Ice, Fire and everything in between

by Prisioux

Summary

The most powerful Noble Houses of Westeros are also terribly unhappy and the Maesters might be partially to blame:

Marwyn the Mage is made Grand Maester in the year 271 A.C and is ready to enable the members of House Targaryen to bring back the world of Magic and Dragons, going against
his own Order;
Maester Flowers works to tame the wild wolfs of Winterfell to do his bidding;
Maester Tyrion cannot forget that he was born a Lannister of Casterly Rock.
OR: Less Blood; More Fire. Beware of Triggering subjects and unlikely pairings.
PS: If you are a Jonerys shipper, I do recommend to read it from the start (there is build up
and foreshadowing to it), BUT if you are only for their relationship, it starts on Chapter 24.
Jonerys sex, next- chapter 28. If you just want their sex scenes, might be a better idea to read
smaller and jonerys centric fics.

Notes

PLEASE: read the tags. This work will contain sex, multiple partners, all sorts of Kink. It is
not Porn, but will have very sexual characters who enjoy what they are doing.

In This” What If ”scenario, the timeline for birth to some characters is changed (Daenerys is
3 years older than Jon for example) and paternity will also differ from cannon in some cases.

In my experience, I know there are some pairings (Jonsa and Jonerys !) with shippers who
have VERY strong feelings about what they like and what they do not like. In order to avoid
any UNMET EXPECTATIONS complaints, I am upfront saying that in this work, until
people find their one true love, they will have lots of sex with the wrong people.

The First Chapter is only to explain where the characters come from; there will be a time
jump of ten years, and from there, the story will REALLY start.

Other than that, I hope you enjoy my crazy imagination. It is all for fun, no offense intended.

For Jonerys shippers: stop with the nonsense. GRRM will only get them together in the last
chapters of winds of a winter IF WE ARE LUCKY. I just get as much canon as possible. So
Jonerys is endgame, but only appears in full force by part 3. and they do not jump to bed
right away. if you want only jonerys smut without character development or if you enjoy
jonerys centric fics, might not be for you.
Generation Lost

House Martell and House Targaryen

Princess Elia knew her husband well.

Rhaegar was dutiful, quiet. Beautiful. She fell in love with him at first sight and felt foolish for it. *I am not that different from all the young maidens in the Realm, after all.* Her mother, Princess Dorea of Dorne, had received an emissary from King Aerys, who was still journeying the Free Cities. No brides of Valyrian Ancestry were found for Rhaegar. The daughters of the Great Houses were all of the wrong age. Aerys had reached an agreement with House Lannister for the future, but the present was what worried him.

Aerys needed a suitable bride for Rhaegar and the only option he deemed acceptable was Princess Elia.

If Elia felt offended at winning Rhaegar by default, she did not show it.

*The offer is a good one and it will bring glory to House Nymeros Martell.*

Oberyn surprised everybody by declaring Rhaegar Targaryen to be a perfect match to his dear sister.

Elia smiled; it had become almost a joke, the search for a suitable husband for Elia. The Hightower heir, Baelor, was close to perfect, until he farted. Oberyn would not stop reminding Elia of the fact, making light of the situation.

Elia took the opportunity to remind Oberyn he was also in need of a wife: “Mayhaps now you will find yourself a bride too, brother. Mother would be happy.”

“Mother *is* happy. A half Martell will sit on the Iron Throne and Dorne will benefit from your good luck, Elia.”

Ravens were sent, guests from all over Westeros arrived, and Elia Martell wed Rhaegar Targaryen at the Great Sept of Baelor.

King Aerys did not bother to shorten his trip with his cousin Steffon and his son, Robert. He was enjoying his fame in Essos and his freedom far from the eyes of his sister wife. Rhaella was heavily pregnant and complained bitterly that her husband would miss the birth of “their princess”. Rhaegar gently explained Elia that their parents had finally found a degree of happiness in the last years, and that they had been hoping for a girl since he had been born, 18 years earlier.

But Aerys, after living a life in the golden cage of King's Landing, seemed to have forgotten about his duties and family; in his newfound enthusiasm for travelling, the letters he promised to send home were scarce and far in between. For what Rhaella said, they felt impersonal, cold and Aerys was always changing his mind about the date of their return.

Rhaella Targaryen became friends with Elia, sometimes even sharing her troubles with her good daughter: “I do not understand it, Elia. Aerys did not want me and I did not want him. He resented me for years and blamed me on our bad luck. When I started fearing for his sanity, things changed. The High Septon instructed Aerys to dismiss Grand Maester Pycelle and The Citadel sent us Marwyn. Aerys health improved and my body became stronger. But it was not only that. Aerys changed with me. For better. He would take me for walks, notice the way I combed my hair... small things. He was considerate of me. The High Septon renewed our vows and I fell pregnant. Aerys
stopped visiting other women’s beds. For a time, after Viserys was born, everything was perfect. I thought he would return from his travels after it was evident there was no bride for Rhaegar and I was with child, but it is like we do not even exist now that we are far from his sight. I pray Rhaegar’s affections are not as volatile as Aerys. “

In truth, Elia wondered about Rhaegar’s true feelings. Their couplings were pleasant and she always looked forward to his visits. He was kind to her and, with time, Elia could see that she was amongst his circle of trust, something she was extremely proud of. She had feared that Rhaegar, being a dragon, would be an aggressive, irascible husband. She realized the contrary to be truth.

If there was fire in Rhaegar, Elia never knew.

He held back with her; there was a part of Rhaegar’s personality that he kept to himself, completely out of reach for Elia. Even after the birth of their first daughter, Rhaenys, when she saw her husband shining with pride and glee as he held the small bundle in his arms... even there, Rhaegar remained inescrutable.

As the years passed, Elia started to piece together the missing parts of the enigma that Rhaegar was.

Upon being informed that the ship carrying King Aerys, Lord Steffon and Robert Baratheon sunk at Shipwreckers Bay, Rhaegar’s first reaction was to comment, with tears in his eyes, how his newborn sister, Daenerys, would grow up without a father.

The birth had been a difficult one and Queen Rhaella almost died. Daenerys was born during a storm so strong that part of the Targaryen Fleet stationed at Dragonstone was danificated. Rhaegar travelled to the Island with his brother Viserys to visit his convalescent mother, leaving Elia to rule in his stead.

At that time, Elia was thankful for the trust Rhaegar had put in her and she was already pregnant of Rhaenys. Looking back now at the event, Elia realized it was the first time Rhaegar made a true distinction between the family he had with her and the one he felt he truly belonged to.

This is not to say that Rhaegar did not love Rhaenys and Aegon, because he did. However, the bond he had with Viserys and ,even more strongly, with Daenersys became more apparent to Elia through the years.

Elia could not help but feel bitter about it.

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Rhaenys was born exactly six moon turns after Daenersys in the year 279 A.C and Elia suffered as much as her godmother did, almost dying in the birthing bed. Both princesses shared the same wet nurse while their mothers recovered, which Rhaella did in no time. Elia, however, had lost too much blood and could barely leave her room without assistance for sennights after the ordeal.

Grand Maester Marwyn was the most honest man Elia had ever met. She had always preferred the hard truth to the good lie, but this time around Elia wished that the Maester had spared her. Marwyn explained to the Royal family that the Queen was “in no way able to perform her duties as a wife without risking her life.”

Elia had always wanted children and she was devastated. Oberyn was there when Marwyn gave his opinion, but not even her brother could hide the gravity of the Maesters words with jokes and comforting words.
She felt like a failure, a Queen that could not even be a wife to her King. Rhaegar said very little to her and Elia feared she would be set aside. There was no precedent, of course, but the High Septon being so close to the Royal Family was a fact Elia could not ignore.

She decided to follow Oberyn’s advice and take some initiative, meeting with the High Septon and sharing her worries, humbly asking for “his guidance and comfort.”

The High Septon saw women as vessels. Bringing life was their natural call and Elia should be brave, not hide behind the opinion of men without faith. Her marriage had been blessed by the Seven, the High Septon was sure, and Elia should insist her husband to do his Duty, and pray to the Mother, asking for strength. The High Septon added that he would not annul a consummated marriage and furthermore, he would “fast and pray during seven days and ask the Seven to bless Her Grace with a living boy and allow her to survive to see him grow.”

When Elia told Oberyn about the meeting, his brother laughed: “The High Septon is smarter than we give him credit for, sweet sister. You either die trying to give Rhaegar an heir, and most importantly to him, no dangerous precedent for annulment is set during his tenure as the Leader of the Faith or you survive and has to be forever thankful for his Holy Grace interference on your behalf.”

Elia insisted that the advice the High Septon gave her was sound and not out of malice; Oberyn called her naive: “You should not listen to him; you are more than a broodmare, Elia. Do not kill yourself. Rhaegar has Viserys. He could marry Rhaenys and we would still have House Martell’s blood flowing through the veins of the future generations of rulers of the Seven Kingdoms.”

“I already made up my mind, Oberyn.” Elia said, defiantly. “As soon as I am strong again, I will give Rhaegar a son and I will survive.”

Prince Aegon Targaryen was born in 281 A.C

A Tourney at Harrenhal was organized to celebrate the event and it was there that Elia’s carefully built world started to fall apart.

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Lady Ashara Dayne was quickly married to Lord Rickard Stark’s second son after the Tourney at Harrenhal; Eddard Stark had supposedly “dishonoured” Lady Ashara and was forced to marry her to hide his shame. It would have been the scandal of the season, if not for King Rhaegar Targaryen, who crowned Lady Lyanna Stark as his Queen of Love and Beauty.

It was Ashara who alerted Elia of Rhaegar’s plan of abducting Lyanna Stark and having her as a second wife. Ned Stark had been granted an abandoned Keep at Stony Shore, where Ironborn raids were frequent in the times before the Conquest, and insisted Ashara to stay at King’s Landing with her brother until he had everything organized up North.

Elia did not know how Ashara learned about the plan; if had been Ser Arthur the one to tell his sister or even Lord Eddard Stark, trying to save his sister’s honour.

Elia knew the new High Septon was cut from a different cloth than his predecessor; a generous donation and a show of piety would surely grant the new King his wish of having the long forgotten Valyrian tradition of polygamous marriage restored.
Elia would not allow it.

She went to her husband’s chambers and found him ready to leave: “Rhaegar, you are making a mistake.”

Rhaegar did not try to deny it:” Lyanna loves me, Elia. She is part of the prophecy. I am sorry. She awaits me. Soon, we will return to King’s Landing and establish a new routine. Aegon and Rhaenys will come before any child of Lyanna in the line of succession, as it should be. You have my word.”

*He cannot expect House Stark to accept this madness...what a fool Rhaegar is!*  

It was not love for her husband that compelled Elia to throw herself at his feet and beg for Rhaegar not to leave, but the politician in her. It was not even about the line of succession; it was about the existence of the Iron Throne and the unity of the Seven Kingdoms.

The dramatic gesture made Rhaegar stop, as Elia predicted: “No! Do not go, Rhaegar. Instead of saving the Realm, you will cause a war. She is betrothed to Lord Dustin’s heir. Her father is your Warden of the North. He will turn against you, Rhaegar and you need House Stark on your side when time comes. You do have Aegon and Rhaenys; together, you are the three heads of the Dragon.”

Oberyn told Elia that “performers live for the applause; they crave it even more than gold.” There was no greater performer in the whole Seven Kingdoms than Rhaegar Targaryen. Elia was struck by the dichotomy; he was so reserved and quiet in everyday life and yet, so comfortable in being the center of attentions when he had his harp on his lap.

Rhaegar had been a single child for the first thirteen years of his life, the beloved Crown Prince of the Seven Kingdoms, the dream of every girl in the land and beyond.

It was this side of him that Elia was appealing to. She knew it would be enough to make Rhaegar at least consider what she was saying.

“What, Rhaegar, do not go. Not now. Not this way. We will think of something. There must be a way of convincing House Stark to give you Lyanna.” Elia felt his indigo eyes on her. *He is almost convinced. I must make him doubt of her, without him even noticing.* “If you really love her and if she really loves you, Rhaegar, if she really has a role to play in the prophecy, then a day or a sennight more will make no difference. If it is meant to be, she will wait until you find a better way to have her.”

While Rhaegar spent the next days with his nose stuck in old parchments and books on prophecies, conferring with both Marwyn and his Great Uncle Maester Aemon at The Wall, a raven came from the North announcing that Lady Lyanna had married Lord Willam Dustin at Barrowton, a mere fortnight after Lady Catelyn Tully wed Lord Brandon Stark at Riverrun.

Elia breathed in relief.  

She had successfully averted a disaster.

She knew nothing.

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*House Lannister*
Grand Maester Pycelle was a fool. But he was a fool that had a purpose and now Lord Lannister would have to make do without him.

Pycelle was a Hill of Lannisport and never forgot his origins. He knew his place. Tywin Lannister was his Superior and Pycelle was happy to serve him.

Everybody agreed Lord Lannister was born to rule the Seven Kingdoms, but, if the Hand of the King had a problem, this problem was the King himself.

Aerys Targaryen had always been vain and quick to anger, but in his youth he was also charming, engaging and ambitious. Through the years Lord Lannister witnessed his friend falling into the pits of madness. The stillbirths, miscarriages and unhappiness in his union to Queen Rhaella took its toll, but also a resentment and envy towards Tywin himself, who had married the woman Aerys desired and was father to perfect golden twins, while House Targaryen was down to a single heir.

The fits of anger were almost an everyday occurrence and had already affected their friendship. They barely spoke without an argument erupting. Tywin was forced to conclude that the bad blood between them was starting to affect the Realm.

Something had to be done.

The High Septon was a good influence on the King, one of the only people capable of making Aerys see reason. Tywin was not a religious man, but if the Seven would help Aerys Targaryen control his worst impulses, then so be it.

When Pycelle made the mistake of being found abed with two very young girls, this after being accused of taking liberties by a minor noble woman that sought him for medical assistance, the High Septon urged the King to make an example out of Pycelle.

The execution of the disgraced Grand Maester was carried by another fellow westerlander, Ser Ilyn Payne, now Justice of the King, one of the few appointments Lord Tywin had made that were approved by Aerys.

Lady Joanna knew the madness of Aerys firsthand; she wrote Tywin, advising her husband to seek a truly neutral Maester from the Citadel, one both specialized in dealing with maladies of the body and soul, and with great knowledge of the Arcane, a subject that fascinated the convoluted mind of the King.

Tywin did precisely that and, in 271 A.C, Marwyn was sent from Oldtown and made Grand Maester.

Tywin was appalled at the sight of the man, who looked more like a sailor than an scholar. Nevertheless, in a question of days, Marwyn proved to be perfect for the job. Political power meant very little to the new Grandmaster, who focused in repairing the Royal couple’s health, only giving his advice when asked and had the grace of not aligning himself to any group or House as far as Tywin Lannister could see.

Marwyn had travelled as far as Ashai, was honest to the point of bluntness and crude. Exactly the kind of man Aerys liked to have by his side.

The grandmaster reputation was a strange one. He had forged a Valyrian Steel link to his chain and was rumoured to take part in queer rituals at the little sailor’s temple at Oldtown. Instead of bringing whores to the Red Keep, Marwyn had the tact of discreetly visiting them at the street of silk.
One day, Lord Lannister called the Grand Maester for a private conversation: “The Queen is pregnant and she looks healthy and happy for once. His Grace has also improved, both in mood and in general disposition. I asked you here to personally congratulate you on your efforts and to inquiry how you succeeded where many had failed.”

“The truth always, My Lord. Queen Rhaella is frail and her body cannot be treated the same way His Grace would treat his bed warmers. The High Septon might have spoken in terms of sins and blessings, but I explained to His Grace that, by keeping to other beds, he was constantly bringing small maladies, imperceptible to strong and virile men as him, but dangerous to an already weakly woman like Queen Rhaella.”

Marwyn took a sip of Arbor Gold and continued with his explanation: “I advised them both to spend more time together, engage in more regular and less aggressive sexual intercourse and space out the time between pregnancies. Rhaella is romantic; I advised His Grace to at least pretend to be her knight. She will not be the first, or the last woman to fall prey to such lies. As for his health: King Aerys needed more physical and mental stimulation than he was having locked in the Red Keep, to keep his mind away from his obsessions. My concoctions and potions only help so far. The body and the mind have to be made stronger, so the process of self healing has better chances of success.”

The next days showed to Lord Tywin that, although the friendship with Aerys would never be the same, a middle ground could be reached. The key to this balance was Marwyn. Tywin disliked the feeling of needing somebody’s constant assistance, but he had to admit that Marwyn dealing with His Grace made his life and work much easier. Aerys would not come as often to the Small council meetings and, in the sessions he did attend, he started to do more than simply disagreeing with any of Tywin's suggestions just to spite him. Aerys did even give a couple of workable ideas, which were promptly incorporated by Tywin, eager to show Aerys he was not his enemy.

With the situation at King's Landing under control, troublesome news arrived from Casterly Rock. Tywin felt sure about his position as Hand and, most importantly, Aerys was on his best behavior in ages, so he decided to travel to Casterly Rock.

The problem was their twins; Joanna told Tywin that she had caught them in “physical intimacy” and, in her opinion the act far exceeded the common curiosity of children their age.

At first, Tywin did not want to believe it; he thought Joanna was exaggerating: “What I saw that day was alarming yes, but far worse is that the servants are starting to whisper and even more worrisome is how the twins behave and interact socially. Jaime only does what Cersei allows him to do. They live alone in their own little world. Cersei wants to be a Knight; I would have indulged her if she behaved properly, but I forbade her from attending practice at arms because it is the only thing that Jaime has that is his own. It has affected both in a very negative way, Tywin. Cersei has no friends and Jaime can barely read and write.”

As Lord Lannister still did not believe his wife, she asked him to observe the twins the next days without interfering.

It took Tywin just one afternoon to realize the gravity of it all.

Lady Joanna felt that his husband was putting all the blame in Cersei, which was unfair. She did not voice her worries, but Tywin was the man who had his father’s mistress walk naked through Lannisport.

“Our daughter is intelligent and has a strong character. She only needs to be taught the value of duty and that kindness is not the same as weakness. Jaime needs to learn that he cannot rely on his sister to
think and to act. He has a tendency of wanting others to do his work for him and Cersei just happens to be more than happy to oblige. We need to show Jaime that he is as strong as Cersei.”

Lord Tywin agreed, but since he was not a man of half measures, he had already concluded that Cersei should not be allowed to stay near Jaime in the future. Instead of agreeing with Joanna that sending their seven year old boy to be fostered by House Marbrand was good enough, Tywin decided to also send Cersei to be a cupbearer somewhere, feeling that the hundreds of cousins, uncles and aunts that lived at the Rock would treat Cersei with more indulgence and reverence than she truly deserved.

Tywin Lannister chose to send his only daughter to stay a couple of years at Riverrun, strengthening the bonds between House Lannister and Tully. There, Cersei would have two girls close her age to play with and not be surrounded by family all the time. Tywin still had hopes that Aerys would agree to have Cersei marry Rhaegar and become Queen; and if she was to become Queen, it would do House Lannister good if Cersei was to take House Tully’s words- Family. Duty. Honour- to heart.

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Viserys Targaryen was born in 272 A.C and Lady Joanna travelled to King’s Landing with Jaime to meet the new addition to the Royal Family.

The visit had to be quick, since Aerys Targaryen still lusted after Lady Joanna and both Lord Tywin and Queen Rhaella wanted to avoid any unpleasant situation.

Joanna insisted Jaime go to Riverrun to visit Cersei with her; they would be chaperoned the whole time, she said and added that she missed her daughter and wanted to see for herself how Cersei was faring as a guest of House Tully.

Their stay, Tywin insisted, should not be stretched; Casterly Rock needed its Lady. Lady Joanna wrote from Riverrun to inform she was again with child; and that Cersei had, in her words “given Lord Tully a lot of trouble in the beginning, but her temper and willful nature had been somewhat subdued. Jaime, however, reverted to his more passive role in her presence, but nothing too grave happened. Lady Catelyn is good company for our Cersei and Lady Lysa, despite being shy, is well behaved and proper. The only oddity is Lord Tully’s ward, a lordling called Petry Baelish, who follows Cersei around like a dog. I would have taken issue with him, for he is far too lowborn, but they are children and, much like her aunt Genna, it seems that Cersei enjoys torturing her would be suitors.”

In 273, Tyrion Lannister was born and Lady Joanna died. His son was a dwarf and there was nothing Lord Tywin could do about it, except focus his energies into providing Jaime and Cersei with bright futures and pray that Tyrion would either join the Citadel or even better, the Faith and his existence be forgotten.

Although Joanna wanted Cersei to become a Princess of Dorne, Tywin Lannister was still interested in the Crown Prince.

When Lord Tywin finally made his move, Aerys Targaryen offered no reply.

Instead, His Grace sent Grand Maester Marwyn to explain his position: “Cersei is simply of the wrong age; Rhaegar needs a bride ready to give him sons and daughters in the next year. His Grace insists on a young woman with at least one Valyrian forefather and already asked his cousin to join him in travelling through the Free Cities. If the search bears no fruit, His Grace will turn to House
Martell, the only of the Great Houses who can claim a blood link to House Targaryen. Houses Velaryon and Celtigar also have no daughters to spare. “

Marwyn continued: “However, His Grace would agree in binding both families in the future. Her Grace is again with child; if it is a girl and Lord Jaime Lannister agrees on waiting fourteen years, King Aeris would agree to the match. The wait being too long, there is also Prince Viserys to be considered. Or we simply accept that we must wait even longer, for Rhaegar and Jaime to produce offspring of their own, the only possibility for House Lannister to have a half lion sitting on the Iron Throne one day.”

Not being a gambler by nature, but seeing he had no choice, Lord Tywin decided to trust his luck. Cersei was unfit to be Queen, he knew deep down. Tywin wanted a child of Lannister blood to sit on the Iron Throne, no matter how long it would take. His relations with Aeris were cordial and Rhaegar looked up to him; Tywin was healthy and capable and decided he would stay in King’s Landing for as long as it took to sign a betrothal agreement.

In 278, Rhaegar married Elia Martell of Dorne and the Princess Daenerys was born; Rhaenys Targaryen came to the world in the following year. When Elia gave birth to the Crown Prince Aegon in 281 A.C, Tywin saw it was time to act. He had already sent Cersei to the Eyrie and had initiated negotiations on Jaime’s behalf in the Westerlands.

Ser Jaime Lannister married Lady Mellara Hetherspoon at Casterly Rock in 282 A.C; later the same year, Lady Cersei Lannister wed Ser Elbert Arryn in the Eyrie. Lord Tywin Lannister was in attendance at both events.

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House Stark

Brandon Stark was not happy with his Lord’s father choice of bride: “House Stark married southerners before, but they were Royces and Blackwoods, First Men families tied to the Old Gods. Father, our bannermen will not accept her.”

Lord Rickard had befriended southerner Lords during the war and Maester Flowers had convinced him that turning south would make The North richer and stronger: “When Winter comes, we need grains, boy. The Riverlands are fertile and Lady Catelyn’s dowry will feed our smallfolk in the years to come. The Lords will appreciate not having their people dying from starvation. Lyanna will marry into a northern house and nobody will dare complain.”

The discovery of sex was outside Winterfell walls, age 13, at the brothel. When he was sent to the Rills, Brandon continued to enjoy the company of wenches, serving girls, prostitutes, until he met Lady Barbrey Ryswell. They shared the love for horses and the warmth of their bodies. Brandon had hoped that her name and station would impress his father and had promised to breach the subject with Lord Stark, as he was expected in Winterfell for a visit.

Brandon could not endanger his position as heir, nor shame his father, but he could try to bend Lord Rickard’s will and buy some time: “I was not expecting this news, father. Lady Catelyn is far too young. All I ask is that we make no official announcement until she turns four and ten.”

Upon his return to the Rills, Brandon convinced Willam Dustin to visit the Ryswell lands, an easy enough feat, since his friend was infatuated with Barbrey. Brandon knew of this and, partially out of self interest, and partially because he new Willam was a good man, Brandon convinced his father to
reach for House Dustin regarding Lyanna’s hand.

