curtsey and left in a trail of faded velvet skirts. The maester gave a look of relief as the blackened oak door closed behind her, and then fusséd at the bottles and jugs on the bedside coffer. The room seemed larger by her absence, neat stone blocks hung with elaborate hunting tapestries, furs laid on the floor and above her small form in the bed. At least the woman hadn’t confined her to some mean garret.
‘What is your name, Maester…?’ she said idly as the healer handed her another brew to drink, this one fouler. She made a face and the maester smiled cautiously.

‘I am Maester Timeon, once of Dorne, then the Citadel, then posted here, for my sins,’ he said, then took the cup when she bravely drank down the rest. ‘A strengthening tonic for your babes, your Grace,’ he reassured her. ‘Raspberry leaf tea. I carried out a quick examination when the maids undressed you, but all looks well.’

‘What ails your mistress?’ she asked, pulling more faces at the dry, earthy taste on her tongue but relaxing at his words. She dreaded reaching beneath the covers to find the red blood of failure on her hands.

Timeon’s feathery eyebrows lowered, lips pursing guardedly at her enquiring look. ‘Lady Dustin is a bitter woman, I fear,’ he said slowly. ‘She loathes the Starks and pays them as little allegiance as she can get away with. She was once young and beautiful, and ambitious. She hoped to marry Brandon Stark the elder son of Lord Rickard but was not found worthy, and her life since has been one cruel loss after another.’

Her life had been the same, but as soon as she found the strength within herself it had been what she made of it. She had been sold to a man she did not want and turned it to her advantage, and had not wallowed in grief and resentment of the fate she had been dealt, when she so easily could have. She finished the tea and shrugged off the past, turning her attention back to the tumult outside. ‘Tell me of the siege.’

‘They arrived a few hours before you did, your Grace. Thousands of them and three demon men. Luckily our walls are stout, and the king’s men arrived with fair warning,’ he said grimly. We dug trenches before the gates and set the fires, but they couldn’t stay lit in this ill weather. They were breaking through when your dragons joined the fight.’

‘My dragons,’ she repeated, a qualm of fear flickering in her gut. ‘Did you see the White Walkers, good ser? And were they armed with spears of ice?’

The old maester frowned. ‘I was curious enough to climb the walls and take a look, your Grace, to see these demons of myth with my own eyes. Swords of ice I saw before I turned coward and ran from the foul sight, but no spears.’

She expelled a tightly held breath, but then began to struggle at the cocoon of blankets. Her limbs felt bruised all over and weighted with lead, and she trembled with fatigue. ‘Help me up,’ she asked him. ‘Get me to the window so I can look.’

Timeon tutted and fussed, but at her fixed stare he helped her out of the bed with hands wrinkled with age and care. He was a tiny man, only her height, but his grip was strong as he led her to the narrow window overlooking the town. The twilight was awash with leaping flames, its orange glow throwing the encircling stone walls into sharp relief. Figures ran to and fro, men swarmed the wall walk, but there appeared to be a lull. She heard a thunderous growl cut through the smoke and shouts, its echo making her slump in relief, her hand gripping the window ledge for support. The maester patted her shoulder. ‘There you go, your Grace. Your beasts are alive, likely the king too.’

Following his words there was a crash and creak. She spotted a humped steaming silhouette on a nearby slate roof, a gleam of heaving green and gold scales, a lashing spiked tail. A cheer rose up from the town below, a ragged chorus of voices shouting not in terror, but triumph.

‘King in the North!’
‘King in the fucking North!’

‘Dragon King!’

‘Three cheers for the beasts!’

Her mouth twisted, wryly amused, and so relieved her burst of strength faded, draining through her bare feet beneath the borrowed bedrobe. An arm hooked in hers as she staggered. ‘Come on then, my queen. You’re a hero of the North this day, and so is your king. It’s safe to return to bed and rest a bit longer until he comes for you.’

***

He sat apart from her, bruised skin dipped in gold from the candles, the crescent scar across his heart black not dull red, his eyes huge and soot dark in the tricky light, tired and unhappy. She sensed it, the old wall of reserve being fitted together brick by brick, the dregs of terror from when she had dismounted and ran recklessly towards the worst kind of danger souring in his mouth. No matter the magic of her blood and her fierce will, no matter that she was the Unburnt, she had scared the shit out him, and now he had time to brood over it.

Shamelessly she ignored the construction, shifting across the linen sheets to curl in his lap, her head hidden in his belly, hard as iron and cool against her cheek. Her lips curled slightly as she felt it, a hand nestled in her messy braids, stroking reluctantly, the tinkle of a battle bell at the caress. A small victory, but it was not the end of it. It had been some time since they had erupted into harsh words, she would have to guard her tongue to avoid it, turn these brief hours of rest into comfort, not a confrontation.

She spoke first, her voice soft and careful. ‘Jon, I am sorry, but I had to do it. I couldn’t just leave him maimed. He was my son once, it was my responsibility as his mother to end his pain, and he was in pain and could still do much damage. I didn’t think, I just trusted to hope.’ She risked lifting her head and looking up. His brows were folded, a glimmer in his eyes that was equal parts sadness and resentment. They were so easy to read, those beautiful soulful eyes.

‘You were lucky,’ he said hoarsely. ‘Damn lucky, Daenerys. The enemy could have been lying in wait for you. That unnatural blue fire could have killed you. You should have let me do it. The Gods only know why all my bloody hair hasn’t turned as white as yours after this day.’

She gave a burst of nervy laughter. ‘No, your hair is still as black as a pretty crow’s,’ she said lightly, then tilted her chin, a little stubbornness strengthening her voice. ‘You are right, but he wasn’t there, and the blue fire is as cold as death, but it is still my element. I am alive, and you are alive. Let’s be glad of that while we still can, my love. I am tougher than I appear, how many times do you have to see to believe it?’

‘You are still my wife,’ he grumped. ‘My small, dainty, pregnant wife. It’s easy to forget.’ A deep sigh escaped him, his burdened shoulders slumping, but then he shook himself, the corner of his mouth twitching. ‘If you weren’t so weak and sleepy and with child I’d turn you over my knee and spank you.’

‘That’s better,’ she smiled at him. ‘And if you weren’t so knackered I’d give you the same for taking my sons off without me to be a bloody stupid hero and get yourself named the Dragon King.’ She propped herself up a little against his chest, and an arm snaked around her, the soft vibration of a chuckle. She arched a brow, and the half smile deepened. She didn’t mind, not really, he had no choice but to try it. ‘How did you get Drogon to follow you both? He is used to leading, like his mother.’
The smile faded. ‘I had no control over him, I can’t think at him as I can sometimes with Rhaegal,’ he mused. ‘He got the scent of them and followed us, though he circled above for a while calling for you before he started spitting fire. The dead went up like dry kindling, and the Walkers just faded into the twilight in the end. Saving themselves for the main battle, I expect.’ He shivered, though the chamber was warm enough from the well-tended fireplace, and his forehead creased into a dozen furrows. ‘The Night King was gone too, when the dragon fell. Almost as if it was him in that bolt of lightning that struck the ground. Perhaps the fall weakened him, or maybe that’s a fool’s hope.’

She didn’t want him to mull it over and fall into despair at what lay ahead, likely in days, so she moved to change the subject, her right hand drifting over his enticing yet bashed about torso. ‘Did you eat downstairs? Did you drink a barrel of ale?’ She sniffed him, smelling smoke and sweat and musk and a tang of malty brew, and he snorted fondly.

‘Aye. Lady Dustin feasted us when we came in, and glared like she begrudged every mouthful, despite saving her bloody town and most of the men guarding the walls.’ At her huffing noise, he snorted again, his lulling, pleasant voice hardening. ‘My father…Lord Stark…he never liked her, I remember. A hard woman, and a spiteful one. Always used to eye me like I was a roach scuttling from the rushes whenever she called in to Winterfell, and she hasn’t warmed any.’

Satisfied that he was taken care of, she dropped a kiss on one flat nipple, the hand in her hair now carding through knots and snarls, her roaming hand dipping below the furs, tracing the wispy line of black hair to cup his groin, heavy but slumbering. At her gentle touch, there was a lively twitch. Her fingers curled around his length, stroking from stones to tip lazily. He cleared his throat.

‘Dany…I just saw you burn, then I had to leave you in the hands of strangers all cold and still and weak. I don’t think…’

Her grip on him tightened, and despite his denial he was swelling in her warm hand, thick and turgid, the hood of delicate skin pulling back under her strokes. There was a slight tug at her scalp, a small hiss, the musk of his skin was stronger in her nose. ‘I’m not dead,’ she purred. ‘You just won a battle, and I have what you need right now. Take it.’

‘We won a battle,’ he corrected her, lifting her chin to look down into her face, his tongue darting out to wet his lower lip, eyes glowing with pride and love and raw male need. His hair was a messy nimbus around his face, beard shaggy and inviting a nuzzle against his scratchy cheek, though it still ached to move her head abruptly. He was hers and she was his, and despite the terrible odds they were still here. He caught her lips, pressing an open kiss there that made her sigh and melt.

‘Let’s get this ugly robe off you then, so I can check you are all in one piece.’

When she was naked, he laid her down carefully and mapped her with his rough touch, every curve and hollow, muscle and bone and sensitive spot he knew, following with kisses, glances through his lowered lids as she murmured and squirmed under his weight, her hand resuming its attentions at his groin whenever she could reach him. ‘I can’t wait until its summer again so I can see you in fine silk, or nothing at all, with no blankets or bedrobes to hide all this,’ he growled at her, and she giggled, grabbing for his hair to nip at his lush mouth.

The pain in her body was becoming distant, but still she felt weak and clumsy. The ice fire had hit her like a whole body blow, it was a miracle no harm had come to her precious babes. No blood on her thighs now opening for him, no wrenching grief and guilt. In his arms, she felt made of fine crystal flawed with invisible cracks, but he could mend her. ‘Go easy on me, my king,’ she breathed into him. ‘You can save spanking me raw for another time.’

‘I won’t forget about it,’ he said with a hint of menace, and she giggled again, warmth blooming in
her belly at the prospect, and the feel of him above her, his lengthy shaft pressing against her mound, demanding entrance to her cunt. She was not ready yet to take him, though she wanted to feel it splitting her apart, the ache and burn of ownership, struggling for air at the surrender, those changeable eyes going black and blank as the heat and pressure swallowed him whole.

Instead, his mouth trailed to her breasts, playing court to each nipple with tender care, soft, wet pulls and licks until they were red and sheened. She felt an echoing pull within them, as if milk was surging though to feed and nurture, though that was still months away. She imagined herself heavy and swollen with it, and his sweet mouth drinking his fill of her, and the thought was so stirring she whimpered sharply and cradled his head there closely.

Under his hand, her belly curved and fitted to his palm, no movement yet but they were there, one of each like he had predicted. He left her breasts and trailed lower, a scrape of beard down her pliant body, the hand between her legs, tracing the lips of her cunt and opening them to receive his attentions. She hadn’t bathed since the previous night, but the taste of her was good to him, he growled in his throat and settled there, latching on to pull her into his mouth, thighs held flat to the mattress, covers shrugged off his back so he could see her quiver and struggle and grow pinker and wetter under his lips, whiskers and probing tongue.

Fatigue started to fade as pleasure took over, she wound her fingers in his curls to hold him fast, wanting to be lost in it, arching and keening when his hand slipped to probe her, one finger then two gently stretching her cunt, his other hand pulling her petals apart to explore every crevice with the tip of his tongue. Her legs were freed, but she kept obediently still, letting him dictate the pace, a slow build up that settled in the pit of her belly and sparked across her quivering skin.

She opened her eyes to watch him, crouched and predatory, pink lips and pinker tongue dipping and flicking and sweeping over her parted folds and protruding nub, the digits inside her pushing deeper, curling and teasing her hidden spots he knew so well. ‘Do you want more?’ he hummed into a mouthful of her, and she hitched a breath.

‘More…’ she gasped. ‘Make it ache. Make me come…’ A third finger pushed inside her, a twist of pain making her pleasure spiral to the sky. Too far away to touch and tease him in turn, she used her faltering voice. ‘Jon…so good love…more…’ She was so wet now she could hear the slick drag of his tongue, his fingers spearing her deeper and deeper. Her spine bowed, ripples so powerful the pleasure of release had a keen edge. She howled and pulled at his hair sharply, her nub twitching under the rapid lapping of his tongue until she could stand no more and pushed him away.

Though she was dazed and foggy, she watched him rise to his knees, blinking to take in the arresting sight of pale muscles coiled, the scars of battle and betrayal only enhancing how very lovely and very male he was, staring down at her through falling locks, his hand curled around his thick length and fisting it deliberately, slow and provocative. She moaned in her throat, the sight of him pleasuring himself near as thrilling as the promise of having him inside her. ‘I could spill on you like this, I am so close,’ he husked at her, lips wet from her juices and slack, his eyes black as ink.

‘No,’ she said softly, both selfish and giving. ‘Take me, use me. I need to feel every inch of you.’

She offered him life when they were surrounded by death on all sides, a warm accommodating body, turning on her side and hitching a leg to expose her entrance beneath her cheeks. He snarled at the invitation, but he moved to hold her with reverence, flush against her back, nips and bites at her neck as he slid a knee between her thighs, found her cunt with the head of his cock, and escaped within. A tight, hot trap of flesh, so slick and eased by his fingers he sunk to the root with one
thrust.

A hand flat against her belly and an arm across her breasts to guide her backward, heavy breaths decorating her skin, his cock stretching her sweetly, her muscles giving way until every movement was a subtle glide. Memory fluttered in her dark, pulsing thoughts, her first submission in her bed on Dragonstone, her defensive shell cracking and letting him crawl inside her heart, her resulting tears and fury. Long ago and far away, though only months past. She didn’t care that it was fate or destiny, that they were born to save the world as some insisted, she was just his woman, a woman prone to laugh and tease and beguile to make him smile, to make him indulge himself, to throw down the wall of reserve and show her who he truly was.

She had gotten the taste of him that night long ago and become addicted, a pleasant diversion she had foolishly thought, when she was already beginning to love him and admire him, to yearn for a man who was pure and good, accepting the baggage of death and duty that came with him. She had given everything she had to keep him, and it was worth the price, no matter that they hovered on the brink of a bottomless gravepit with every shortening day that passed.

The smooth strokes within her channel, the twisting knot of pleasure in her loins, his soft grunts and groans and murmured endearments as he fucked her gradually emptied her mind. She began to keen and hooked her leg over a calf to open herself more, the position not quite fulfilling her urge to be overwhelmed. He grasped her tighter against him, hips rolling at an exquisite angle that turned her keening to cries. A little faster, a little harsher, her body now pulsing with raw energy, all weakness banished. ‘I need to go deep love,’ he hissed at her. ‘Roll over and get on your knees.’

She trusted him now so there were no qualms and no discomfort, only surrender, a pillow tucked under her belly for support, her hands burrowing into more pillows to hold on, her thighs split and her haunches grasped, his slippery cock resuming its strokes right where it felt the most good, slow and deliberate, yet deep and satisfyingly rough. ‘Are you all right, love,’ he growled, as she cried out sharply. ‘Tell me to stop if it’s too much…fuck, you feel so good…Gods, so tight and wet…I can’t hold it.’

She lifted her bottom higher, the smack of his increasing movements mingling with her wild noise, not caring if she found satisfaction or not, as long as he came for her, but the angle was right, the pressure and sudden violence enough. The knot in her core unfurled and she released again with a scream into the pillows, her cunt grabbing hold in rapid flutters, but then he wrenched away from her with a hoarse cry, leaving her empty.

Sometimes he had the urge to mark her, and it always made her feel like his whore, a deliciously black and strange satisfaction that had her moaning as hot droplets hit her raised buttocks, quivering shaft pressed against her cleft, a trickle down her thighs then a collapsing weight over her smearing it into her flesh. Musk and earth and salt, heaving breaths and helpless whimpers, then kisses on her blazing cheek. ‘Now I will sleep and not dream,’ he whispered. ‘Wrapped up in you, with your scent all over me.’

It was the least she could give him, small and meaningless maybe, but better than a cold narrow bed, with only duty and honour to keep him staggering towards the end, and he had granted her the same fleeting bliss, as he always did. She prayed silently as she settled into his arms when he curled against her back again, prayed to any power that would listen, that the end would be soon, with that breaking sunrise of hope she struggled to keep fixed in her mind.

***

The flew south through swirling fog only dimly lit by daylight, the sun crawling along the southern horizon behind the layer of murk that likely covered the continent to the mountains of Dorne. They
dropped down occasionally to sight landmarks and orient themselves, her usually flexible, fast
movements to guide Drogon absent, slumped in her saddle and using her mind instead of her body,
though that was tired as well. Her frozen outer clothes had been aired and dried while she rested, a
maid sent in to tidy her hair, but her face in the mirror she peeked into before taking their leave had
not been a pretty sight, chalky with purple shadows beneath her eyes.

They heard the horn some distance away when they were following the causeway through the
pewter and dun swamp, a low call, then a louder peal of triumph to warn everyone they had
returned. A smile flickered on her freezing lips at the welcoming clamour, though in the murk to
their backs the dead were marching south, turning every unlucky soul in their path. They had saved
Barrowtown, but there was no news of White Harbour, and everyone in between would be gone.
Even if hope won out, the North would be long recovering from the horror of it. The North would
remember.

At the foot of the downlands there was a flattish field of boggy turf used for drilling and sparring,
and as they cleared the three crumbling towers of Moat Cailin, the Unsullied watchers on the
rooftops lifting their dragonglass spears in salute, they brought the dragons down in a shallow arc,
aiming to land there. There was a deputation of people, tiny antlike figures swarming in
multicoloured garb, the banners of Stark and Targaryen displayed in a semi-formal welcome.

There were broad grins on the faces of friends and allies as she hit the ground in a slither and spray
of mud, Rhaegal following and leaving his own furrow of muck in the spongy ground. As Drogon
settled, heaving and grumbling, she kicked her feet out of her stirrups and began to lower herself
down his side gingerly, stiff and awkward and annoyed to be in public view in such a state, but
there was a fluid figure in grey fur running to catch her, dark eyes glinting at her vexed expression.

She was grateful to be grabbed and set on her feet without falling on her face in the mud, and she
pecked Jon’s icy forehead quickly before she gathered her dignity and walked forward to the rather
excitable crowd. Their joy was perhaps unwise, but a victory gave people heart and strength, so she
returned the smiles and shouts with her own sadder smile. Davos came forth and thumped his king
on the back and Qhono followed with more force, Tormund roared and hugged them both, not
caring less as usual for kings and queens. When she was set down Jorah took her hands and kissed
them more decorously, and Ghost barged through the crowd and sniffed Jon and her lavishly.

For a moment, they felt more like a family than subjects and generals. Even Lord Jaime was there
in the fray, bowing impeccably when he caught her eye. ‘I should never have doubted your Grace,’
he said, his courtly voice cutting through the energised babble. ‘I shall write my brother right away
and let him know the dragon is dead and won’t be paying King’s Landing a visit.’

‘He is dead, and the enemy is without a mount, and the siege of Barrowtown was lifted,’ she
imparted, her ringing tones quieting the noise. ‘But I fear they are not far behind us, mere days
until they meet us in battle.’

The pleasure in people’s faces faded a little, and her gloved hand went to Ghost at her side,
scratching his snowy head to calm herself as questions were asked and answered. From behind her,
she felt the impact of the dragons lifting to fly off and hunt for well-deserved prey, and her
stomach rumbled in turn. She had eaten little yesterday but soup and the maester’s possets. Even
unappetising camp slop would be welcome, and a chair to support her aching back, but likely she
would stay on her feet until midnight preoccupied with meetings and preparations.

They needed to see Bran and the High Priestess, to try to obtain spiritual guidance for what they
must do to win. Jon was drifting away from her, caught from all sides by demands for his attention,
the grim and grizzled Northern lords arriving at last and demanding news from home. She felt
strangely isolated in the swirl of men, her hand still on Ghost for support and Jorah hovering solicitously, when Arya slinked through the crowd with her blacksmith behind her, begrimed with soot and dirt and towering over his tiny but deadly lady.

He blushed when she looked at him, and she noticed he and Arya were carrying new spears tall as themselves, with points glittering bright, honed to a wicked double edge. ‘Gendry, Arya, what do you have for me?’ she said curiously when they came to a halt in front of her. Gendry looked tongue tied as usual, but Arya elbowed him sharply and handed over her weapon for her to inspect. Her fingers danced over the edge of the spearhead, bigger than her hand. It was bright silver, too bright to be common steel.

‘Gendry did it, him and Sam and the Red Witch with her chanting,’ Arya said proudly. ‘The dragonfire, the glass, the steel. The High Priestess, Sam brought her and she knew the spells.’ She felt Jon back at her side, snatching the spear from her with a look of pure amazement. ‘Well, what do you think? Is it Valyrian steel?’

He cursed when the edge sliced through his thick gauntlet, a broad smile creeping on his face, and he thumped the Baratheon boy soundly on the shoulder. ‘It looks real enough to me. You’re a bleeding marvel, you are. You and Sam, between the pair of you I knew you’d figure it out.’

Gendry grinned, handsome white teeth in a blackened face. ‘Glad I could help, and I’m glad you and the queen are back,’ he said, dipping his head when she offered her hand to him to shake.

‘Thank you, Gendry Waters, and thank you again for the saddles,’ she said warmly. ‘Anything I can do for you when all this is over, name it and it is yours.’ Her hand was clasped in his briefly, then loosed as if she burned him, but he smiled at her shyly.

‘I want nothing, your Grace, except enough steel and glass and enough days to make many and more of these to kill those dead fuckers,’ he said. ‘And I need to borrow a dragon again, if you don’t mind.’

She sighed at the prospect of getting a grumpy Drogon to cooperate yet again, but at the surging hope on her husband’s face she laughed, energising her and sending her fears skittering away from the recesses of her weary soul like bats from strong daylight. ‘I will have the command tent moved up to the forge, since we are likely to be busy there for a while,’ she replied, taking the spear back from Jon, liking the heft of it in her hand. ‘And I will keep this one for myself.’
No dawn, no day, I’m always in this twilight, in the shadow of your heart

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A/N: Shuffling in sheepishly…um, sorry to those who are still reading this. I needed my Winter of Discontent to be over and done before tackling this chapter. A bunch of bullet points and half-baked ideas lovingly crafted into a hot fucking mess. There is smut, meaning I have managed to write smut for EVERY SINGLE CHAPTER. Gold star for me.

Quick recap of the recent plot points – Daenerys is four months pregnant with twins, Viserion is dead dead, the North is abandoned apart from Barrowtown and White Harbour, I packed Sansa off with the refugees, and everyone else is now at the Neck awaiting the Night King. The final battle approaches, enjoy.

Her right arm ached, her lower back ached, and the constant pulse of pain at her temples was wearing her down. Her eyes were so tired they felt dry and grainy, and when she closed them to try and snatch a few hours respite a welter of confused, muddled images swirled behind her lids, like she had drunk a jug of firewine, or sipped at the poppy for her myriad discomforts.

A spear thrown through the air, repeatedly missing a target until her muscles and tendons were screaming and finally, it hit the black circle. Two men, dark and fair, dancing across the muddy, humpy ground, scowling and snarling, the clash and screech of fine steel cut with heavy breaths and rich curses. A rivulet of blood squeezed from a clenched fist, a glittering blade bursting into flame. The small, pinched face of the greenseer, the life draining from him by inches as he fought daily to pierce the enemy’s mind and maintain the opaque blanket around theirs, so he would not discover their plans.

She wanted this to be over, and yet she was afraid of the end. Her fear crouched in the cowardly corner of her mind, constantly shifting and kicking and threatening to break loose and consume her. Every day was one shambling step forward towards the precipice through a bone gnawing fog swathing the fetid land. She couldn’t see the dawn ahead with her shoulders bowed and her gaze to the sucking quicksand beneath her feet, and she often felt she walked alone, the strain creating a distance between her and her lover, a distance increasing until he was a mere shadow in the eternal gloom.

In her hand was a ball of rags Sam Tarly had made her for the tension in her arm, and to squeeze it gave her temporary relief from the deeper tension in her guts. She was buried under a blanket in her camp chair, four braziers providing heat and light in the tent. The forge outside was burning day and night, turning confiscated steel and dragonglass into blades and spearheads, and yet she froze, so jittery with cold and nerves she had to force herself not to tremble.

She tried closing her eyes again to centre herself, the click of the knitting needles of her companion a little soothing, but she could still hear the constant activity outside, the shouts of busy men and the chanting of the red priests, her ears searching for the familiar thunk of boots in snow and muck, one final long night in his arms before the sorcerer’s storm descended to consume them all.

She had sent Missandei off to spend the night with Grey Worm after her hair had been brushed and oiled and her muddy clothes replaced for a loose gown and a new hooded fur robe, but then Tansy had descended on her uninvited but most welcome, bearing her knitting and a good store of camp gossip.
‘It’s as cold as a witch’s tit,’ the midwife groused, and she blinked away her miserable reverie and looked up with a faint smile, glad of the distraction. ‘I can’t get bloody warm no matter what I do.’

‘No one can, not even a dragon queen,’ she said ruefully. ‘It would have been far worse in the North. Snows six feet thick, I saw them myself. But I agree this is a vile, uncomfortable place, and I regret that the king dragged you here with us, much as I enjoy your company and counsel.’

The midwife dropped her knitting, a tiny gossamer robe of creamy wool for one of the babes, snatching her wine goblet from the floor instead, sipping as she pondered. ‘I don’t regret coming it all, as I said it’s an adventure,’ she said bravely. ‘And I’m comfy enough in my little wagon now I’ve got a big, hairy bear of a man to cuddle up with.’

‘I trust Ser Jorah is good company for you,’ she said discreetly, though she was more than curious. She had never seen her old friend display any interest in other women over the years, but perhaps the sense of impending doom had changed his mind, that and a nice pair of big teats.

‘He frets and talks about you a little too much to be healthy,’ Tansy sniffed. ‘But aye, he’s a good man, and a good bed warmer. I could do much worse, and I have at times.’ She shrugged, her lively green eyes sobering as they focused on her queen’s face. ‘You look knackered and peaky, your Grace. And where is your lovely lad? I’ve barely seen him since we arrived with the wagon train.’

Jon was ever busy, he could be in any number of places. With his brother, his men, her men, the High Priestess, with Arya and Gendry at the forge, or with Lannister. ‘He’s likely with Lord Jaime and the other generals, calibrating and testing out the catapults and such,’ she said vaguely. ‘The enemy grows nearer, which is why it grows colder, and I hardly see him from dawn to dusk as all must be made ready.’ Not that the sun’s daily path was evident, they laboured under a cap of cloud, waded through mist and fitful snowfalls.

‘I thought the Starks hated the Lannisters,’ Tansy frowned. ‘And I see those two about often, and sparring in the practice field too, which is a fine sight.’

‘War makes for strange bedfellows,’ she replied, taking a small sip of firewine. ‘And Lady Brienne made Lord Jaime apologise to Jon, Arya and Bran one night in this tent. Told him to make his peace with the bloody Gods, if they were listening.’ It had been an awkward tableau, Jon and Arya sceptical, Bran absent and uncaring, lost in his complex inner world, Ghost emitting a perpetual growl. But after that, Jon was less prickly with the humbled lord. Though he hadn’t mentioned it, she wondered whether Jaime had been so bold as to tell him tales of his real father, before it was too late. She hoped so.

‘After all that lot did to the Starks, it’s a bloody miracle your lad hasn’t gutted the pompous wanker,’ Tansy snorted. ‘Nobody at home in King’s Landing likes the Lannisters, even the Imp, and he’s the best of them.’

‘Tyrion is the very best of the Lannisters,’ she said, feeling melancholy. ‘I miss him, strangely enough. Though his acid tongue can be very tiresome, it always had some wisdom for me.’

The midwife’s gaze shifted from her drink to study her closely. ‘I think you miss the king more,’ she said softly. ‘Don’t worry, when you deal to all those walking dead men he will come back to you. You’re both so busy now you barely have time to think, let alone get some love while you can, but make the time.’ She dropped her silver goblet to the rug and gave a slow, knowing smirk. ‘You know well what you need to do for him, your Grace. Get him in here alone tonight and remind him of all he has to live and fight for. You, and the babes you made together. Never mind duty and destiny and the dead, you’ve done all you can.’
‘It’s all I have to give him right now,’ she said ruefully, her hand cradling the small swelling of her stomach beneath her layers. ‘A distraction. The same bloody tempting distraction that brought us together and made these.’

‘Go on then, your Grace. I’m all ears about that.’ At the bright glint of interest in the woman’s eye, she hesitated, ever wary about revealing too much of herself, but what was the harm? The end was coming, and Missandei was too circumspect to open her heart to, mindful of her position as her trusted advisor, and there were no other sympathetic female ears in her life. The woman smiled encouragingly. ‘I want to know how the aloof, ambitious Mother of Dragons gave her heart to a grumpy, pretty bastard king.’

She raised a brow at the mention of the blunt word bastard, which seemed so irrelevant now, but that news wasn’t for sharing. She fished in her mind for words that were enough to satisfy, surprised at the emotion that spilled out with them.

‘When I met Jon Snow, I knew he was brave. A great warrior, brave, stubborn and honest,’ she said slowly. ‘But reserved, so reserved I could not explain it, how he made me feel…like there was another side to him, deeply buried and repressed that I needed to know, no matter how much I argued with myself for being so damn stupid.’ There was a rather dreamy sigh from the listening woman, which made her swallow a laugh, hunting for discretion but longing to spill like a giddy girl. ‘Then it was let out, and I was lost,’ she mused. ‘He carries the weight of the world on his shoulders, but there is something wild and untameable that wants to be free.’

Another sigh, and the midwife fished for the wine jug on a side table. ‘My toes are curling, though you’re not telling me any of the juicy details,’ she said cheekily, pouring herself another generous measure of the Essosi wine. ‘And this vile stuff is warming my innards nicely. ‘Now tell me more of your grand romance, we’re all in need of a good distraction around here.’

***

When Jon finally pushed through the tent flap, letting in a gust of sleet in his wake, she was glassy eyed and yawning, despite the raucous laughter of the midwife and her entertaining commentary on the charms and annoyances of men. At the sight of him, his abstracted scowl smoothing out to politeness as he took in her visitor, she blinked and perked up instantly. She had not expected to see him until he crawled into bed past midnight, which was the pattern lately.

Tansy rose from her chair and curtseyed clumsily, a knowing smile on her curly mouth. ‘I’ll leave you two alone and tell that demanding lot outside to bugger off for the night,’ she said, tucking away her work and drawing her brown cloak tight around her. ‘I’m off to my wagon and my own man.’

She murmured a grateful goodbye to the squat, retreating figure, snorting when she saw her dart out a hand and pet Jon on the shoulder like he was Ghost. ‘Right proper lad,’ she said saucily, then ducked out the door before he could react, lacing the flap closed before she disappeared into the hostile night.

Jon turned to her, eyeing her suspiciously beneath black brows as she rose and approached him, pushing back the hood of her robe and smiling secretly. ‘What have you two been talking about?’ he grumbled.

‘Men and their many uses,’ she said innocently, pleased when the corner of his mouth twitched. Ignoring the distance that had kept them apart in body and spirit for days she boldly stepped into his arms, shivering at the envelope of cold around his body. He kissed the top of her head absenty, but that wasn’t enough for her. Her hands went to his swordbelt, her lips to find his, chapped and
chilly but sweet.

A little gasp, the warmth of his mouth yielding and tasting of ale, gauntleted hands finding her bottom. She had the belt loosened from long practice, the magical blade dropped safely on the furs, then her fingers reached for the toggles of his coat. ‘Mmm, like that is it?’ he whispered into her hungry mouth, idle but interested. ‘I’m all mucky and grubby and cold.’

‘I don’t care,’ she said simply. ‘You smell good to me, like a wolf.’ He snorted, the shape of a smile against hers. ‘Take me to bed and have me, once I get all these bloody clothes off. You can eat later.’

The hands on her arse moved, gauntlets tossed to the floor before he cupped her again, bringing her closer though she was now struggling with the straps of his armour between kisses. ‘I’d rather eat you anyway,’ he said, and when she opened her eyes she found his hooded and dark, that pretty, predatory look that made her belly clench. The scruff of his beard was dense and scratchy against her cheeks, his lips plump and pink and tempting. She growled in irritation at his clothes, the buckles too stiff to manage with her cold fingers. He snatched her hands and brought them to his mouth, laying a kiss on each palm. ‘Never mind that, lass. Get in bed and warm it up for me.’

He was better at stripping off his heavy leather armour than she, the blue gambeson, worn boots, breeches, and two undershirts. She watched him, stretched out beneath the furs in her unlaced bedgown, her feet on a hot brick. The bruises on his torso were an ugly yellow-green, but he was still lovely to look at, all bare, pale muscle and elegant lines, a sleepy cock in a thatch of soft black hair, curls torn loose and combed through his fingers, denying her the quiet pleasure of it.

Neither of them had bathed properly in days, but there was a basin of water on a bracket fitted to one of the braziers to keep it warm, and Jon brought it over with cloth and soap, gooseflesh rippling up his arms and making the fine hairs prickle as he drew closer. ‘It’s so fucking cold even I can feel it,’ he muttered, shrugging it off. She sat up against the pillows, her breasts tight and high as the air hit them and catching his eye. ‘You first, before I dirty the water,’ he said, ever chivalrous, but the blankets were flicked off her, his sultry eyes travelling from her breasts to her hidden loins, finding the hem of her gown and drawing it up her legs.

She knew then he wanted to feast on her, and though she was clean enough for that she would indulge his whim, for she loved to be tended to with care, like she was made of something rare and fragile that he was preparing to leave in ruins. What a relief, to just let go and be in the moment, tomorrow banished for a minute, an hour, the language of bodies who knew each other’s secret tongue.

They had forgotten the inhospitable cold, the soapy cloth dragged slowly over her lower lips, followed by his gaze on her, trimmed silver curls and pink petals pulled apart by the square of cotton, then lower to the crevice of her bottom. A few more passes that made her parted thighs quiver, then she confiscated the cloth and dipped it in the basin, sitting up to reach for his cock, now standing proud and full, the muscles of his belly shifting as she stroked him from stones to tip.

His hands were on her breasts, the nails dirty and ragged, her unbound hair wrapped around her along with her tangled gown as he tilted her head to receive his kiss. It was a jolt of sensation, sipping from her mouth, his tongue delving, the plump sensitivity of her cunt increasing, making her squirm impatiently, the cloth forgotten as she took him in her fist, pumping firmly the way he liked. Her other hand went to his hair, twining a springy handful, her body bowing to offer her breasts.

He pulled at each in turn, worrying with sharp teeth, arching up into her hand as she manipulated him, the surge from his famished suckling joining the tingle between her thighs. She stroked his
bearded cheek as he took her, his beloved, angular face, pale skin blooming with a blush, his brows and lashes like the strokes of a fine quill. She wanted his hands to leave bruises, his teeth imprints, that feral joy of being owned, wanted and needed so badly the real world vanished.

She sniffed him luxuriously, sweat and smoke and mud and blood, the scents of war, and musk and heat, the scents of sex. She wanted his grimy hands mauling her, but he broke away reluctantly to dunk his hands in the basin and scrub them with soap. She laid back down, keeping her legs spread for him, the gown shucked over her head to leave her naked, a rare sight these days and appreciated, his autumn brown eyes taking her in once he’d disposed of the water, especially the hand she used to open herself shamelessly, pulling her folds apart and toying with her nub.

She heard a juicy curse, his tongue flicking out in response. ‘I want you,’ he husked. ‘I want you to sit on my face and ride my tongue, and don’t try and be quiet about it.’

‘There are four guards outside,’ she breathed, her thumb circling the small protrusion as he watched.

‘I sent them away, I had a feeling you’d be minded to ambush me,’ he said wryly. ‘I’ve noticed you getting all tense and shrewish.’

She giggled, then pretended offense, making a huffing noise and tilting her chin. The flash of a grin she got in response was a gift. She made a half-hearted show of sliding off the bed so he would grab her, and he did, and she thumped at his chest weakly before sinking her teeth into his throat, sampling his complex taste as she twined around him. ‘Mmm…lie down then and let me give you what you want.’

A hand skimmed up her throat to lift her chin, solemn eyes as black as night peering into her. ‘I am sorry, Dany,’ he said softly. ‘I know I said we have to banish our fear, but mine has been gnawing at my guts like a rat. It’s hard to look at you and see how beautiful and small and soft and full of child you are beneath all your armour, and not be fucking terrified. My brother says tomorrow, the next day…Gods help me I’ve done everything I can, but it’s not enough to keep you safe.’

She felt tears welling, and she sniffled desperately, a brave but wavering smile on her face. ‘Shh…don’t spoil it,’ she whispered. ‘I love you, my Jon, and I understand, but kiss me again and do as you’re told.’

His laugh held a thread of bitterness, but he obeyed, nipping at her lips and tracing the shape of them with promise, a fistful of her hair caught and tugged as he kissed her, then laid down in the rumpled furs, waiting for her to take over. She squatted, her knees tucked over his shoulders facing his feet, vertical for now but already contemplating the heavy length against his hairy thigh, saliva pooling on her tongue as she thought of his male scent and very male groans as she used her mouth on him.

Palms scuffed from hard wear smoothed over the back of her thighs, and she was seated across his face, a jab of tongue to open her fully, then a slow burn of pleasure that had her panting and wriggling to force him to consume and lap and bite, make her so wet he was bathed in her juices. She lost herself in it for a long while, mewling and shaking, her buttocks parted so he could reach all her spots and get a good view of her gaping cunt, tiny grunts signalling his enjoyment along with the flicker of muscles down his belly and the twitch of his cock.