Willam’s father must had told him about Lord Rickard’s proposal, because Willam made himself scarce during their stay. Brandon went for Barbrey and told her about Lady Catelyn. His plan was simple: he had bought them enough time to get her with child: “Father agreed not to make any announcement for almost a year, Barbrey. He values honour above all. If you are with child and the betrothal with Lady Catelyn is not public knowledge, father would have no choice but to agree to our union.”

When Barbrey mentioned that Lord Rickard could still force the marriage even if Brandon got her pregnant, he brushed it off: “Then you would take moontea, My Lady and we would pretend you lost your maidenhead to the saddle.”

Lady Barbrey agreed; the next six moon turns were spent in constantly heat, their encounters growing in passion and intensity. But Brandon’s seed did not take root. She despaired and went to her father, who was aware of Lord Brandon’s intentions. The Maester was asked to prescribe tonics for Barbrey to conceive. He insisted upon a physical examination and it was then that any hope of becoming Lady Stark ended for Barbrey.

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Brandon Stark found Catelyn Tully to be beautiful and proper, but boring. He wondered if her hair would be any indication of her temper and wished for nothing more than a good lay. He played along her silly ideas of knights and songs because, otherwise, there would be nothing in common between the two of them.

Catelyn tried to please him and was very impressed by his appearance, he knew it. Brandon could not fault her for not being what he really wanted her to be and had already made peace with the fact that he needed to marry “for her womb and the grains of the Riverlands.”

Brandon attended the Tourney in honour of Crown Prince Aegon at Harrenhal and there he took the courtship of Lady Catelyn a step further and even agreed to join the lists. It was all great fun, playing the southern game of chivalry and watching Catelyn blush and be proud at each round he won, but Brandon knew it was just a game for him, and not really who he was.

The Tourney was bittersweet in many ways. They all knew it would be probably the last time the Stark siblings would be together as children.

Ned was almost eight and ten, more Arryn than Stark in his demeanor, so quiet and reserved that Brandon for a moment thought Catelyn would be better suited to his brother than to him.

Benjen was three and ten and spent most of his time running after Lyanna, one year older. A recruiter from the Night's Watch was in attendance and Benjen seemed to have taken the words the man spoke seriously, which made his younger brother look even more naive in Brandon's eyes.

House Tully was being honoured by the King, who had appointed Ser Brynden to the Kingsguard. Lady Catelyn looked magnificent and, for a moment, Brandon thought he could grow to love her in time, had she been less ladylike and more carefree.

If only she was more wolf and less fish...

When King Rhaegar crowned his sister Lyanna “Queen of Love and Beauty”, Brandon had to be restrained.
The only thing that could have taken Brandon´s head out of the slight would have been sex. It was then that he noticed the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Her name was Ashara Dayne, one of the Queen´s ladies in waiting.

But Catelyn Tully, his betrothed, would not leave his side and Ned, Brandon could see, had fallen in love with the beauty at first sight.

“Come on, Ned. You should ask her for a dance. Tell her about the North, our strength and honour. Impress her with your...seriousness!”

“Surely, you do not expect Lady Ashara Dayne to feel flattered by my advances, brother. I am but a second son, without lands or income of my own.”

Honestly, Brandon had no idea how Ashara would react, but it annoyed him that Ned thought so little of himself. “You are a Stark of Winterfell, you are good enough for a Dayne. Lands, gold, this all can be arranged. I will speak to her on your behalf. This way, if she turns you down, you can blame your fool of a brother and his sloppy attempts at playing matchmaker.”

Ned danced with Lady Ashara and after their dance, they disappeared in the night.

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Lyanna convinced Ned not to return to the Eyrie and stay in the Riverlands because she knew her older brother was unhappy in The Vale and that his heart already belonged to a dornish Lady.

“You could speak to Father about Lady Ashara, Ned. Riverrun must have a raven that flies to Starfall after all. Be bold, at least this time. You have nothing to lose, and all to gain.”

Ned gave Lyanna a rare smile: “Aye, you are right, Lyanna. Since Robert died and Lady Cersei arrived, things are really not the same at the Eyrie. The truth is, if Ashara would have me, I would wed her in the morrow.”

Lyanna rolled her eyes; the noises that came from Ashara´s tent could only mean that the Lady, for some strange reason, thought Ned irresistible.

Possibly because the fruit of his indiscretion was already growing in Lady Ashara´s belly, Ned decided to meet Lord Rickard at Moat Cailin. Days after Brandon and Catelyn were wed, Eddard quickly and quietly married his Lady Ashara at the Godswood of Riverrun.

Lyanna was happy that she helped Ned overcome his insecurities and marry the woman he loved, but she was miserable.

In the confusion that followed the Tourney of Harrenhal and the preparations for Brandon´s nuptials, Lyanna had been foolish to think that, she too, had found love.

Willam Dustin was a good, solid young man, but the King had made her heart almost stop when he played his harp. Lyanna did not want it, but there, at Harrenhal, she fell for Rhaegar Targaryen.

When Rhaegar found her to be the Knight of the Laughing Tree as she was dropping her armour and trying to make her escape, Lyanna was sure that her feelings were reciprocated. He asked her to stay and speak to him. They kissed. Letters were exchanged. A meeting place was agreed and Rhaegar would be sending men of his trust to escort Lyanna back to Harrenhal, where they would wed.
But the day came and went and Lyanna only received a small note; an apology really, asking for more time.

The tone was distant, very different from the love letters of before.

Lyanna started to doubt Rhaegar’s intentions and, in her doubts, she found that Willam Dustin, being of solid, northern stock, was well suited for her, better than the Dragon King, prone to melancholy and sadness, would ever be.

Before she could second guess herself, Lyanna went to Lord Stark: “Father, I wish to speak to you, in private.”

Rickard Stark offered Lyanna his arm and they went for a stroll. They sat on a bench, at the Godswood of Riverrun and Lord Stark was all ears :“Very well, you have my undivided attention, Lyanna. “

“You might have heard of King Rhaegar, how he crowned me Queen of Love and Beauty. It caused a stir and people are doubting of my honour now. But it meant nothing. His Grace had just discovered that I was the mystery knight and wanted to thank me for my participation without revealing I had broke the rules of the Tourney. Brandon took offense, but Willam said nothing. “

“Lord Willam is a fine man; your brother has a lot to learn. What do you have in mind, Lyanna, to stop the rumours?”

Lyanna put up a brave face, trying to hide the heartbreak: “ My betrothal was announced last year. I am four and ten, old enough to be wedded and bedded. I wish to return to the North with my intended and stay at Barrowton.”
Illusions and Realities

Chapter Summary

In the North, Catelyn and Brandon try to adapt to their marriage in very different ways. Maester Flowers becomes Brandon’s most trusted advisor.

In the South, Lord Lannister feels like he has his family finally under control.

Daenerys’s life changes forever during the week of celebrations of her brother Viserys wedding to Princess Arianne.

House Stark

Ned Stark had been very happy in The Vale until his foster brother, Robert Baratheon, perished in the sea.

For Eddard, when Robert died, the joy left The Eyrie.

The arrival of Lady Cersei Lannister soon after the tragedy did not make things any better- quite the opposite really. Since the difficult woman was soon to wed Ser Elbert Arryn, Eddard started to feel less and less comfortable and longed for Winterfell.

The visits home became even more frequent. Ned had never really lost touch with his siblings, but without Robert, Ned started to turn to them for friendship and comfort.

Ned still missed his best friend and Brandon knew it. The eldest Stark brother made sure to spend more time with Ned and was intent in making the Tourney at Harrenhal a merry affair for them...

They were brothers and they shared the typical features of Stark appearance- brown hair and grey eyes- the similarities stopped there.: While Ned was reserved and quiet, Brandon was bold and loud. "It is the wolf’s blood." their father used to say "Brandon has too much of it running through his veins."

Despite such differences, something of Brandon boldness must have inspired Ned the night he danced with Ashara.

The Dornish wine served during the party made Lady Ashara cheeks turn red; Ned thought fresh air would make her feel better and offered his arm. Before long, they were alone. He kissed her and discovered he could not stop.

Ned had been feeling rather alone, despite his brothers and sister being close, and there, in Ashara’s arms, he finally found solace.

Eddard had assumed Ashara to be experienced in bed, but he found that she was just curious about physical intimacy and as overwhelmed by her feelings as he was.

They lost their virginity to each other. Ned wished to wed Ashara as soon as possible, but worried
about his father’s reaction. Laying with Ashara without the benefit of the wedlock had been the only time in his whole life that Ned had done something he considered to be dishonourable. He loved Ashara, but felt shame for having bedded her.

Ned simply did not know what to do; he had always done things the right way and was totally at loss now at his first misstep.

Lady Ashara had to leave for King’s Landing. He understood she had responsibilities and tried to hide the pain. They promised to exchange letters. Eddard kissed her many times and told her he would make things right, but Ashara insisted on drinking moon tea: “I do not want your Lord Father to think I tricked you into marrying me, Ned.”

The decision to stay in the Riverlands with his siblings was the one that really changed Ned’s life, because it prompted him to heed to Lyanna’s advice. When Ned arrived at Riverrun, there was already a raven from King's Landing: the infusion had not worked and Ashara was expecting.

Their wedding was a quick and informal affair, which contrasted with Brandon and Catelyn’s nuptials.

Ned felt his wife deserved better, but could not complain.

Ashara cried when he told her they would be separated for some time and convinced her to return to King's Landing and wait for him:

“Father has been kind enough to grant us the Stoney Shore. The Keep has been abandoned for centuries, since House Fisher was extinguished. House Stark has been appointing Castellans every since, the incomes of the villages nearby reverting to Winterfell, which was only possible since the Ironmen stopped raiding those lands after Aegon's Conquest. As it stands now, Stoney Shore cannot receive a Lady of your standing, my love. Father wrote the Citadel to send us a Maester and your dowry will pay for the repairs, but it needs time and I want you to be comfortable and protected.”

Ned worked night and day for the next six moon turns and, thankfully, Jon Stark was born in the Keep he was destined to inherit, in the last day of the year 281 A.C.

Robb came next, in 282 A.C and four years later, Elia.

Robb was a mixture of both parents with brown hair and violet eyes, and Elia, a miniature of Ashara, which pleased Eddard immensely; Jon, on the other hand, was a Stark: long and solemn face, grey eyes and dark brown hair.

The only source of friction between the couple was the constant visits to Winterfell. Eddard would not want to admit it, but he too felt uncomfortable and unwelcomed by Lady Catelyn Stark.

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Lyanna realized she had made the right choice by not waiting for King Rhaegar to rescue her when her Lord Husband took her to the Ryswell lands and gifted her with a fine red steed.

It was not the horse that had convinced Lyanna that Willam was the right man for her, but rather his acceptance of her ways: “He is magnificent, my Lord, but I must tell you that I do not know how to ride side saddle.”

”Nor do I expect you, Lyanna. I shall not tame you, my she-wolf. I am your husband and I wish us
to be happy “

Their marriage remained un consummated. Willam said they could wait. He wanted them to know each other and Lyanna agreed. There was no bedding ceremony and Lord Stark supported their decision: “There will be plenty of time. One should not rush such things.”

They spent hours together and Willam even took Lyanna hunting a couple of times. He also wanted to see the world, but was still his father's heir, aware of his responsibilities: “As long as father lives, we can enjoy our freedom, Ly. I hope he has a long life, not only because he is my father, but also because I like nothing more than to make merry with you.”

Lyanna and Willam fell for each other.

Their first time happened not on the marital bed, but outdoors, under the setting Sun.

When they visited Winterfell together for the first time as a married couple, Lord Stark came to his daughter and took her aside: “I had Maester Flowers correspond with Barrow Hall about the irregularity and discomfort of your cycles. Both Maesters agreed you should wait a couple of years until you are to conceive.”

Lyanna was incensed: “With all due respect, this is for the couple to decide and not the Maesters.”

Lord Rickard said nothing; Lyanna complained to Brandon about this interference, but found that her brother, once resentful of the influence Maester Flowers had at Winterfell, was now an ardent admirer: “He saved my son’s life and his advices have been beneficial to House Stark. You should listen.”

Everybody knew Maester Flowers was the force behind Brandon’s marriage and Lyanna could see her brother was not happy: “Do you mean to tell me you are content with your bride, dear brother?”

“No, I am not, but Maester Flowers serves Winterfell and not Lord Brandon Stark, sister. My misery will save many of our smallfolk from starvation.”

It was too little, too late; Lyanna was already pregnant.

Arya Dustin was born in 283 A.C but her mother, Lady Lyanna Dustin died a sennight after, of fever.

It was said that Lord Rickard Stark was never the same again; he died later that same year.

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Catelyn fell pregnant at Riverrun. She knew it must have happened on her wedding night, because Brandon did not touch her for a fortnight after.

Young Brandon Stark was born in 282 A.C, small and frail, before his time.

Maester Flowers guided Catelyn in caring for a sickly babe. She nursed Brandon herself and was instructed to share her body warmth with him, sleeping in the same bed for three moon turns.

When Maester Flowers finally deemed the babe’s size and weight to be normal and had confirmed Catelyn was fit to resume her wifely duties, she was hurt by Brandon’s obvious indifference.

When Brandon took his leave and went to visit Lord Ryswell to acquire a new horse, Catelyn found
out about Lady Barbrey.

It broke her heart.

As long as Brandon does not shame me in public and continue to do his Duty to me, I should be fine.

She tried to fool herself into believing that she could be a wife in name only, but the fact was that Catelyn had fallen for Brandon and craved for his affections.

Catelyn remembered Harrenhal fondly. Brandon was tall, fierce, handsome. He courted her as she deserved. She thought it would always be that way. Catelyn had been tempted into giving him her maidenhead as he so wanted, but she held back.

Perhaps that was a mistake; Brandon started to act colder after I turned him down that night.

She was a Lady, not a harlot. Catelyn told Brandon. Her job was to bring forth sons and daughters to House Stark and to manage Winterfell.

Catelyn thought that Brandon would love her again once she provided him enough sons and daughters to fill Winterfell walls and bring glory to House Stark.

Instead, Catelyn gave her husband only Brandon and Sansa. Despite Sansa being a big and fat baby, her delivery was an easy one. To Catelyn’s delight, her Lord Husband, so indifferent towards his first born, doted on the girl: “She might look like you, my Lady, but this one is as Stark as it gets! The she-wolf of Winterfell!”

Young Brandon was plagued with headaches and fatigue for the greatest part of his childhood. Maester Flowers searched for ways of improving the boy’s health, constantly communicating with the Citadel on the matter and eventually, Catelyn’s prayers were answered and her Brandon, age 6, was given medical leave and allowed to play with other children and his cousins, who visited very often.

Lord Rickard Stark, her greatest source of support, had died. Brandon’s middle brother, Eddard, was constantly being summoned to Winterfell. As soon as Ned arrived with his perfect family, Brandon would leave his brother to do all the work and would spend most of his time drinking and whoring, either at Wintertown or visiting his mistress.

The years of neglect starting to wear her off, Catelyn started to get angry.

She was angry at Brandon, for not looking at her the way Ned looked at Ashara, like there was no other woman in the world. Ned had even built Ashara a small Sept, while Brandon, despite being made a rich man by Catelyn’s father, would not spare a single coin of gold to provide her with a proper place of worship.

She was angry at Ashara, for being so comfortable in the North and so lucky in the birthing bed, whereas she, Catelyn had miscarried three times already since Sansa was born.

Catelyn was even angry at small Jon Stark, who looked more like her husband than her auburn haired, small sized Brandon. Jon was a nice lad, she knew, always ready to help his cousin with archery lessons, but even this kindness was bad, because it made young Brandon look even more helpless.

Catelyn was angry, but mostly, she was angry at herself.
She was raised to be better and there she was, being a failure.

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Benjen went to his brother’s solar to communicate his decision: “I wish to join the Night's Watch, brother. Now that Father died and you already have your heir, there is no need for me to remain at Winterfell.”

Brandon did not like doing paper work and delegated as much as he could to Maester Flowers and to Ned, when he was visiting. This day, however, Brandon was reading and writing letters, with a very serious look on his face: “Sit down, Benjen.”

He then handed his younger brother one parchment, and asked Benjen to read it.

Benjen read the letter twice, but did not understand its meaning: “His Grace seems intent in investing gold, time and effort to develop The North. Good news. But I came here to speak about my future.”

“This is precisely about you, Benjen.” Brandon handed Benjen even more parchments and continued to speak. “King Rhaegar has proposed to help The North, from The Wall to the The Neck. The plan is ambitious, but sound. It will improve the lives of the Black Brothers, the smallfolk and the Lords alike. Time finally came for you to work for the honour of House Stark, Benjen.”

Brandon revealed that, for the past six moon turns, ravens were being exchanged between King's Landing, Castle Black, Winterfell and the Citadel. His Grace felt that The North spent too long “surviving” and now he wanted to usher in a “new era of prosperity”. The lands that should sustain The Night's Watch were underdeveloped. Its inhabitants were fleeing south in search of better lands; this, in turn, robbed The Watch from revenues and caused The Wall to fall in disrepair. The terrible state of the Night's Watch was known to everyone in The Seven Kingdoms. Good men would not even consider enlisting. The Wall was now a place for rapists and bandits. Wildlings were constantly raiding Umber and Karstark lands, terrorizing the smallfolk and damaging property.

King Rhaegar wanted to remedy the situation once and for all within five years, by making the lands of the New Gift productive and protected. Kings Landing would send gold and men; The Citadel had already agreed to have Maesters learned in agriculture helping establishing farmlands and Winterfell would be appointing four new lordships in the New Gift. Those Lords would be sworn military to House Stark, but would pay \( \frac{3}{5} \) of their taxes to The Watch and work alongside the Black Brothers. Instead of the Watch, Houses larstark and Umber losing people and revenues, the new Lordships would be a new barrier to raiders and, luckily, would become a good option for migration.

“His Grace will visit in two years time to inspect the results of the lands. Although we think the plan is too ambitious to bear fruits in only 5 years, we must do everything in our power to at least come close to where the goal is. We will start with two Lordships, leaving the western and eastern shores for later. I already wrote House Umber asking them to appoint a lord to tend to the lands bordering Last Hearth, and I will appoint you for Queenscrown.” Brandon then gave Benjen a brotherly smile: "A Lord needs a Lady and I also happen to have one for you."

Benjen could not believe it: Brandon had been the one who took him to the brothel at Wintertown for the first time. After marrying Catelyn, Brandon had told Benjen that a man did not really need a wife to be happy, an advice he considered sound since Brandon was miserable with Catelyn.

Now, Brandon was telling Benjen that he too had to be married and miserable for House Stark to prosper.
“I am not going to lie to you, brother. Lord Cerwyn is old and already has an heir so he agreed in marrying my Barbrey. My life with Catelyn is...not what I wanted for me. Lady Jonelle is sweet, but plain looking and Lord Cerwyn has been offering her hand around for years now. Not everybody is as lucky as Ned, to have wife and mistress rolled up in one. Accept my offer, put a babe in the wench’s belly and find yourself a better bed to warm you at night. Or freeze your ass at The Wall, calling rapists and murderers your brothers.”

Lord Rickard Stark was born at Queenscrown in 284 A.C

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**House Lannister**

Lord Lannister could not help but to smile at his predicament- praying that Jaime's first born would be a daughter. King Rhaegar had confirmed it was his intention to have the heir to the Iron Throne, Aegon, marry a Lannister of Casterly Rock from Tywin’s line.

When the raven announcing the birth of Lady Joanna Lannister in 283 A.C arrived, Tywin Lannister felt his lips turning upwards, in a smile.

His Grace was amongst the first to toast the joyous event : "Congratulations, Lord Hand; it seems our families are destined to be united."

Jaime, the next Lord of Casterly Rock and Joanna, the next Queen of the Seven Kingdoms, would be Tywin Lannister’s legacy.

If his son and granddaughter were a sure source of pride, his only daughter and younger son were best left forgotten.

Tyrion, at least, was mostly kept out of sight. The only time the dwarf was allowed to visit his father at King's Landing was when the boy had misbehaved and needed some discipline. Jaime had dealt with the situation, but Tywin had already decided Tyrion had to be set aside in order to prevent him following into Gerion’s footsteps and becoming the shame of the House.

Lord Lannister had come to rely on Grand Maester Marwyn and, seeing how the ugly man in grey dealt so well with the Royal Family, he had since long re evaluated some of his assumptions about Maesters and their Order. When Tyrion arrived, showing a great interest in books and wine, Tywin Lannister actually asked for Marwyn to convince his son to finally do something with his life.

For years, Tywin Lannister had offered Tyrion’s hand around to no avail; when Lord Lannister found out that even the youngest daughters of his Landed Knights were apparently too good for his younger son, he gave up.

On one hand, Lannisters are not born to be servants; on the other, Tyrion was clearly not born to be a Lannister in the first place.

Pragamatism, in this stance, took precedence over deeply ingrained beliefs, and Lord Lannister decided that, since Tyrion could not be expected to actively work for their House’s glory, he could very well learn to serve it.

A moonturn after his first visit to King’s Landing and Tyrion Lannister became a novice at the Citadel, age 14.

Cersei, however, could not be sent to the Silent Sisters without people asking questions. Lord Lannister strongly felt that, had Lady Joanna lived, Cersei would have changed her ways; but Joanna
died, leaving him with a half-son and a good for nothing daughter, so Tywin thought it was best to turn his attentions to the future heir of Casterly Rock and cut his loses.

When he was informed that Cersei was not to be queen, Tywin lost his patience and decided to keep his daughter out of the Westerlands- and far from Jaime- for good. Although her character was flawed, Cersei was a beautiful girl and a Lannister; which meant that Tywin had a Duty, not only to his House, but also to his daughter. With this in mind- and recognizing there was no place for her at The Rock- Lord Lannister quickly negotiated a foster agreement with House Tully and then, when she flowered, Cersei was promptly betrothed to Lord Jon Arryn’s heir and, since it seemed only logical that her new family would take her in, she went from Riverrun straight to the Eyrie.

Lord Lannister was glad to have Cersei removed from the Westerlands. Without her, Jaime developed into a good and dutiful son, knighted at age five and ten, married no longer after. Cersei could still do her part and work for House Lannister, but as far as possible from her homeland.

Cersei would send letter after letter, asking her father to summon her to King’s Landing or to send her back the The Rock. Instead of risking to be ashamed by Cersei’s irrational behavior at King’s Landing, Tywin would visit his daughter from time to time, first in the Riverlands and then in The Vale.

Cesei was still his daughter, despite all.

Only after Cersei wed Jon Arryn's heir, was that Lord Tywin Lannister finally relented and invited the couple to Court.

Tywin was appalled.

Cersei is more courtesan than Lady!

Tywin thought Cersei’s behaviour was unacceptable. Her husband seemed oblivious to her obvious faults and Tywin had to count Elbert Arryn’s foolishness for a blessing.

The fool is besotted with her.

Cersei would flirt with knights and lords alike and bask in the attentions of singers and squires. Her dresses were fitted to display her full bosom and she would wear too much make up, drink more than it was appropriate for a woman and had not made any effort into stricking any meaningful friendship with women of her station. Cersei was always ingratiating herself to dignitaries, ambassadors or any male really, any man who happened to caught her fancy.

Tywin provided the couple with a household and chambers befitting their position. He also insisted that a man of his confidence, Sandor Clegane to become Cersei’s sworn shield. Among the usual responsibilities of a bodyguard, the Hound was to spy on Cersei for Lord Tywin. He wanted to be the first to be informed of any “indiscretion” his daughter would perchance commit, in order to be able to deal with the matter, preventing Cersei from bringing shame upon House Lannister.

Tywin knew Cersei was wicked and not to be trusted, but could not possibly go and tell her husband. The best course of action, it seemed to him, was to keep the couple at the Red Keep and under his eyes for three years, making sure Myrcella and Robert were legitimate Arryns.

As soon as blond haired, blue eyed “Sweet Robin” was born in 286 A.C, Tywin convinced Ser Elbert to return to The Vale with his family and washed his hands on Cersei for good.