She could not resist it, bending to follow the path of her hands until she had him, his stones nestled in her palm, his length held up to receive the ring of her pursed lips. She was dancing on that edge where her climax was waiting, too soon but too tempting to back away from the firm patterns drawn on her flesh, the thumbs pressing inside her to hold her open. Whimpering, she attended to
her task, easing down until she felt the soft hair of his groin tickle her nose, relaxing her throat to hold him. He bucked under her and growled, forcing himself deeper, and she retreated, dribbling spit to make it easier. If he wanted to fuck her mouth until he erupted, she would give him all.

It was hard to concentrate when he was tying her belly in knots, probing and dragging, teeth scraping where she was most sensitive. She needed to pop him loose from her mouth and wail, but instead she muffled her noise, using her fingers to massage his stones and lower, spreading his strong thighs to reach everywhere and make him growl and shift and moan as lewdly as she. He filled her mouth, she could not fit all of him, but she tried, succeeding in fits and starts, a twisted triumph at her watering eyes and stretched lips, his hips rising to hit the back of her throat until she backed away and gasped and heaved.

She allowed herself a blissful moment of just feeling everything, his thumbs, tongue and bristly lips, the burn of pleasure needing to break and course through her veins, and then she began to lick him teasingly, circles around the taut, folded skin, then over the head. Her cry was smothered as she came all over his face, riding it out in a slow grind of her hips as she dived and applied pressure along his full length, gently tugging at his stones, letting him buck upwards in rapid, choking jerks until he joined her in release, creamy spurts of seed trickling down her throat, his cock pulsing like his thudding heart.

She wanted him engulfed inside her, hitting that spot only he knew, her arms and legs pinned to the bed as he fucked her, but she could wait. To make him come apart like this as he served her was the sweetest reward. If she had no other incentive to get through the next two days and out the other side intact but forever changed, there was this, the selfish privacy of their bed, the use of each other’s bodies in a mindless celebration of life.

Afterwards, he left her tucked up under the covers, finally warm and drowsy, tossing his old cloak over his shoulders and shuffling about the tent, appearing appealingly dishevelled, adding more peat to the braziers then munching at the food left out for him mindlessly. He poured a goblet of wine, then a second, her attentive gaze following him wherever he went, enjoying the sight but worrying over the shadowy prints of fatigue under his eyes, the stress returning with clenched fists and hunched shoulders.

She cooed at him to come back to bed, and he returned to her eventually, curling around her in a tangle of chilly limbs, pressing his groin against her bottom and handling her breasts and belly, a purring sound of dismissal against her hair as she tried to talk business. ‘No love, leave it, I just want to hold you, and hope my lazy cock wakes up so I can see to you properly.’

‘You need to sleep,’ she demurred, taking his hand and bringing it to rest on her stomach.

‘Aye and I will, once I’ve fucked you until you’re all limp and glowing and I have you in my mind instead of a headful of nightmares,’ he husked, drawing her closer against his loins, which were now stirring. ‘Tell me your dream of us, when this is all over. I want to hear it, I need to hear it.’

He always liked to listen to her talk, since they first shared a bed on the ship back from the Wall. She would not tell him a story of duty and triumph, crowns and subjects and councillors, riches and reverence. Her old dream, now thin and hollow, no comfort to either of them. ‘Well, I will tell you what I want when we return to civilisation,’ she began, squeezing his hand in hers. ‘We will order everyone to leave us alone for a day and a night and threaten them with your wolf or my dragons if they complain about it.’

At his chuckle, she smiled and tilted her head to catch a glimpse of him, his dusky eyes sparkling. ‘Then we will have a long hot bath, and I will call my handmaiden to strip all the hair off me, so I am bare and soft, just how you like it.’ The battered hand crept between her thighs, holding her still
slick cunt in his palm. ‘Then I’d like to lie with you by a roaring fire and make slow, gentle love all afternoon, until it becomes too boring and I want you to fuck me hard enough that I weep. Then we sleep, we sleep for as long as you like, with no nightmares, only rest.’

Two fingers ran down the disarrayed seam of her cunt, causing her to murmur, his voice low and amused. ‘You better not tell our babes such wicked stories.’

She laughed quietly, shifting so his rigid length pressed flush against the cleft of her arse. ‘I don’t have many stories suitable for children. You’ll have to remember some of Old Nan’s to tell them.’

‘She liked to scare us all with grumpkins and snarks. All those tales turned out to be true.’ There was a pause, a deep sigh, then a burrowing through her loose hair to find her pulse in a biting kiss. ‘Enough of that, I am awake and hard as stone. Roll over for me, I need to see your face when I take you.’

She settled on her back, propped against the pillows, his head held to her breast with her fingers trapped in his knotty curls, watching him toy with her nipple, circling it then biting down to make her whine, his cock held in his fist to rub between her folds teasingly. ‘Spread your legs and keep them open.’ She drew her legs further apart and backwards, arching her spine and freeing his hair to hold them pinned for him. ‘Good girl... just like that. I want you sore in the morning.’ The noise she made in response to the threat was purely wanton, she felt her mind emptying, her walls tensing to resist the achingly slow penetration as he pressed into her fully, her panting loud in her ears, eyelids drooping so the sight of him crouched over her was obscured.

Breathe in, breathe out, gripe and whine like a maiden being ravished for the first time, not a whorish and practiced bedmate, make him feel in control, yield and stretch for him... since he had already come in her mouth she knew she was in for a long, rough ride. Since there was no one around to eavesdrop she gave her anguish full voice, so good it was near unbearable, the slow glide turning to something harsher, her breasts bouncing, her bent body curling in defence to absorb the deep jabs against her womb, which felt full of flame.

She slid a hand to her nub to counter the tension that tightened over her skin, but he snarled and knocked it away. ‘No, hold it in,’ he grunted at her. She cried in frustration and threw her head back, submitting to be ridden raw, her hands caught and held imprisoned, her swollen belly a presence between their fused bodies, a heavy weight of muscle and bone and a bite on her throat so vicious she yelped.

It was a blissful assault, his thickness and hardness working her from every angle, the fluid movement of his hips a perfect punishment until she thought she could not bear any more of it. She would shatter in pieces, the top of her empty head would fly off, the hand encircling her neck adding to the inward pressure that would split her skin and pour out all her fear and grief and rage and love, that agonising love that made her weak and strong.

Her savage lover wrung it out of her without the need to touch herself, a long, tortured wail through the grip on her throat, rasping and unhinged, the storm of ripples and clenching of her muscles around his cock confused by his own abrupt climax. She didn’t know where he ended and she begun, one flesh, one mingled heart cry, the flicker and pulse of completion, the trickle of their essences down her splayed inner thighs.

She was wrecked, a dozen aches in her exhausted body, her cunt gripping and releasing his length despite the urge to push him away and claw back her equilibrium, his weight above her folding her legs in half so she could feel the wall of the tent against the soles of her feet. She wrenched free of his hand to breathe again, wriggled to lie flat at last, and fought to grab the sides of his face and kiss him.
Her fingers mapped every line and curve of black and white and pink while he gazed into her blackly and vacantly, lids lazy with repletion, memorising him to hold deep within her forever, no matter whether death or life awaited them in the morn.

***

The morning came too soon, and there was no dawn. When they emerged from the command tent dressed and armed, a murky twilight loomed threateningly over the tent city on the downlands, only lamps and firepits and torches providing any light to guide their steps. They knew that they were coming, without consulting with Bran in his tower room in the crumbling keep, without calling Melisandre and Kinvara in for a hasty conference. They all knew.

Primed and drilled for days, every cohort of troops; Dothraki, Unsullied, the Northmen and the Southron armies, the strongest, most skilled swordsmen of different affiliations armed up and hurried off, including the small, quick figure of Arya Stark, determined to fight despite her brother’s misgivings. Horses were screaming and shifting nervously in the marshalling area, and men everywhere were cursing and quarrelling in a multitude of tongues. A string of fires erupted from the braziers of the fire priests, a rough half circle on the edge of the solid ground before the causeway. The dragons spiralled down from the void of the sky to land and wait by the forge, abandoned and cold. There was no more time to make weapons and fuss about with preparations, no time for goodbyes beyond dread filled looks.

Jon clutched at her desperately as she stood by Drogon’s shadowy bulk, picking her up off the sodden ground and laying a scratchy kiss on each cold cheek, flakes of cruel, icy snow in his lashes and bound hair, one last glimpse of that face before she closed her eyes to find the fire within her.

‘I won’t see you after we light it up,’ he said rapidly. ‘Be safe, use all your tricks to stay out of the way of those spears, and get the giants. You must get the giants first.’

Her head drooped like a flower on a broken stalk, then she clenched her jaw and showed him her brave face, the face of a warrior, earning an approving nod before he broke away. Her guts squirmed under her heavy battle clothes as she watched him leave her, but then she began the climb to her saddle, the heat of Drogon’s twitching, cobbled hide felt through her gloves a reminder of what she was. Not just a lover, wife and mother, but a saviour, and she would not, could not fail.

Like the map table at home on Dragonstone, their whole plan was laid out beneath her in a dim tableau as she spoke the command silently and Drogon lifted in a churn of mud and snow to slice upwards through the air. Such a cramped space to make their stand, a narrow stone roadway rapidly filling with neat rows of Unsullied spearmen in the vanguard, risking their lives to act as a barrier when the gaping hole in the causeway was breached. The swordsmen were filing behind, all armed with blades of Valyrian steel or dragonglass, plain steel being useless against the Walkers. Lannister pikemen were next in line, then Dothraki horselords filling every inch of the island in the middle of the swamp to sweep down if the dead reached Moat Cailin.

It was inevitable that men would tumble into the muddy water, but at least they could swim to safety when the dead couldn’t, though many would perish from the cold before they reached the Broken Tower where the healers waited. The fire priests would weave their spells to keep the fires burning, safe from the actual battle but likely to drain themselves of their strange gift with fire, as Melisandre had warned her. ‘I was meant to die here, my queen, die in the service of the Lord, burn out like a torch and leave nothing but smoke. I have seen it.’

She shivered in the howling wind as she recalled the flat voice of portent, her eyes flicking to the retreating shape of Rhaegal flying west to ignite the trail of wildfire from Jon’s side of the causeway. If the witch had known their fates, she didn’t speak it. They had the resources, they had
the spells of heat and light, they had Bran, the centrepiece of a mystical game that she didn’t fully understand, safe in the tower but his incredible mind flying over the drear landscape to meet the enemy in a battle of wills. But still it might not be enough.

She flew east, leaving the frantic but ordered scene behind, squinting for landmarks to remind her of the caches of wildfire strewn at intervals to the sandy edge of the waterlogged land. The Crannogmen had planted them, and stacks of rushes and cords of wood, and there were noisome gases in the swamp that would help ignite the fireline, though only sorcery would keep it burning for long.

She glimpsed the sun on the horizon of the Narrow Sea, a dull iron coin providing enough light that she found the dead tree which was her marker, and she dug in her knees, throwing her thoughts into the bond with her mount, bringing him in a tight curve to retrace their path. ‘Now, my son. Dracarys!’ she shouted into the muffling fog, and Drogon roared, the ignition of his fire heating her body from below. They needed the light as well as the cleansing fire to help them fight, and Drogon provided, his stream of liquid flame illuminating the land in a bright flash like the sun had remembered its strength, the cauldron of red and gold boiling beneath them joined by a thunderclap and a plume of poisonous green fire.

They didn’t know how far the dead would spread out into the swamp to try and break through, so the fireline stretched from coast to coast, and she and Jon would meet again over the causeway. He would dismount and join the swordsmen, his sister and friends and allies, keeping Rhaegal safe in reserve in case she was shot down, and she would fly above the march of the dead and target the giants and mammoths from high above.

Drogon glided along the invisible pathway, spewing a constant stream of fire which had him heaving and hissing, heating the freezing air to blooming summer, the light growing brighter and casting tricky shadows as they moved rapidly west and left the fireline erupting in their wake. Far away she could see her mirror image, flapping wings and spitting jaws and a towering inferno of multi-coloured flames which rose too high to be natural. The priests were chanting their ancient Valyrian spells, and they would keep chanting until they dropped to the ground, withered and smoking.

Entranced by the fireline which was long in the planning and anxious to track Jon’s movements while she still could, she didn’t notice them right away. She drew closer to the ramshackle keep, the legions of troops carefully placed in the narrow field of battle, the dots of fires, the rustle and rumble of thousands of people mingled with the crackling of the flames, but she smelled them, that fug of rot and decay, the dirty chill of the grave, the sting of winter on her cheeks. There was a flash of a signal from the highest tower in Moat Cailin, a horn blowing three blasts of warning.

She brought Drogon into a hovering position, the dragon beating his leathery wings in slow swoops over the crowded causeway as she turned to look. It was a grey river that stretched on to infinity, humped shapes of mammoths and giants and bears towering above the shambling mass of wights, too many of them to spot the real threat among them, the enemy and his brothers. The fire might kill the dead, the water might suck them down, but eventually the Walkers would get across, and Jon would be there to meet them.

Strapped to her back were two Valyrian steel spears, small enough for her to throw if needed. She took them because something told her she needed them, so he would not be standing alone even if all his companions fell. She would use all her wits and bodily skill to make sure she survived long enough to be there at the end, so they could do it together. Earth and air, ice and fire.
Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, comments appreciated. I don't get paid a single magic bean for this and my enthusiasm depends on your enthusiasm to some extent.

The next chapter will be told from both Jon and Dany's point of view, since its near impossible to write a battle from one perspective. Unsure when that will be at this stage. Cheers to those who did show up for the last two chapters, you are darlings.
The world’s a beast of burden you’ve been holding up a long time

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A/N: I have been smashing away at this fic for nearly a year now, and finally I make it to the War for the Dawn. It has taken this long as I would much rather write porn and feels than your typical Season 8 fic, plus many distractions in smut and elsewhere. Apologies to Peter Jackson, whose imagery I borrowed heavily from as well as the show itself. Dedicated to my husband, who has been nagging for this part for months. Spoiler alert, he liked it a lot.

I am breaking my narrative for this chapter as we really need both point of views here with Dany up in the sky. Without further ado, here is Jon.

J.

Here it was, the end of all things, the reason why the mysterious God of the Red Witch had brought him back from the void. But it was not the reason why he needed to win. Previously he saw no dawn for himself after he had done his duty to the people and the realm, what was left of it. He would fall again, leaking blood from a dozen holes and let the void embrace him for eternity, everything that had been and gone forgotten, a paragraph on a vellum page of the tale of reluctant heroes that someone alive, perhaps Sam, would write in the aftermath.

Now he wanted to live, he craved it, to see the sun rising over the wreckage with her safe and whole in his arms, and their children tucked between them. Ever since he had met her, argued with her, attempted to persuade and then charm her then taken her as his own, he had been a hopeful fool quivering with want, he who had never allowed himself to want anything. Hope drove his steps through the ranks of men on the causeway, his eyes ahead, fists flexing to relieve the tension fruitlessly, hope propelled him forward though fear clawed at his innards, the flight instinct screaming though the fight instinct was in control.

Dany was in the sky, at one with her two elements air and fire, please Gods let them serve her well, as he did not have a moment spare to fret over her. Davos had caught him staring at the swift shadow of Drogon against the orange and red clouds and slapped him on the back emphatically. ‘Now lad, you can’t think of the queen. Off you go and kill those fuckers so we can all go home. I believe in you, we all believe in you.’

It was a crushing burden, it always had been, especially now when the will not to believe no longer served. He could scent in the air the sour taste of fear, men like to piss themselves, turn tail and run if they could, knock kneed and shaky though they stood straight, square jawed and eyes stern, mutters of ‘your Grace’ and ‘Gods save you’ as he passed by, escorted by the mismatched pair of Lannister and Tormund.

The one-handed knight was determined to fight the Walkers though he was still not strong enough, with the sword his father had re-forged from Lord Stark’s Ice. ‘You were lucky enough to have two good fathers to my one bad,’ the man had said one night after too much wine. ‘I knew them both as better men than I would ever be.’

He had said little to that, not willing to examine who he truly was, not here and not now, though later might never happen. All he had been told about the mad, cruel Targaryens growing up was still in the back of his mind, despite his wife and all she was to him, beautiful and fierce and wise and good. He was still puzzled, the ground beneath him falling away to a fathomless hole of
questions. *Blood of my blood*, she had said, and it called to him, a current that flowed between her and him and the dragons. That strange energy, they were meant to unleash it, here and now.

His other half strode before him, hackles raised and teeth bared at the permeating smell of death and all the clamour, ensuring the soldiers pulled back for their erstwhile king to pass to the front lines. He had debated leaving Ghost behind, not wanting all that was dear to him to be in danger, but Bran had spoken up, reminding him that direwolves had their own magic, the power to bring down wights and walkers in their bite without turning.

*The Lord of Light wants you alive,* a sonorous voice echoed in his ears, the battered figure of the southron lord who had died not once, but six times, waiting with the too small group of swordsmen up front. What for, to die again, or live for everything he had won since that foolish trek beyond the shattered Wall? Again there was no time for it, those eternal questions, there was only emptying himself, becoming an instrument, his sword, his blood, the glass blades at his belt, surrounded by doughty fighters but in the end alone, as he’d dreamed for so long.

‘Are you alright, Snow?’ a voice bellowed, laced with nerves though Tormund was grinning as usual. ‘You’re always so fucking glum, Thank the Gods your wife likes that pretty glum face, or else we’d be facing these icy cunts with ten thousand men shitting themselves and no dragons.’

A clap on the shoulder, and he managed a snort. His old friend was ever able to laugh in the face of horror, and it was; a scene from the deepest hell, a towering conflagration, a river of grey rotting flesh, the sky livid and boiling with tricky shadows and billowing smoke, a narrow field of battle amidst a sucking swamp. Fighting in six feet of ice and snow would have been worse, but not by much.

‘Aye, you’re right,’ he replied. ‘Make sure you remind Cerwyn and Flint and the rest of them of that next time they have a whinge about northern independence, there’s a good lad.’

This earned a guffaw, the Wildling fingering the edge of his great dragonglass-tipped axe as if itching to wield it. ‘Think Glover is dead? He was the worst of them, and a mouthy fucking coward to boot.’

His smile was bitter. ‘Aye, no doubt. And no doubt he’s marching down the causeway straight towards us.’

‘Good. I’ll kill him first if your wife doesn’t roast him,’ Tormund said with some glee, and there was a wry chuckle from the silent Lannister. Like him, the lord’s woman was on the forefront of battle, not safe behind the lines with the healers, wielding the other half of his father’s sword in her more than capable hands. The usually cool and collected lord looked edgy as a vexed cat, a muscle twitching beneath an eye. If he fell, Tyrion would be the only one left to carry his proud name.

The ranks of southern troops came to an abrupt end, leaving a square of space where all the best swords were clustered, including his stubborn minx of a sister, Needle replaced by a slim Valyrian blade Gendry had hurriedly made her, the curved catspaw dagger on her other hip. Bran had told him the Valyrian dagger had been Rhaegar’s, passed down through the years to be used in the final fight his unknown father had foreseen.

Up ahead, the ranks of Unsullied stood in tight rows in their winter armour, spears tipped with glass or glittering silver, likely to die trying to hold back the dead once they’d filled the breach with their burning bodies. He hoped Grey Worm was fast enough on his feet to fall back and save himself for the sake of Dany and Missandei, if not himself. There was no fear in their still, neat bodies, only determination, and he took heart from it.
‘Everyone bunch up in the middle so they can fall back if they can,’ he snapped at the waiting men and two women, and the group formed a rough oval back to back. It was hard to stand there unused with squirming guts, not able to see their foe advancing, only the sound of thousands of dragging steps, snarls and grunts and the unearthly cries of beasts, the crackling, hissing firebreak, launching catapults of burning pitch, the far off screech of Drogon answered by a frustrated Rhaegal at the rear, for now obeying his plea to stay back and mind himself. Knowing his stroppy dragon, it wouldn’t last.

He who had walked alone all his life, any trust he had turned like a bad blade, now had to trust in so many things. The stout hearts of a slave army, the conflicted hearts of the Lannister legions, beasts of myth and magic and their dainty, fairylike mother, swelling with child and not as tough as she liked to think. The advice of witches, the hands of the unseen Gods, his brother’s mind flying from its tower on the wings of a three-eyed raven. His baby sister, a trained assassin standing with him shoulder to shoulder. One dead father and his noble lies, his other dead father and his painful truths, all of it coalesced in him, his slight but strong body, trained and honed not to be a lover and a father and a king, but for this.

There was a lull, the noise of flame and beast and man and wight fading to a hiss in his ears, everything living or dead holding its breath, then the cold, sharp as a razor but thick as treacle, creeping into his lungs and sending a shiver down his back. His companions shifted in unease, teeth chattering and bodies shaking with tremors, but then as if in answer a pillar of flame climbed in the distance, a flailing figure bellowing and staggering.

I am the last of the giants, a cheerful ghost from the past sung in the back of his mind. He thought of her, of Mag the Mighty fallen in the tunnel beneath the Wall, of Wun Wun shot full of a hundred arrows, and the sadness wrenched at his heart even as he prayed for Dany to light every one of those monsters up, and the fucking mammoths too.

‘There goes your lass, Snow!’ Tormund yelled. ‘Can you feel that cold? They’re coming. Stand fast, your southern wankers, and remember all those fancy sword tricks!’

The hideous racket from thousands of dry, rasping throats was growing louder, drowning out his friend’s rude, rallying cry, the curses of the others, his heart thundering. The ranks of Unsullied ahead suddenly took two steps back, spears poised at an angle. He couldn’t see a bloody thing, but it had begun, bodies falling into the trench to burn, the remnants building an eventual bridge, wights falling off the road to sink, but some would make it, clutching at legs to drag down their prey, or swarm up the sides, and they weren’t the worst of it.

I’m not alone, I’m not alone, he told himself fiercely. She is in the sky, and the Gods are with us. That was the last thought he would allow himself, drawing his sword from its sheath in a fluid motion borne of years. By adding his blood along the blade it would become the sword of heroes the Red Witch spoke of, but to him it was still Longclaw.

***

D.

She felt it too, the miasma of liquid ice that choked one’s air and made every nerve under goosepricked skin fire with terror. Despite the scorching heat of Drogon’s hide, the sheer physical effort of her movements the cold reached her, the embrace of an unwanted lover whose kiss was death. To the south she noticed the firebreak stutter and shrink, fighting against the sorcery, the flames growing as dull as tarnished copper, but then it burst into life again.

She turned away from the distraction, bringing Drogon in close to the causeway in flits and jinks to
avoid thrown missiles and the snatching paws of enraged giants, and her son spat and roared and roared, utterly furious at the foul smell and fouler foes beneath him. The tether that bound them together in thought became thin and stretched as she struggled to maintain control, and she could sense Rhaegal’s thwarted energy, circling in a holding pattern for now but likely to join them at any moment without a rider to keep him safe from peril.

There were six giants above the rabble, and luckily they were clumsy and slow. She flew right to the back of the procession, the illumination from the fires fading, leaving her to rely on Drogon’s sharper eyes to sight them. A stream of dragon’s breath from a careful distance was enough to light one up, sending him tottering and howling into the fens, knocking over wights as he went. It was all highly satisfactory, but the next target showed her vainglory, nearly getting a grip on Drogon’s wing before he snarled and let loose.

The number of dead at the back needed to be thinned to reduce the pressure on the frontline, so she directed her mount higher so she could lay a line of fire, digging her heels into the stirrups and turning sideways to avoid a spear of ice from a cluster of Walkers peering at her unscathed within the inferno. There was over a hundred of them, Bran had warned, and the only way to kill them was by steel or glass, or by killing their maker she could not sight in the chaos. But the monsters could fall down, and she gave a whoop of triumph when the next giant sent two of them spinning into the water.

The one left standing glared daggers and flung another well aimed missile at her, passing her crouched figure by inches and sending Drogon spiralling in a rapid uplift. She felt a wave of pure fear she could not suppress as she held on for dear life, wondering what would have become of her if the spear had found her. The best way to scotch that fear was pure, focused rage, pouring it into the bond, pouring it into her body so it was light and deft and strong.

Be a dragon, she told herself, bringing her son under control and banking to attack again, getting closer to the break in the road and the distraction of the scene below. A quick look revealed a fury of movement, antlike figures falling into the inferno, swarming up the sides of the roadway, men with spears and blades jostling for space to stab and slash and dodge. More wights were dropping out of formation as a group pushed through to the front, hitting the sluggish water, and then she wrenched her gaze away, Drogon lighting up two giants and their mammoths with a roar that shook her to her bones.

Her blood sang within her veins at the havoc she was wreaking, and she took a spear from the holster strapped to her back as they glided into a hovering position, thinking a practice throw was a wise idea. There was one lone White Walker amidst his troops, eyeing her with loathing, spear in hand. Every one of the nightmare scum were armed to take her down and steal her precious son, her sudden outrage like hot metal in her mouth. She dug in with her knees and yelled at Drogon to turn and swoop low over the road, the Valyrian falling from her lips, and took aim and threw without hesitation, with all her puny strength and weighty righteousness behind her arm.

It hit the Walker right in the throat, and he exploded in a million shards as she lifted away screaming in amazement, thousands of dead around him disintegrating and causing more mayhem that sent intact wights tipping into the swamp. She imagined the shades of every God of man’s creation watching the scene from another plane like a particularly thrilling game, blood and rot and mud and men voiding themselves, smoke and ashes and fire, fire everywhere, within and without. Not people with hearts and souls and the need to live on but pieces wielded for no good reason.

It gave a keen edge to her temper, her moves chancier, diving in closer to pour more and more heat and light for the sheer joy of watching them scatter, and every one she ended was one less that Jon had to face. Halfway down the column that was now in complete shambles, the last giant she
turned into a thrashing figure lined in leaping tongues of fire, the light so bright she could now see clearly all the way to the towers of Moat Cailin.

She guided her mount out of range of the rusty spears thrown from below to glance off Drogon’s belly. The illumination was not enough to see Jon lost in the melee, but enough to see a phalanx of blue-grey figures smashing through to the bridge filling the breach, at least thirty of them, led by a figure on a dead horse, its blackened guts trailing from a rent in its hide, the Night King’s new beast of burden. She felt a qualm, a cold clawing in her belly right where her babes lay small and quiescent, talons ripping at her in a hideous echo of the horse’s fate.

Bran’s interference to protect their minds and shield their strategy had clearly worked. The enemy had marched down the causeway as if expecting little resistance, but the advantage could all be lost in an instant. There were too many of them for the swordsmen to face, and they would be over the bridge in moments. Shouting into the superheated wind she urged her mount down into a low traverse of the seething mass of heads, judging it safe from ice spears for the moment, heart hammering and eyes streaming from the stinking smoke, not knowing what use she could be but knowing she must get there fast.

***

J.

The priests had done their work for the barrier held despite the enemy’s smothering cold, and his wife, his fearsome goddess wife, even from his shielded view he could see the glorious maelstrom erupting down the column, the giants going up like dry soldier pines one by one, showing her progress. He had fought in many uncomfortable places, but there was something about where they stood he deeply misliked. They were rats in a cage, the flanking men with spears and pikes reminding him cruelly of his near second death at the hands of the Boltons, drowning in a cauldron of frantic bodies.

At first it was easy, only needing to rush to the sides of the causeway to jab at burning wights who had managed to get through. It grew worse rapidly as the ranks of Unsullied sprang into battle, calm and coordinated but forced back by the masses spilling across the bridge of bodies. There were so many falling into the fenlands it was hard to tell friend from foe until they got closer, and the cage became crowded with the bolder Lannister troops hauling men out of the water, or spearing wights like fish in a barrel. Others behind were falling back, some breaking and running, causing Jaime to turn and bellow in stentorian tones. ‘Stand fast, or I’ll hang the lot of you as traitors!’

He limbered up, flexing arms and legs and cracking his neck, glad he had left his coat behind. It was hot enough now from the fires and the press he was sweating beneath his layers. The panic that skittered up his spine, he couldn’t let it take him. Instead he ran his gauntleted hand up the length of his blade, the steel parting the leather like his wife’s silk shift, a line of pain, the hiss of blood, the silver disappearing amidst a corona of fire which he held aloft. His sister cursed in amazement at the sight, Dondarrion flourishing his own magic blade in answer.

It was grim seeking rank upon rank of brave Unsullied crumple and fall away, some reeling back to reinforce the swordsmen, others dead or dying or merely vanished. Through the searing heat he felt the stab of ice that twisted in his heart, made every old wound on his chest ache and his stones shrivel. Wights charged towards them to be hacked and slashed in a flurry of moves that made it difficult to tell the fighters apart, aside from Arya as the smallest present, so quick and deft she was like a striking adder. And Ghost, he was everywhere, a huge ball of fur leaping at throats and snapping at legs, shredding the dead to fragments.
No time to worry about them, or anyone, they would die or live, he knew the fight of his life was coming closer. As Walkers began to push through the heaps of bones and meat, he went on the offense rather than wait, darting towards them with a growl as feral as his wolf, all sense of his surroundings vanishing, even the sight of Drogon drawing closer not distracting him, though he felt Dany in his blood, a thrum of recognition as his burning sword thrust into the belly of a Walker and sent him to hell in an implosion.

Another one off to his left was dispatched, one to his right, but there were harsh, desperate screams of wounded and dying friends. Already his sword arm ached from fending off blows with twice the strength of the biggest man he’d ever fought. An Unsullied still upright, hopefully Grey Worm, used a blade of glass to hit another from behind who was busy beating him into the cobbles, and he staggered upright, breathing like he’d run a dozen leagues, nodding at his saviour once before dashing off after his sister.

She was dancing away from a sword of ice, looking for a spot to sink her slim blade. He barged in, swinging his sword with both hands to slice off the monster’s legs. After the frosty dust settled Arya cursed at him, but he shouted her down. ‘Stick close by me, or one of the others. I told you’re too fucking small for this!’ He could barely hear himself over the din, but she scowled and obeyed, acting like his shadow when he tackled the next blue bastard, attacking from the left while he went in from the right, her replacement Needle finding the back of a knee and earning another gratifying explosion of shards.

It was all going well, too well. If he turned back he would find more men dead and like to stir and turn against them soon, more wights getting through, more troops breaking and running, but if he looked back, he was lost. Every muscle was screaming in pain and warning, his bones were made of lead, but he was ready for him, the Night King, without a mount, stepping over stirring bodies delicately with feet of stone, bringing the numbing cold and making his surroundings contract like a collapsing tunnel. The face in his nightmares near every night since Hardhome, save those nights his lover distracted him, filled him with love and light instead of foreboding.

It wasn’t him the struck the first blow, but the red and gold figure of Lannister shouting and charging forward, only getting one slice short of an arm before his throat was gripped in a lightning fast move and he was thrown to the ground, choking and turning blue as frost. A scream of grief and rage from Brienne, his remaining companions dragging her and Jaime away, turning their efforts to the remaining Walkers, leaving him alone to face the enemy, aside from Arya, as white as curdled milk but her jaw clenched and both weapons held ready.

He was dimly aware of black wings and buffeting wind filling the ashy, glowing sky, but then his sword was up, his feet stepping in their usual fluid dance, trying to find a way in to smash his burning blade down and end this, but the Night King was too fast, his blows hammering and hard when they connected, the battle of wills between blue eyes and brown filling every corner of him with blank fear and telling him nothing as to what all this was for. Arya circled warily, unnoticed for now but visibly terrified and faltering, a walking spectre from their shared childhood stories and a viler enemy than either of them had faced.

He tried and tried, took cuts to his face and arms that burned with frostbite, parried blows from high and low and middle that made him broken and bruised, but still he could not get through. Time slowed to a crawl, every movement draggy and sluggish, light dimming to shadow, the noise dimming to a murmur. His foe swung his spell-forged sword in an arc that he knew was going to connect, he had no strength left in him. He was to die again. No Dany, no children in his arms, no sunlit island of escape, its little house facing a golden strand, backed by fields of grass and flowers. No growing old and grey and forgotten but surrounded by comfort and peace, all gone. The void would take him again, the kingdoms, the world would fall under the enemy’s heel, a barren waste
of the dead howling at each other to infinity.

He braced himself in that suspended moment, gave himself over to failure, but then there was a flicker of confusion across that hated face, the sword freezing in mid swing, then everything happened all at once, a flurry of growls and fire and smoke and action. The wingspan covered them like a leathery blanket, a spear whistling through the murk, his sister sliding across the cobbles between the Night King’s legs and sinking his father’s dagger to the hilt.

He hefted his sword with everything he had left in him, a ribbon of brightness cutting through solid ice and tendon and bone, a head parting from its neck, then a boom like the earth beneath him shifted, the sky exploding to match it, knocking him and everyone off their feet in a violent push, the Gods growing bored with the game and knocking all the pieces off the board.

The last thing he knew as he hit the water and sunk like a stone was the familiar taste of ice water in his gaping mouth, the weight of mud in his lungs, then he knew nothing.

***

D.

She was spinning and spinning, caught in a black vortex in a storm-tossed sea, a pitiless ocean that held her trapped no matter how hard she kicked and pushed and gasped for air. Her eyelids were sealed, her face stiff and cracked like an old woman’s, there was a throbbing cramp in her arm and ankle, but all was dark, so dark she was unable to take stock of her body and surroundings. If she was dead, surely it wouldn’t hurt so much, unless she had done something to deserve the hells of the Seven Gods.

Her battered and broken form gave a mighty twitch at last, gummy eyes cracking to reveal a slice of gloomy grey sky, scraped by the boughs of leafless trees in a chilly wind. Her ears were still stopped, but through the ground beneath her she felt the vibration of a huge monster shifting and grumbling nearby, her heart leaping in fright until a word floated into her addled brain. ‘Drogon,’ she muttered. ‘Drogon, where are we?’

There was no answer, only famished growls filtering through, meat being torn and bones crunched, the crackle of a fire in dry brush. It was cold, but the source of warmth permeated her rucked up clothes, all tattered and twisted around her when she lifted a hand to check herself. The white coat she was wearing was in shreds, only the silver dragon chain across her breast holding it closed, and the sight of it gave her a nauseating flash, though she remembered nothing of how she got here and why she was a bloody ruin.

She moved her arms and legs cautiously, finding no bone ache from a broken limb, and tried to sit up, the bed of bracken beneath her rustling and poking through her clothes and hair at the three weak attempts. The glade was ringed by tall trees, some snapped and knocked by the bulk of the dragon, who lay there steaming, jaws buried in the carcass of a deer, rents in his folded wings and a nasty gash in his flank he kept pausing to worry at. He looked as exhausted as a dragon could, slack and slumped in the thin snow melting into the dead grass and vocalising his displeasure in a series of deep grumbles that warned her off climbing on his back and asking him to take them out of here.

All was still a blank, all she knew for sure was that she was Daenerys, that was Drogon, and she was in a terrible state, though at least it wasn’t snowing. The sky was clearing from charcoal to dull white through the naked limbs of the slumbering trees as she lay there helpless, the only colour in the dell the red markings on the dragon’s hide and ruff, the small bracken blaze nearby dancing merrily, and a flash of leaves on the far edge of the clearing. The colour of old blood, wrenchingly
familiar, bringing a sudden lump to her throat.

She tried to stand up very slowly, but her ankle folded under her in a flare of agony and she collapsed on all fours, swallowing a sob, eyes prickling as her memory started to fire back to life. Like a madwoman she tore at her ruined coat, shucking it off as if it burned her, though she didn’t burn, she never burned. *You are made of air and fire*, a husky voice reminded her, the sense of a scuffed, scarred hand cupping her cheek, a plump, bristly mouth capturing hers in a kiss.

She was weeping in earnest now, even as she crawled across the glade towards the teasing, fluttering leaves, her undercoat and trousers collecting muck, her arm and ankle twinging in protest, tears and snot making her near blind, but she would get there, she would find the tree that was sparking a barrage of painful emotions, beauty and ugliness and smothering terror and pleasure from the rough, urgent touch of a lover that was gone.

Her hand fumbled beneath her coat for her belly, finding it curved still, between her thighs in search of sticky blood, but nothing. She began to keen, a well of grief tapped by the sight of the tree, small and stunted but there where it shouldn’t be, twisted bones and spreading crimson leaves that defied the winter. *There are no weirwoods left south of the Neck*, that low voice told her, except there was. The tree on Dragonstone beside the hot spring, the tree where they’d made their vows, that watched over them as they made their babes. This wasn’t the one, but it was enough to bring awareness flooding back.

She knelt beneath this outlier, this freak that had taken root in this southern wood and endured, and threw her head back and howled in mourning, the hollow space inside her chest telling her she was doomed to walk the earth without him, go through the glittering motions of ruling and reshaping this shattered land, their children all that was left. The shape of his face, his curly raven hair, the deep dark eyes, the stolid practicality hiding a fiery core, little flashes of remembrance in their babes to torment until she was old and withered. The mighty explosion that had blown her away like a shredded spring blossom couldn’t possibly be survived. Jon was dead, they were all dead. That was the price she had to pay. Only death can pay for life.

She was lost in that vortex again, the sound of her pointless crying, her unhinged rocking, arms folded around herself, shuttered to everything external, that she didn’t notice the crashing and growling and frantic shouting, the thundering weight of massive creatures, not until she was snatched up and whirled around, a pair of brown eyes so wide the whites were showing, a face caked in mud and blood, lips curled in a snarl. She blinked and screamed in shock as if he was a dread foe, and he shook her like a rag doll in his grasp, her unravelling hair falling across her dazed eyes.

Suddenly angry, she got a hand up and slapped him across the face, and the snarl became vocal, low and threatening as he reeled back under the vicious blow, then a kiss, a clashing of teeth and lips that bruised her and made her whimper, crushed against soaking leather armour. She didn’t yield, fighting with all her might until his warm living breath and guttural crooning snapped her out of it. ‘Dany…Dany love, stop crying, stop fighting…it’s me…I’m here, lass.’