Or so he wanted to believe.
House Targaryen

“Son, I would like to take leave of my duties as Queen Mother and travel to Dragonstone with Daenerys. Now that Viserys is betrothed to Arianna and Elia has proven to be so capable, I would like to rest and enjoy the last days of my daughter's childhood in peace.

Daenerys was growing up. She was three and ten and already a beauty, reminding Rhaegar of Queen Naerys, the angelical wife of the unworthy Aegon. Rhaenys too, was beautiful, a mixture of dornish and valyrian features. Both princesses were not yet betrothed and soon, House Targaryen would have to choose suitable and profitable matches for both princesses.

There was, of course, always the risk of having any of them seduced and disgraced. Rhaegar would have to be quick in making his choice, but it would not be easy.  

Especially Dany, who is most beautiful; any man would be lucky to have her.

Viserys' betrothal to Princess Arianna Martell took the Seven Kingdoms by surprise. Since Daenerys birth, people assumed Rhaegar would follow his House tradition and wed his brother to his sister, and do the same with his own children.

Rhaegar dedicated part of his time to study the prophecies. He found Grand Maester Marwyn to be a great mind. The man had wrote “The Book of lost Books” and travelled to Ashai. Together, they studied House Targaryen’s genealogical tree and concluded that every second or third generation, their members married into other Houses and the motives, they suspected, were not merely political.

The finding made Rhaegar’s heart sink.

Rhaegar felt closer to his mother, brother and sister than to his own family. They spoke in High Valyrian when in private and they were the ones Rhaegar would turn to when faced with any difficult decision.

Viserys idolized Rhaegar and found no greater joy than being a second son. When time came for his martial education, Viserys asked to squire for the Red Viper, hoping to learn from Oberyn how to enjoy the privileges of being a Prince without all the responsibilities of a firstborn.

But his brother had been raised by dutiful Queen Rhaella. Viserys knew too well that he had a role to play. He had always submitted to Rhaegar’s will without arguing, which made things easier. The only time Viserys disagreed with his older brother was when he was told Daenerys was not to be his. He had always thought this to be the case and was truthfully disappointed. Only Arianna Martell and the prospect of being Prince Consort of Dorne made Viserys recover from the heartbreak.

When the day came for their departure, Rhaegar went to Daenerys chambers to say goodbye: “Behave, sweet sister, and take care of mother. You will be missed.”

Daenerys would always welcome Rhaegar with a smile and a warm hug but in recent times, Rhaegar would make sure to put some distance between them, a thought he had never had before when Daenerys was just a girl in pigtails.

Rhaegar however, hugged Daenerys back this time, wishing their embrace would never to end.

“I doubt you would miss me at all, dear brother. You barely have time to see me these days, Aegon spends most of his day reading the Seven-Pointed Star or in prayers and Rhaenys will be more than happy to have Ser Arthur Dayne all to herself. “
Rhaegar would always smile with Daenerys. He loved her sense of humour and playfulness, but knew of her intelligence and temper. “You are too smart for your own good, Dany.”

Rhaegar remembered the first time he really paid attention to Daenerys intellect. She should have been no older than eight and they were in private. Viserys, who had never really warmed up to Elia, was lamenting how unhappy Rhaegar was with a wife that could not do her duty. Rhaegar gave his brother a look, as that was no subject for a child to hear. But Viserys insisted Dany was not even paying attention. He then made a reference to the fact that Daenerys had been “born too late”. Despite being but a child, Daenerys was quick to understand the implied message and, much to Rhaegar’s amusement and Viserys consternation, replied that perhaps, it was Viserys who should have been born a girl.

“It will not be for long anyway, brother. I will return to attend Vis’s nuptials and rip his clothes during the bedding ceremony.

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Daenerys flowered on Dragonstone and Queen Rhaella had to inform King’s Landing of the fact.

She then spoke to her daughter about what would be expected of her now that Daenerys was a woman: “When you lay with your Lord Husband for the first time, it will hurt. But the pain will lessen with practice and you might find pleasure in being a dutiful wife. It took years for me to get used to your father, but I pray it will be different for you.”

Rhaella was determined to prepare Daenerys as much as she could. She asked the maester on Dragonstone to explain her daughter about periods, conception and pregnancy, while she and the septa would speak about a wife’s duties to her husband. The Queen Mother thought the lessons to be important as she herself had wished many times her own mother would have provided with such valid knowledge when she was that young.

The days passed and Daenerys started to get used to her routine on Dragonstone. She missed her family, her brothers in particular, but she enjoyed having her mother all to herself. Rhaegar would write her often and Rhaella would always ask to read their letters. Daenerys saw no problem; the letters were just Rhaegar telling how he missed her and sharing the latest gossips.

Rhaella’s health was declining. Her mother looked pale and had difficulties breathing. Daenerys would read aloud any book she could find about Valyria. The parts detailing how the slaves were treated broke her heart, but her mother would listen, never asking Daenerys to skip anything.

One day, her mother looked especially concerned: “The Maester thinks my condition will get worse if I am to travel to King’s Landing and Grand Maester Marwyn agrees the fresh air of Dragonstone should help me recover faster. Viserys understands and will be joining me here with his bride after their wedding, but Rhaegar insists you must attend.”

Daenerys did not want to leave her mother; however, the idea of missing Viserys wedding was not appealing. “Mother, I could go and return with Viserys and Arianne. I am sure Rhaegar would see no problem.”

“Oh, Dany, I wish I could say I knew what goes on your brother’s head.” Daenerys had noticed that Rhaella, for some reason, had been cold towards her eldest brother, which she thought it was unfair, for Rhaegar was not only the best King, but also the best brother and son.
Listen to me, Dany. You are a woman now and men will start to come after you. Rhaegar tells me there are some suitors already seeking your hand. Elia mentioned House Tyrell. The heir, Ser Willas, is of Viserys age and will be in attendance to the wedding. I heard only good things about him, but you should be careful. Your maiden gift is to be given only to your Lord Husband. Men will tell you anything to take you to their beds. Make sure to be always surrounded by people or chaperoned, Daenerys.”

Rhaella then handed Daenerys a letter and urged her daughter to discreetly deliver it to Queen Elia as soon as possible, which Daenerys did.

Four moon turns had passed since she left King’s Landing and Daenerys body had changed. Before departing, she had already be given new dresses, as her measurements had changed, but she soon outgrown those and Rhaella had to ask Rhaegar for additional fabric.

Rhaegar said nothing when he saw her, his eyes inspecting his sister, looking at her from top to bottom many times, then he gave her a small smile and murmured that she looked even more beautiful than he had imagined, which made Daenerys feel proud.

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Rhaenys had always been Daenerys best friend. She came to her aunt´s chambers, bringing Balerion with her: “Dany, we missed you!” She then handed Daenerys the fat cat and continued: ”I am sad that grandmother is not coming. How well she fares?”

“Mother said she feels weak, but the maester said she will recover in no time. She is also sad that she will miss the wedding.” Balerion was now an old and fat black cat who only moved to beg for more food, but Daenerys still loved the little ball of fur and was trying to entice the cat to play with her, to no avail.

“There are so many suitors for us, Dany. Some very dashing, if I may say. Father told me I should not be generous with my attentions, but to give preference to Great Lords.” Daenerys chuckled, but Rhaenys continued, raising her voice so that Ser Arthur Dayne could listen: “I told Father that Knight's make for better lovers than Lords and he went as red as a pepper! I have never seen uncle Oberyn laugh so hard and Mother be so mad at me! You should have seen it!”

There was a reception followed by dinner that night. Daenerys sat by Rhaenys side, as always. Aegon, her nephew, was the first to be excused to his quarters, too young to enjoy partiers, Dany thought to herself.

Rhaenys and Daenerys, however, were women grown and flowered at three and ten and could stay up late. Rhaenys flirted rather openly with most of the young men courting her, but she, being a good daughter, followed her father’s advice and, as the night progressed, seemed to focus on Ser Edmure Tully.

Daenerys was having great fun seeing Rhaenys trying to juggle them all, but worried her friend was going to run into trouble with her father. “Rhae, I think you ought to be more discreet. His Grace keeps looking at us with a rather serious expression.”

The observation made Rhaenys stop. She took a moment to screen the room and analyse the situation and sipped the diluted wine they were being served.” Father is not looking at me, but at you.”

Daenerys could not believe it, but it was true. What am I doing wrong? She had spent great part of the evening speaking mainly with Ser Willas Tyrell. Her mother approved of him; they were in a room filled with people and Daenerys was behaving like a proper lady. She blushed when Willas
complimented her eyes and told her she was the most beautiful woman in the room, but there had been no physical contact, or any attempt really, Willas being nothing but respectful.

Prince Oberyn came to their end of the table, bowing to both ladies and addressing the young men around them: “You certainly do not lack for company, but I could not miss the opportunity to compliment my niece on her choice of dress and her aunt on the new hairstyle.”

The younger generation simply adored Oberyn, and Daenerys was no exception. Willas made a comment about how he expected to, one day, have the honour of defeating the famous Red Viper in the lists, to which Prince Oberyn replied he had to cancel his participation last time as his dear sister, the queen, had requested his presence in Court.

Daenerys laughed at some joke Rhaenys made and did not notice Rhaegar moving towards them until people started to bow and address their King.

After acknowledging the presence of Sers Edmure and Willas, Daenerys’ brother turned to her, offering his hand: “May I have the honour of the next dance?”

“Certainly, Your Grace.”

Rhaegar was a very skilled dancer, his hands firmly holding Daenerys’s waist every time they swirled and turned.

Daenerys went to bed that night with her feet sore, as she continued to dance through the night, her brother being her most constant partner.

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The ceremony at the Sept of Baelor was long; the High Septon had a powerful voice and he sure liked to hear himself speaking, but his speech was dull and only Crown Prince Aegon seemed to be really interested in what the old man had to say.

Princess Arianne looked splendid in her silky, white and yellow dress, her dark hair styled in an intricate braid and decorated with pearls. Viserys too, looked every inch the Prince he was.

His Grace had insisted Daenerys to sit between him and Viserys and the three of them engaged in friendly conversation for some time, until Queen Elia interrupted them: “Princess, you must not have more of our wine, I am afraid is quite strong and you are not used.”

Daenerys would have politely agreed, but Rhaegar was the one answering on her behalf:” My sister may have a second goblet if she wishes, the occasion being too special.”

The night passed in a blur. When it came time to the bedding ceremony, Daenerys was feeling light headed, but Rhaegar was there to hold her: “Do not fret, I am here for you. No more wine, sweet sister. Mayhaps it is best if you lay down.”

Daenerys nodded and Rhaegar asked Ser Arthur to escort his sister to her chambers.

About an hour later, Rhaegar came to see how she was faring. Daenerys had almost slept in her clothes, the book of poems she was reading lost in the immense bed.

She stood up when Rhaegar entered and saw when he dismissed Ser Arthur, urging the friend to “enjoy the rest of the festivities.”
He then sat on a chair facing a round table and gestured her to sit by him: “Are you feeling better, Dany?”

“Yes, Your Grace. The room suddenly stopped spinning and the knot on my stomach disappeared.”

Rhaegar chuckled: “We are alone, Dany, no need to be formal. I remember the first time wine went up to my head, I must have been two and ten. Mother was furious with me!”

They laughed. Rhaegar moved closer to Daenerys, placing his hand on hers: “I noticed that Ser Willas is taken with you. Are you in love with him? Should I accept his proposal, if House Tyrell asks for you?”

In the sennight since they met, Daenerys could say that she came to appreciate Ser Willas. She found him kind, handsome and intelligent. She smiled every time she thought about how he held her hand when nobody was noticing during the wedding ceremony. Daenerys knew Willas was a man she could come to love, but remembered she was a Princess and the decision was Rhaegar’s, not hers: “I find Ser Willas to be an acceptable match, but I bow to your judgement. My aim is to please you, my King.”

“Tell me the truth, did Ser Willas try to kiss you?”

Daenerys blushed: “No! Ser Willas respects me.”

Rhaegar smiled: “Would you have welcomed him, had he tried?”

Daenerys remembered how her mother had told her not to allow such liberties and vehemently denied it.

Rhaegar then did something that would have startled her, but it did not: he took her hands, brought them to his lips and kissed them.

Daenerys did not know what to do, so she did nothing. She remembered how her mother had told her to be always chaperoned and realized they were alone, in her chambers.

She would have grown alarmed, but Rhaegar was older, married and her King. He surely knew better than her.

“Do you love me, Dany?”

“Of course, Rhaegar. You are my brother and my King.”

Rhaegar was so close that Daenerys could feel the warmth of his breath. He then stood up and scooped Daenerys from the chair, his eyes locked on hers, while he carried her to the bed.

Rhaegar then sat on the edge and had Daenerys on his lap. He started to stroke her hair, telling her how beautiful she was.

Daenerys froze and remained silent; Rhaegar brought Daenerys closer to his face, took a deep breath and kissed her.

His tongue forced its way into his sister’s mouth and she felt herself getting breathless. It dawned on Daenerys that this was her first kiss.

Willas should be the one kissing me, not Rhaegar.

Daenerys could not think straight. What was happening?
Rhaegar broke the kiss; Daenerys could hear her heart beating. She was trembling. House Targaryen had wed brother to sister many times as it was custom in Valyria, but such unions were born out of Duty, the need to keep their blood pure to ride dragons...

But dragons were gone and what they were doing did not feel like duty.

“I meant to ask if you do love me as a man, Daenerys.” Rhaegar’s left hand was holding her by the waist, while the right hand was between her legs. Daenerys felt his hand caressing her curls. “I know you do love me, Dany, because I love you.” His finger had found a place in her that she did not know it existed. In her bed, sometimes, Daenerys had used pillows to cause friction. Daenerys had also touched herself, but the act, to her, felt incomplete.

It had never felt this good when she was doing it.

Daenerys moaned and melt under her brother’s capable hands.

Rhaegar suppressed her moans with another kiss. He continued to pleasure Daenerys, but now instead of softly massaging her folds or pressing her nub, he had inserted one finger inside of her, finding the place soaked. “You are wet…” Her body was betraying her, the sensations overwhelming her: “You want this.”

Daenerys remembered the Maester explaining her about intercourse and realized what Rhaegar was doing.

“Rhaegar… please…” He did not listen and kissed her again. It seemed to Daenerys that he wanted to devour her. She tried to push him away and this made him halt the kiss.

“We cannot do this, Rhaegar.”

Rhaegar looked Daenerys straight in the eyes: “You want me. Your body says so. All stupid notions, what the Septa told you, what Mother taught you. I am married and I do not sleep with my wife. You could be my wife, Daenerys. This could be our marital bed. We are made of flesh.”

He said those things with such certainty that made Daenerys doubt of her own morals and education.

Rhaegar is the King, my older brother, the bravest, the kindest. He knows better.

Without releasing her, with one hand, he unlaced his breeches. “This.” Rhaegar said as he placed Daenerys hand on his rigid cock “This is flesh. We are made of flesh.”

She gasped, feeling the hard member under her skin. It was big and thick, alive and throbbing, the tip leaked a transparent and viscous fluid. Daenerys had only seen babies before, never a grown man. She was both repulsed and curious at the sight.

Rhaegar then took the same hand and made Daenerys touch herself: “This is flesh.”

When Rhaegar kissed Daenerys again, she did not try to protest. Rhaegar was quick to undress her, the beautiful blue gown laying on the floor, ruined in his hurry to have her.

Daenerys nakedness revealed, Rhaegar drank from her. “You are , and has always been, meant for me, Dany. Never forget that.”

Soon, Rhaegar was naked and on top of her. “You are beautiful. My true wife. My true Queen.” When he kissed her breasts, then licked and sucked her nipples, Daenerys whimpered. She felt dirty for it, for enjoying what her brother was doing to her, but the part of her that was fighting, that knew
this to be wrong, was now silent.
Hopes that get shattered

Chapter Summary

The aftermath of Rhaegar and Daenerys first night;
A King visits The North,
A new Maester arrives.

Chapter Notes

This fic will probably be a 15+ chapters

I will update as much as I can to get the story going, but eventually we will be down to an update a week. I will let you know

I am also on Tumblr
http://reviewpri.tumblr.com/

House Targaryen - 292 A.C

Rhaella Targaryen was used at being dismissed as nothing more than a sickly, frail woman. She was, indeed, not strong of body, but her mind was sharp. Aerys death and Daenerys birth had given Rhaella strength and purpose. The ones still thinking little of her were fools.

The Seven Kingdoms were in awe of King Rhaegar and his mother was proud. As a King, he strived to be fair and just. Rhaegar attended Small Council meetings, did not spend money unwisely and surrounded himself with capable men from all the different regions of Westeros. He had travelled the land, as far as The Wall. Rhaegar had changed a couple of laws giving the smallfolk more rights and access to the forests and lands. Lord Lannister had been against it, but eventually, he found a way of having such law benefitting the common folk and not being too heavy on the Lord's properties.

But Rhaegar was only human and his father was Aerys. There had also been a sense of doom around her oldest son. Rhaella thought it was the sadness of his birth- Summerhall had burnt to the ground- but, over the years, with the stress of rulership and the strained marriage with Elia, Rhaegar started to crack.

First it was the madness with Lyanna Stark. Rhaegar had fallen in love for the first time in his life. He had convinced himself Lyanna was part of a prophecy- the prophecy that had guided his life. And was adamant about having his Bride of Ice. Kings can do almost everything, but kidnapping Lyanna and contracting a second marriage, without any knowledge of the girl’s family, breaking a betrothal and, most importantly, forgetting about the alliances forged through Elia's wedding, it would have been a blow to his rulership. People would question the legitimacy of his marriage and children; it would provide the seeds to a second civil war.
Rhaella had helped Elia take Rhaegar’s mind off the northern girl. Grand Maester Marwyn had presented other interpretations of the texts Rhaegar had drawn his conclusions and, in the days that followed, Lyanna had decided not to wait for the King and married her intended.

It was Rhaella that consoled her son when he received the news: “She did not love me, after all. She did not wait for me. I only wanted to avoid problems with House Stark. I would have found a way for us to be together.”

“My son, let go of your feelings. Lyanna will not be the last woman you fall in love with. I know you will never feel this way for Elia, but you should not despair. You will find love, I know you will.”

Her words were heartfelt and true. Rhaella wanted Rhaegar to, at least once, experience love. Aerys had loved Joanna Lannister more than he let the world know. Behind his crude remarks and jealousy of Tywin Lannister, there was the longing of a lost opportunity. Rhaella knew Aerys would have defied their parents and married Joanna, but she had turned him down. Rhaella would have helped them elope; she also did not love Aerys. The prophecy, they both agreed, could be fulfilled by a future marriage between their own lines. Rhaella believed that it would have worked, but Joanna’s refusal put an end also to her dreams.

As Daenerys grew older, it became as clear as day to Rhaella who would be Rhaegar’s true love. Her son had always felt close to Dany. Viserys too, but his feelings were always more basic, simpler.

Rhaella had never really worried until Daenerys turned two and ten. Her body started to change. She would not be a child for much longer, at least not physically.

Rhaegar noticed and he looked at his sister with hidden lust.

Elia’s brother constant visits to the Red Keep had the purpose of keeping Rhaegar happy by providing him with constant and varied female companionship, the assumption being the women travelling with Oberyn would be warming his bed. Sometimes, a courtesan would make herself visible at Court and attract Rhaegar’s attentions for a fortnight or two. Even a Red Priestess of Ashai had warmed the King’s bed. But, as with many others, Rhaegar had no use for the Red woman after a while and she was quickly and quietly removed from Court.

When the Maester had told Rhaella she needed more time and was not to attend Viserys wedding, she panicked. Letters were exchanged with Elia. Rhaella favored Willas Tyrell. The nuptials would grant Daenerys a perfect opportunity to meet the young man and fall in love with him. House Tyrell was second only to House Lannister in wealth and much more loyal to House Targaryen. Rhaella knew Daenerys would be happy at Highgarden. The Queen Mother requested her good daughter’s assistance in closing such deal. Rhaella told Elia not to leave Daenerys alone with either her brothers and to ensure she was to meet and spend time with Ser Willas.

Daenerys had wrote her mother, telling her that she found Willas to be handsome and charming. He was teaching her hawking. They shared the same taste in books.

Rhaella was elated.

On the day of Viserys wedding, she was praying in the Sept at Dragonstone when felt faint. It was a passing sensation, but the first thing she thought was of Daenerys. That her daughter needed her.

The next day, Queen Mother Rhaella arrived unexpectedly at the Red Keep.

Just by looking at Daenerys, she knew what had happened.
Rhaella went to Rhaegar’s solar and almost bumped into Lord Mace Tyrell and Ser Willas. The young man looked devasted.

A couple of hours later, Rhaella went to meet Elia Martell.

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“Do you know what happened last night, Elia? I am not speaking about Viserys wedding to your niece.”

Elia lowered her head: “I am sorry, Rhaella. I tried. I really did. Rhaegar insisted Daenerys to have a second goblet of wine and then…”

“… Rhaegar went to his sister’s chambers, a child of three and ten, and convinced Daenerys that her maidenhead belonged to him. Daenerys has just recently flowered; she was in no position to choose. I helped you many times, Elia, but I am not going to watch you turn my daughter into her brother's whore. “ Elia was about to open her mouth to protest, but Rhaella screamed: “ Shut your mouth and listen. The maids told me you were about to move Daenerys chambers to be near Rhaegar’s. It would be so much easier for you, for Rhaegar to have his own mistress instead the ones Oberyn brings him. But you gone too far, Elia. You and Rhaegar did. Daenerys is a Princess, not a chambermaid.”

Elia started to cry “I...Rhaegar...he told me she wanted. She is a woman, Rhaella.He is my husband.If somebody should be angry, it is me.”

“Do not play this game with me. When you arrived, I saw the intelligence behind your smiles. I took you in. I supported you. I helped you rule and you are capable, Elia, you know that. But whatever innocence you had in you, was lost. You have been in King’s Landing far too long to know what a marriage with House Tyrell would bring to your daughter.”

Elia tried to deny it, but Rhaella pressed the subject. “ House Tully is not that impressive. Not that rich. The Riverlords are a quarrelsome bunch. The Reach, no. They have the numbers, the grains, the power. House Tyrell has a tenuous claim to the Gardener Kings, but link still, whereas House Tully has no real connection to any House of Royal Blood. Aegon wed to Joanna Lannister; Rhaenys at Highgarden and Viserys in Dorne, your line would have a firm grasp on the Seven kingdoms. Rhaegar told me you supported his decision to keep Daenerys here and you gave him the idea of wedding her to Jon Connington, from all people. The Master of Laws has been in love with Rhaegar for years. But you miscalculated, dear good daughter.”

Elia’s tears had dried. She was stunned; she did not know Rhaella was that strong and shrewd. “There is nothing you can do. Rhaenys will marry Ser Willas. The King gave them his word.”

“Are you sure? I offered Rhaegar a much better deal. Rhaegar must go North, travel through his Kingdom. He loves Daenerys and wants her to be his wife. As a mother, I already accepted his proposal on her behalf, but made my demands since he dishonoured her. Rhaegar agreed to take a holy vow of celibacy until he marries her. Daenerys will grow even more beautiful in two years, don’t you think? His Holy Grace knows from yourself that Rhaegar has not visited your bed in over ten years. There will be no annulment, but since you are no longer fit to be a wife Elia, and the King must stay on a sinless path, the High Septon allowed House Targaryen to claim the Valyrian Tradition of polygamous union a second time, due to such extreme circumstances. Rhaegar will marry Daenerys when she turns six and ten. Grand Maester Marwyn is already working on the agreement as we speak. Daenerys will be the one sitting by Rhaegar’s side, not you.”
It was her mother who told Daenerys about Willa’s betrothal to Rhaenys.

“Our brother will announce it soon, Dany. I am sorry, I know you were quite taken with him. I wished you could have had what I did not: a choice. But so it is with Princesses. We all must do our Duty.”