‘How…Jon, how on earth…’ she said stupidly, her tongue thick and mind lurching. She was truly going mad this time, like she’d always secretly feared, this was all a fancy of her twisted, overtaxed mind, but then he kissed her again, hard and demanding, his mouth hot and so very sweet, and she knew. He was magic, they were magic, and they had made it. In the cold, sterile glade, bedecked in mud and snow and twigs and fatigue, she felt suddenly hot and feverish and liquid, her dazed madness turning to the sinful madness of the flesh, her tongue finding his, her hands burrowing under the skirts of his armour and gambeson in search of skin.
She was borne down to the ground under the length of him as she sank her nails into his bare back and raked furrows of possession. A dozen kisses, a hundred, smearing her face with grime, scratching her to ribbons, her battle coat unhooked with fumbling fingers, boots yanked off then two layers of trousers. Rocks digging into her spine, leaves in her hair, his bloody armour digging uncomfortably into her belly, but she was desperate and needy, the chill and the lack of dignity and every annoyance of being flat on the dirt under a ravaging wolf in the worst mess she’d ever been in making her laugh wildly.

There was an answering flicker of a smile on his swollen mouth, his eyes tired and haunted but dark with desire, as black as obsidian. His hand found her slit, touching her once through his gauntlet then shedding it so his fingers could delve within and check her readiness. She was a torrent of wetness already, the digits slipped in easily to find her nub and work it in circles, and she squirmed on the nest of her parted coat, throwing her legs wide, as eager as a whore.

She had ripped at his laces to bring his cock out, not easy under all those layers, solid and warm in her palm and hard as granite. ‘Do it,’ she breathed, stroking him from stones to tip and wriggling again to urge him on. ‘Do it. Take me and show me you’re real, Jon Snow.’ She didn’t want to wait until she was pretty and primped and clean on a soft bed. She wanted him here and now, she wanted to feel him in her very bones.

‘I’m real love, I’m still here,’ he rasped, nipping at her lower lip as he notched his hips between her thighs, his layers folded back in an awkward bundle. ‘Gods, so tight, so hot…burn me alive, love…’

It hurt her she was so tense, a cry of pain as she dug her bare feet into the back of his armour and took him all with an upward arch to seat him, stretching her wide with each deep jab to open her up and hold him against her full womb where she wanted him. So thick, so rough, struggling to take the punishing thrusts as he immediately lost himself, rutting like an animal with the selfish urge to mate and mark and vent all that bad blood and nervous energy into her willing body.

Her arms were pinned to the dirt, neck exposed to a bite so savage she whined in protest, but she was loosening now, growing slicker and softer, waves of sharp pleasure travelling from her toes to the roots of her hair, so relieved and thankful she was weeping again. The knot of delicious anguish in her loins was telling her despite the swiftness and the discomfort she was going to come for him, as she always did, that they were bashed and scarred inside and out but gloriously alive, and for the rest of their days there would be her and him, lovers and partners and allies with a shared darkness in their throats.

His face was buried in her neck as he drove her into the ground, sobbing wildly, tears dropping on her mauled skin. She felt the knot snap abruptly, her walls clenching around him in a familiar violent flutter, dragging a heart cry out of his chest. ‘Don’t leave me,’ she keened. ‘Don’t ever leave me, oh love.’

He lifted from his hiding place, convulsing and growling as he ignited and spilled inside her rippling embrace, panting out his promise as his release reached its peak.

‘I swear that now I never will.’

Chapter End Notes

Well, I hoped that was a satisfying read, but I’m kind of happy with it regardless. I will
give a roll call of the dead in the next chapter, and considerably more smut than this chapter (I also have a beautiful new moodboard that made me sniffle like a girly girl). I’m not sure of the level of enthusiasm for this fic anymore, given its long and old. If you want to hear about the coronation, the babies etc let me know, or else I’ll wrap it up in a couple of chapters. Thank you for reading, feedback always appreciated.
The air has filled me head to toe, and I can see the ground far below

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A/N: Hey thanks for enjoying my war, thank fuck that’s over eh? The first part of this chapter is the aftermath and therefore somewhat grim, but it gets happier. We find out who bought it in the messy aftermath, and Jon and Dany get a night alone in pleasant surroundings by popular vote. Have fun and enjoy the indulgent smut, i’ve been itching to bring the epic smut for a while. Beautiful springlike board provided by Justwanderingneverlost.
‘It wasn’t just me, in the end,’ Jon had said hesitantly when she was dressed and stood on her feet and just held carefully, as if he was afraid she would once again be blown away in a mighty wind. ‘It was you with your spear, Arya with her dagger, Bran with his mind. Alone, I could not have done it.’ The shadows of horror and awe and lingering shock flitted through his eyes as she stared up at him, silently thanking the elements, the shades of the Gods, the magic that was given to them to save the world and themselves.

The euphoria of being found by her lover and roughly taken in triumph and their return to the Neck to be met with a wave of ragged cheers and bellows lasted until they dismounted from Rhaegal and faced the carnage. Her loyal, splendid children roared as they lifted to the sky, circling the towers once, Drogon’s left wing drooping awkwardly. She watched them go rather than meet the crowd that mobbed them, sending her love and gratitude before she set them free to roam and hunt as they pleased.

Still feeling disorientated, not quite understanding where she had blown to and how she had survived it, she pulled herself together with a shake and focused on duty. She wanted to look upon every one, the rows and rows of bodies smashed and broken and drowned and burnt. She was cold and fatigued and very sore, gripping her husband’s arm for support because it was hard even to put one foot in front of the other, but there was no time to rest and warm herself. She needed to know what it had cost them.

The Dothraki were mostly intact save a few who had fought on the front lines, but her brave Unsullied were decimated, only Grey Worm and a handful surviving. The Lannister troops were in a similar state, their heavy plate meaning many who had not been killed by the enemy had drowned in thefens, and Jaime, her gracious, noble former foe was gone, lying dead on the trampled grass of the practice field along with his men, Brienne standing vigil beside his body, her face a stolid mask but her pale blue eyes awash in misery. She wanted to weep, but she was blessedly numb.

Her old friend Ser Jorah had vanished, no body had been found by the Crannogmen in their little boats searching the swamps diligently. Lady Tansy had wiped fat tears away when she went to tell her, before she went back to binding up wounds and forcing spirits down the throats of the chilled and soaked survivors. ‘What a fucking state everyone is in,’ she said briskly. ‘Cut to ribbons or dying of the cold and not near enough pairs of hands to help. I’ll mourn him proper later. Can you rustle me up some of those savage women to help me here, and some fire?’

The rest of the grey day passed, and a long night dusted with the first stars she had seen in many weeks, an ocean of them, their cold, clear light providing no warmth or much illumination but still cheering. She did not rest, helping where she could, losing sight of Jon for hours as she soothed and sympathised, fetched food and drink and directed traumatised people to tents and firepits to rest and warm up, as busy as any camp follower. A slashed and clawed Ghost followed at her heels whining and grumbling, not leaving her even when she tried to chase him away, and refusing all attempts to see to his wounds with a silent snarl.

Of the fire priests, none were left standing, even Kinvara, they had sacrificed themselves to their Red God to keep the fires burning against the cold. Their burnt bodies were strange, withered and old, the fresh, exotic beauty of the women and the dark, youthful grace of the men an illusion that left them when they passed into the next world, making the Dothraki deeply uneasy when they collected the corpses to be burnt on the massive pyre being assembled on a hill above the camp.

The bodies of some of the lords and Jaime would be taken home to be buried in accordance with local tradition, but the rest would burn, lighting a beacon that would be seen from north and south, east and west. The ones that had fallen would not rise again, Bran had promised. He had emerged from the tower in the arms of Ser Davos and Gendry when they landed, his hair nearly pure white
but his abstracted eyes finally sparking with boyish life. ‘I am tired now,’ he said simply when she hugged him. ‘I would like to go back to Greywater Watch and sleep for a week.’

In the Spring she would return and mourn at the spot for those who had paid the price, plant it out as a grove of sturdy trees as a memorial, see a fine stone carved with their names, she would remember them all. Faces known and unknown, the sadness filling her heart and banishing her sheer relief at being alive. She had to take stock of all who had survived due to luck and tenacity; Bran and Arya, Gendry and Sam and Davos and Qhono and all the rest. The losses were terrible, but it could have been so much worse.

Dawn was breaking over the dreary expanse of the swamp, the sullen red sun breaching the horizon and turning the water pink, etching every clump of reeds in sharp relief. Her tired gaze took it in and marveled at the beauty of it, even as her legs collapsed beneath her and she fell on the grass outside the Broken Tower, Ghost sniffing at her face, his ruby eyes looking almost human with worry before dashing off. ‘Good boy, smart boy,’ she whispered after him. She had willed away all her aches and pains, but now they returned with every slow thump of her heart.

She closed her weighted lids to the swarm of anxious faces around her, not opening them until she felt herself lifted in familiar arms, finding Jon still utterly filthy. ‘You’re truly disgusting and need a bath,’ she murmured, and his stern mouth relaxed a little. She wanted to lift her head to kiss it, but she was too drained.

‘Aye, and so do you, grubby lass,’ he husked, his lovely chestnut eyes glowing in the strengthening light, still so very handsome under all that filth. ‘But first you’re going to get those clothes off and get in bed. Missandei has some hot water for washing and hot bricks ready, and don’t scowl at me, do as you’re told and mind yourself for a change.’

She sniffed at him haughtily, then tucked her face into the curve of his neck and let herself be carried back to camp. She then tolerated being stripped by two handmaidens and the worst bits of her scrubbed, bundled in her woolen bedrobe and tucked into bed with a hot posset while her husband drank a mug of ale and waited for the women to curtsy and disappear. She was asleep long before he could disrobe, but she sensed him join her in bed and relaxed entirely, knowing herself safe even in her disturbed dreams when he curled against her back, his palm cupping her swollen belly protectively.

When she awoke she discovered she had slept through a day and a night, perhaps more. Jon was long gone, giving her a qualm as she did not want to let him out of her sight, and she heard the rumble of activity outside, genial shouts and curses and even men singing some bawdy song. Fresh clothes were laid out for her and the braziers were all lit to take off the chill, and she saw a slice of blue sky through the door of the command tent that urged her to struggle into leggings, boots, tunic and a form fitting grey coat with red beadwork she had not worn in an age. The laces of her leggings would not draw tight over her growing stomach, which seemed to have increased in size while she dreamed.

A hovering Dothraki handmaiden helped to brush the twigs and dried mud out of her hair and braid it in a simple cable after dousing it with lavender oil. It was so greasy and limp she was ashamed of it, and she still felt grimy all over, let alone her bruises and the overgrown hair at her loins and pits beneath her layers of clothes. Feminine fretting she had no time for, but it gave her a mild feeling of discomfort that wouldn’t leave her, made her long for a tub of hot water big enough to float in, creams and perfumes and tidy nails and the unwanted hair stripped from her body.

She brooded over it as she stepped outside, two Dothraki greeting her gruffly but happily and trailing her steps as she wandered the camp in search of Jon, soon joined by the furry bulk of Ghost
sniffing her lovingly, not minding at all that she was not at her best. She patted the wolf absently as she walked, smiling faintly at greetings from all sides. The blended troops looked tired and hungover, they’d likely drunk the camp dry of ale and wine, stuffed their faces with the dwindling food and availed themselves of available and obliging women. Loafing outside their rows of tents, enjoying the sharp brightness of the winter sunlight, she begrudged them none of their sloth and debauchery, for she was selfishly longing for some of her own.

She found him at the tent where the ravens were kept, quorking and squabbling in their wicker cages, puzzling over scrolls at the trestle with Sam Tarly scribbling replies to the pile of messages at his elbow. When she entered the pair of them rose, the furrows on her man’s brow smoothing out. She wanted to cling to him, cleaned up and free of his perpetual armour, thumbprints beneath his eyes but his stance relaxed, but settled for a nod given the men crowding around, including a coterie of northerners looking impatient and vexed. ‘What news, my king?’ she enquired. That should please them.

‘I’ve messages from Tyrion, three of them demanding news, and from Sansa and Edd at White Harbour,’ he said, then cut his eyes at his liegemen. ‘And these lords are demanding that your Dothraki build them a bridge across the break in the causeway so they can go home.’

She eyed them coolly, the gaggle of sour men in their furs and leather, none of them looking grateful to be alive, and sighed inwardly, hunting for gracious words. ‘The North is likely frozen solid despite this clement weather, your folk all dead and evacuated and food very scarce. Will you not linger awhile in the south, my lords, and take your ease?’

One of them, Lord Flint she recalled, managed to be gracious to her. ‘We thank your Grace for her concern, but we are anxious to get home and see who is alive up there. White Harbour withstood the siege, and you relieved Barrowtown. We can rely on them for supplies and men, we will leave the south for you and your king.’

Jon looked thoroughly exasperated, his shoulders slumping, and suddenly she didn’t care whether they remained to show their loyalty to their new rulers, or were comfortable and warm and fed. She would much rather be shot of them, and let them plot and bitch in their draughty castles as much as they pleased. It had been growing in the back of her mind that the North should be granted their independence along with the Iron Islands as agreed, and she would discuss it with Jon. ‘Very well, my lords,’ she said calmly. ‘I will give orders for my men to find timbers to build a bridge, and I wish you and yours good fortune.’

Finally they remembered to bow to her as they exited the tent, and she rolled her eyes at her now grumpy husband. Tormund stepped forward from his corner with a skin of mead and a nasty slash across his cheerful face, now creased in a scowl. ‘Well fuck off then, ungrateful cunts,’ he muttered, making Jon bark out a laugh, Davos fighting his own grin. ‘I’m not pig headed and stupid enough to go back up there before it thaws, and I’m minded to find my daughters first and the rest of my lady folk. You sure they made it to your island, Snow?’

‘It’s my queen’s island,’ Jon said with a rather wistful look in her direction, luring her to his side. ‘And aye, my sister says the fleet ferried them all to Dragonstone, and some folk from White Harbour too. She’s just as pig headed as the lords, wanting to get straight back to Winterfell.’ He turned to nuzzle at her hair, as needy as she. She wondered what the mob of Wildlings and northern women and children had done to her castle, and whether there was enough food for all. She thought of her bathhouse and pined foolishly.

She couldn’t be tempted by thoughts of rest and recuperation, the tent city had to be dismantled, the bodies burned and their troops led south to warmer, kinder climes to disperse and wait out the
winter as best they could, though it already seemed to be softening. There was little warmth in the sun, but the light was much stronger than the washed out days of previous weeks. She hoped that the winter would be short and weak, the end to the sorcery of the Night King dulling its bitter edge. She picked up Tyrion’s scrolls as the men talked over her head, snorting at the three curt and frustrated messages from her Hand, then her face fell as she thought of writing him the news that his brother was dead.

She was far from a hot bath, preening herself and hours of lovemaking and bouts of sleep and feasting on fresh food to feed her and her babes. The realm awaited her, ready to judge how she would take the reins, how she would feed and house them all and show them a better future. Her neck bowed under the weight of it, and suddenly she wanted to find Drogon, mount up and fly far away, with a protesting husband behind her. Her rebellious thoughts must have shown, for his arm went around her back, squeezing her close, Davos’s kindly seamed face peering at her sympathetically from across the trestle.

‘Righto lad,’ Jon’s Hand said firmly. ‘I’m looking at your lovely wife, and I can see she’s knackered and still peaky. I’m sure if I put it to a vote, we’d all agree that you two need to fuck off and look after yourselves, the Gods know you’ve earned it.’

‘I want nothing more than to take her out of here, but we can’t,’ Jon said with weary amusement. ‘And I believe telling your sovereigns to fuck off is not good manners for a Hand.’

‘You’re not my bloody sovereign, Lord Crow,’ Tormund butted in before she could voice her protest at being discussed like she was some weak ninny. ‘And I vote that you fuck off too. This lot can find their own way to King’s Landing. Go to your dragon island and take your wife to bed, and tell my daughters their Da is still alive and I’ll throttle them if they’ve broken any of the queen’s nice things.’

‘And you could check on Gilly and Little Sam,’ Tarly said hopefully. ‘Tell them I didn’t get myself killed.’

As always, the blunt wisdom of the red headed giant pleased her mightily, she was struggling with the urge to laugh aloud. She felt the vibration of her husband’s deep chuckle, and when she turned her head his dark eyes were alight. ‘Much as I resent the implication that I need looking after, I admit it’s very tempting,’ she said simply.

‘All right,’ he said. ‘If my queen agrees, I’m taking her home for a night at least, then we better move on to King’s Landing and give Tyrion all the news before he pisses his fine breeches.’ His gaze swept the table, and he gave one of his customary heavy sighs. ‘I’m leaving you lot, Arya and Qhono and Grey Worm in charge of getting them on the road. ‘Those three should be scary enough to keep them in line, but send a raven if there’s any trouble.’

***

In the end, they were selfless enough to stay on long enough to see the northerners head over the ramshackle bridge of split logs over the chasm in the causeway, see the pyre set alight and prayers said by those who believed, and supervise the organised chaos of dismantling and packing away the tent city. By then the raven messages had been dispatched and likely read, so they would be expected and news would be filtering through the realm that a great battle had been fought at the Neck to save them all, though many would not believe it unless they came north to witness the landscape churned and forever changed.

She still had some clothes and personal effects in her chambers at Dragonstone, so she took nothing with her, her black sable cloak wrapped around and tucked beneath her seat to replace the
destroyed coat. The procession of armies heading south-west snaked beneath Drogon’s bulk as they lifted to the clear skies, and she gave a satisfied nod, knowing there would be no trouble on the route. All their enemies were dead, and they were yet to make new ones.

During the lengthy journey, separated from Jon by the span of their dragons wings, her mind fuzzed and pondered over what lay ahead, the snow bedecked crags and green valleys of the Vale barely registering. She was as free as a queen could be, surrounded by blue sky with victory behind her and the triumph of her house before her, but her brain would not let her rest until the azure sheet of the ocean was laid out before her, a misshapen, wave-tossed island of grey rocks, sparse trees and faded heath, and her castle crouching like a black stone beast on the clifftops.

Then she smiled widely and the yammering in her head died away, her ice locked limbs tingling in anticipation of a long hot bath, and other more strenuous activities involving her lover. He was there beside her, alive and whole, and yet foolishly she missed him, craving the abstracted, obsessive intimacy of those too brief weeks together in the beginning, when her thoughts were full of Jon and little else, what he did to her and she to him, no matter that the world was falling apart around them. She needed him now as fiercely and completely as she did back then now that she could allow herself, if only for a night.

When they landed in front of the castle, a gaggle of people spilled out of the doors to greet them; Wildling spearwives and their unruly children, the old women and men of the Dothraki who had been left behind, a group of well dressed northern folk who looked like townspeople, and Lady Sansa, her usual careful reserve replaced by a wide smile and fleet feet running to greet her brother. They were swarmed by questions and exclamations and fluttering hands and thumps on the back from the spearwives, heading inside to find the castle crowded but better run than the army camp in Sansa’s capable hands.

When her good sister ran out of questions she took one look at the pair of them, her icy blue eyes thoughtful, and shooed away the others. ‘Their Graces are tired and cold and have come here to rest,’ she said gently but with a hint of steel, then murmured to them that her chambers were made ready, all the temporary residents moved away from that wing of the castle to other rooms so they could bathe and sleep in complete privacy.

They left with the bare minimum of niceties, her arm tucking into Jon’s as soon as they were out of sight. ‘Bathhouse,’ he murmured into her chilly ear. ‘You and me, a locked door instead of bloody canvas. Thump me if I fall asleep on you. I don’t intend to sleep for a long while yet.’ The smouldering look he gave her made her belly squirm pleasantly, and the catching of his lush lower lip with his teeth and hiss of breath when they entered the well lit, steamy chamber and she started to strip gratefully. But alas, as soon as he hit the hot water he tilted his curly head against the marble edge and dozed off, leaving her bemused, but not vexed.

Despite being exhausted and battered he was a lovely sight bare arsed as he stepped into the water, and she felt a pang of regret as she turned away from his supine form to tackle her hair first, wanting to get her soapy hands on that milk white, hard flesh, warm and pumping with blood and life, cup his round cheeks, lick the sparse hairs of his chest, feel the weight of his cock in her fist. She wanted to map him like an uncharted territory, own him before he inevitably owned her, but he had pushed himself to the very edge, and needed sleep more than fucking.

The bathhouse had been thoughtfully fitted out with every pot of soap and cream and bottle of oil she could possibly need by one of the Dothraki women, including a silk roll of tiny handled razors she had forgotten she had, the next best thing to having Nari there with her sorcery with linen and wax. The stone room was lit by a dozen oil lamps flickering in the draughts through the vents near the ceiling, bright enough that she could move on to shaving under her arms once her hair had been
washed three times and doused in almond oil at the ends.

The curve of her pregnant belly was only modest, but was enough that trying to shave her mound was going to be very tricky. She was perched on the edge of the pool frowning down at herself, curved razor in hand, when a pair of inky eyes fluttered open, fixating on her instantly. 'I hope you’re not thinking about trying that with your belly in the way,' Jon said lazily. ‘I’m rather attached to that part of you in particular.’

‘My belly isn’t that big,’ she replied rather huffily, making a smile quirk in the midst of his whiskers, damp and wild from the steam along with his loose hair. They needed a trim along with her interesting parts, although not his curly locks, she liked them just as they were. ‘It is foolish of me, but I’m desperate to have it off. It has been too long since it was bare and soft.’

He slid off the step and cut through the water like a shark of the deeps, still eyeing the juncture of her spread thighs, and she felt her flushed face grow warmer. He came to a stop before her, plucking the razor from her hand deftly. ‘You once told me you trust me with you life,’ he said lowly. ‘If you’re really determined to have it off, let me do it.’

‘I trust your steady hand, but not my ability to stay still when you are touching me there,’ she demurred. Her legs embraced him like a coiling vine, and she caught his lure of a mouth in a slow, dragging kiss she felt in her toes, the ripeness and scratchiness, the flick of his tongue a gift she marveled at. He should be dead, she would be constantly brought up short with a happy jolt for a long time realising he wasn’t.

‘You open for me, and keep very still. Think about something boring, like a four hour Small Council meeting,’ he murmured. ‘Arguing over taxes, that should do it.’ She giggled into his mouth, and in the strong yellow light of the lamps his eyes looked amber, sparking with wit, his hair twisted between her fingers as black and shiny as coal. She wanted him now without any preliminaries, an ache of emptiness in her core, but then she remembered his lips and tongue and teeth devouring her stripped petals and folds until her heart burst within her in shattering climax, and she told herself to wait, and trust.

He made a nest of towels for her on the hard marble floor, arranging her bruise-bedecked legs so she was on full display before him as he returned to the pool, soft foamy soap rubbed over the short scrim of hair on her cunt. She bit her lip and struggled not to move at his careful touch, her eyes on the basalt wall and not on his intent face, brows tilted in concentration. Luckily it was not dense, it grew wispy and fine, and with each delicate stroke of the razor that didn’t cut into her flesh she relaxed an inch, leaning back on her hands so he could reach front and rear.

She risked a look downwards when more soap was added, the skim of his fingers along her outer lips eliciting a whimper, and he shot her a warning glance through his lashes. ‘Still as stone, love, I don’t want you to bleed,’ he crooned at her. She was plump now, a sheen of arousal visible on her nearly naked skin, only the fine, tricky hairs left to remove. She tore her eyes away from the erotic sight of him attending to her, closed her mind to what he would do to her when he was done. She thought about taxes, provisions, squabbling lords, food riots, her thighs straining not to twitch when the razor scraped the hair away from around her entrances.

There was nothing left when she looked again, only a narrow, neat strip above her nub, the skin slightly inflamed but not a single nick or cut. Their eyes met over his fine work, his pupils swamping the brown telling her that beneath the water he was hard and needing. ‘Thank you,’ she breathed, venting all lingering tension and letting herself feel the sweet burn of her arousal. ‘Now please taste me, have me. We have one night alone and I don’t want to miss any of it. Don’t let me rest.’
He made a pleasant noise somewhere between a growl and a hum, his hands splayed on either side of her cunt to open her like a flower. She moaned urgently like it was the first time all over again, her nipples drawing tight and the skin of her belly prickling. So sensitive that each flick of his tongue and suck at her folds sent little sparks bursting in her brain, so wet he was bathing in her, slurping and grunting like she was the rarest of morsels. She couldn’t hold herself up on her hands anymore, she fell back into the layers of towels, her hands fistng his hair and holding him closer, guiding him to where she needed his clever mouth.

His long fingers slid into her, as smooth and rough as fur rubbed backwards on a wolf’s scruff, plugging her abruptly, and she cried out to the ceiling, the unhinged noise cutting through the thick air. He had her nub caught between his teeth, pulling gently, then poking it with the tip of his tongue, impatient and wanting her to break, both hands employed to drag between her lips and fill both her holes, a thumb disappearing into her arse in rapid movements to give her that special twinge of pained pleasure. She was pulling on his curls hard enough to hurt him in turn, but he only growled and buried his face deeper in her rosy flesh.

The image of him devouring her was too much, as perfect as the myriad sensations, black brows, half moons of lashes, muscles shifting in small, elegant movements under his skin, flushed and gleaming. So focused, so giving, so gloriously savage and alive. Later she would treat him with the same care, make him bow off their bed in an elegant arch when she took him deep in her throat, but now she was selfish, a helpless pile of quivering limbs as the ball in her belly expanded like blown glass, then splintered.

She wailed and clamped her thighs around his head, her cunt and arse clenching around his digits, her release gushing into his mouth to be lapped up with grateful groans. She let him loose and grabbed onto the towels beneath her as the room spun in slow circles, struggling to calm, jerking away from the slither of his tongue when the sensitivity became too much, but he wouldn’t let her escape until she wailed again, her orgasm going on and on, grateful there was no one near to hear her this time, only the drip and slosh of water, the bubble of the spring welling from the earth, the womb of rock hiding them away from the world.

She really needed a minute to gather her wits, but Jon did not grant it to her, hauling himself out of the pool as sleek as an otter, shunting her backwards beneath his steaming hot weight. He kissed her with slick, puffed lips, and she tasted salt and honey, depthless doe eyes capturing hers. ‘I can’t be slow and sweet, and I know you don’t want that either,’ he husked at her. ‘Get on your knees with that pretty arse in the air, and turn your head so I can see your face when I fuck you.’

She was so loose jointed and clumsy he had to help her turn over once she’d had her fill of plundering his mouth, her kisses biting and probing to wind him up further, her voice a throaty purr. ‘Not slow, not sweet, I want to be ruined, I want you to carry me out of here.’ Placed on her hands and knees, her bottom lifted to the perfect angle to take him, long, bedraggled hair pushed to the side so he could look at her reactions. Her eye gazed up at him, she felt both thoroughly riled and serene, her trust and love turning her into a receptacle, a wanton with nothing in her head but the desire to be ravaged.

He had that preoccupied glaze over his face, his inky eyes locked on where she was swollen and dripping open, his scuffed palms pulling her buttocks apart to get a better view. Gods he was hard, his thick cock horizontal, red and full so every vein was visible. She hoped he could hold it in long enough to take her front and back, it had been too long since she’d received such thorough and lusty treatment. She widened her knees on the towels, letting out an impatient sigh, and he mounted her, tucking his right leg over her to sink to the hilt on that angle that drove her utterly mad, sent her flying to cling to the ceiling, howling at the girth of him filling her cunt in a single stroke.
At first he took her with long, fluid strokes, the tip of him reaching her womb. Her hand curled into a fist beneath her in reaction, breath coming in heaving pants, but then she growled in frustration when he backed off to short, shallow thrusts, her cloudy gaze finding him with a rather wicked expression. ‘No lass, hold it in,’ he hissed. ‘Don’t come yet.’ She gritted her teeth and endured the sweet torment, her muscles adjusting around his cock, little sneaky movements backwards to make him go deeper which earned her a sharp spank on the side of her left buttock. ‘You never do what you’re told,’ he gasped, adding another to heighten the sting of the blow, his cock withdrawing from her horribly then slamming deep enough to make her yelp, but only once.

Tease and withhold, over and over, until she was stretched and dripping and achy and babbling nonsense and begging like he aimed for, and only then did he fasten his strong hands around her hips and take her in earnest, so forceful her teeth clicked and her bones thrummed. She lost all sense beyond the feel of him overwhelming her, concentrating on the dense mass of pain and pleasure in her core, the flickering of every pore on her skin, the animal grunts and groans, the smack of his hips against her bottom. Then it slowed to an infuriating crawl again, and she was petted and soothed, her drying hair in his hands, his torso pressing against her sweaty back when he bent to kiss her flaming cheek.

‘You feel so good,’ he murmured into her ear. ‘Hot as fire and soft and wet...but I want all of it, I want your arse, then you can come.’

She tensed and mewled as if afraid, but only to stir his dark heart, she wanted it as much as he, her whole body drawing tight at the prospect of his cock invading her completely, the anguish and total submission. He was coated with her juices, slipping from her cunt in a dribble of fluid, the thick tip of him aligning easily with her smaller hole and pushing past the resisting ring. She heaved under him, and he steadied her with more petting and crooning, going very slow though he was quivering with the impulse to plunge deep.

The pain was intense, the carefulness of it drawing it out, but then he was fully buried and motionless, and she moaned and wriggled slightly for the first spark of friction, his sharp teeth sinking into the curve of her neck in response. ‘Move,’ she keened. ‘Please Jon move...don’t spare me.’ She was balanced on one arm, her other hand snaking beneath her to delve into her split flesh, circling her nub to counter the possession. The noise he made was feral, not quite sane, and she heard it, the sound of his restraint snapping, then he was gone, kneeling behind her and grabbing a firm hold of her offered arse, pulling back with a burn of rent flesh then sinking, diving, owning.

It was filthy, obscene, invasive, exactly as it should be, her body being used, being taken like the lowest slut and revelling in it, no reverence, no worship, only instinct, and neither of them could hold it in for long. No warning at all, her cunt closing around her fingers, the delectable burn of his cock cramming her full of him, and then she was carried away. She hunched under him and began to come in waves, battered and buffeted and screaming as the tempest swept through her mind and drowned her in sensation, not cold grey ocean but scorching hot like a lake of lava in the Doom.

Sore and bent double and gaping open to take his relentless thrusts, she sobbed as the climax continued on and on to the point of agony, then he was snarling and gasping her name and it was over, a blessing and a curse. Even in her turmoil she felt the mighty kick of his release, a warm eruption of seed filling her forbidden depths.

His hips snapped to drive her flat to the floor, and her knees were no longer able to hold her up, her spine kinked and belly squished, tears and spit on her face, her hair a tangled mess, but she was smiling, even laughing as her aggressive lover found her with his lips and kissed her gently as if in apology. Three kisses, four and more, locks nosed out of her eye so she saw his expression, his eyes so black they were dragonglass drinking the light.
'Dany love, you alright?' he mumbled thickly through lips bitten raw and red, looking as stupefied and undone as she likely did. Her mouth curled at him, a hand reaching backwards to pat him on his lovely bottom. He was heavy and Gods her spine was nagging at her to get him off, but she didn’t want to move.

‘I am so glad I’m alive, and you with me,’ she whispered. ‘I think you broke me, but I have never felt better.’

***

There was a wind blowing from the south-east with a hint of warmth in it, ruffling the tired grass and making the ships in the deep water port tug at their anchors, the black and gold and black and red sails snapping in the bluster. A begrudging raven from Tyrion allowing them more time before returning to matters of ruling had stretched their one night’s escape to two, and they were there to see the Greyjoy fleet arriving back from Pentos with much needed supplies, some splitting off to sail direct to King’s Landing but Theon and Yara staying.

She was very glad to see Yara again, the formidable pirate queen still sporting awful fading scars from her captivity but fit and well enough, and Theon was glad to see Sansa, treating her with a careful reverence that was almost tender, which set her speculating idly about a possible future. The lady had little time for men aside from her brothers, and she gave Jon a hard time even now, but she was different with the Greyjoy boy, perhaps sensing he would never harm her or challenge her.

Though they gave everyone as much time as they could spare, and she tried to turn her skittish mind to the future, she and Jon just wanted to be alone, barely stirring from bed or bath until she had suggested they dress and go for a walk to check on the dragons. Swathed in her cloak she felt almost comfortable in the frail sun, her body so heavy with languor from their couplings and gorging on good Essossi food she felt lazy as a cat drowsing in a patch of sunlight, holding onto her husband like she was a dizzy maiden.

Despite Jon telling them to bugger off more than once a gaggle of Wildling children followed them at a distance, agog to see the dragons and pestering them with questions. ‘So you’re the famous Dragon Queen,’ Freda, the flame-haired daughter of Tormund said to her pertly, her eyes flicking between her and Jon. ‘What does that make you, King Crow? The Dragon King? What does my Da call you now?’

‘He still calls me bloody crow, Lord Crow, King Crow, nothing has changed there,’ he said. ‘And mind your manners around the queen, or she’ll feed you to her beasts.’

‘She bloody won’t, or my Da will brain her,’ she said confidently, making her laugh, but the younger one’s blue eyes went wide. Her sister grabbed her hand and dragged her off. ‘King Crow’s a bit grumpy, I think he wants to go back to bed with the queen,’ she observed as she skipped. ‘Come Frigg, lets go hide behind that rock and look at the dragons where they can’t see us and eat us.’

When the children were out of sight, and the dragons visited and fussied over in their amphitheatre of sheltering rocks, including Drogon’s healing flank grudgingly inspected, she let her meandering thoughts spill from her lips, stopping Jon with a gloved hand on his bearded cheek as they walked into a grove of bare trees in a small gully, out of the persistent wind. She gave him a serious, queenly look, and he leaned into her touch, turning to catch her hand and drop a kiss on her palm. ‘I know that face, what is it?’

‘King Crow, King in the North, the White Wolf, the Dragon King, Jon Snow,’ she said softly.
'You could have as many titles as me, if you wanted them, but what I want to know is if you will take the title that is yours.’ A frown appeared on his lined brow and he moved to speak, but she went on. ‘You are the son of the Prince of Dragonstone. I don’t ask if you seek to supplant me. You will rule with me, be my king as well as my husband and lover, but what name will you bear?’

His earthy eyes did not evade her, but there was a flash of uncertainty there. Even now, after all that had happened, he had not allowed himself to think too deeply about it. In his mind he would likely forever be the bastard and outcast she had fallen in love with, their shared blood making it more difficult to accept the truth. Though he had denied it hotly, though it had not changed how he loved her body and soul, it was still a stigma, a twisted flaw in their marriage with hideous history behind it. The love affair of his parents had started a war, and they had ended it, but it was not over. The story would go on.

‘I want to accept it, take your name and my name and wear it proudly,’ he said decisively at last. ‘But I want to be myself. If I can be both, a Targaryen and a Stark, I will do it. I will leave my bastard name behind me, but I don’t want to lose who I was, who I am.’

‘I don’t want you to either,’ she said softly, trying to keep her welling emotions in check as she soothed him. ‘I would be pleased to never see that old armour and cloak of yours ever again, but I would not change any of you for all the gold or kingdoms in the world. I don’t really want it, the gold or the kingdoms, not anymore. I just want you, and our children safely born, food and sleep and making love, or fucking. I warned you, I’m a very selfish creature when it comes to you.’

At his chuckle, the honest happiness in his eyes, she relaxed into him, his arms enfolding her against his chest, the thump of his heart against her ear audible in the sheltered grove. ‘Jon Targaryen, first of his name,’ he mused into her hair in a low rumble. ‘Sounds ridiculous, but I like it better than Aegon. It was the name my father gave me, and I will take the name of my other father.’ There was another laugh that shook her nicely, his voice tinged with acid enjoyment. ‘And I can’t wait for Tyrion bloody Lannister, Hand of the Queen and high and mighty when it comes to who his precious queen marries, to get that bit of news.’

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this, comments as always bring me warm fuzzies. It strikes me as a good place to end this fic after an epilogue, but I haven't made up my mind yet. This has always been a bit of a 'fuck it, just write and see what happens' story, not intricately plotted, but if I end it at Chapter 33, I'll be a sad smut scribbler. We will see.
And the grass was so green against my new clothes

A/N: Dear readers, I have three outstanding fics to finish before Season 8 and it ain’t gonna happen given real life has taken over. I have less time to write or think about writing, but this fic is my fucked up magnum opus so it gets my highest priority. This is the last main chapter of Wall, so enjoy it. There will be an epilogue from Jon’s point of view to round things out and because people want to see the babies, but this is the real end.
Thank you for all the kudos, the 118k plus hits, and especially for all your comments, and hello to all the new readers that have shown up in the last few weeks (so quiet, don’t be shy). It’s been fun, and a glorious escape when life was really tough, I hope it was for you too.

The exhaustion and nausea were long past, though her body was swelling unbecomingly, like a belligerent small creature puffing up to ward off a foe, though their foes were mostly all dead. Her growth was accelerating, as if a lever had been pulled within her, knowing it was safe to be a pregnant woman who no longer needed to run, fly and fight. Seams had to be let out, extra panels put in her leggings, and she struggled to even put on her boots. She had dismissed the idea of new clothes for now, not in the mood for prettying herself, especially considering the treasury was full of mice and echoes.

Smells though, sometimes they snuck up unawares and assaulted her senses, making the old heaving rise in her chest. Fish in particular, unwashed furs, and the thick, cloying scents of multiple bodies crowding around her, mingled perfumes hiding the reluctance to bathe properly in such raw, cold weather. The council meeting was emptying out now, leaving more dry air to suck into her lungs, the dusty smell of coals burning in the braziers, the light musky scent of her husband at her elbow reassuring her as always. She felt his rough hand squeeze hers under the table as the bulk of the lords took their leave.

There were two councils now, the governing council of lords, merchants, maesters and common folk from the city wards, and the traditional Small Council, trusted friends and advisers and their two Hands Lord Tyrion and Davos, cunning diplomacy and gruff honesty at either end of the board. Sam Tarly looked flustered, his hands splotched with ink, scribbling frantically to catch up with the series of startling proclamations their Graces had dreamed up for this day of business.