Rhaegar had been her first; Daenerys had heard about women losing their maidenheads to the saddle, but she could not see herself lying to Willas.

*Would Willas see me as as spoiled goods? Or would Willas still love me?*

Daenerys would never known.

Rhaegar had stayed after making love to her. He held her and told Daenerys how special she was; how happy she had made him.

But the morning came and he had to leave her. Daenerys could not help but cry. Rhaegar had cleaned her and taken the proof of her innocence lost with him, as it was a trophy, she felt. The maids said nothing when they found Daenerys curled and nested among pillows and linen. She asked them to draw her a warm bath and soaked in the water.

She was sore. It had hurt her. Rhaegar was big and he had taken her twice more that night.

*I wish mother was here...this would never had happened.*

Daenerys decided not to leave her chambers. How could she face Rhaenys...Elia?

She barely touched her breakfast, just sipping honeyed milk when the door opened.

“Mom!”

Daenerys cried in her mother’s arms. "Stay here, daughter. I will solve this situation."

It was late in afternoon when Rhaella retuned.

“Shhh. Everything will be fine. Elia forgot I was the one who appointed the High Septon. I made Rhaegar take a vow not to touch you, not until you are wed. You will be prepared, prepared to become Queen. Grandmaester Marwyn will give you some tea and lotions to help with your soreness. Then we will leave for Dragonstone, far away from the vipers of Dorne. Rhaegar is ready to pay the price for your hand and I will make myself live long enough to see you married to him. He will not dishonour you any longer. “

Daenerys only left her chambers for supper. Queen Mother Rhaella would not leave her daughter’s side.

Ser Willas sat beside Rhaenys on the other side of the table. When their eyes met, he gave Daenerys a sad look.
Lady Catelyn had fond memories of the first time King Rhaegar Targaryen had honoured Winterfell with his presence. It had been six years ago, in the year 286 A.C. It was Spring and His Grace laughed when confronted with some snow, a reaction Catelyn, a southerner, understood all too well.

Brandon was a good host and had organized enough entertainment for the King, but there was still a part of her husband that could not forget the Tourney at Harrenhal. King Rhaegar smiled when introduced to Arya Dustin, Lyanna’s daughter and broke protocol speaking fondly of the late Stark sister: “I never had opportunity to apologise for crowning your wife, Lord Dustin, Queen of Love and Beauty. Lyanna Stark was not only beautiful, but a force of nature. It was the only honour I could bestow upon the famous Knight of the Laughing Tree without revealing her secret. I hope you tell her daughter of how her mother defeated men twice her size in that jousting competition.”

After the revelation, Brandon relaxed, mayhaps too much, for Lady Barbrey Cerwyn had been allowed by His Grace to join in the hunting the next day.

While Brandon was all to happy in leaving his wife behind, Ned Stark had to be convinced by Lady Ashara to hunt with the King: “I promise your daughter will wait until you return, my Love. Besides, one has to take care of my dear brother. You know poor Arthur depends on you to have his back. He can barely hold a sword…”

They all laughed at the jape, Ser Arthur Dayne included. Catelyn just gave a polite smile.

His Grace had been kind enough to bring Ser Brynden and Ser Arthur with him in this trip, for he knew both Ladies Stark would be delighted to receive part of their families in The North. Catelyn had approached her uncle to take little Brandon as squire, when time came.

“I would be delighted, Cat. He is a good boy, but you must explain it will be hard work! Ser Arthur told me that Jon will also join him in King´s Landing.”

The King spent a sennight at Winterfell, always singing in the evenings. Even Lady Maege Mormont had watery eyes after His Grace finished “Jeyne´s song”.

Now, Jon and little Brandon were eleven and ten, respectively. Soon, they would ride south, for Ned had convinced Brandon that his son was strong enough to go. Catelyn’s son reminded her of Edmure, good hearted and well intentioned, but not very talented in arms. Under Ser Rodrik Cassel’s tutelage, Brandon had improved and could now, at least, defend himself. He would never be a Tourney champion, but Maester Flowers had convinced Catelyn that a Lord needn’t be.

But Jon...that boy was a wolf. He was handsome, strong and well spoken, even at such young age. Brandon was also good looking, but shy. The only physical activity that Catelyn’s son was proficient was dangerous and unbecoming: climbing the walls and towers of Winterfell.

*Brandon could very well be Ned’s son and Jon, Brandon’s.*

Catelyn would sometimes have such fantasies, of what would have been if Ashara had married Brandon. Would he be faithful to such a sensual, beautiful woman? Barbrey was more than pretty, but everybody knew Ashara had no equal. Brandon would sometimes make a comment about his good sister and be met by Ned’s disapproving eyes.

Ned treated Catelyn with more respect and tact than her husband. When the King had announced the second visit, Ned convinced Brandon to have a small Sept built. Catelyn had always complimented
her good brother on this loving gesture towards his wife, expecting Brandon to follow suit. But it took Ned and the King’s visit to finally persuade Brandon that his wife would benefit from the comfort of praying to her God.

Lord Dustin would also be in attendance, bringing his daughter, Arya.

He raised Arya like a boy, allowing the girl too much freedom. The uncles indulged Arya, for she reminded them of Lyanna, whom they missed too much.

Arya Dustin wore breeches, rode horses and sparred with the boys. A terrible influence on Sansa. Catelyn had tried to have her sister, Lysa, be married to Willam, but he had refused to even entertain the idea. His love was Lyanna and his heir, Arya. He did not need a wife. Lysa was married to Lord Mallister heir, Patrek in 286 A.C.

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Lady Ashara Stark had a bad feeling about King Rhaegar’s second visit to Winterfell.

Regardless, she had to go. Ned was Brandon’s right hand and Arthur would be there. Jon was already of age and would be travelling with his uncle and his cousin, Brandon, to train in arms. Their second son, Robb, would be sent to Lord Bronze Yohn Royce, for Ned still had bonds of friendship in The Vale.

The night before they were to depart to Winterfell, Ned was especially intent in pleasing Ashara.

His face was between her legs for a long time, sucking, licking and pressing her sensitive area. Ashara had already peaked once when Ned deemed her wet enough for him.

She smiled. “You are spoiling me, my wolf.”

“You are the one that spoils me, my Lady.” When Ned entered her, she gasped. Ashara was very happy about their lovemaking; it was, suprisingly, getting better as the years passed.

However good they were in bed, Ashara did not want more children. She had given Ned an heir, a spare and a daughter after all. But her Lord Husband wanted nothing more than to get Ashara with child again and it was his hope that, by making their bedtime as good as possible, she would be tempted.

Ned could be forceful sometimes in his hunger for her; those times, Ashara was not beyond using some tricks to have Ned spend faster.

“Even your back is most beautiful, my Lady…” The sight of her ass inspiring him, Ned half sat in bed, bringing Ashara hips to his direction, forcing her to be on fours.

They would usually end on this position, him mounting her.

When Ashara felt he was about to come, she masterfully moved forward and his seed fell in their sheets.

“I wanted to spill in you, Ash…” Ned then laid by her side, kissing her neck. “I would have taken you a second time with my seed running through your legs.”

“You are a pervert, Lord Stark...every time I am pregnant you cannot contain yourself. Morning, day
and night, all you want is one thing and one thing only. You think just because I am dornish I can take all you got, but the wolf has more stamina than his humble, southerner mate!"

“You are the one to blame...you and your haunting, violet eyes.”

Ashara kissed Ned once again and stood up to clean the mess, otherwise they would be sleeping on it. Ned was about to fall asleep, sated and happy, while Ashara was trying not to freeze while she dispose of the linen in a nearby basket, naked as in her nameday.

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When Lady Barbrey could not join him- she had social obligations as Lady Cerwyn after all- Brandon Stark would visit the brothel in Wintertown. This was true especially when his brother, Benjen, was visiting from Queenscrown.

This time around, Barbrey would be arriving at Winterfell with Lord Cerwyn. Brandon sighted “I cannot fault the old man for wanting to show off his lovely wife, but it leave us with less options. All the rooms will be taken, nothing to spare.”

“Mayhaps you should think of other places...stables...the broken tower?” Benjen offered.

“Aye, Barbrey would need some convincing. Now that the children are older, she does not want to get caught. They see her as a sweet aunt and she dotes on them. It is the closest she got at having her own, you see? Domicic is now squiring and she barely sees her nephew.”

They chose two prostitutes, Brandon insisting Benjen would take the better looking, Ros, since his Lady Wife, he said "is not pretty by any means.”

After they had found their releases, Brandon and Benjen had some wine: “I would ask you not to speak about Jonelle that way, brother. She may be plain, but she is the mother of my child and a dear friend. You don’t see Ned speaking ill of Catelyn.”

Brandon laughed: “You are right, brother, I apologise. For what you told me, Jonelle at least tries to make up and please you. Catelyn might be beautiful, but she is cold. What could you expect from a fish? She just lays in bed, spread her legs and close her eyes. Sometimes I think she pretends I am not even there.”

When they returned to Winterfell, they saw that Ned had arrived and was inspecting the almost finished Sept. Ned had convinced Brandon to use the project of the Sept he built at Stoney Shore, saving gold in what Lord Stark deemed “an unnecessary expenditure.”

His Grace was received with all the pomp and circumstance the event asked for. Brandon appreciated that the King had not brought too big of a retinue, for they would be staying about three moon turns in The north, between Winterfell, The New Gift and The Wall.

King Rhaegar was particularly taken with the direwolves the children had adopted and Ned Stark, who had been with the kids when they found the litter, introduced the animals and their owners: “Jon named his wolf Ghost, because he is an albino; Robb has Greywind and Brandon, Summer. Rickon calls his shaggydog. As for the girls: Nymeria is Arya’s direwolf, Sansa has Lady and Elia insisted to give hers a very dramatic name, Seastorm.”

Rhaegar laughed: “My sister is called Daenerys Stormborn. She will like to know that northerners also have a penchant for such theatricals.”
Prince Oberyn Martell made sure to bring Dornish Red, which Brandon greatly appreciated. Grand Maester Marwyn, a short and weirdly looking man, and Prince Viserys Targaryen also came this time. The remaining members of the Royal Family, including Queen Elia, stayed behind.

The welcoming feast was a thundering success, as Prince Viserys was intent in dancing with every pretty Lady in attendance. As it was expected, Brandon shared the first dance with his wife.

"You would do good to smile more, my Lady, this is a party after all."

"I dislike when Lady Cerwyn spends too much time with my children, my Lord. She already has your attentions."

"Barbrey means no disrespect, my Lady, she truly likes our children. I will tell her to avoid seeking them out, if it pleases you, but she would never be anything less than kind and you know it."

After the dance, Brandon returned to his place of honour and resumed his conversation with King Rhaegar, ignoring his wife for most part. Catelyn danced one more time, with Ned, while Ashara was taking turns between Ser Arthur, Prince Viserys and Benjen.

The next day, they held a mock Tourney with the squires and youngsters. Brandon had agreed to allow Arya Dustin to join the archery competition, much to Catelyn’s chagrin, who deemed women’s participation “improper”.

Brandon reminded her that the women of Bear Island would also participate and that His Grace saw no problems. In fact, Rhaegar Targaryen applauded when Arya won by a landslide, achieving a perfect score.

Jon won the melee and Lord Stark was pleased that his son, Brandon, had not embarrassed himself, all that time spent with Ser Rodrick finally paying off.

Lord Stark was looking forward for some time with Barbrey. Between the preparations to the royal visit, her time at Castle Cerwyn and his duties as Lord, they were apart for over three fortnights.

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Little Brandon Stark was at his happiest when he was pulling pranks with his cousins or climbing the walls at Winterfell. His Lady Mother disliked both activities and his Lord Father insisted in Brandon spending most of his time sparring, which he found boring. He was not good at, nor he had interest in becoming a warrior.

Mother wanted him to go south and squire for his great-uncle, Ser Brynden Tully. Brandon was quite excited at the prospect. He knew he would not become as strong as Jon or as agile as Robb, but father had said it was important for a man to be able to defend himself, not to be dependant on others to do his bidding.

“Ours is the old way; the man who passes the sentence, should swing the sword. One day, Ice will be yours.”

This thought, of wielding Ice, was enough to make Brandon put more effort into his martial education.

He might not grow up to become as fierce as his Lord Father, but Brandon hoped he would be worthy of Ice.
It was also good that Jon, his cousin, would be joining him in King's Landing. They were raised more like brothers. Uncle Ned was always visiting Winterfell despite having his own Keep. Brandon loved his family. They were all very close. He wished his mother would be happier, but she was from the south and The North was a harsh place, he had been told.

Not only his blood family had Brandon’s affection. He came to respect and care for Ser Rodrick and his nephew, Jory, Captain of his father’s guard. Lady Barbrey was also very often at Winterfell, full of smiles and hugs. She was married to the father of Brandon’s aunt, Lady Jonelle and would care for Rickon Stark when his mother had to stay at Queen’s Crown, to hold her husband’s holdfast during his travels to Winterfell. Thankfully for Brandon, Uncle Benjen always brought Rickon with him and the two boys were inseparable.

It would be an ordinary day, except for the King's visit.

Brandon climbed the Broken Tower with ease. From its top, he could see The Wall. Or so he thought.

Strange noises were coming from the window; Brandon was curious. It sounded like animals mating. In two sennights, Brandon would be turning one and ten. His father had already explained him some things about “men and women” but Brandon was really not interested.

Brandon had already sneaked up on a couple of knights pleasuring each other at the stables and assumed he was about to see the same couple again, until he heard the man’s voice.

It was his father with his aunt Barbrey.

Lord Stark realized he had been caught and cursed himself for this foolishness; his son, Brandon lost his balance.

Then, he fell from the Broken Tower.

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In her grief, Lady Catelyn locked herself in Brandon’s chambers, praying to the Seven, asking God to save her son.

She left Sansa to act as Lady Stark in her stead and did not leave Brandon’s side.

On the third day of her vigil, Catelyn’s husband came to speak with her: “Grand Maester Marwyn and Maester Flowers both agree that Brandon will survive, Catelyn. They do not know when he will wake up, but he will. However, the boy will not walk again.”

Catelyn turned to her husband and saw tears in his eyes. For a long time, she thought Brandon had little love for their son. Now, seeing him showing so much affection for their boy, Catelyn felt she had judged her Lord Husband too harshly.

Brandon sat down with her, holding her hands: “We had a meeting about the succession of Winterfell, Catelyn. It is too early to tell, but the fall might have impaired Brandon’s ability to sire sons. Ned believes we should try to have another. I insisted with both my brothers that we needed to discuss all the possibilities, in case I am to die before you are with child. Do you understand?”

Catelyn did; Maester Flowers had told them the previous year that, although Catelyn was fairly young, the succession of five failed pregnancies in the eight years after Sansa was born had severely
dwindled her ability to conceive.

Brandon Stark had mostly kept to Barbrey Cerwyn’s bed. Catelyn was now, for the first time, glad of this fact, for his mistress was barren. Her husband had no bastards to be legitimized and threaten her son’s rulership.

“Our son will come after me, as it should be. Sansa would be his heir, but I have other plans for her, after I spoke with His Grace and Prince Viserys, who believes Sansa will do well in the south.”

Catelyn voiced her objections: “Sansa should marry a second or third son of a northern house, stay at Winterfell and provide Brandon with heirs. My father would insist the next Lord of Winterfell to have his blood and you should know that.”

“This was my first reaction, too, but there will be great changes in the south, changes that might affect us, Catelyn.” Brandon told about King Rhaegar taking his sister, Princess Daenerys as wife. The announcement would be made upon His Grace return to King's Landing. Daenerys was sent to Dragonstone and the next Queen of Westeros was in need of Ladies- in-waiting.

“King Rhaegar wants the Court to be less dornish; he feels his union to Elia and now with his brother also married into House Martell, made their position too strong. The Small Council and the Kingsguard have representation of all Seven Kingdoms, save for The North. His Grace has been a great supporter of the Night’s Watch and is the force behind the repopulation of the New Gift, which brought us great prestige among our bannermen and even more grains. King Rhaegar and I agree that The North needs to have its presence felt in the South. It was mentioned that His Grace second cousin, Lord Baratheon, would be amenable to a match between our Sansa and his heir. “

Lady Stark decided it would be a far better prospect for Sansa indeed. Their daughter had enough wolf’s blood in her, but she was also Tully in looks and a follower of the Seven.

The South would agree with Sansa and there were other reasons to consider....

_House Baratheon is in line of succession to the Iron Throne, as the closest relation of House Targaryen without the Royal name._

As tenue as the link was, it would be a connection to the Iron Throne, Catelyn thought to herself.

Catelyn was about to agree when Brandon continued to weigh in their options:” Prince Viserys is quite impressed with our daughter. He mentioned that Lady Joanna Lannister is, for what he heard, as frail as Queen Elia was. As much as I dislike the implications, I do understand House Targaryen thinking twice about honouring such betrothal. Sansa will turn ten in four fortchnitts and it will be years until she flowers. We can always call her back to Winterfell if the betrothal with Lord Baratheon´s heir is not agreed upon, and marry her to Robb.”

Catelyn looked at her son. She was a mother, but also Lady Stark. Now that Catelyn saw that her husband cared for their son and would not take Winterfell away from the boy, even if he was an invalid, she was ready to agree with him.

She had to ask, but Catelyn knew who would be named as next in line after her son, if their plans bear fruits.

“Jon Stark would be next in line if Brandon is unable to sire sons and if Sansa is to become Lady Baratheon. House Stark must endure another eight thousand years.”
Tyrion Lannister had thought about joining the Faith and becoming High Septon - for he was a Lannister of Casterly Rock and he had to always have the best - until he fell in love for the first time.

Tysha was her name. Tyrion was four and ten. He found a drunk septon to perform a wedding, and they were briefly married.

Then his Lord Father, Tywin Lannister, interfered.

The marriage was declared “null and void”; he supposed they had made Tysha drink moon tea. His brother, Ser Jaime Lannister, told Tyrion that the girl was a common whore, not a helpless servant girl that he had rescued from would be rapists. It had all been “a jape at his expense”.

Tyrion could not believe it, but Jaime would not lie to him. “Do not fret, little brother. I dealt with the problem with discretion. Father wanted to punish the girl for her insolence, but even whores have dreams and we cannot really fault her. So, I gave her gold and had Sandor Clegane take her to the docks and board a ship. You will survive, Tyrion.”

Since Jaime’s way of dealing with such issue was not cruel enough for Tywin Lannister, the Old Lion summoned Tyrion to King’s Landing. The sister Tyrion had never met, Lady Cersei Arryn, had been sent the year before to The Vale, after the birth of her second son.

“It seems, dear Father, that you can only take one offspring at a time.” Tyrion said matter of factly. His Lord Father would visit Casterly Rock every year, but of Cersei, little was known or said. “One day I shall visit this sister of mine. They say The Eyrie is…”

“Quiet!” Lord Lannister screamed. “Marrying the whore was stupid. Lannisters don't act like fools. You are going to say something clever? Go, say something clever!”

Tyrion tried to: “The rumour is that my dear sister has been exiled to the Eyrie because she was eating too much and you could not abide having a second Genna Lannister, fat and loud, in your halls…”

Tywin interrupted his son once again “Your mother is dead; before long I will be dead; and you and Jaime and your sister and all of their children. Dead. All of us, dead. All of us, rotting in the ground. It is the family name that lives on. What are you doing to add to House Lannister’s greatness, I ask?”

Tyrion fell into silence. His father ordered him to think about his options and to speak to Grand Maester Marwyn, who had agreed to take him under his wings. His Lord Father had too much to do as Lord Hand. He did not have time, or interest, in teaching Tyrion anything.

“Your Lord Father already told me about your dalliance, boy.” Tyrion lowered his head, in shame. “I thought my misstep would be known only by my family. There is no reason to be ashamed, Lord Tyrion. Whores can be as sweet as any noble maiden.”

Marwyn invited Tyrion to sit and drink some Arbor Gold: “Look at us. Tell me what you see.”

“Two men…sitting and drinking?” Tyrion offered.

“A dwarf and an ugly man. There will be no songs for us, Lord Tyrion. We are no valiant knights
and no sane woman would open their legs to us willingly, except if we pay them to. Never hide who you are. Learn how to use it, to your advantage. I am ugly, but intelligent. With you, I was told, is the same. The Citadel is a place for people like us, the ones who fight their battles in their heads, not in the fields.”

Tyrion took the hint, and left for Old Town as quickly as possible.

But before, Marwyn celebrated the event by taking Tyrion to a brothel. “Maesters also have pricks, my Lord. Septons too, if you have not noticed. Discretion is always the key. You, as a Lannister, will not be sent to a remote Keep in the shores of The North. Your Lord Father will call for you. You might even succeed me as Grand Maester. Or become an Archmaester, which was the path I had designed for myself before that old fool, Pycelle died.“

For once in his life, Tyrion took his studies seriously. He forged his chain in less than four years.

As Marwyn predicted, Lord Lannister had used his influence to have Maester Tyrion returned to Casterly Rock. The betrothal agreement between Crown Prince Aegon and Lady Joanna Lannister signed, Tywin resigned and returned to his homeland.

Maester Tyrion was to assess Lady Joanna´s health and act as her tutor; he would be accompanying his niece to King´s Landing once she flowered and the betrothal be officially announced.

Lord Lannister wanted to hear Tyrion’s professional opinion on Joanna: “ Some women find it harder to birth babies in their first attempt. My dear good sister Lady Mellara is to be accounted as one of them. She was not yet six and ten. She would have been in a better position if older. Joanna was, like Queen Elia, born premature. Her lungs had not properly developed by the time she left her mother´s womb. Joanna is clever, funny and will be a great Queen one day. But her health will be always a source of concern.”

For the first time in his life, Tyrion saw something akin to pride in his father's eyes: “ I see my gold was well spent and that you learned your trade well. Is there something we could do to improve Joanna’s health. Grand Maester Marwyn sent me word that my granddaughter’s health has been mentioned during Small Council meetings, now that I am not there to control information. A mistake, it seems, to have wanted to return to where I belong before my time comes…”

Tyrion had always wished to be loved and cherished by the father he secretly admired. Now, hearing Tywin speaking so candidly, Tyrion started to have hopes.

Father is...confiding in me, asking for my advice!

“The treatments so far have been working. In my opinion, would only do Joanna good if she spend more time in light outdoor activities. We could increase the intensity of exercises slowly. She must develop some muscles to be fit enough for birthing babies. We need to allow her body to develop. Joanna would be in great danger if she falls pregnant before the appropriate age, which would be six and ten, or older.”

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House Arryn

Lord Jon Arryn now sat in the Small Council as Hand of the King. He left his heir, Ser Elbert, to rule
The Eyrie in his stead.

This had been two years ago, in 290 A.C. Elbert was still under his wife´s spell and blind to her many vices.

Cersei Arryn was beautiful, willful and had a temper many in the Vale had come to know. She could be pleasant and performed her duties as Lady Arryn adequately, but she was far from being an asset to House Arryn as her father, Tywin Lannister, had convinced them she would.

The only real friend she had made in all her years in The Vale was one that Cersei had met during her childhood at Riverrun, a small Lord of the Fingers called Petyr Baelish. Ser Elbert never gave the man a second thought. Baelish knew his place and was always helpful. They sent him to Gulltown and the revenues from taxes doubled.

This appointment and Cersei providing House Arryn with an heir, was the extent of her additions to House Arryn.

Lord Baelish became a constant presence in The Eyrie.

Cersei did not care to establish good relationships with most of bannermen. The people of the Vale, too dutiful and proud, were "bores" in her opinion. The Eyrie was too isolated and would not provide her with enough pastimes as the Red Keep.

They had spent three years as her father’s guests in King’s Landing and the idea of returning to that city that smelled like shit and intrigue became an obsession of Cersei.

Soon after Lord Arryn left, Cersei started to nag her husband to return to the Red Keep: “Now that your uncle is Lord Hand, we should at least visit more often. You must think about our Myrcella, my love. She would have more and better prospects in the Court.”

Ser Elbert told his wife that they were to remain in The Vale, where they were needed. He was adamant about it.