‘I wonder at the wisdom of alarming people with too much change all at once,’ Tyrion ventured. The grief he had worn on his furrowed brow at the loss of his brother was fading now, replaced with the intricacies of ruling, a game he was born to play. Late last night he had come to her with news that had lightened his spirits, the Lady Brienne was with child, and between them they cooked up a soothing lie that Lord Jaime had married the lady knight in secret the night before the great battle, giving her child a name and Tyrion a family, though the new world they wanted to make would not care about bastards, or last names.

‘We wanted to break the wheel,’ she reminded him. ‘You don’t break something with small taps, but a hammer blow. The people have already endured much worse than seeing tired old traditions thrown to the four winds. They will accept it. They want bread, peace, coins in their pockets and spring to come, and justice.’ She hid a qualm when her mind flashed back to the chaos of Mereen, but this wasn’t the same, it wouldn’t be the same. She was wiser now, and not alone. She would never be alone again, the fingers laced through hers, the strength and cool nerves of her lover and partner assured her of that.

Tyrion shrugged and moved on. ‘I must counsel against your copper pinching on the matter of the coronation though, your Graces. The people want pomp and splendour and authority as well as all that. As we are seen, so we are esteemed.’

‘The Crown is broke,’ Jon said bluntly. ‘Your sister’s debt to the Iron Bank saw to that. Trade is at a standstill, except for the small amount of Valyrian steel we can produce. We need all the money we have to get everyone through the winter, not to spend on crowns and gowns and free wine so the smallfolk can get pissed and drink our health, then curse us behind our backs when the wine and grain runs out.’
Around the table was a gaggle of men as usual, a polyglot of east and west. Tormund snorted, and Qhono followed when his inner translation of the common tongue caught up. Davos glanced at his lad approvingly, but one of the women present stirred, her ice blue eyes thoughtful, tongue always ready to argue with her brother who wasn’t. ‘You haven’t spent much time in King’s Landing, I have,’ Sansa began. ‘Tyrion is right. The people love a good show, they won’t respect you if you have some cheap, hidden coronation as bare and dull as a feast of meat and mead at Winterfell. It wasn’t just fear that kept them in line when the Lannisters ruled here, it was awe. Stop thinking like Father and find the money.’

‘Thank you, Lady Sansa,’ Tyrion said smugly as Jon sighed and shot her a sideways look, vexed as usual at his sister.

She smiled at him in sympathy, torn between his practicality and her gut instinct. ‘I have to agree with Lady Sansa,’ she said. ‘The Targaryens understood spectacle, it’s why we are still here, even after all that happened, and why we were remembered.’

Jon eyed her rather accusingly for not backing him up, then sighed again, slumping in his chair. ‘All right,’ he muttered, his mouth twitching amidst his unruly beard. It really needed a good trim, and Gods she was looking forward to the tailors getting hold of him and making him some new clothes, but he was still distractingly handsome, especially when annoyed. ‘I will leave the bloody pomp of fussing to those who care about it and I’ll show up on the day. Shall we run over those proclamations again, Sam?’ There was a mischievous glint in his big, dark eyes as he tilted them at her, and she bit back a giggle. They were saving the best for last, the news their Hands and a few others present did not know yet.

Sam began to mutter and shuffle the mess of scrolls in front of him. ‘Let me see, I’ve got...Gods my hand is aching.’ He flexed his inky fist. ‘The Night’s Watch is disbanded, not that there’s much left of us. Free to join the royal guard or go home to their families. What else...Wildlings are invited to join the realm and granted the Gift south of the Wall in perpetuity…’

Tormund grinned. ‘Not that there is much left of us either. I’m still not kneeling to you, Snow, even if you’re a fancy king in a pretty crown and fancy lad clothes.’

‘You’ll behave yourselves though. No raiding the neighbours for goats and women,’ Jon said dryly. ‘What else, Sam?’

‘Speaking of no raiding,’ Tarly said, eyeing Qhono cautiously. ‘The Dothraki are to winter in the Reach where there is still plenty of grazing, save those who wish to stay in the city and guard their Khaleesii. Any complaints about unruly behaviour to be made to Lord Tarly of Horn Hill…’ He gulped as her chief bloodrider smiled slowly and fingered his arakh, and she heard Jon laugh.

‘You’ll do fine, Sam. Go home and see your mother and sister, and continue your studies with that lot of useless old men in Oldtown. What else?’ She knew he was feeling confined, needing to get outside for what remained of the short winter day, see to their beasts and find someone to spar with to relieve some tension. Her stomach rumbled impatiently, her babies and herself needing good food, and lots of it. She was eating like her mount.

‘Hmm,’ Tarly said, shuffling more papers. ‘The Council of Maesters to help govern the realm, trade envoys to the Free Cities and Bay of Dragons, a new High Septon, the Greyjoy fleet to become the fleet for the Seven Kingdoms for fair payment, the Iron Islands granted their independence in exchange for fealty, some vacant lordships…’

‘Don’t give Storms End to Gendry,’ Arya said from her corner. ‘He won’t know what to do with a castle or ordering people about, he wants to stay here and smith, he doesn’t care about his new last
name, or bossing around a bunch of snooty lords.’ Arya couldn’t be more different from her older sister, what was unspoken was her horror at being coerced into settling down to be a lady of a castle, no matter how much she liked Gendry, or liked thumping him.

‘Perhaps we better give the Stormlands to Lord Tarth if Gendry isn’t keen,’ she replied. ‘I expect the lad just wants to be wherever you are anyway.’ The girl sniffed dismissively, and he sister gave a knowing smile.

‘Now, Lord Tarly of Horn Hill. If you haven’t run out of ink, the king and I have one more proclamation to dictate, to be sent out to all corners of the realm and beyond,’ she went on in her most queenly voice. Fingers squeezed hers, and out of the corner of her eye she saw a slight worried frown on Jon’s brow, but then he sighed as if letting go a heavy burden for good. The maester in training smoothed out a fresh sheet of parchment, her eyes then slid to Tyrion, finding him puzzled. He had been privy to all their other plans in advance, and he didn’t like political surprises, but she was doing this the way that pleased her, petty and childish maybe, exacting revenge for his hectoring all those months ago about marrying a penniless bastard with nothing to offer her but a pretty face, woe and war.

Her voice was smooth, rolling over the murmurs of shock and shortles of amusement in the chamber. Legacy, love, family, she had fought and suffered for it, and she wouldn’t deny it, and neither would Jon, not anymore.

‘Let it be known that Jon Snow, known as the Bastard of Winterfell and son of Lord Stark, the White Wolf and the King in the North, consort to Queen Daenerys of House Targaryen and the victor of the Battle for the Dawn, is the trueborn son of Rhaegar Targaryen and Lyanna Stark, wed in Dorne by Septon Maynard as recorded by the Citadel, named Aegon Targaryen at his birth, and is therefore named King of the Seven Kingdoms, to rule alongside his queen and blood.’

The look on her Hand’s face was, as anticipated, absolutely priceless, and she felt the vibration of a laugh cut off suddenly through her clasped hand. At least Jon could laugh about it now, if only for a moment. He wasn’t done brooding over it, perhaps not ever, but he always kept his word.

***

As he announced, the king had very little to do with any of the fussing and planning and lavish spending, leaving it up to his wife, their Hands, and his sister, only reluctantly attending a few sessions with the tailors who crawled all over him with measuring tapes and pins and swatches of subdued fabrics, shooting her resentful looks as she supervised and made sure he didn’t order anything in brown leather, or do a bolt. Security he did look after though, making sure there were plenty of guards along the route, and enough armed men from north, south, west and east in their train to bring an equally important sense of awe to proceedings.

It had taken two weeks to organise, many idle craftsmen employed around the city, their pockets filled with the last of her gold and whatever else they could scrounge. Gowns and tunics and banners and jewels, two crowns fashioned of white gold, rubies and dragonglass, two simple thrones carved from warm-hued wood gifted from the Summer Isles, etched with birds and flowers and dragons, beautiful works of art that bore no resemblance to the destroyed throne.

The brief ceremony was to be held in the Dragonpit, the anticipated free wine would gush from the city fountains, the lengthy procession of grand folk and fierce barbarians providing the entertainment for the mob. Many hours were spent and arguments had over placement, lords arriving in the city to attend and swell the skeleton court, even a few from the North, the ones that weren’t dead or stubborn as rocks. She was run off her feet to the extent that her fatigue made an unwelcome return, and eventually she left her Hands to it, not caring less who was where in the
procession and who deserved the most honour.

She endured another examination by Tansy, who declared her twins fit and raring to get out in nearly three months, and that she was getting as big as a prized cow at a Crownlands fair. ‘The war is over now, your Grace,’ the formidable lady scolded. ‘Eat, sleep, fuck while you still can, and snuggle that lovely lad of yours. Be grateful you’re alive, even if you’re bloody uncomfortable.’

She tried to be, but she bore the heavy weight around all day, had to sleep on her back or side with a pillow tucked between her knees. Making lengthy, indulgent love was a distant memory, she wasn’t in the mood to be seen as she was, and hid under voluminous bedgowns and spent any precious time in bed sleeping. Every night Jon would curl around her and cup her belly under his palm, the occasional heavy erection pressed against her bottom, giving her a loose, warm feeling in the pit of her belly she enjoyed, but didn’t act upon. The desire that flared up between them and burned through terror and pain and strife was banked now, a slow, steady fire. With the prospect of imminent death now gone, there was no rush to lose themselves in each other. He knew she was tired and touchy, and he would wait for her.

Coronation day had dawned clear and bright, the frost glittering on the battlements melting quickly in the weak sunlight, the sky an inverted bowl of pure blue traversed by gulls and the distant silhouette of Drogon hunting over the Kingswood on the far side of the bay. She knew he would return at her call, to perch on the edge of the Dragonpit in all his massive, coiling majesty, his brother beside him, another show of power and pomp which cost her nothing but love.

She turned from the window in a slither of rich fabric, the blood red of her house, the train so long she would be forced to ride sidesaddle on her new black horse. She missed her practical tunics and boots, but the occasion called for this, a stunning gown appliqued with the same birds and flowers and beasts as her throne, her belly swathed but still obvious, a queen with the future under her skirts, but not the kind of future everyone was expecting. Her children would not rule when their time came, unless they wanted to, The old world would be forever changed, though many years and much hard work was ahead of them to make it so.

They were waiting, all those that had followed her from Mereen expecting this day to finally come, what she had fiercely fought for, but now seemed a burden as heavy as her belly. She had passed through the vale of cold shadow and out the other side alive and whole, her body and soul entwined with her lover forever, but the core of her old self was fractured, shot through with permanent cracks. She was only putting herself through this charade because that old need to help people, guide people to a new future was still there, but she didn’t need the triumph, the satisfaction of vanquishing her enemies and the naysayers.

King’s Landing was not her home, her end. She had yet to find it.

Everyone was looking at her, dressed in their fine new clothes, Tyrion and Varys and Missandei and Grey Worm, her four chief bloodriders in fur and leather and horsehair and long, oiled braids, out of place in the richly appointed chamber. Tansy in a lovely dress of green velvet, the Stark sisters choosing to visit with her instead of their brother, one beautifully dressed in an elaborate court gown, the other in tidy boys garb and armed for any trouble. Arya didn’t like King’s Landing much, but she fit in anywhere, a wolf that slipped through the changing scenery of her eventful life, ever watchful. The other Stark was itching to get home and rebuild, she belonged in the North, queen of all she surveyed, safe and alone and untouchable in her gigantic pile of stone. ‘The king will be waiting downstairs in the courtyard, your Grace,’ Sansa said gently.

‘He’s already had three ales,’ Arya imparted. ‘Better get down there before he drinks any more. I don’t think he likes thousands of people staring at him and girls yelling out how handsome he is.’
‘I know he doesn’t,’ she said wryly. ‘He’s picked the wrong job, and the wrong wife.’ She kicked her trailing skirts behind her, and Missandei bent to straighten them out. ‘Shall we begin?’ If she was a different woman she might have babbled, told them how nervous she was and full of doubts, but she was a queen, her uncertainties and frailties had to stay mostly hidden. Only in the dead of night in bed would she speak them aloud, after she had gotten over her ridiculous shyness and been thoroughly ravaged by her lover, as best as could be managed with her belly in the way.

Down in the courtyard, all debris from the throne room collapse now cleared away, salvaged blocks of stone neatly stacked for its replacement audience chamber, there was a sea of people waiting to line up and exit the gate, impatient horses stamping and edging away from Ghost, who was pacing restlessly, misliking the crowd as much as his sire. Their friends and followers were all there in their best clothes, even the Wildlings replacing their manky old furs with new, and haughty courtiers and lords who didn’t want to be left out of the first splendid occasion in many months.

The courtiers bowed and women cooed admiringly at her gown and intricately braided hair as she swept past, but her eyes were fixed on her husband, already astride his matching black horse. He wore a tunic and breeches of black brocade with his new sigil stitched in silver on his breast, snowy linen at his throat and cuffs, his curls ruthlessly subdued in a tight knot. It was the fanciest outfit she had ever seen him in, even his boots were new, and he was as beautiful as some dark prince of ancient fables, visiting from the underworld, his velvety eyes widening at the sight of her. Neither of them wore cloaks, and though the air was chill she felt nothing but warm under his gaze.

He immediately dismounted to help her up on her horse, taking her arm and whispering. ‘Don’t trip on all that and fall on your arse in front of them all.’ She laughed, patted his gloved hand, and sniffed him lavishly, nuzzling the pale skin of his throat before she was swung in the air and deftly placed on the annoying sidesaddle. He gave her a promising look beneath hooded lids before he turned away, and she felt it beneath her falling skirts, a tingle over her perfumed and groomed skin.

They were first out of the gate to a mighty cheer from the seething crowd of people waiting there for the first look, lining up in a perfect trot, their heads lifting to face them all, careful smiles and roving eyes taking in the faces below them, young and old, poor and prosperous. There were no resentful looks or mutterings, only curiosity, early drunkenness, and even some faces full of hope. She felt her throat swell with warring emotions at the sight of them all, their dreaded responsibility, and her hand fumbled for Jon’s across the small space between them, utterly relieved for the hundredth time that she wasn’t left to face them alone.

They rode, the king and queen, ahead of their procession of savages and sophisticates, with a wolf at their heels and two dragons wheeling above, rode the long road through the begrimed, worn out, stinking city their ancestor had founded, letting the mantle of responsibility fall on their shoulders like an oxen’s yoke. Their minds were not on the destination of two thrones and two crowns and a crumbling stone arena full of well-wishers and nascent enemies looking on, but on a future where they could be alone, not just the coming night in bed as lovers, but that island of escape that haunted her dreams, and now his.

***

The hour was late when they finally slipped away from the riotous feast, all their remaining guests drunk, the less sedate gloriously tipsy and loud and full of black and bawdy humour, others asleep in their chairs, the musicians now playing sloppy, wild tunes, the linen tablecloths smeared with food and spilled wine and ale. Though she should have been asleep long ago, she was pulsing with energy, pleased that the day had gone smoothly and that the people seemed happy for now, and even more pleased that she had extracted her slightly inebriated man from another toast to take him to bed as anticipated.
When they reached their chamber and the Unsullied guards were sent on their way, the door locked behind them, Jon was on her, sweeping her up so her toes barely touched the marble floor, a blur of flushed white skin, full pink lips and tumbling hair, a kiss that stole her breath, hands roaming for the hooks at her spine. He smelled good, so good, the note of alcohol not masking his wild, musky male scent, and he felt even better, his broad palms smoothing down her back to ease the tight gown down and off, his neat whiskers scraping her face as his tongue delved deep into her purring throat.

The gown slid to the floor in a noisy whump of crimson silk, leaving various layers of chemise, stockings and slippers which he fumbled at and cursed over under his breath between kisses, so many plump, dragging, delicious kisses she was giddy enough to forget what she looked like beneath, all swollen and heavy, her small breasts distended and purple tipped, belly fully rounded and decorated with odd red streaks no amount of careful rubbing with oil could prevent. By contrast he was all hard muscle beneath his shirt and breeches, hard muscle and a harder cock curled in her palm, but then he stepped back from her grasp and really looked at her.

She felt like a fecund animal on display, and the kicks and squirms she had savoured like a secret were now under his calloused hands. He was staring at her, distracted from the freshly waxed petals of her cunt by the visible shifting of their babes, awe and hesitation and lusty need flaring in his shadowy eyes. He handled her belly gingerly, like a pot of wildfire, flinching when a good kick was aimed at his stroking hand.

'Seven hells,' he said softly. ‘Look at you, love. How can I ravage you with those two in there. I mean, I can feel them wriggling about.’

She was uncomfortable under that heavy lidded gaze full of conflict, but she found herself again, that wanton, self assured girl beneath her mother’s body, though she felt a twinge of lingering resentment. After all, it was him that had caused this transformation from a svelte, supple lover into a matron, him and his magic cock. At that thought she snorted in mirth. ‘You better ravage me now, my king, before I get too big and grouchy for it, and kick you myself for trying it.’

His exploratory hands were now in her hair, reaching for the pins holding her mass of braids in place, flicking them to be lost on the rug as he kissed her again, almost reverently. ‘I will tell you what I see,’ he rumbled. ‘I see the girl I love, filled with the children she thought she would never have, wearing the crown she wasn’t sure she was going to get.’ He lifted the circlet from her brow, tossing it away. She had no idea what had happened to his. Her fingers were buried in his curls, intent on making as much of a mess as he. ‘I want so you badly I don’t care if I get kicked for it.’

Hair half down, she was picked up with a grunt of effort that made her smile against his throat before nipping it sharply. The bed awaited, a pool of shadow from the swagged curtains. He left her there naked and sprawled, her thighs open for him, and shed the rest of his clothes, gloriously bare with an impressive erection that bobbed as he walked, lighting a taper from the fire so he could light both oil lamps by the bed. She settled against the pillows as he crawled up her body, spreading her wider so his hips slotted neatly between her legs, cock dragging against her nether lips.

Very delicately he took a nipple in his mouth, only increasing the suction when she moaned and pressed him closer in. She was so sensitive there the slightest pull shot down her body in tingles, she rubbed her cunt against him like a stropping cat, enjoying the smooth slide of her bare flesh against his. One nudge and he would be inside her, stealing her breath with the sweet pain of being taken deep when she wasn’t quite ready to receive him, but he was in no rush, suckling at her leisurely, using his teeth to scrape until her nipples ached, his solid length getting good and wet from her welling juices. Mmm, she needed his tongue in her, lapping up her mess, his thumbs
opening her up to receive its thrust.

She whined impatiently, forgetting about her babies, her ungainly body, the crown that was discarded on the floor, a hand gripping a fistful of raven curls and pushing him down, her hips raised in silent appeal. Long lashes, a bristly bead, cushiony lips grazed over her stomach, which now lay quiet, eyes hot as coals gazing down at her cunt, which she couldn’t see with her belly in the way. She knew it looked pretty, stripped and swollen and gleaming, ready to be tasted, toyed with, then filled until it was sore and stretched.

Her mind wandered back to the bathhouse, when he’d used her arse very hard until she was spent and weak, the last time he had thoroughly ruined her. As he began to touch her, just the barest tracing with a fingertip, her mind drifted back further, to the first time she had gotten on all fours and surrendered herself, knowing she could trust him implicitly, that his worship of her body was so intense that he even handled himself while feasting on her. All these drifting, lusty memories only added to her pleasure when his tongue burrowed between her lips, parted by his hands in a delicious pull, then freed to be sucked into his mouth, the tip of his tongue a feathery sweep over her nub.