When Cersei realized her husband placed his Duty above her desires, their marital bed became as cold as the snows of the Mountain.
Secret Ambitions

Chapter Summary

Viserys is more what he makes appear;
Maester Flowers cleans up for Lord Stark;
Grand Maester Marwyn is connecting several dots and
Maester Tyrion receives an invitation.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

House Stark 292 A.C

Lady Catelyn Stark happiness at her husband's decision of confirming Bran as his heir, regardless of the boy’s ability to sire sons - and that, even in the event of Ned's son, Jon, being made Bran’s heir, that Tully's blood would still be running through the future Lords of Winterfell veins, was short lived.

“As soon as Bran wakes up and the Maesters tell us for sure...” Lord Stark said while sitting at his son's bedside “ I would like you to travel to Riverrun and speak to your Lord father. Lady Lysa Mallister, your sister, has daughters you should meet. One of them might come to bind our families again in the future after all, should Jon succeed Brandon and Sansa marries into a southron House…”

Catelyn agreed, adding that the eldest of her nieces, Minisa Mallister, was five years of age and a good enough match for Jon.

The worries of a Mother and the duties of a Lady overlapping, Catelyn deemed the matter of Winterfell’s succession was appropriately discussed. She then took the initiative to bring another problem into the fold:

”My Lord, we should conduct an investigation on Brandon’s fall. Our son has been climbing that Tower for as long as I can remember and he never had a scratch or a scare. Mayhaps we should consider that our security has been breached. There is the possibility that Brandon was pushed from that window. Once he wakes, he could clarify, of course, but this does not preclude us from acting on the matter.”

Lord Stark reacted badly to his wife’s ponderations:“Do not be absurd, my Lady. Our son simply fell. Maester Flowers said that he might be confused or not remember once he awakes. We should move on and adapt to a new life, not waste much time and energy on a fruitless task. ”

Brandon stood up and, without even sparing a last glance at his wife or son, left the chambers at once.

Catelyn started to suspect that his Lord Husband was hiding something from her.
“How is the boy, my love?” Barbrey asked as Brandon leaned in for a kiss; he stopped the movement halfway to answer her:

“Bran might become an invalid, Barb. The Maesters are not yet without hope and I pray he will wake up and be whole again.”

Barbrey opened her arms for an embrace, hugging her big framed lover and stroking Brandon’s thick, brown hair as she tried her best to reassure him.

After a few moments, Brandon broke the hug and spoke about the agreement he reached with his wife. “However, that is not the end of it. She wishes me to investigate the accident. Catelyn thinks Bran was pushed.”

“Do you think Catelyn will start making questions? Some of the household must have seen us entering the Tower.”

"The Household are to serve Lord Stark and not answer to Catelyn Tully. Now, go and get dressed! We have a King to entertain!"

Barbrey went to her chambers to change into a new gown Brandon had gifted her. It was a plain, but well cut long sleeved dress, embroidered with great care by a man of the Mountain’s Clans that lived at Wintertown.

Barbrey was not more than a girl when she met Brandon. It did not take much long for him to notice her and soon, they were inseparable. He did not want to marry Catelyn Tully, he told her. Defying his father’s will and arrying Barbrey without his approval instead was not in Brandon’s plans however. *As having me wed to a disinherited Stark was also not part of my father’s plans.*

Lord Ryswell expected nature to run its course, for Barbrey to get with child and he would have played the part of “wronged father” to Lord Stark, but destiny was cruel and their little scheme, unsuccessful.

Brandon was not a romantic. He simply wanted to avoid a marriage he felt would not work and Barbrey was, in his opinion, a much better candidate for Lady Stark than the Tully girl. They understood one another and were compatible in many ways.

But Barbrey’s womb would not quicken and Brandon went south, intent in not looking back.

Catelyn Tully was a beautiful woman. Not even Brandon could deny that. Barbrey knew he had tried to keep to his wife’s bed for the first year. Lord Rickard Stark would not abide for his heir siring bastards while his perfectly capable to conceive good daughter was ready to do her duty.

Brandon, however, disliked only doing his duty. He longed for something different than what Catelyn was able to offer him. The whores at Wintertown were just a passtime; Brandon needed a mate, like the wolf he was, and he instinctively turned to the girl he had left in the Rills.

What had started as a juvenile infatuation mixed with lust turned into love as Barbrey provided Brandon with both release and comfort. With the years, she also started to care for both his children, Bran and Sansa, as if they were her own.

*They would be, if the Gods were not so cruel.*

But a dutiful son Brandon was and he waited until his father passed to dare having Barbrey at
Winterfell.

Lord Cerwyn had a daughter nobody seemed to want and Lord Ryswell had another that could not bear children. Barbrey did not know whether it was Brandon or his Maester that came up with the idea. She only knew that the agreement had made many happy: her life as Lady Cerwyn was tolerable, for her old husband was distant, but respectable; Benjen Stark had gained a lordship and poor old Jonelle was given the chance of having her own family; and Brandon had a discreet and highborn mistress a day’s ride from Winterfell, that would not bring forth bastards and endanger his legitimate line.

The only one unhappy with such arrangements was Catelyn Tully; as a woman, Barbrey did feel pity towards the wife of her lover, as it was evident the woman had wished for a much different marriage than the one she got. Barbrey suspected that Brandon had played the valiant knight part and fooled the girl, but she also felt that Catelyn should not only have known better, but also, should have tried her best to adapt to Brandon instead of simply expecting him to be the fulfillment of all her silly fantasies.

*The fool could have had a perfectly happy marriage if she cared at being less Lady of Winterfell and more a wife for Brandon.*

She was already getting late; in a hurry to leave, Barbrey did not even try to search for her pearl hair pin that went missing.

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Lady Ashara Stark felt sorry for what her good sister, Catelyn, was going through. No mother, she thought, deserved to see her son fighting for his life at so tender age. Ned had asked his wife to take some responsibilities in the Keep, as Catelyn, quite understandably, would not leave Bran’s side.

Not being particularly close to Catelyn and even feeling sometimes resentment from her, Ashara suggested she take Sansa under her wing and start training the girl for managing the Castle. There was always work to be done at Winterfell, especially now with the Royal visit.

King Rhaegar was showing The North great favour with the visit, the second in less than 10 years, and it was vital that Lord Stark would show His Grace the results of their mutual cooperation.

The accident with little Brandon, however, derailed some plans; Rhaegar decided to shorten their stay in a sennight and to move to Queenscrown with Lord Benjen and his most trusted advisors sooner, not wanting to impose on House Stark in such a turbulent time.

Ashara had noticed that Rhaegar looked happier than she had ever seen; the change agreed with His Grace, who had always been a beautiful creature. Elia, her friend, loved her husband, but could not be possibly the cause for Rhaegar's change, Ashara wondered...

Jon and Robb were training with Ser Rodrik; Ashara’s brother had been given a day off, so naturally she organized her day to spend as much time as possible with Arthur. She both missed him and wanted to know all about the Court's gossip.

“Are you satisfied with Jon so far, brother?“

Arthur was. “Jon has real talent, Ash. Robb also shows promise, but I must tell you, the decision to send him to The Vale and Jon to me was a good one. His Grace said he would have accepted Jon as a squire for himself had I been too busy. It is quite the compliment. The King has plans for Jon,
This really took Ashara by surprise. *What kind of plans?*  “Explain yourself, Art. You are terrible in keeping secrets from me; I know you are dying to tell me!”

“I have always wanted to visit the Godswood, Ash. Would you care to walk me?”

*Something is indeed amiss with Rhaegar, it was not just my impression.*

They sat by the weirwood and Arthur spoke freely, noticing there was nobody in close proximity, except the Old Gods:” Plainly speaking, Ash, our friend Elia will be set aside; she miscalculated and tried to come between Rhaegar and his family.”

“What do you mean, Art; Elia is his family, she almost died so he could have his heir.”

“I am speaking of his true family, Ash, you know this well. “ Ashara nodded; Elia had always said she wished Rhaegar would be as close to their children- and by extension, to her- as he was with his mother and siblings- “There is something wrong with Aegon, sister. You just need to spend an hour with the boy to notice. Rhaegar thought his son was a child of prophecy, but Aegon seems to think he is a miracle of the Faith. One and ten and his voice is changing, but he still spends all his time either praying or reading the Seven Pointed Star. As for Rhaenys, yes, she has her father's affections. Elia he never loved. “

“What had Elia done that caused such rift, Art? She has been dealing with the Targaryens for far too long to make a mistake now of all times. Elia would not endanger the future of her family for nothing.”

“It was exactly thinking about her own that Elia gave Rhaegar his reasons to remove her. Princess Daenerys was to be wed to Ser Willas Tyrell. Queen Rhaella was very supportive of the idea and the boy was obviously in love with the King’s sister. Princess Rhaenys, as you know, is very clever and, noticing a bond was being formed, had told her father that she would accept Ser Edmure Tully. Elia, however, would not let her daughter play second fiddle to Daenerys.”

*It cannot be that trivial; setting Elia aside because she pushed Rhaenys into a more advantageable match?*

Ashara did not even need asking, as Arthur answered her obvious question next: “ Rhaegar does not love Elia, but he does love Daenerys. All I know is that, the day after Viserys wedding, Queen Mother Rhaella suddenly arrived; Rhaegar announced he was to go North and the High Septon granted him an special leave to wed Daenerys in two years time.”

“As for Jon, sister; the boy is a wolf and Rhaegar is in need of one. Since Aegon in all probability is not going to risk his precious life to protect the savage, Old Gods worshiping North, the King wants to prepare Jon for the enormous task that lies ahead. “

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Lady Catelyn Stark asked to have a word with Maester Flowers after he had performed a physical examination of little Brandon, sharing her concerns over the safety of Winterfell and the accident.

Maester Flowers offered his advice and assistance:” You present good reasons, my Lady. Lord Stark is very busy at the moment and you, of course, must stay by Bran´s side. If this puts your mind at ease, I could go the Broken Tower, and search the place for signs of foul play.”
Lady Stark nodded in agreement, thanking the Maester for the help.

In truth, Maester Flowers already had an inkling of what had happened and a very particular pearl hair pin he found on the floor, a couple of steps from the window from which Bran fell, confirmed his suspicions.

Maester Flowers discreetly returned the pin to its owner, reporting to Lady Stark that his search found nothing that could lead credence to her theory.

When Bran woke up a couple of days before the Royal party was to leave for The Wall, Flowers invited his colleague, Marwyn to evaluate the boy’s health.

Both agreed that the extent of the injury Brandon suffered made him unable to further the Stark line. After informing the fact to the parents, Maester Flowers was sought by Grand Maester Marwyn:

“The boy conveyed me the most unusual dreams.” Marwyn said with a hint of amusement. “The North is an odd place, Flowers, and I have been to many odd places in my life. He was telling me of a crow, and I looked to the window and what did I see?”

“A crow?”

Marwyn smiled: “Not any crow. This one had three eyes.”

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House Targaryen

Prince Viserys had no qualms about leaving his newly wedded wife behind and travel north with his Kingly brother; he had known Arianne for a long time and they could be apart if needed be. Arianne lost her maidenhead to him- and Damon Sand- when she was four and ten. Prince Doran and Queen Elia had forced the subject of marriage as means of reparation for dishonouring Arianne, as if they did not know the Princess of Dorne well enough, but Viserys did not mind; Arianne’s true allegiance was to Viserys, but it served them well to think otherwise.

Viserys was not beyond exploring the many benefits of being the second son and third in line of succession. Everybody considered Prince Oberyn Martell to be nothing more than a travelling knight, filled with lust and spreading mischief through the Seven Kingdoms, completely forgetting how prepared and how well the Red Viper served his family in all things. To give the impression of being nothing more than an adventure seeking, carefree Prince not expected to inherit anything gave Viserys another great advantage over his secret enemies.

In short, Viserys hid his ambitious nature under a cover of apparent simplicity.

Viserys had been, once, perfectly happy in playing second to Rhaegar, but things had changed through the years. The loss of Daenerys as his bride was a big blow to him; the mere thought of his dear sister being given away to a mere bannermen as a reward enraged him, however Arianne was not without charm and more than a suitable substitute to his first choice.

Rhaegar was his King and Viserys was nothing if not subservient to the wills of his brother; the betrothal was announced and Viserys spent even more time at Dorne.
Rhaegar's son, however, was not worth following. The boy was too prude, religious and bland to ever hope to become a good King. Since the beginning, Aegon had not shown any strength of character or defining trait marking him as anything but ordinary.

Aside from his valyrian looks and position in the line of succession, Aegon Targaryen was nothing but an insipid boy.

Dull personality aside, Aegon Targaryen had Elia Martell and Tywin Lannister as his closest allies. Viserys Targaryen had been raised around both; he knew first hand how they moved the pieces on the board. Elia had her tears- which Viserys had dubbed “Water of Dorne”- and a heir with her blood in his veins while Lord Lannister controlled the richest Realm of the Seven Kingdoms and a granddaughter conceived and raised to become the next Queen.

The game of thrones had started and neither had noticed.

Every since Daenerys started to grow tits and her hips became wider, Rhaegar had lusted for her. Viserys knew this too well because he felt the same way, but Daenerys had to serve a greater purpose, he said to himself.

Viserys had learned to be a patient man and it was not the lure of taking her maidenhead that would divert the Prince from the path he had set.

*If I play my cards correctly, I will have it all, Daenerys included.*

A few dornish whores and the occasional essosi courtesan was not enough to fill the hole in Rhaegar’s heart; only a Princess out of a fairytale, innocence personified would do.

The day of Viserys wedding to Arianne was the perfect occasion to start the process of replacing Elia Martell.

The Queen was, of course, unaware of Viserys *true* intentions. It would not do him any good to be openly against Elia. The Prince had given his good sister only reasons to trust him, even offering his help to have Princess Rhaenys be wed to the Tyrell heir, a much better match than Lord Tully’s only son.

When Rhaegar went to see Viserys on his wedding day for a few brotherly words, the Prince set his plans into motion.

“Dear brother, our sister has only eyes for you; the Tyrell boy means nothing.” Viserys said while offering his brother a goblet of wine. “She sees him as her duty, I tell you. Mother surely gave Daenerys the impression you need her wed to House Tyrell. “

Rhaegar’s indigo eyes could not hide a spark; Viserys knew he had hit the bull’s eyes: “Dany is not meant to be mine, Vis. I do love her and I cannot dishonour her. Mayhaps it is for the best that she goes to Highgarden, far from my sight.”

Viserys could have rolled his eyes, but instead, placed his hand over his brother’s shoulder and insisted in playing matchmaker: “Ah, brother, always sacrificing yourself for the good of the Realm. You are King, Rhaegar. Married to a Queen that is more of a sister than your own. Everybody knows it. The High Septon sure knows it and you have him in your pocket. Be bold; go to Daenerys tonight. Declare your feelings. If she accepts you, who is to tell you she is not meant to be yours? Why would father’s seed take root in mother's womb if not for this purpose?"

Rhaegar did not need to be told twice.
Elia, of course, would not allow to be replaced without a fight. Viserys would not have expected her to, actually. The Queen almost managed to convince Rhaegar of keeping Daenerys as his mistress - which, of course, was not what Viserys had intended.

Had Queen Mother Rhaella not arrived, Viserys would have to blow his cover and provide Rhaegar with good reasons not to follow through Elia's cleverly improvised plan of having Dany wed to Jon Connington.

After the agreement was signed and Rhaegar took his holy vow of celibacy, Viserys informed his wife he was to go North with his brother; Queen Elia insisted Oberyn would also join and in a fortnight, they departed to White Harbour.

The dornish influence in court had to be broken and the the alliance with Lord Tywin Lannister, shaken. House Stark would prove invaluable to weaken both Martell and Lannister in the long term. Rhaegar was so obsessed into uniting “Ice to Fire” that he almost had run away with Lady Lyanna Stark once. Viserys simply had to go North and see it for himself.

Lady Sansa Stark was a mere child - about to turn 10 years old- but there was beauty, poise and eagerness to please. The direwolf she had as pet, of course, was there to show anyone that Sansa was a true maiden of the North, however there was enough of the south in her to make the girl acceptable at Court.

Viserys openly praised Lord Stark’s favorite offspring and convinced Rhaegar in appointing the girl as Lady in waiting for Daenerys. The least that could happen was the pretty girl start to feel thankful for the patronage of the Prince and start providing him with information.

However, if Viserys game was well played, Sansa Stark could be a replacement for Lady Joanna Lannister, and, from this place forward, he would find a way to further his plans.

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King Rhaegar was soon to depart to The Wall and was taking his last moments at Winterfell to write some letters.

The first was to his Hand, Jon Arryn, simply answering some inquires. The appointment was made so that the Vale would have someone in the Small Council and Lord Tywin himself, his predecessor, had suggested the name. Rhaegar was aware of the ties between House Lannister and Arryn, but a good suggestion is a good suggestion and he had no reasons to regret the choice, as the Lord of the Eyrie was diligent in his work.

The other letter was directed to his immediate family. Of Elia and Aegon, Rhaegar wanted to know as little as possible. He would have addressed only Rhaenys, but he did not want to displease his wife or be less than cordial to his heir.

When Aegon was born, Rhaegar had thought he was the Prince that was Promised. Elia had almost gave her life to bring this life forth, a sacrifice Rhaegar would always be aware of and thankful for.

The hopes from the past were gone; Rhaegar prayed that Aegon would be a suitable replacement when time came and that he, somehow, would find a way to win the only war that mattered, since he was convinced that Aegon would not be playing any important role in it.

*Had Lyanna waited for me, would the prophecy be fulfilled?*
The first time Rhaegar had gone North, her memory was still fresh. There was no bitterness or regret on his part, just sadness when Rhaegar was introduced to Lyanna's daughter, Arya Dustin. His best friend's nephew, Jon Stark, despite being half Dayne, was the personification of a Northern Warrior. The boy’s eyes were such a dark violet that looked black, Rhaegar noticed.

*Had Lyanna waited, Jon could have been ours.*

The correspondence with Maester Aemon, his grand uncle, never ceased; the longest summer in ages would be followed by the longest winter and , when winter came, The Others would come with it.

From the line of Aerys and Rhaella this Prince would come, the prophecy said. His grandparents forced his parents into a loveless union for the sake of the Realm. His own unhappiness did nothing but give Rhaegar hope that the sacrifice was not in vain. If Aegon was not the one, who was then?

In the last years, Daenerys showed Rhaegar a glimpse of greatness within her. But something more, however, was happening inside of him; Dany was the only one who could take his head out of his many problems and provide Rhaegar with peace.

His heart had already chosen her, he knew it.

The impetus of seeking Daenerys was provided by their brother. For once, Viserys convinced Rhaegar to be bold when he had already decided to give up. Rhaegar went to her chambers not thinking about prophecies, magic, war, responsibilities... all Rhaegar wanted was the comfort of Daenerys body against his.

The moment Rhaegar took Daenerys for the first time, he knew it.

It was not Aegon, nor Rhaenys or even himself. It was her.

The day after such revelation, Rhaegar was confronted with the political implications of his careless act. Now, after his first attempt had failed, Rhaegar was better prepared to face the consequences. He allowed Elia to believe she could lead him again as means of buying him time. Rhaegar had already summoned the High Septon and spoke to Grand Maester Marwyn when Rhaella came from Dragonstone, furious and demanding the marriage contract to be signed, not noticing that Rhaegar had already started to move towards the same goal.

After the vow was taken under the High Septon and Queen Mother's eyes, Grand Maester Marwyn requested an audience.

Instead the draft of the marriage contract, the Maester placed the Targaryen Family tree and several parchments detailing the birth, care and deaths of the dragons over His Grace's desk.

His new findings were song to Rhaegar's ears.

“Your Grace, it seems we have been trying to answer the wrong questions. Although the evidence suggests House Targaryen would purposely marry into other families every second generation, to bring new blood and preventing deformities and infertility to plague your line, we failed to see the link between the births of both types of dragons. There is a very intriguing correlation I found, which makes it evident that there are distinctions between riding dragons and hatching them.”

Marwyn theorized that not every dragon rider was a dragon hatcher. The feat was very rare, even in a Family of dragonlords, and was the true source of Power. Magic was but one component and the presence of dragons itself generated the perfect environment for others to be born. Marwyn proposed to the House that the female members of the House could be capable of hatching dragons; the tradition of placing a dragon egg in the cradle was more of a way to intensify the bond between a dragon and a possible
rider. Although many eggs failed to hatch, Marwyn said, some of those babies in the cradle grew up to become riders, by claiming unbonded, older dragons, which supported his theory.

“I came to this conclusion studying the Dance of Dragons, Your Grace, and going back the generations I found this to be consistent with the rate of dragon hatching and pure, female Targaryen’s birth. Who knows, mayhaps Queen Rhaenyra was his father's heir because of her dragon hatching abilities. One has to remember how her brother lost an eye by going to Dragonstone to claim one of her dragons, as he was not capable of hatching an egg himself.”

Rhaegar felt that his heart had always been right, his reason always on the way; Daenerys was the key.

Their mother was not against the match, but blamed Rhaegar for breaking protocol and wished to protect Daenerys from harming herself and her life by marrying too young.

Only because the thought of losing her was too much for him to bear that Rhaegar agreed in waiting for his bride, his true Queen, to grow.

The last letter Rhaegar wrote was addressed to his sister; after years of not being inspired, Rhaegar had finally be able to write her a song:

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You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride;
you have stolen my heart
with one glance of your eyes,
with one jewel of your necklace.
How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride!
How much more pleasing is your love than wine,
and the fragrance of your perfume
more than any spice!*
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**House Tyrell**

Ser Willas Tyrell had been knighted age five and ten much to his family delight. Not yet betrothed by age seven and ten, his parents and grandmother had great hopes for their stay at the Red Keep. Prince Viserys was to be wed; the Targaryen Princesses had flowered and the event would give nobles the chance of courting them.
Rhaenys was very pleasing to the eye, Willas agreed, a mixture of both Rhoynar and Valyrian, but he could only see her as a friend, nothing more.

Daenerys was not only beautiful, but intelligent, kind and innocent. A perfect rose.

Willas parents were more than happy with his choice, despite Rhaenys being ahead in the succession: “Princess Daenerys is much better suited for Highgarden. Princess Rhaenys is maybe too Dornish for The Reach. We must make haste, dear boy.”

Lord Mace Tyrell and Ser Willas were to speak with the King in his solar the morning after the bedding ceremony of Prince Viserys and the Princess of Dorne, having submitted a formal proposal for Daenerys hand the day before.

His Grace told them the details of the proposal were satisfactory and that he would be happy to finally unite Houses Targaryen and Tyrell through matrimony. “However, Princess Daenerys is not available.”

When Willas saw Rhaegar and Daenerys taking a stroll in the gardens, with only the Kingsguard and Queen Mother Rhaella as company, the King’s hand gently touching his sisters, he realized who would be Daenerys intended.

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House Lannister

Maester Tyrion was surprised to receive a letter and an invitation from his sister, Lady Cersei Arryn, to visit her at The Eyrie.

He mentioned the fact to the only person at Casterly Rock he knew Cersei kept a friendship with, which was his good sister, Lady Mellara:” How come Lady Arryn writes you, but not her twin brother?”

“Cersei has spent most of her life away from home, Tyrion. I do have fond memories of her, we building sand castles at the beach, but mostly, I remember her being very close to Jaime. When Lady Joanna died, Lord Tywin decided Cersei would be staying at Riverrun, while Jaime continued to be fostered at Ashemark. I suppose Jaime is a stranger to her now and it is simply easier to write to another woman.”

Interesting that I seem to be the only one who thinks there is something wrong with her exile.

Lady Mellara, of course, kept no information from her husband and soon Jaime was asking Tyrion if he planned to leave for the Eyrie: “I am not attached to any Castle and I consider time travelling as time well spent. Mayhaps I could write about the Mountain Clans, the wildlings of the south? It would be interesting. Not as interesting as finally meeting my elusive sister, of course. Why Cersei does not write you, Jaime? I understand she waiting for me to reach adulthood before finally contacting, but you...you were very close, once, everybody agrees on that.“

Jaime gave Tyrion a confused look; then, he covered his mouth with one hand, his eyes lost in thought. It must have taken Jaime a minute before he made his reply: “We would write, you know? The last time I saw her, mother was pregnant with you and, when mother died, Cersei would write me even more often, asking me to convince Father to return home. She wanted to see mother’s
resting place. For years, I begged Father to allow Cersei to come. I think he did it once, but had me at Ashemark at the time. When my betrothal was announced to Mellara, I asked Father for Cersei to attend my wedding. He said Cersei was an Arryn, not a Lannister, not anymore. For me not to worry about her, as she was strong and that she would never return to Casterly Rock, because it was not her home. I wrote her a long letter, explaining it to her, the best way I could, that Father would not have her and that I was sorry. It was then that she stopped replying my letters. I also stopped writing them.”

Chapter End Notes

* this verse is, of course, from The Song of Songs, King Solomon’s masterpiece.
Chapter Summary

Prince Viserys grip on his Princess wife is explained; Rhaegar is in Queenscrown, meeting with wildlings and hearing Marwyn; Cersei starts to make her moves.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

House Martell 292 A.C

Prince Oberyn would have assumed that his good brother, King Rhaegar, would avoid him at all costs and was already prepared to spend most of his time either practicing with the famous northern warriors, or at the brothel- always a good occupation in his opinion- but instead, Rhaegar had insisted him to be present at very important meetings and, most surprisingly, invited him over to Castle Black.

He could not argue with His Grace’s logic: “You are capable, Oberyn, and we need men of intellect in this war effort. Elia is still the mother of my children and it is better that she hears from her own brother about our dealing than from spies.” Rhaegar silently gestured to the chair before him; Oberyn sat, the solid wooden table filled with maps and parchments.

“Wildlings are risking their lives to come south, Oberyn. They are not raiding; some are even willingly bending their knees. Why would they do that? Lord Benjen Stark decided to cross The Wall with rangers from the Night’s Watch to investigate why so many are giving up their freedom. He saw enough to convince him that the tales are true; Lord Stark agreed in sending him once again to represent House Stark. You should come, Oberyn, not as a relation of mine, but as your brother’s emissary. I already informed Lord Hoster Tully that I am bringing Ser Brynden with us. “

“What you considered that the repopulation of the New Gift in itself is reason enough for the free folk to cross? Good land, enough game and a pacified area is a attractive enough prospect.” The prophecy was real to Rhaegar; he was forever trying to fit events into the frame of what he expected to happen based on his studies. Even Aegon’s conception, under a falling star, had been proof that his son was the song of ice and fire once. Oberyn sighted; he was used, by now, at being the only voice of reason in many such discussions. “Sometimes, the simplest explanation is the right one.”

“Normally, yes, I would have paid those rumours no mind, believe me, but...” Rhaegar then grabbed a letter from under his mess of prachments and read the following passage:
I saw a large host across a river and they were all armoured on ice; a part of me knew I was dreaming, but another part exulted; they were bathed in dragonfire and melted away, like dew and turned the river into a torrent…

Princess Arianne threw a fit when her Husband, Prince Viserys, informed her he was to join his Kingly brother North: “You tell me you are leaving a sennight after we wed, Vis! How do you think I should react?”

“Thanking me for looking after our interests would be a good start, beloved.” Viserys said with a smile on his face. “Besides, we have been sleeping together for over two years now and you have my leave to seek comfort in our dear Ser Daemon Sand’s arms.”

When her uncle Oberyn brought his squire and the newly knighted Prince with him for a visit at Sunspear, Arianne could not decide which one she was attracted the most. In doubt, she took her cousin Tyenne’s advice and focused on Prince Viserys- her father would never allow her to marry a bastard, after all- but much to her surprise, Daemon always found a way of being near the new couple.

Everybody knew that Sand had been one of Oberyn’s lovers, but her uncle would never touch Viserys in any improper way since Elia had expressly forbidden her brother to take any liberty with his charge.

The silver haired Prince treated his younger friend, some moon turns older than Arianne, with distant affection. Viserys took pains not to be involved in any scandal with nobles or their bastards while in Dorne and, instead he was known to spend his nights in the company of courtesans or prostitutes, his preference being the bedwarmers of Lys, much to Arianne’s annoyance, since she, in looks, was as far from Valyria as one could be.

Daemon gave Arianne her first kiss; she suspected it was also the first time he had been kissed by a woman, but did not ask. Viserys must have heard about this, maybe even from Daemon himself, because the next time she saw him, the Prince made his moves towards her, obviously inspired by his competition.

Arianne felt it was only proper to at least feign some resistance, which amused Viserys: “Why, Arianne, would you be more willing if a I ask a certain squire to join us?”

She was speechless. How does he know I have been fantasizing about the both of them? There was no hint of jealousy or disapproval in Viserys tone. Arianne decided that yes, she wanted this to happen, as Viserys had already proved to her that he was very good at keeping secrets.

Daemon joined them in bed that night. However, Viserys was a Prince and, as such, insisted in him being the first to take her. The sight of Arianne’s maiden blood in Viserys cock was deeply arousing to the three of them. Viserys was the clear leader and instigator; since that night, he was the one establishing the rules of that relationship.

After commanding Daemon to lick Arianne’s virgin blood from his member, Viserys made them both swear oaths of loyalty and fidelity to him; Viserys himself said he would wed Arianne if his brother approved of the match, and Daemon would be the only man he allowed to take his wife
during his absences, provided they refrained from siring bastards: “Her womb belongs to House Targaryen, Sand, this much I insist.”

They spent the night discovering each other’s bodies; their needs sated, the three overslept and were found by Arianne’s parents the morning after; their already strained marriage barely survived the shock.

Mellario of Norvos came from a much more conservative society; she did not understand or accept her daughter’s appetites.

Prince Doran’s reaction was a much more practical one and Arianne knew her father was relieved to know that Viserys was looking forward to marry Arianne.

The incident was kept a secret while the betrothal contract was being negotiated; but Prince Doran insisted Ser Daemon Sand would be staying behind, feeling it would be in bad taste to bring him to King's Landing for the nuptials.

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House Targaryen

Rhaegar took pains to read only the part where Daenerys detailed the strange dream, without giving Oberyn many explanations. He was, after all, Elia’s brother. Rhaegar could not go on and tell the dornish prince how, after taking Daenerys maidenhead, he had somehow woken something inside of her, unlocking the gift of sight in his bride, or, as Grand Maester Marwyn put it "allowed the Princess to open her third eye”.

They left the next day; Rhaegar ordered Viserys and Ser Arthur to return to King's Landing immediately with their charges, Lady Sansa Stark and Lord Jon Stark.

Rhaegar did not expect to spend more than a couple of days at Queenscrown; despite Lord Benjen’s renovations, it was only a Tower.

The simplicity of the surroundings were reminiscent of his first trip, however this time Rhaegar was impressed to see the fruits of their hard work, as the nearby village was alive and the farmlands around the area, productive and vast.

“My ancestor, Alysanne, stayed at Queenscrown for some nights; if it was good for her, it is certainly good enough for me!”, he declared, much to Lady Jonelle’s happiness.

His Grace insisted there was no need for feasting, but did not refuse when his hostess asked His Grace to play at least one song to the audience.

Rhaegar was nice enough to grant plain Lady Jonelle this honour, but elected to play “Jenny’s song”, a tried and tested, safe enough choice instead of revealing the new composition he had made that filled him with pride.

*I will not displease my good brother by singing “Sweet Dany” here; there will be time for that, in the future, when Elia is no longer at court…*

After dinner, Lord Benjen asked his son's nanny, a wildling named Osha, to give the King a full
account of her time Beyond the Wall and the reasons why she left.

Even Rhaegar had a hard time believing the woman; it was not that he thought Osha was lying, but... when she told them her late husband, whom she had laid to rest in a shallow grave as there was not enough wood to make him a pyre, came back from the dead and tried to kill her, His Grace asked himself how this would be even physically possible.

Grand Maester Marwyn offered an explanation: “Necromancy is still being practiced in Qohor and Ashai, Your Grace, but not on this level. Mostly, they use corpses as divination tools, vessels for other spirits to take place and share secrets of the future; their magic is not strong enough to raise the dead for more than minutes or to make the corpses do their bidding. The Wall, however...has magic woven in its foundations. If this is true, there is a very powerful necromancer living among the wildlings.”

“Osha” Benjen said “ His Grace has the intention of going Beyond The Wall to investigate. This visit is really important, Osha, and might help your people if we establish that their lives are indeed in danger. However we have no time to actually kill someone and wait for this person to turn into a wight, so I ask of you to tell us about any proof, anything really that we could find there …”

“The giants I’ve seen, the children I’ve heard tell of, and the white walkers...there is a vile man called Craster; he is despised by us, the free folk. He takes his daughters as wives; the boys, he gives them to the walkers. Ask the crows; Craster is friends with them. The white walkers are his Gods.”

The next day, they departed; since Queenscrown had only ravens capable of flying to the main northern Keeps and the manned Castles at The Wall, Rhaegar sent a letter addressed to his Lord Hand and the Queen Regent, detailing his last decisions.

It was a painful letter to write, because it brought Rhaegar back to the day he felt he had lost his daughter forever.

Princess Rhaenys had been furious about his father betrothal to Daenerys and, out of spite, requested Ser Arthur Dayne to become her sworn shield and move to Highgarden with her. “Father, you took my best friend away from me; I shall take yours.”

“You disappoint me, Rhaenys. I could never expect you to support my betrothal, nor was I asking this of you, but such petty vengeance... this is beneath you, my daughter.”

Rhaenys did not back down and continued to attack her father: “ What do you expect? You force me to marry Ser Willas, and not only that, but it is your desire to remove me from court as soon as possible. I am five moon turns younger than Daenerys and yet, I am to marry and start bearing children next year. I know the risks damn well father, for grandmother explained to me what happened to her after you were born when she was four and ten. It pains me that you care to protect her and not me.”

“If that is the main reason for your hateful words, my daughter, you should be telling this to your dear mother. I must admit that I granted her request of having you wed Lord Mace Tyrell’s heir next year without a second thought, and that it was a mistake perhaps, but I gave my word already.”

Rhaenys was speechless, stunned at the revelation.

While Rhaegar felt that, if his daughter was old enough to be telling him some truths, that she should be old enough to hear some, he could not be indifferent to his eldest’s feelings, and he tried to make it right, or rather, correct his wrongdoing in somememure:
“Rhaenys, I am really sorry. While I cannot go back on my word, I could approach Lord Mace and his Master and request them an additional year for you to conceive.”

It was too little, too late; Rhaenys looked defeated and betrayed : “No father. I apologise for being out of line. I shall do my Duty, as both my sires saw fit.”

Therefore, King Rhaegar Targaryen confirmed in this letter the schedule for the next Royal Weddings:

Princess Rhaenys Targaryen is to wed Ser Willas Tyrell at Highgarden in 293 A.C- His Grace would be in attendance with his bride, Princess Daenerys and their betrothal would be announced the day after the bedding ceremony;

His Grace, Rhaegar Targaryen, First of His name, would wed his sister, Princess Daenerys Targaryen at the Red Keep, in 294 A.C and the announcement for the betrothal of Crown Prince Aegon Targaryen and Lady Joanna Lannister would also be made at the end of the festivities.

Queen Elia Martell would be formally set aside; it was His Grace wishes that Elia was to accompany the Crown Prince to Dragonstone after Daenerys was elevated to Queenship; she would be welcomed in the Red Keep as the mother of the next in line, returning to her usual chambers in 295 A.C, where she would bear witness to her son’s marriage to Lady Joanna.

Rhaegar hoped that this timeline would make his children more accepting of his upcoming marriage, or at least, indifferent enough not to create problems. Sending Ser Arthur Dayne and his northern nephew, Jon, to Highgarden also had advantages. Aegon would not take kindly to the presence of Jon Stark and a direwolf.

Rhaegar had learned that anything Aegon saw as opposing The Faith would meet with his son’s most violent reactions.

But his love for Daenerys gave Rhaegar at least some hope for the future, despite Aegon’s flaws, Rhaegar wanted to believe it was only the sturboness of children. My son is still young; he will grow out of so many of his silly notions.

Therefore, Rhaegar decided to send Ser Arthur and Jon to Dragonstone, joining Daenerys household for the year before Rhaenys was to be wed, when they would also be moved to Highgarden for an undefined amount of time.

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Daenerys continued to feel guilty and conflicted about her new status as her brother's bride.

Rhaegar altogether avoided his first family, spending all the time he had free in Daenerys and Rhaella’s company. Her brother would only see and interact with his wife and children at lunch time, when most of the Court would be present and paying attention.

Their betrothal had not been officially announced, but anyone with eyes and ears knew it was just a matter of time. Rhaenys stopped speaking to Daenerys, a fact that deeply hurt her since they had been the best of friends since the cradle ; Elia would make sure to be seen addressing the Princess in a polite and warm manner, but her eyes were cold pools of resentment. The Crown Prince refused to stay in the same room with Daenerys and took his meals in the privacy of his chambers.

Rhaegar remained oblivious to the Court’s gossip, urging Daenerys to trust only in her family by
blood, as if Rhaenys and Aegon were adopted. With the treatment she was receiving from them, Daenerys could see the wisdom in Rhaegar’s words. They hate me now because I am taking their mother’s place, despite not being really my choice.

Viserys would sometimes join Rhaegar and Daenerys for supper. It was usually a private affair at His Grace’s solar, with only some close friends and advisors attending upon written invitation by the hand of the King, and their brother was the first to both congratulate them and joke about the shift in the courtiers loyalties: “Sweet sister will have trouble managing all the attention and politely refusing offers of honest and uninterested friendship of nobles trying to be in our Kingly brother’s favor.”

It was exactly like Viserys said and Daenerys watched, in horror, how even some of Queen Elia ladies in waiting would flock to her side once her presence was noticed in the Halls.

Rhaegar and Rhaella decided it would be best to select ladies in waiting for Daenerys among the most noble and loyal families, to join her at Dragonstone as soon as possible. Rhaella insisted they should be “around Daenerys age, either a couple of years younger or older and, preferably, from Houses not yet at the Red Keep, or at least, not under Her Grace’s influence.”

The night before they were both to sail- Rhaegar to White Harbour and Daenerys to Dragonstone- Queen Rhaella allowed the couple to spend ten minutes alone, with only Ser Arthur Dayne as chaperone.

She was nervous about it.

“Dany, please. I will not disrespect you, I swear it. You can come closer, I just wish to hold your hand.” Daenerys knew about the holy oath Rhaegar took it; he had apologised to her about his lost of self control and she had been instructed by the High Septon to open her heart to her betrothed. I must trust Rhaegar; he loves me and he will not hurt me.

He looked very happy that Daenerys managed to relax, and started to stroke her hair:” You know I love you, Dany. The next two years will be very hard on me, but I must repent. You are my princess, my heart, my soul. I will write you often, and I want to receive as many replies as possible. We will not see each other for at least a year; it pains me to think of it, but I have a Duty to my people and you must study and prepare for your new role. You will be a great Queen, my love, of this I am sure.”

For all his mistakes and flaws, Rhaegar at least had faith in her and for that, Daenerys was deeply thankful.

In the days after Rhaegar departure, Daenerys life began to change for the better.

His letters were a balm for her soul; Rhaegar would tell Daenerys about The North, its people and landscapes and, more importantly, about himself. He would ask her opinion and answer her questions, not in a condescending way, but in a direct and honest manner. Daenerys started to feel even closer to Rhaegar and she herself also opened up to him, detailing her strange dreams and premonitions, things that she would not even tell her Mother, in fear of her reaction.

Daenerys had been raised with Rhaenys and the Red Keep was always filled with youngsters. Now, isolated at Dragonstone, she prepared to receive her ladies in waiting and form her own household, praying they would be good and loyal.

The first to arrive was Lady Leonette Fossoway, from The Reach. Rhaella declared any Tyrell or Redwyne to be too closely associated with Queen Elia, so Rhaegar approached a couple of Houses and decided on Leonette, who was about two years older than Daenerys and played the High Harp.
The young woman was very pretty, proper and sweet; Queen Rhaella adored Leonette and Daenerys happily spent hours learning or listening her to play.

It was Leonette who instructed Daenerys in playing the song Rhaegar had gifted her. “His Grace is so romantic, Princess. This song will be sung for many centuries to come, the legacy of his love for you.”

When Rhaella heard her son’s new composition “Sweet Dany”, instead of getting teary eyed and commenting on the sweetness of the melody and beauty of its lyrics, the Queen Mother laughed.

“Better not play this when Queen Elia is around; I am not sure she could survive the slight.”

The second to arrive was Lady Brienne of Tarth. Rhaegar explained that the stormlander was four and ten, but very tall and plain looking. Her father had been hesitant in accepting the invitation, pointing out that Brienne was his heiress and “not well versed in the womanly arts, preferring to wear mail to dresses.” However, it was exactly what Rhaegar was looking for. He had instructed the Master of Arms at Dragonstone, Ser Terrence Celtigar, to develop a training routine for Daenerys and her ladies in waiting, reasoning a woman should, at least, be prepared to defend herself.

In this regard, Rhaegar’s views were in agreement with his good brother, Prince Oberyn, who trained his daughters in arms. He had commented once how he regretted to have entrusted Rhaenys education entirely to Elia, who insisted their daughter to be a proper Princess and now, that she was to marry into House Tyrell, it seemed that the opportunity had been lost. In his letters, Rhaegar explained that they must be prepared when time came, for the war they would be fighting in the future was one for survival. His intentions, Rhaegar said, were not to turn women into spearwives or shieldmaidens or place them in the line of fire, but he had to be prepared, and prepare his people, for the worst.

Brienne did look more like a boy than a girl, but she was shy and had a beautiful smile. Rhaella allowed the girl to train in arms even more thoroughly than Daenerys and Leonette, but also demanded that Brienne saw to her other duties. The stormlander was dutiful, but not very talented at needlepoint, and they could all see how she struggled to fit.

“Do not fret, child” Queen Rhaella said one day to Brienne “you can read for us while we work with our needles.”

When Lady Myranda Royce, age six and ten, arrived from the Vale, Dragonstone suddenly became smaller. The girl was so full of life and laughter that put even Brienne at ease. Rhaegar had asked Lord Jon Arryn for suggestions since Lady Myrcella Arryn was far too young for the honour, and he had mentioned the daughter of his steward, since Lord Yohn Royce’s daughter was even younger than his great niece.

The last letter Daenerys received from Winterfell before her betrothed was to depart to The Wall told her about her fourth companion:

“Our dear brother suggested that Lord Stark’s daughter, Lady Sansa, would be a fine addition to your household, my Love, and I must agree. She just turned ten, but she is
dutiful and intelligent. Lady Sansa is a daughter of the North, but has the Tully looks and keeps Faith in the Seven. I must confess that, what made me heed to Vis advice was the fact that Lady Sansa has a direwolf as a pet. The beast is sweet temperated and is becoming quite fat, since Lady Sansa feeds her lemon cakes.

Their progress might be slow; Viserys, as you ca imagine, is intent in visiting every Castle there is and enjoy our bannermen’s hospitality. It gladdens me to say that Lady Sansa will not be the only northerner going south. Lord Eddard Stark will be accompanying his younger son, Lord Robb Stark, to the Vale, where the boy is to squire for Lord Royce. Good old Ser Arthur Dayne, the Sword of the Morning himself, will be taking his eldest nephew, Lord Jon Stark, into his service. As I allowed Lord Jon to bring his direwolf- much more impressive than Lady Sansa’s , I must add- they are also to stay at Dragonstone; such beautiful animal should not be constrained in the Red Keep. Ser Jonothor Darry will return to King’s Landing while Ser Arthur Dayne will look after you, my precious bride.”

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House Stark

The only joys allowed to Lady Catelyn were the ones she took from motherhood.

Bran was now an invalid, but he lived. Maester Flowers said he would grow to be a wise and a capable Lord of Winterfell; the military duties could be delegated to either Robb Stark, if he was to marry Sansa, or to Jon Stark, if he was to be named his cousin’s heir.

Catelyn hated to think of Jon as anything but Ned Stark’s son; even if the boy was to marry her niece, Catelyn would have preferred a second son of Sansa to inherit Winterfell, Baratheon or not. Her grandson could adopt the name Stark and continue the line. She knew, however, the man she had married, and this would never be enough for Lord Stark; Jon looked, behaved and carried himself as a Stark, untainted by her Tully blood and looks.

_Sansa’s future will be bright and she will make me proud, as proud as a mother can be._ His Grace himself invited Sansa to enter into the future Queen’s service and Catelyn knew that her daughter would be happy in the south. Dragonstone was close enough to King’s Landing and Princess Daenerys would be moving her household from the island to the Red Keep when she was to wed her betrothed.

_Mayhaps Sansa will even be noticed by the Crown Prince; his betrothal to Lady Joanna Lannister is not yet announced._ The slightest possibility was still good enough and allowed a mother to dream; the agreement had been signed, His Grace had confirmed, but the very attentive Prince Viserys had confirmed to Catelyn that the girl was indeed frail, much more fit to become a septa than a mother.

“Remember to obey Queen Mother Rhaella when you arrive at Dragonstone, to write us as often as possible and not to create any problems to Prince Viserys. Septa Mordane will keep you company at all times and I want you to lit some candles and pray for my Lady Mother in my name, once you arrive at Riverrun. “

Catelyn held Sansa very tight, fighting the tears. _You are my last hope, dear daughter._ The girl also cried, kissing her older brother, who was sitting on a wheelchair, before finally crossing the Gates of
Winterfell.

When it was time to say goodbyes to her Lord Husband, Catelyn´s tears had already dried.

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The least thing that Brandon Stark wanted was to spend time with his Lady wife and son. The boy was now a cripple; Brandon told himself many times that it was not his fault, that the kid should not have climbed that damm Tower, but the look on his son´s face when he saw his father fucking a woman he considered part of the family did break Lord Stark´s heart.

Barbrey of course, felt the same; their bond, their love, only deepened with this hidden guilt, but even from her, Brandon wanted some time away.

When Ned announced that he would also be joining Prince Viserys party until the Riverlands, and from there, he would go The Vale, Brandon saw an opportunity for escape.

“Dear brother, I cannot leave my Sansa go south alone. Seeing that you are taking Robb with you made me realize how neglectful I was being. “

This meant that Ned Stark would be returning not to his Keep at Stony Shore and his beautiful Lady wife, but to Winterfell, boarding a ship from Gulltown or the Fingers as soon as Robb was entrusted to Lord Royce´s care.

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Lady Ashara Stark was furious.

“We have a life, a Keep, a family, Ned. Brandon cannot expect you to be always available to clean after his mess when he wants to take a small vacation. As far as I know, this job belongs to Maester Flowers.”

Brandon and Catelyn Stark were a constant source - the only really- of discontent and friction in their otherwise perfect marriage. The only limit that Ned had set to love and devotion for Ashara was his duty as son of House Stark.

“ Ash, please, you must understand. Catelyn and Flowers cannot care for all the matters of The North, at least not in the way a Stark would. There must be always a Stark in Winterfell. “

“Then I should also stay and wait for you, Ned.” Her husband objected; they had developed Stony Shore into a port city. It would never be as big as White Harbour, but it generated enough business to prompt Ned to expand and invest even more time and effort in the docks. The Westernlands were in constant need of tinder from The North and Bear Island ships would make stopovers at Stoney shore on their way to Lannisport.

Ned felt Ashara was smart enough and respected enough to hold their Keep in his absence: “ I swear I will not be staying too long, beloved. This time, I will not even wait for Brandon to return.”

Ashara came to hate Winterfell; it was the only thing that kept Ned away from her. The distance between Lady Catelyn and Lady Ashara had turned into a more clear dislike. Ever since Bran woke up from his coma, Catelyn had behaved as if Ashara was some sort of usurper, by taking much of
her responsibilities as Lady of Winterfell while the riverlander stayed by her son’s side.