Everything she wanted she received, his thumbs roughly entering her channel to hold her open, long drags from her arse to the top of her slit, his deep groans countering her ecstatic mewls, nails cutting into her thighs to hold her still as she twitched and ground and fought to get more friction, more depth, her body melting and opening wider, the edge of her pleasure sharpening, until the liquid heat in her womb started to burn her from within. She couldn’t see much of him, not his face at least, but the sight of his coiled limbs, his perfect arse in the air, a peek of unruly curls between her thighs...three fingers thrust brutal and deep, making her nub exposed enough to be caught between his teeth, the rest of his mobile lips sucking at her in a greedy growl.

Her hands flailed uselessly, then clutched at the covers beneath her, and she howled like a bitch in heat, her climax making her arch out of her cosy nest, thighs clamping around his head, the fingers in her stretching and beckoning and drawing out the agony of it until it cut all her strings and she collapsed, whimpering and squirming to get away from his lapping tongue. When he entered her with his thick, satisfying length he would glide to her limit with ease, she was so drenched and gaping. She wanted it rough, not a slow introduction but a possession, and she wanted to see him, not submit on her knees but watch his face as he fucked her until every part of her was begging for respite.

He was roused enough to have no qualms about her belly and what was shifting lazily within it, thank the Gods, rising up on his haunches, stroking his swollen length a few times, licking some of her off his lips. He bent to kiss her, smearing her face with her taste, his eyes so dense and dark she could be swallowed by them. ‘I need to go hard on you, love,’ he rasped at her. ‘I know you can take it...it’s been a while, and you are so soft and round and ripe you’re driving me mad...and your taste...you’re sweeter.’

She merely moaned stupidly, lifting her arse to try and line him up with her needy cunt, but her belly was between them. His gaze cleared and he eased a pillow out from beneath her head, then another. ‘Lift your arse again, prop yourself up then lie back.’ She was leaden with her release, but he arranged her limbs, the pillows lifting her up so he could enter her on his knees. He caressed her belly in a slow stroke before positioning his cock, his lips now very red, eyes glittering onyx. She smiled at him and stretched, feeling like a whorish goddess. ‘Open your legs wider, show me…’

Hands braced on the back of her thighs, one quick plunge and he was deep and lost within her, grinding against her full womb until she gave a strangled cry, her hands fluttering then landing on her breasts, squeezing and pinching them as she watched him take her, and he watched her. He
managed to make her feel crammed, filled, vulnerable and cowering under his superior strength, though she had been roused and arranged to be a perfect vessel for his cock, so thick and hard the waves of pleasure had an edge.

He was slow and careful, then pounded her until her bones shook, then slow again, his gaze black and blank with concentration, nearly silent but for the odd grunt and gasp while she wailed whenever he battered her, her fingers finding her bud at the top of her slit, then tracing where he disappeared into her, then back again to rub herself harder. He let go of her thigh to push her hand away, lifting her arse higher to take her in sharp jabs. ‘Don’t touch, I have you,’ he growled. Torture, sweet torture, lying passive while he churned deeply, his white teeth flashing and sinking into his lip, unable to kiss him where he bit himself, guide his hand to her nub and help her come.

She was on the plateau, the pleasure swamping her mind in a black tide, drowning in it, struggling for a glint of light to reach towards and surface, then he was snarling, hips snapping, the head of his cock hitting that elusive spot high up inside her again and again until the waves parted and she soared upwards, sobbing and bucking her hips in violent spasms as her cunt grabbed hold of him. A weight squashing her belly flat, fists planted on either side of her, horribly bent and uncomfortable but coming and coming with the taste of his blood on her tongue, his gruff groans merging with hers, the hot spill of seed making her toes curl.

She wanted him again, and again in the morning when they woke, until she was brimming with him, the creamy mess dribbling down her thighs, her body an exhausted jumble of aches and pains, their hair so tangled silver and black were knotted together. Mildly alarmed at her own savage desire when she had been preoccupied with serious matters for so long, she sniffed at herself and smoothed curls away from a sweaty brow, and shifted slightly to ease him off her belly, the thrum in her veins finally calming, though the glow would linger long.

The babes were quiet between them, despite all the strenuous activity. Jon’s lashes, enviably long and thick, were black crescents against his cheeks, he looked so peaceful against the swell of her breast she felt her racing heart ache. She didn’t want to cry, but it was threatening, she was so grateful for everything, all of it, even for the grief and loss that she had to endure to get here, and the tedious squabbling and coin counting and wars and traitors that likely lay ahead of them.

Love was the death of duty, a wise old man once said, but they had proved that the old adage was cynical wisdom. They had managed both.

She dozed, so simply happy all her swirling emotions drifted away into an imaginary sky that was pink with sunrise, each one evaporating as she pictured herself flying across a gleaming ocean, flat and calm and warm, her mount shifting fluidly beneath her in slow flaps of his massive leathery wings, flying into a future she knew she would find one day. An island, floating in the sea, with a little white house with a red door, a husband, and children, every fight, every death, every betrayal, every compromise left behind her forever.
Epilogue - leave the door open, I will sleepwalk into your dreams

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A/N Um hi, sorry this took so long. My excuse is that its very difficult to finish off a canon fic when you fucking hate Game of Thrones now and are forever pissed with Season 8 Jon Snow, but yeah, this is my story and my precious bean so I need to disassociate and just do it, and my husband said he missed when I used to write smut (for the fringe benefits).

I’ve broken my Florence rule with the title, it’s from Emilia’s dress she wore at the premiere (paraphrased), and it sounds kinda Florence-esque anyway. Thank you for loving this fic so much, kia kaha my dear Jonerys fandom. Broken, very salty, confused, but not quite dead. Here is the Jon Snow we love.

It was late, the slate tiled floor cold against his bare feet, the torches in the sconces guttering and spitting, the chilly gloom of the hallway, the sigh of the winter wind off the Narrow Sea around the walls of the castle giving him a childish prickle of fear down the back of his neck, though that could have been the crazed images still floating around like a foul reek. The dream that had woken him and sent him fleeing from his cosy bed of state was even more strange and terrifying than the ones that had dogged him during the war, and he sought sanctuary not in the unmarred breast of his wife, but with the next best option.

He began to calm a little as he entered the room, warmed by a brazier tended by a sleepy nursemaid who bowed and scuttled out when he stumbled in, goggling at the king in his unlaced shirt and breeches, hair a tangled mess around his face. They were awake in their carved double crib, fat little arms and legs stirring, tiny faces crumpling as they got ready to wail for their next feed, not from their sleeping mother in the next chamber, but the sturdy Dothraki wetnurse they’d brought in to help with the daunting task of feeding two greedy babes.

At the sight of their father they smiled, two wobbly, gummy grins, their grumpiness turning to coos. His inner turmoil flattened like a becalmed sea, and he gathered them up, settling down in the nursing chair to comfort and be comforted. So small, so perfect, fuzzy newborn hair turning to silver for his daughter and black for his son, their cloudy blue eyes unfortunately not changing to the green-blue of their mother but dark brown eyes he thought dull and common, but Dany thought beautiful.

They had hummed and hawed over names once they had gotten over the shock of the tiny creatures being here, whole and alive, and settled on Ned and Visenya. He hoped his daughter would grow to be strong and fierce, as skilled with a blade as he, and live up to her warrior name. He hoped his son would be as noble and good, but wiser than the man he had thought his father. He had many hopes now, but it appeared his mind liked to test him with old horrors and new horrors. The dream he had run from was so vivid and awful he could see it painted on his eyelids, and so improbable the gods only knew where it came from.

She had been a long time recovering from the birth, his dainty, tough wife, the weight of carrying two babes to full term and then birthing them, the labour stretching to a day and a night of strain and terror where he felt wretchedly guilty and next to useless. Hence it had been a long time since their bed had been used for anything other than sleep, whether exhausted or fitful, and perhaps it was playing on his mind as well as his other, more selfish parts. He felt so close to her through the
new bond of being parents, but their old bond as lovers was rather withered.

Today the cheeky midwife had found him alone in an alcove and brooding over it, and whispered in his ear that his wife ‘was all healed up now and in need of a good seeing to.’ He had blushed and muttered something incoherent, getting a saucy wink and a thump on the shoulder from the bosomy dame, but Dany had been so tired at bedtime after a fractious council meeting he hadn’t plucked up the courage to initiate anything. Her small body under her old wool bedgown, returning to its supple shape but enticingly generous in breast and hip, seemed unfamiliar territory, though he had used to map and claim every inch of it. So like a dolt he’d kissed her cheek, turned and fallen asleep with aching stones and squirming thoughts, only to bolt awake from that bloody vision he wanted to forget.

He longed for her, but was afraid to touch her, like long ago before he had snapped and snatched her up in the dragonglass cave, going against his very nature for just one taste of her plump mouth before he sailed off to freeze and fight and likely die again. It was the most reckless, selfish thing he had ever done, and he thanked himself every day for it. Perhaps that’s what the dream was, one possible future where they ended as enemies and not lovers, where they held aloof from each other and made mistake after mistake. United, but torn apart by malice and legacy and shit advice from treacherous fools, somehow surviving the war to destroy each other in a broken throne room adrift in ash, one dying, one dead inside.

He had wanted to wake her and confess it like it was something he had actually thought of doing, listen to her sweet laugh and soothing logic and even her ire at his dream self or his foolishness, but he was filled with horror, so much horror that he feared he would turn her over and find his dagger in her mother’s breast.

The prince and princess of Dragonstone were getting restless, bored with his heavy musings and remembering they were hungry, not finding chewing on his fingers a good replacement. He began to rock them as they grizzled, a sharp ache in his heart at the warm weight of them against his chest, vivid and squirming, a perfect blend of their shared blood. A song of ice and grim foreboding and dreary duty, a walking dead man brought back to save the world, now freed to live on, be a father, and stumble and bluff his way through setting the world to rights. He longed to escape from it, take his bride of fire and children and beasts and run away, but his sense of duty had never left him.

There was one means of escape that was always there, and he wistfully thought of it even as he wrestled with two squawking babies. She was waiting for him, soft and warm, smelling of breast milk and spiceflower and her musky sweetness that he longed to bury his face in and drink down, the furled petals of her cunt opening for his tongue, her sharp little nails sinking into his shoulders. He wanted to disappear inside her and forget, deny the dream like the absolute mad nonsense it was, the reality of her living, vital body wrapped around him snugly, no words needed other than the odd lusty taunt and expletive.

When the wetnurse shuffled in and placidly eyed him, muttering a few half-understood words to her Khal, he rose and handed the babies over into her meaty arms with alacrity, kissing their crinkled foreheads and leaving to do what he should have done earlier, wake his wife and show her how much he needed it, the merging of two bodies that never failed them even in their worst moments. He was afraid of hurting her, so recently healed up and perhaps quite changed from her perfect prettiness and tight grip around him, but he also burned to possess her, to lock her in her chamber and take her front and back until she was bruised and breathless and utterly conquered.

Dany welcomed him with a dozy murmur, her perpetual warmth melting the chill from his naked skin as he slipped into the shadows of Aegon’s great bed. Tendrils of silver hair splayed across the
pillows, her dull bedgown pushed to her waist so he could kiss the battle scars on her belly. He was rock hard in an instant, nudging eagerly against her thigh, and she laughed, sitting up so he could drag the gown over her head and leave her naked under his feasting eyes, her wide mouth curling at him.

‘Thank the gods,’ she murmured. ‘I have missed my lover.’ Her breasts were full and red tipped from nursing, but her cunt was a surprise, not furred but stripped bare for him, slightly pink from the recent wax but already gleaming with a trail of arousal.

She snatched a handful of his hair before he could descend and pulled him up for a long, dragging kiss, her tongue tracing the shape of his lips. ‘I thought you would have me before sleep, I knew Tansy would tell you I was fine just to make you blush and squirm with women’s talk. She enjoys that.’

He huffed into her mouth, her diffuse eyes sparkling naughtily in the light of the lamps. ‘That she does,’ he said ruefully. ‘I wanted to take you very badly, but you looked so tired I thought you would thump me for suggesting it.’ She was wriggling under him, lifting her hips so his cock was pressed against her seam. He could be inside her in a heartbeat and a choked cry from her lungs, but he wanted to taste her, his mouth was watering for it.

‘Mmm, but then you could have held me down and punished me for it,’ she purred. ‘It has been long since you spanked my arse.’ He blinked at this, feeling an angry throb in his loins, but then her quicksilver mind shifted. ‘How are the babies?’

‘Hungry and grouchy,’ he murmured, taking her lips again with a quelling nip. ‘But don’t worry yourself, the wetnurse has them and she told the Snow Khal to piss off to bed.’

She relaxed visibly, her roaming hands trailing to cup his bottom. ‘You have such a nice arse,’ she sighed. ‘Go on then, Jon Snow. Seduce me. I am tired, but not that tired I can deny you. It’s been months, I hope I haven’t forgotten how.’

‘I shall remind you,’ he smiled, scooting down to nuzzle her breasts. When he sucked one into his mouth, he tasted her milk, sweet and earthy and strangely exciting, but she was sore there from hungry mouths, so he backed off when she hissed, carefully paying court to the other. He could scent her now, that dizzying, addictive scent of her wetness, and he could not resist its lure. He moved down her in a trail of distracted kisses to pin her to the bed and hold her open and inspect her lewdly, a thin raw scar between her open cunt and the dimple of her arse that he traced with reverence, her deep pink flesh beckoning him like a drunk bee with a flower.

Hot, slick, sweet, pinching her little bud to expose it, lapping at it with the flat of his tongue as she liked, testing her depths by easing one, then two fingers inside her. She wailed and shifted beneath him, grinding greedily, the sound of her pleasure urging him on, no thread of pain or wince of discomfort to worry him. He was throbbing, trapped between his belly and the sheets in a painful angle, his selfish cock screaming at him to get up inside her and flood her womb, but he was good at ignoring it, though he would likely last a disappointing minute or two when he fucked her. Spilling like a gormless boy like the first time he had her against the rough wall of the cave, though it had not mattered in the end, for she’d taken him to bath and bed, sending him away in the morning leaden with regret and a fierce desire to live that she had awoken.

He lost all caution, stretching the skin around her outer lips with one hand and beckoning within her with the other, sucking her silky skin into his mouth entire and growling. She keened wildly, bucking her hips to urge his hand deeper, tight around his fingers and scorching hot. He glanced up her belly and breasts, finding her watching him through slitted eyes, her hands gripping the pillows to anchor herself, and he was relentless, smoothing over her nub in circles until he felt it, that
delicate fluttering in his mouth, the pulse in her depths. She arched and mewled, a goddess crowned with messy silvery gold, as undone as her hair, and he drew it out, lapping at her until her legs twitched and she pushed him off with a curse.

His beard was drenched, his cock on fire when he sat up and fisted it for some relief, wiping his face absently, pleased at her flushed cheeks and heaving breaths. Her lazy eyelids lifted, her blue eyes dark as the night sky. ‘Ride me,’ he rasped. ‘Otherwise I will spill in seconds and shame you, and I don’t want to hurt you.’ She had taken his fingers eagerly, but his cock was somewhat larger, and he wanted her to ease into it before he lost control and rutted in her with no restraint.

Her brow creased as if she was disappointed, but then she smiled slowly, rising up to find his wet lips and lick them clean like a sultry cat. Then she pushed his chest with both hands, sending him sprawling with his head knocking against the ebony footboard of the bed. He scowled at her, but she kissed his head in apology, her hair like a curtain around him, the scent of her cunt a sweet smothering perfume, her breasts in his face a comforting weight. Then she was gone, making him blink, then groan as he watched her straddle him, then turn to face his feet, her round buttocks spreading to reveal her slippery hole, and the tighter, neater hole he’d often plundered to make her cry in pain, and then pleasure.

He could not resist, pinching and slapping what was presented to make her yelp, roughening his voice to give instruction, though she held the reins, telling her to take him slow and deep, her long hair swaying, her bottom raising, her little hand wrapped around his cock, the scorching fit of her descending, as tight as ever was, the arch of her spine as she settled him in her. ‘Love, oh love,’ she whimpered. ‘So good, so big inside me, oh…’

An expiration of air, her body shuddering, and he took her hips, guiding her into a roll that exposed her and filled her with ease, the view of her taking him inside her core and the stroke of her walls utterly maddening. He felt that coil of wire tightening in his belly, ready to snap and turn him into a creature of violent instinct, to subdue and mark, tear and bite, relishing her sobs of submission as he twisted her limbs into a pleasing hold and hammered her into the bed, but he couldn’t, he wouldn’t, she held him in thrall.

He moans were languid, her hands flat on his thighs as she fucked him slowly, getting reacquainted with his solid fit inside her, the friction enough to tantalise but not enough to make him erupt, leaving his mind free to wander in a haze of pleasure, through past and future with her, always her. The lone wolf finding himself with a mate, lust and awe and respect turning to love when he began to know her, her bravery, her selflessness and ruthlessness, that she thought him worth risking all and giving all, until he was so besotted with her no spite, no hostility, no pridefulness, no painful truth could pull them asunder.

He needed to see her, needed to imprint the sight of her blissful, contented face in his mind to banish that dream forever, so he ordered her to turn around and ride him hard, knowing she would relish the control of her, not resent it. She lifted off him in a trickle of her juices and sheathed him deep again, planting her hands on either side of his head and submitting as he held her pinioned and hammered upwards, her cries muffled into his neck before she rose up and fought back, grabbing his hands and pinning him down, riding him like a warrior.

‘What am I?’ she growled at him, spearing him with her gaze, burrowing into his secret thoughts, which were quieted by the onrushing orgasm building in his stones. Gods, he needed to come, but he didn’t want this to end.

‘You are my queen,’ he gasped, a fragment from deep in his subconscious. ‘Now and always.’

That didn’t satisfy her, she leaned down and bit him, slowing her movements to an agonising twist.
'What else?'

He groaned, fishing for words when his mind was perfectly blank, and then the coil snapped, unleashing the wolf within him. She didn’t fight it when he rose up and flipped her on her back, pushing her thighs back and looming over her before thrusting home again, relishing the gasp and wince on her face as she adjusted to the new angle, to being helpless, but he didn’t deny her the words she sought, spitting them out as he churned within her tight clasp, so slick there was rich, slapping noises as he took her. ‘Wife, mother, lover, whore, mine.’

Then he dissolved into a thousand sparks, a thousand motes of air on a summer breeze, filling her with spurts of seed as she rippled around him, collapsing flat to lick the tears off her face and swallowing her cries and laughter, knowing what was real and what was a dream of old fears and insecurities, and knowing that he was allowed to have this, to be happy and content. To love, and all that came with it, as well as do his duty.

THE END.

And they lived happily ever after...

Chapter End Notes

Goodbye, I won't say I will never write again, but it won't be often. Special thanks to internet friends who supported me, and to those writers who gave me a shout out as a inspiration for their writing, which is the greatest accolade.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!