Ashara knew Catelyn would feel this way and, to avoid any problem had insisted Sansa to assist her in the tasks. Instead of being thankful, Catelyn added this to her ever growing, imaginary lists of insults, and was as cold towards Ashara as she could dare to be without raising her husband’s ire.

There was also a more elemental aspect of Catelyn’s hatred of Ashara that did not fail the dornish woman’s notice. The love and care Ned showed his wife contrasted heavily with the treatment Catelyn received from her husband.

Catelyn looked at Ned with clear admiration and, perhaps, even something more.

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House Arryn

The news that Lady Myranda Royce was to become one of the next Queen Lady in waiting did not sit well with Lady Cersei Arryn: “The honour should have been granted to our Myrcella.”

Ser Elbert Arryn agreed, but took the time to explain his Lady wife that House Arryn had not been slighted: “It would have been, but Myrcella is too young, not even nine and Princess Daenerys needed company her age or older. My uncle advised His Grace to turn to House Royce instead, and they settled on Lady Myranda, also passing over Lady Ysilla on account of her age. Do not make of this a problem, Cersei.”

Cersei knew her husband was right, but still… “Mayhaps in a couple of years, the new Queen would be agreeable for Myrcella to enter her service?”

“My uncle writes me that His Grace will announce his betrothal next year and confirm the Crown Prince’s own betrothal the year after. Myrcella is not even a year younger than her cousin, Lady Joanna. They must be searching for ladies in waiting again in two years time at the earliest and…”

Cersei said nothing; it was better to keep her mouth shut, even if all she wanted was to jump at her husband’s throat and squeeze the life out of him.

Only over my dead body my Myrcella is to serve that sickly child of Casterly Rock.

Lady Arryn smiled at her husband, while pouring herself a goblet of Arbor Gold. “My little brother is now a sworn Maester of the Citadel and wrote me about a visit; he entered into my Lord Father’s service this year, my aunt Genna told me, and is, by all accounts, impressing my family with his skills. I took the liberty of inviting him to the Eyrie, Lord Husband, as it would do good for Myrcella and Sweet Robin to meet a relation from the Westerlands. His horrendous deformity aside, Tyrion is a Lannister.”

Ser Elbert saw no problems, but feared his wife would be scheming; she had never shown any interest in meeting Tyrion Lannister and this could only mean that she had hidden reasons for inviting her brother over.

The Arryn heir frankly, could not care less. If Maester Tyrion wants to play with Cersei, he is saving me time :“You should do as it pleases you, my Lady. We will receive your brother with respect and courtesy and yes, I do think our children would benefit from making their uncle’s acquaintance.”
Chapter End Notes

The ages of Daenerys ladies in waiting were changed based on the Canon differences from them to both Daenerys and Sansa; Myranda Royce is about eight years older than Sansa, so I placed her on the limit of age Rhaella had set. Brienne is a years older than Daenerys and Leonette should be, at least, Margaery’s age, give it or take.
Chapter Summary

Rhaegar makes a discovery;
Elia evaluates her current situation
Maester Tyrion leaves Casterly Rock and goes to The Eyrie.

Chapter Notes

Crucial Chapter for what is coming; I might make some small changes.

Elia Martell POV will be counted as House Martell, since she is now virtually divorced from Rhaegar

House Targaryen  293 A.C

Daenerys turned four and ten and her mother's former Lady in Waiting, Lady Velaryon, came from Driftmark for the occasion. “You have always been lovely, my dear child, but now you are stunning! His Grace is a lucky man to have your hand!”

The Princess was getting used to all the attention and compliments being paid to her; while she had to admit it was pleasant to be in polite society, Daenerys knew that most of the times people would tell her not the truth, but what they thought she wanted to hear:

“Good that you took notice of this by yourself, my daughter; it will save you from many disappointments in the future! Smile, smile always, but guard yourself; never lose your sweetenes, Dany, but do not forget who you are! The hardest is to tell the friends from foes. I myself, thought Elia was a friend... “

Elia! Elia, what have you done? Daenerys was never close to her brother's wife, but she could never have guessed that such a frail looking woman could hide such venom. Her mother, Daenerys knew, was as hurt by Eli as she was by Rhaenys treatment.

Rhaegar took my innocence, but it was Elia that sold it to him; my mother just asked for a higher price, when there was nothing more to be done. Who profited from it?

It was a question that haunted her; Daenerys knew she could not turn back and undo what have been done. Rhaegar was behaving as a perfect prince once again, and she was starting to have feelings for him and yet...she could not say the prospect of being Queen held any attraction to her.

Queen Rhaella definitely wanted a very different destiny to Daenerys- namely, Highgarden. Rhaenys too, despite being angry at her former friend, was getting married to a man she did not love, after years of being told she would have a say in such choice.
Who benefits from my marrying Rhaegar?

Daenerys could not answer it.

She was allowed a goblet of wine - Arbor, not Dornish Red- and went to bed soon after eating her name day cake.

There, a strange bird- a raven- was by the window when Daenerys entered. She started to feel as if the animal was observing her when suddenly, the raven flew.

Daenerys could barely sleep. Dreams.

Dreams of cold; cold in the summer snows.

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Maester Aemon Targaryen received his great nephew with a warm smile and a hug; not even his double oaths to the Citadel and The Watch would rob him from taking pleasure in his family’s visit.

“I hear congratulations are in order, Your Grace.” Aemon said as soon as his steward closed the door of his study, leaving the old man in the company of Grand Maester Marwyn and King Rhaegar.

“Daenerys is very special, uncle. Truly special. I love her dearly and we shall be happy.”

“Oh, I hope so, nephew, you sure deserve it! All that you have done for The Watch and The North, we are truly thankful. “

Rhaegar helped Aemon sit comfortably in his chair, and then sat by his side, while Marwyn stood nearby.

The old man continued speaking about the upcoming nuptials:“ Your parents were unhappy but your grandparents, Rhaegar...they loved each other. Egg did not want them to marry; he had spent too long among the smallfolk and came to think the Valyrian Tradition was wrong, but our blood...it does strange things to us.”

The dragon dreams, the madness and us, falling for our sisters. “ The coin is definitely on the right side with Daenerys, uncle. Marwyn, could you please explain our findings?”

The three men spent hours in deep conversation; King Rhaegar had brought grains and coin to The Wall and Lord Benjen was helping Lord Commander Mormont with the inventory while Oberyn and Ser Brynden took a tour of Castle Black.

Aemon’s steward came with their lunch and quickly left, while Grand Maester Marwyn spoke about Daenerys spiritual awakening and their belief that she would become a dragon hatcher.

Maester Aemon was open to the possibility of Marwyn’s theory, but was concerned about the lack of written accounts that could guide them about hatching dragons: “ Most of our knowledge has been lost, between the Fire of Valyria and Baelor, the Blessed burning all those books. Fool that he was! Dorne, however, was not yet part of the Seven Kingdoms. Have you asked your good brother to search his library for some dragon lore tomes? Mayhaps you should send even somebody to Volantis, the last daughter of Valyria…”

“We failed to remember such trivial details, Maester Aemon, we are sure to rectify the neglect now
that you reminded us. “Marwyn then went to add that Rhaegar had plans for travelling to Volantis in the future and visit their library himself.

The steward knocked once again, bringing a letter from Dragonstone. Even blind, Maester Aemon could sense that Rhaegar was keen in breaking the seal to read the piece of parchment with Daenerys handwriting and he saw no problem with it:

“Go ahead, nephew; pretend we are not here!”

Rhaegar smiled; he opened the letter and started to read in silence. At the end of it, there was a passage that related to another dream, one that Rhaegar felt he needed to share with his uncle:

A man, clad in black and walking aimlessly in the snow. Around him was a hill, and the hill had huge stones, arranged on a circle. For days the tall man walked into the deep forest; he could hear the river that would bring him to safety was not that far, but something stopped him. He unsheathed his sword; in the pommel, a ruby. But fight he did not; he went willingly to this cave, giving his hand to the catlike friends.

Maester Aemon knew exactly of whom Daenerys was writing about: “She is dreaming about Lord Brynden Rivers, clearly. He went ranging one day; something happened and only a man returned from his party. The group disbanded at the Fist of the First Men, this hill she told you about; it is located in the Haunted Forest. The river must be the Antler, where many of our rangers are known to go when they are in trouble, for the wildlings living nearby are not shy about accepting bribes.”

“Bloodraven took the sword with him; mayhaps Dark Sister is still in this cave…” Rhaegar said, barely containing his excitement. “And Craster...his home is also in this Haunted Forest. It seems it is where we should go.”

They went to have supper with the Lord Commander and Officers. When His Grace explained he was there not only to inspect their work and bring supplies, but also to go ranging and his party included other nobles not used to the hardships Beyond the Wall, Jeor Mormont had the presence of mind not to try to dissuade King Rhaegar, but rather started to prepare immediately.

Marwyn advised King Rhaegar and the members of his party to give the impression they were sorely interested in retrieving Dark Sister; not to mention anything about Craster or human sacrifices and white walkers.

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They left at Dawn, prepared to spend a fortnight in the wilderness. Grand Maester Marwyn, being a traveler and fighter by nature, joined them. He would provide medical assistance, and tend the ravens. Because it was Summer- despite the snows- they decided to forage and hunt as much as they could in an effort to travel light.

Qorin and Mance Rayder were the rangers assigned to lead His Grace and his party and they had prepared to search the area between the Fist of the First Man and the Antler River. “We must find a cave system, for what I was told, near enough the river. The problem is, we have caves everywhere.” Qorin said.

Marwyn could see how both Black Brothers were uneasy about the whole thing; he could not blame them, but he did not make things better when he reminded everybody how Gerion Lannister had
disappeared in Valyria trying to find House Lannister ancestral sword.

“The Others take you, Grand Maester! This is not what we wish to hear!” Prince Oberyn said, his tone somewhere between exasperated and amused.

Ser Brynden just shook his head: “I must say that now I feel grateful that House Tully never had a Valyrian Steel Sword!”

His Grace, from all people, was the only one to laugh of his Maester attempt at small talk; he was about to say something when a sense of dread invaded the minds and soul of all seven members.

“Why is it so cold?” Lord Benjen spoke suddenly.

Mance Rayder had an inkling of what was behind the sudden drop in temperature. He decided not to scare His Grace with his suspicions, working instead on a solution: “We are not far from Craster’s...mayhaps we should seek refuge at his Keep.”

Marwyn could hardly breathe; the cold was threatening to freeze him from inside out. His hands went to his dagger when the group heard cries and chants coming from the south.

“Craster’s must be in that direction for what I was told. It is true then. “ Rhaegar said, as he recognized the cries as coming from a baby. “Your friend is involved in sacrificing to the Old Gods?”

Rayder had also assumed it was so; Craster came from White Tree, a place known for blood offerings to the weirwoods. But no, he had to admit; Craster was different.

“Old Gods are cruel Gods indeed; yet...no. We are here, we must as well see the truth of it.” Rayder started to walk to the cold; they all followed it.

Between the trees and stones, they hid and saw as a pack of strange looking women left a bundle behind, in the snows. “It must be a boy; those are Craster’s daughters-wives.” Benjen said; Qorin made a sign for everybody not to move or speak.

The cold was now almost unbearable; they remained close as to keep their body heat. Most of their things stayed behind, in their camp, but nobody gave much mind.

They were too scared for their lives to even remember why they had come.

A shadow emerged from the mists of the cold. It stood in front of the baby, who had stopped crying. Tall, it was, and gaunt and hard as old bones, with flesh pale as milk. Its armor seemed to change color as it moved; The patterns ran like moonlight on water with every step it took. The baby in its arms, the white walker disappeared in the mists, taking not only an innocent life, but also the cold with it.

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Rhaegar was the first to say something when the cold mists dissipated: “What kind of men are we? We should have saved that baby!”

“We are humans, good brother; we are made of flesh; at that moment, my heart was telling me to go and fight the walker. And yet, my body...I could not move. I literally could not move. Was it the necromancer’s magic? Or was it my fear?”
They fell into silence and, while the battered soldiers before him were too numb to discuss the implications of this apparition, Marwyn’s mind was a place of great activity, adapting the new piece of information to his web of knowledge.

The Grandmaster knew he had to give them time, and yet, he had to say something: “We should move on; north, direction Fist of the First Men and then, southeast, to the Antler River, as we had planned. Our mission should be not only to find Dark Sister, but also to gather information about the Walkers. Remember Daenerys visions, Your Highness?”

The eyes fell in Rhaegar, who answered: “She saw an Army of walkers being defeated by dragon flame…and Bloodraven, being led by Children of the Forest into a cave.”

“The Princess knew of this?” Qhorin asked, incredulous. Without thinking, he went on: “What is she, a witch?”

“If we were not in need of your knowledge, crow, I would take your life right now for this insolence. Or mayhaps I should demand your filthy tongue on a silver plate, but I doubt you have any silver at Castle Black; I would have to drag you all the way south for that, of course.” For a second time, the members of the company froze, stunned by the Dragon’s wrath. “You are speaking of my sister, my bride, the next queen; make sure to know your place from now on; I shall hear your voice no more.”

Grand Maester Marwyn and Prince Oberyn should have been used to this side of King Rhaegar, but it was always a shock to witness the sudden change; Prince Viserys would call “waking the Dragon”.

Marwyn tried to steer the conversation back to the visions: “They must be preparing an Army, Your Grace, the vision was clear enough: soldiers clad in ice armour, south. The White Walkers being real, Giants, wargs, Children of the Forest…they must also be real. Bloodraven was rumoured to be a powerful sorcerer, and I have reasons to believe he might even be alive in that cave. Visions do not come out of the thin air; they are messages, not unlike a piece of parchment we receive through a raven. Who sent this vision to the Princess?”

The last thing Ser Brynden wanted was to continue with this mission: “Lord Rivers was already an old man when he disappeared; he would be about 130 years old nowadays, Maester; I hardly think he would be capable of sending anything to anyone.” and yet, I just saw a white walker; The North is a terrible place. “I say we should return to Castle Black and speak with the Lord Commander; he has much to explain to us about his friend.”

The decision did not belong to the group, but rather to their Leader: “We must continue.”

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**House Martell**

Queen Elia was walking on thin ice.

For ten years, she had been the single force that held House Targaryen together. Elia would never have the love of her husband, but she recognized she had been lucky enough to have everything else: the alliance and friendship of her good mother; the trust and confidence of her King; the love and loyalty of her family and popularity among the small folk.

When she had given birth to Aegon after a very troubled pregnancy, Elia had felt a sense of relief and accomplishment. *House Targaryen will continue through my son; I have done my Duty.* The
only time that confidence was shattered, was when Rhaegar fell in love and almost walked away from her. He stayed and agreed not to take official mistresses; Aegon was his heir and there would be no bastards to challenge his rule.

*Aegon. All is meant for Aegon. All should go to Aegon.*

But Aegon, her son...Aegon, her hope...Aegon was different.

Two and ten, almost an adult and yet, it was like his physical development had stopped.

He would not be tall and strongly built like his father; Rhaella had mentioned how Rhaegar had decided to become a knight overnight, and how his body had went from childlike to definitely masculine around that same age. Elia remembered the same change had happened with Oberyn, who could barely contain himself, losing his virginity at three and ten.

The previous year, Elia had asked Grand Maester Marwyn to prescribe some tonics for the boy, but was lectured about the Crown Prince’s behavior instead. “He does not eat well and refuses to engage in physical activity as a rule. His body needs the sustenance of a healthy diet and the stimulation of a routine of exercise to grow.”

Elia knew it was true; Aegon had no appetite.

*Appetites, really.*

Usually, parents would fear their children reaching the awkward age; Elia remembered her mother trying to explain her and Oberyn how relations between women and men worked, just to be corrected many times by the already self proclaimed “experienced man” her brother claimed to be.

Since she did not know how to talk about it with a boy, and Rhaegar was always busy, Elia asked Oberyn to speak about Aegon’s duty and how to perform it when time came to honour the agreement with House Lannister.

Oberyn returned an hour later, in shock: “Barr the door, Elia.”

“How bad it went?” Elia was Aegon’s mother, but she knew him to be difficult and Oberyn to be anything but understanding.

“Aegon knows how sexual intercourse works; Rhaegar had asked Marwyn to tell him a couple of months ago, you didn't know that?”

“No, I did not.” Elia shared very little of their children’s education with Rhaegar; their conversations tended to go always towards the political.

“Well, Aegon knows. I made him explain me as he was explained. He knows about menstrual cycles, about how the body is prepared for sex, conception, positions. He told me everything, Elia. Very matter of factly. There was no shame in having this conversation but also...no interest. Aegon did not ask me anything. Instead…”

“What, Oberyn?”

“I asked him to trust me and tell me how he felt about the prospect of marrying Lady Joanna and having children. I even called fatherhood one of the blessings of the Seven…” Oberyn asked Elia to sit in the divan before him, then he knelt before her, and cupped her face. “I am very sorry, sister. The boy is not interested.”
“Do you mean, he is not inclined towards women?”

“No, he is simply not interested. I read about such illness when I was at the Citadel. It is a scientific fact. There are people that do not feel any hint of sexual attraction. I asked him if he knew it was his responsibility to further the line; he said he prayed that it would never come to that. He does not like to be touched, or touch anyone, he explained me. Aegon dislikes the world we live in; he thinks our bodies are cages. It was a deeply disturbing conversation, sister.”

Elia did not want to believe, but she knew Oberyn would not lie to her: “What should I do, Oberyn? Do you think Aegon… is he, mad?”

“There are many forms of madness documented among the members of House Targaryen. Baelor the Blessed and Aerys I shunned their wives and were more interested in religion and books.”

Elia was about to cry. “Do not be sad, sister. At least, Aegon thinks Lady Joanna is an appropriate choice for Queen; if she is willing to be as religious as he is, mayhaps with the High Septon interference, they could conceive. I advise you to keep this a secret; form as many strong alliances to support Aegon’s rule as you possibly can. Pray that Lord Tywin Lannister live a long life. With his strong hands, even if Aegon is indeed mad, nobody would dare go against him.”

“But it is not only that, Oberyn. I did not sacrifice myself to have a son become a puppet. Aegon was supposed to become a great King, to sire sons and …”

“Elia, you must forget your expectations and be more pragmatic where Aegon is concerned. There is an odd intensity in him when he speaks about The Seven. He is your son, but you are also the daughter of House Martell. So is Rhaenys. She would be a much better queen, and you know this.”

“I cannot usurpe my own son, Oberyn. But yes, Rhaenys… she is soon to be betrothed. I just need to select a good match for her…”

Elia did not lose time and started working; the less Aegon was seen and heard, the better. Rhaenys needed to marry the Tyrel heir, if not for her brother, for herself.

*House Lannister would have to side with Aegon, even if he does not sire sons with their blood; The Reach has the army, the grains and most of the population. Dorne would be behind us.*

Her present was bleak; a son that could be the end of her dreams; a daughter that was barely speaking to her; a husband who would soon set her aside and replace her with a younger, more beautiful Queen…

But it was the future that interested Elia, that gave her strength to go on. Aegon could still change; and Rhaenys… *she will forgive me if her children is to inherit the Iron Throne.*

As for Daenerys… she could be Queen. For a time. But never could she be allowed to become a mother.

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**House Stark**

Out of necessity, Ned Stark had to change his travel plans drastically in order to accommodate his Liege, Lord Brandon Stark.
Ashara had been very happy when Ned suggested the whole family to travel through the Riverlands with Prince Viserys party, only separating around Oldstones and going East, to Runestone. They would be making stops along the way and Ned had even sent his childhood friend, Ser Elbert Arryn, word that he would be visiting The Eyrie.

After leaving Robb at Runestone, they would board a ship and continue south, to introduce Elia Stark to her namesake, Queen Elia, Ashara’s great friend. Sunspear, Starfall, Oldtown, Lannisport and finally, home, to Stony Shore. “Oh, Ned, it will be wonderful! Remember when you promised me the life of a wandering second son, filled with adventures and riches to be found?”

“I do, beloved. Instead, I made you Lady of a Keep; for that I apologise and now, it is time to rectify this injustice!”

Ashara was so happy that they barely sleep that night.

Ned could be excused to think that the following nights would be spent in the same way from there to the day they would depart, the couple enjoying the last days of having a soft bed to claim as them, but unfortunately, Brandon announced his decision of going South the next morning and Ned had to break Ashara’s heart and send her to Stoney Shore, alone.

He did not even suggest for Ashara to make the trip south with Prince Viserys´party because Brandon would be there. Ned was thankful that Ashara understood completely his reasons and did not press the subject.

Ned knew he was not alone in considering Ashara to be the most beautiful Lady in the Seven Kingdom. As long as men would respect her status of married woman, Ned had no reasons to worry; Ashara had made perfectly clear that she loved only her husband and this was all that mattered to him.

However, Ned had a responsibility towards Ashara; she was under his protection. It was painful to have witnessed that his own brother, Brandon, had been the one who almost pushed Ned into defending his Lady wife honour once.

The incident was still fresh in his memory: Lord Stark was visiting Stony Shore a couple of years ago and was on his cups. He took Ashara to dance and would not let go of her. Ned had to push his brother, who fell on the floor. The next day, Brandon apologised profusely, but a great deal of trust and respect towards his brother was lost that night. Ned decided not to speak about the incident anymore, and would not tell Catelyn; the woman suffered enough already. Ashara was the one to calm him down, urging Ned to forget.

And yet, he is my Liege and I should serve him.

Brandon had changed: it was not the wolf’s blood running through the veins that made his eldest more prone to impulsiveness and callous acts, Ned reflected, but the disappointment in how his own life had turned to be. Brandon was raised believing that everything was his for the taking; that he was stronger, smarter, better than anyone. He grew up to find out the reality to be much different: The North did not rule itself; being a Great Lord was a hard, demanding job and nobody became a good husband and a good father simply by marrying and siring children.

Life was much more than a game.

Only Barbrey and Maester Flowers were capable of tempering Brandon and make him believe he could still be the man their Father had wanted and hoped he would become...
Brandon Stark was happy to be far from home; life in the open airs and the smell of horse shit, ever present at the King’s Road, agreed with him.

Prince Viserys was charming and ready to entertain his hosts with stories and jokes. Brandon enjoyed his company, especially when they were visiting the brothels along the way while Ser Arthur Dayne would stay behind and guard the children.

However good it was to enjoy his freedom far from Lady Stark, Brandon also discovered many small pleasures in this trip. His daughter, Sansa, would dote on him, like Catelyn never did. Brandon tried to convince Sansa to have her direwolf join them hunting one day, just to be reminded that “Lady is a lady; she doesn't like to have dirty in her paws. She prefers to stay with me, Father!”

“Lady is a direwolf, sweetheart; you cannot treat such beautiful animal as a puppy!”

Sansa finally relented and gave him leave to take Lady with him. Brandon entered the tent they were sharing and saw Lady curled up in Sansa’s bed. “Come now, girl...your Master allowed it!”

Sansa was behind him and nodded: “Lady, you may go with Father if it pleases you. Or you can stay here and rest.”

Rest from what? All this wolf does is eat and have her pelt stroked until she falls asleep. The wolf raised her head for a brief second, looked at Brandon and Sansa, then returned to sleep.

“See, Father? Lady is not interested!”

Brandon just shook his head in disbelief and did not see when Jon came inside to call him for the hunt:

“Leave Lady be, uncle. Ghost will keep us company!”

“You are right, my boy, we should go; I have a feeling we will eat fresh meat tonight.”

Prince Viserys begged off, so the hunting party included Ser Arthur, Jon, Brandon and some riverlander Knights that had joined the Royal Progress. The direwolf was quick to scent a wild boar nearby and Jon was even faster with the bow and guaranteed the finest meal they had until then.

Brandon was beaming with pride: his nephew, two and ten and already a proficient hunter. Watching the boy developing into a fine man made Lord Stark both happy and miserable. It reminded him of his own boy, now a cripple locked at Winterfell; Brandon wished he could turn back time.

I would not have gone to that Tower if I had not married that Tully woman.

For all her flaws, Catelyn had given him Sansa. Brandon knew he should be thankful; the girl was a beauty and would make them proud. But she could have been born out of another woman.

Had Barbrey womb quickened with my seed, Father would have forgotten about Catelyn and her dowry. Or he would have forced Ned to marry that fish; he would have been happy with her at Winterfell. Ned should have been the first born, not me. I hate being a Great Lord. I would rather be the second son, married to Ashara, Lord of Stony Shore, with Jon as my heir...
Lord Baelish was summoned to The Eyrie from Gulltown, where he held control of the Customs. Cersei’s childhood friend was a master of finances, it seems, for the revenues of House Arryn increased tenfold.

She saw that her Baelish would be rewarded for his good services, both by Lord Arryn in King’s Landing, as by herself.

“My lioness!” Petyr said, when they were sure to be alone in the solar after Ser Elbert was called to handle important business. “How can I serve you, my golden Queen!”

“Serve me you will, now and always, Lord Baelish.” Cersei was already on her second goblet of wine; her husband not being present, she had no reasons to pretend or control her thirst.” It seems to me that you are wasting your talents in Gulltown; alas, we are both wasting our talents in The Vale. Boring place with boring people. The sacrifices I make for my beloved husband…. “

Lord Hoster Tully never cared for either his cupbearer or foster son; Lady Minisa was kind, but distant and while their children made for good playmates, they were a rather dull lot.

Petyr, Cersei found, was a much more interesting prospect. He was beneath their station, something he was aware of. He sought to please his hosts and their children always, as if his life depended on it. When Cersei arrived, she immediately understood the dynamic; she had seen the same thing taking place in Casterly Rock, where the hundreds of cousins would fight to get the attention of the main line through the heirs, Cersei and Jaime.

Cersei had ruled over The Rock with an iron fist. She had Jaime to do her bidding and cater for most of her desires back then. She wanted to be a knight, not a Lady. Her brother trained her in arms and would receive his rewards. Jaime was not unlike Petyr, Cersei reasoned; they both wanted to please. To please her.

While he was not brave, handsome or strong like Jaime, Petyr was shrewd and cunning. Cersei started to play with his affections for her, as children do, but his devotion grew stronger with the years and she had to come up with new rewards.

Her maidenhead belonged to House Arryn- Lord Lannister would write this in every letter he sent to Riverrun- and Cersei was not stupid; she went to her marital bed unspoiled and left said bed thoroughly bored.

Ser Elbert was good looking enough, but Cersei craved other things, things the Arryn heir would not be able to give her. She wanted a man who could either submit to her will or dominate her entirely; Lord Baelish had long ago became her servant, an agreement that provided them with both the excitement of a clandestine liaison and the stability of a close friendship.

“I was finally able to convince Lord Arryn to make use of your talents in King's Landing, my dear friend. Unfortunately, it seems that Lord Baratheon is doing well as Master of Coins, but there was an opening for the same position you held in Gulltown. “ Cersei then delivered Petyr Baelish with his letter of appointment for Master of Customs. “ I took the liberty and already accepted the honour in your name, my friend.”

Lord Baelish got on his knees: “Thank you, my beautiful Cersei. What should I do, to make you happy? “
“You may start by kissing my feet. I think you are deserving of such a reward.” Lord Baelish leaned in, pressing his lips on Cersei’s slippers; she smiled. “We need friends in King’s Landing, my dear, the same kind of friend we have in Gulltown.” Cersei made a gesture, indicating to Petyr that he should stop what he was doing and return to his seat.

“Remind me how we go about making friends, Petyr? Real friends, friends that will help us in the future?”

“We could acquire a very friendly house, where friendly women and men would welcome both the powerful and rich, and the poor and desperate. Friends are made both through pleasure, and fear.”

Cersei laughed "Good boy!"

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House Lannister

Lord Tywin Lannister declared Maester Tyrion to be a fool for accepting the invitation of his sister, Lady Arryn, to The Eyrie, but insisted his son to be escorted to The Vale by Sandor Clegane and a couple of his trusted men, and also provided his youngest son with enough gold and supplies as to make the trip a pleasant one.

“Do not linger in The Vale as I have need of you. You had promised to supervise the work on the cisterns and sewers of the Rock and I should not be the one reminding you of your many responsibilities.” Lord Lannister said as way of bidding goodbye to his son, who tried to thank his Father properly, but was dismissed with a waving hand, while the other was busy writing a letter.

Jaime had gifted Maester Tyrion with a beautiful mare for his twentieth nameday and was happy to see that the horse would be his mount: “Safe travels, little brother. Hopefully you will find some Mountain members and write that book you told me about.”

“Not this time, it seems; our Lord Father has not allotted me time enough for exploring the beauties and dangers of the Vale of Arryn.”

Maester Tyrion then went to say his goodbyes to his nephews and niece, children he had come to love and cherish in the last year: “Tommen, take good care of Ser Pounce, will you? He is just recovering from his cold and needs much cuddling!”

“I will, uncle Maester! the boy was chubby, with golden curls and a sunny disposition; Lord Lannister had discreetly asked Tyrion if the six years old was not simple minded”, as Tommen was very mild tempered and wanted nothing more than play with his cats instead of fighting with a wooden sword. Tyrion believed not, that Tommen was simply a happy and self indulgent child.

Tyrek was eight years old and a copy of Jaime, both in appearance and character, which meant Maester Tyrion was seriously considering tie his nephew to a chair and force him to finish his lessons. “What are you bringing me as a gift this time, uncle?”

“You are not very shy, are you? A Lannister through and through, I see. Would you like me to bring you a book, mayhaps?”

The boy stuck his tongue out of his mouth as an answer; Joanna, unfortunately, took ill and was confined to her chambers. Maester Tyrion said it was nothing grave, but Joanna needed to rest and eat well. He planted a kiss on her forehead before finally leaving The Rock.

Sandor Clegane was the worst company Maester Tyrion had ever had, until the dwarf found out the
man’s love for Dornish Red. " Drink, Clegane! I like my guards to have their rewards and you sure
deserve it. You are a big man, do you think only two chickens would suffice?

Clegane had not yet finished his meal, but answered that he " would eat a third one, if the Maester is
offering."

"Good! I am glad to make you happy! chickens, wine...it is very little to ask of life. The simple
pleasures..."

"Do you always talk that much?"

Yes, I do...I like to hear the sound of my voice. " We are in the middle of nowhere; I doubt they have
a vast Library here at this Inn, so I thought it was the perfect time to know you better, Clegane..."

The trip progressed uneventfully until they reached Fair Market, where Maester Tyrion´s company
crossed paths with Prince Viserys and his retinue, travelling south to King´s Landing: “Come,
Sandor, put a smile on your face! We should pay our respects to the last Dragonlords of Old
Valyria!”
Honest Conversations

Chapter Summary

Rhaegar returns from beyond The Wall;
Rhaenys and Willas try to make do and fail;
Maester Tyrion spend some time in the company of Viserys and Brandon Stark and
Cersei has a conversation with her husband.

House Targaryen  293 A.C

Queen Mother Rhaella had noticed the changes in her daughter's behaviour and was, for most part, relieved. She had become more guarded with her feelings and the intelligence that had always been there was emerging. The assigned Ladies in waiting were Daenerys constant companions; they were young and would grow up together, hopefully the ties of friendship would translate into loyalty towards their Queen and Daenerys would be surrounded by people she could trust.

*It will do her only good, to lose some of her naivety and have real friends; I will not be here for much longer.* Rhaella’s body had failed her when she needed the most and Daenerys was the one to pay the price. She had left her daughter alone in a serpent's pit and her own son had taken advantage of the fact.

Now, all Rhaella could expect was to live long enough until they were to be wed. In less than two years time, Daenerys would be Queen. *Elia must be set aside and stay as far away as possible. Rhaegar must know the dangers. But Rhaegar had been a fool once, will he ever learn?*

Her son’s letters from the North spoke only of love and his dreams for the future, not about how he planned in keeping Daenerys safe from his first wive’s wrath, and, even more significant, her son never mentioned his plans for Aegon, the heir nobody wanted to ascend the Throne.

From Dragonstone, Rhaella had learned that the boy had distanced himself from the High Septon, disappointed about His High Holiness role in setting Elia aside. Aegon was now surrounded by poor septons and Silent sisters, piety and humility being his only aspirations. What Rhaella thought it was endearing in a five years old, was worrisome in a two and ten boy, who should have been reaching puberty instead of fasting and hiding behind a Book.

The boy’s anger at the High Septon was, in fact, understandable; but Aegon rebelling against the Leader of The Faith he so dearly had followed his whole life was politically dangerous. Rhaella had wrote Rhaegar, urging him to put a stop to this, but her son was yet to offer her a reply.

Elia remained silent and did nothing. At least, Rhaella thought, her good daughter had the foresight of continuing to attend service at the Great Sept of Baelor as it was expected of a Queen, despite not lingering at the place too long, extending only the minimum amount of courtesy to the High Septon Rhaella had chosen.

Aegon, Rhaella was told, was particularly interested in the travelling Septons and Septas who would visit King’s Landing in peregrination to the Great Sept. The Crown Prince would hold a praying
circle every sennight, the only event he was known not to miss. He would give them coin, read passages of the Seven Pointed Star, light candles and sing hymns.

One of such septons had become a favorite of Rhaella’s grandson; nobody knew much about the story of this man, who had given up his name long ago as a symbol of his devotion. He had travelled the Realm and performed the duties of Septon in villages too small to have their own Septs, his battered body and face proof enough the tale was true. “Aegon’s Septon”, the man had been named by the servants of the Red Keep, was a grey haired, small and thin man, truly devout to the Faith, its mysteries and teachings, not corrupted by greed, lust or vanity.

Like Aegon himself, his septon had an iron will and his influence at the Red Keep was beginning to be felt, since Elia, mayhaps seeing the advantage of funding an opponent to The High Septon who had gone against her interests, was known to silently support the friendship.

Rhaella knew very well what the boy, her grandson was.

*Mad.*

If before she had not said it to Rhaegar’s face, it was out of respect for Elia. Now, everything had changed. Rhaella was dying; she had very little to lose and much to gain by speaking out the truth about Aegon. Her goal was to live enough to see Daenerys as Queen and to make The Court a safer place for her daughter to live and rule.

Daenerys womb would save House Targaryen, Rhaella was convinced. Aegon came out of the serpent’s egg, but it was the dragon disease that made the boy unfit.

Rhaella knew what she would say when Rhaegar returns: *Aegon will be worst then Baelor the Blessed and Aerys I combined; let the boy go and follow his septon; allow him to become One with the Seven and, by doing that, you will save our Family from doom. From Daenerys and Rhaegar’s line, the Prince that was Promised will come.*

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When King Rhaegar Targaryen returned from his excursion Beyond The Wall, almost two moons had passed.

In his estimation, the mission had been a success from every aspect. The unexpected discovery of the White Walkers had been a confirmation his studies had led to the truth; however terrible the visions imprinted in his memory would be, it was enough justification for the way he was living his life, Rhaegar thought. Now, anybody who dared doubt the Prophecy was true and think Rhaegar had wasted time in reading manuscripts and books, was proven wrong.

He had been right all along; the enemy was an ancient one and Dragons had to return.

The North and the Riverlands would be, respectively, the first Realms to be attacked if the Night’s Watch would fail to defend The Wall properly.

Lords Tully and Stark had to believe their brothers and their King’s words. As for Dorne...Prince Oberyn is Elia’s right hand, the person she trusted the most and her accomplice in many of her games. But he was also a very intelligent man and a father who loved his daughters fiercely. From now on, Oberyn would think twice before doing something that could potentially harm Rhaegar and Daenerys, His Grace expected, as he had made it clear they were both to lead Westeros when Winter was to come.
They were received at Castle Black with a Feast, Lord Commander Mormont clearly relieved a King had not died under his watch. As the men made merry in the Great Hall, Prince Oberyn and Lord Benjen Stark went to Moles Town for a quick visit and Rhaegar decided to spend the night speaking with his great uncle and Grand Maester.

He spoke about the nature of Craster sacrifices; white walkers being worshiped as Gods; Daenerys visions being proven real and the finding of Dark Sister.

Aemon was holding the sword; the weight, the feel...he confirmed it was indeed their Ancestral Sword and congratulated Rhaegar on the accomplishment, but noted there was a missing piece of the visions not yet discussed.

“And the Children of the Forest?”

“We never saw them.”

For the first time, Rhaegar told how exactly Dark Sister had been found:

Two days after we saw the walkers, I decided there was no point in going to the Fist of the First Men. “There is nothing there for us to see; we need just go northeast, into the Haunted Forest. The cave is near enough the Antler River, a couple of hours from the waters.”

For the next five days, we wandered. The rations of food were getting smaller and we were having no luck into foraging. We took to rest more than to walk; our bodies would tire very fast, at the smallest effort.

By the second sennight, we decided to establish a new plan. There was no use in all of us wasting so much energy. We would make a camp and just send two in one direction, for scouting. Splitting the group so deep in the woods would also be potentially dangerous and yes, we were still afraid of meeting an Ice Demon, but if I wanted to find Dark Sister, it was what needed to be done.

“We give it another 5 days; if we do not find this cave, I will stay behind with Mance Rayder and Ser Brynden for a sennight over and then, we will return.”

The night before I was to send them to Castle Black, I was on guard duty; everyone was sleeping and then, a figure came to me.

Tall, white as snow, covered in black. The hair was long, silver. He spoke without moving his mouth. I followed him. There was a path to the cave; we were not very far, but walking in circles. There was a hillside covered with wood and a cleft. That was the entrance. I could see weirwoods leading the way, but I was not allowed to follow.

Instead, he gave me the sword and commanded me to go back, never to return again. I had so many
questions… they are all irrelevant, he said.

The sword was never mine, not even when they called my Brynden. I have no need of it, as you have no need of answers. Go, Rhaegar. You do not belong here.

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House Tyrell

Lady Olenna hated to see Willas moping around, especially when there was work to be done, as his wedding to Princess Rhaenys would not be organizing itself: “Cheer up, silly boy; the sister will marry her brother, but you...your grandchildren will have a better claim to the Iron Throne this way. You should be doing some work around here, instead of hiding and reading stupid poetry books.”

“I will marry Rhaenys and have children with her; do not expect me to smile, nana, or do anything other than attend the festivities. I do not care.”

Wallas did not need to look at his grandmother to know she would be rolling her eyes: “ Do not be so dramatic! Your life is far from over. I know, the Princess is half Dornish, but she cannot be blamed for that. The Lord Oaf told me Rhaenys is not ugly, far from it, actually. There are worse destinies to be had, boy.”

Rhaenys was very pretty, Willas knew. She had all the Martell looks, except for the eyes and would make any man happy, he was sure. Willas, unfortunately, had not felt any attraction towards the girl. He had stayed in the Red Keep for two sennights after the Royal Wedding, spending all his free time trying to fall in love with Rhaenys and failing.

The Princess had not asked for this; she made it clear she was unhappy about their union; she was angry at being forced to marry Willas precisely because of Daenerys, and for many reasons as Willas learned with time.

They were allowed to spend some minutes unsupervised, except for the member of the Kingsguard assigned to protect Rhaenys, the day before Willas was to depart. Willas offered to take Rhaenys for a stroll and offered his arm; they walked in silence, at first, just speaking as they felt the eyes of the Red Keep were not on them.

Rhaenys decided it was time to leave the pretenses behind as they passed the Godswood: “I have nothing against you, Ser. You must understand my sadness...I am losing my best friend, the only sister I ever knew because my Father could not keep to his pants. Can’t you see the way he touches her, the way he looks at her? He is not only making me a poor substitute for her in your heart; he is robbing me and her of what we truly wanted.”

Not even four and ten and Rhaenys was smart enough to see underneath the game; Willas knew what Rhaenys was saying it was the truth. It pained him to think of what he might have had. He hoped that, with time, he would be able to let go, but still, it was almost unbearable.

“Growing up is not easy; I assume it is harder for Princesses.” Willas offered Rhaenys his arm again; they walked some meters until they sat on a bench. It was a beautiful day and the Sun was setting. He could only think how beautiful Daenerys hair would look with such light.

Rhaenys is pretty and intelligent, two qualities I value in women, why can't I feel anything?
Willas betrothed broke the silence once again: “The only thing that makes me glad is that Highgarden is very far from the Red Keep. I spent much time at Dragonstone, with grandmother and Dany; I never noticed before how awful the Red Keep truly was because it had never affected me before.”

Willas did not look at Rhaenys when he responded: “You are a good enough girl, Rhaenys. Mayhaps we could reach an agreement and not be miserable together.”

The thought was a practical one; Willas had not meant as an offense, but Rhaenys reacted badly, mayhaps not without reason: “Do you mean to say the only thing I can aspire is for us not to hate each other?”

Willas could have said he would “try to learn how to love her” or claim that “love would grow with time”, however, if they were to be honest with each other, he was not to speak in platitudes and make empty promises:

“I meant we are far from the first or last couple to be united in such circumstances. While love might never be part of our relationship, I do not wish for us to be bitter enemies. I only dared to think about romantic love once, and it ended badly. You know of whom I am speaking of. It also makes me sick the way your Father acts around Daenerys; despite my feelings, despite our feelings... we must learn how to live with it. They are to be wed; you also must make peace with her. It is not her fault.”

“No, it is not. If you speak with my Mother, she might make you believe it was indeed Daenerys plan all along. Father was never as close to us. He always favored her...do you think his feelings had changed or that he had always had this intention...”

Willas could not bare to think; King Rhaegar was not depraved to have had such desires towards a child. He assumed Rhaegar had simply saw in Daenerys what he himself had seen: a beautiful young woman, on the blink of adulthood.

He said that to Rhaenys and saw as his betrothed seemed to become less agitated: “What do you think of my brother, the Crown Prince. Speak your mind, please.”

“I barely met him, Princess...everybody says he is very religious.”

“Willas, he is the reason why Mother sold me to House Tyrell. Not even Grand Maester Marwyn has been able to fix Aegon. Mother expects Houses Lannister and Tyrell to take over and rule alongside House Martell when Father dies. She told me that herself, as means of apology. Do you know the implications?”

*Oh, this is music to Lady Olenna’s ears.*

“Yes, I know. You do well in not speaking so freely with my grandmother and father. They are overly ambitious. We are both young, paws in this game. They are the ones playing. Your mother, was she the one who asked you to tell me this?”

“No, Willas. Mother asked me to tell your Father.” Rhaenys took a deep breath; the Sun had already set and they were to return and have supper with their Families. “You see what the Red Keep does to people? Mother loved me once.”

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*House Lannister*
Prince Viserys was amused at the sight: a deformed dwarf atop of a horse being guarded by an ugly Giant.

“You must be Maester Tyrion Lannister and you, undoubtedly a Clegane. It is so good to see people from the Westerlands. We miss Lord Lannister dearly, of course. How is your Lord Father, if may I inquiry?”

Tyrion curtsied before the Prince and his audience, noticing a very fit and muscular man dressed in northern garb, but without the furs, by the silver haired man’s right side. He was looking at Tyrion with curious, grey eyes. He must be Lord Stark; I heard he was going South. Starks do not do well in the south, of course, but this one might prove different, being that he is so intimate with the Prince.

Their camp was well organized, clean and not as large as expected, a great feat when it came to Royal Progresses. Tyrion doubted Prince Viserys had been the one responsible as the King's brother had not exactly gained a reputation of being a taskmaster or a lover of order... He looked around and saw one Knight, clad in the Kingsguard armour, walking around and giving orders, working tirelessly while the other nobles stayed idle, enjoying themselves. Ser Arthur Dayne, the Sword of the Morning, my brother's hero.

“You are right, my Prince, I have the honour of being a son of Casterly Rock, but as a brother sworn to the Citadel I am hardly my Father’s son anymore and yet, I still work for House Lannister. My lord Father, I dare say, also misses the Royal Family and is looking forward to Highgarden.”

“We also hope to finally see Lady Joanna Lannister, who should be ten now. If she is half as beautiful as her grandmother is reportedly to have been, the Crown Prince is a lucky Prince indeed.”

They shared a most splendid meal; the meat was fresh, as Lord Stark and Jon Stark, Tyrion was told, made for an effective hunting team. “Of course, the wolf they have as pet is doing most of the job, but we allow them to take the credit.” Prince Viserys said with a smirk.

“My Prince, I assure you my boy is a very talented huntsman; ghost is there only to find the trail and to protect us.” Lord Stark then raised his goblet to an incredibly handsome young man, who had been just following Ser Arthur around and just recently sat by the end of the table. The boy answered with a smile and a nod.

“How old is your son, my Lord? Four and ten I assume?”

“Jon is two and ten.” Lord Stark said with a proud smile, looking at the boy with great affection. Then, he added, as an afterthought: “Jon is my nephew; my son, Bran, is the Stark at Winterfell.”

Tyrion decided to stay with the Royal Party for the day and only depart the next morning, when they were to continue their progress. He spoke more thoroughly with Lord Stark and found out that the son he had only mentioned in passing had fallen from a Tower and was not supposed to walk again.

“If I may be bold, I could be of assistance and design a special saddle that would allow your son to ride. It is a good exercise for invalids and would provide him with more mobility. This, of course, depending on the extent of his injuries.”

Lord Stark thanked for the help and was glad to accept the gift: “Maester Flowers is yet to receive a reply from The Citadel regarding the best treatment for Brandon, as he was seeking ways to make the boy less dependant on assistance. This saddle might be exactly what our Maester was looking
It was night when Clegane finally returned to the tent to start his watch over Tyrion. He had spent the rest of the day sparring with the men at arms, being only defeated by Ser Arthur Dayne himself. Tyrion had been busy designing the saddle to pay his Shield any mind, but could see that something had disturbed The Hound:

“What happened, Clegane? You look even more annoyed than usual. Sit, drink some wine and start speaking.”

Clegane sat as Tyrion told him to and spoke: “Tired of having cunts challenge me, that is all. Had to teach a hedge knight a lesson. The poor girl thinks herself a wolf, but is more of a little bird. The dog had to save her honour, while the direwolf was singing.”

Maester Tyrion would have pitied the poor knight, had Sansa Stark been older: “Lady Sansa is as young as Joanna, not even one and ten...we must tell her Lord Father, he is the one who should be protecting her virtue from ambitious hedge knights and not you.”

Clegane gave him a shrug: “Aye, her Lord Father must know, if you are to speak to him. Mayhaps he will give me some coin as he ought to. His daughter is to wed a Great Lord, not some riverlander vermin.”

The next morning, Maester Tyrion spoke to Lord Stark; he handed the promised designs and a letter addressed to Maester Flowers. As Lord Stark said his goodbyes and went to speak with his daughter, Jon Stark approached Tyrion to thank for his kindness:

“My cousin loved to ride; now, thanks to you, Maester, he can be happy again.”

Tyrion and Clegane continued their trip to The Vale after speaking with Prince Viserys, who had been a very charming and accommodating host. “Send my regards to Ser Elbert Arryn and his lovely wife, Lady Cersei Arryn, your dear sister. I hope to make their acquaintance at Highgarden and enjoy their company.”

“Farewell, my Prince; thank you for your hospitality and kindness. We shall meet and feast again soon.”

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House Stark

Ser Elbert insisted that Ned and Robb would visit them at The Eyrie, saying there was something they needed to discuss in person. Once again Ned had to change his travel plans at last time; instead of sailing to Runestone and from there, to White Harbour, they continued sailing, reaching the shores near Iron Oaks, the seat of House Waynwood. From there, they went on mule to The Eyrie, where they were received with a Feast.

“My Lady, it is a pleasure to see you once again. The Vale agrees with you.” Ned said when Cersei gave him her hand to kiss; the Lannister woman was beautiful, yes, but as cold as the Mountain snow, despite extending a friend of her Husband the courtesies she was expected to.

“I am very glad to have you here, Lord Stark. I trust my foster sister, Lady Catelyn is happy at Winterfell? Last time she wrote, her Bran was already making a swift recovery. We all prayed for the boy…”
Ned had completely forgotten they were both raised at Riverrun, Cersei and Catelyn, but tried to hide his surprise: “My good sister is content, I believe, but there is much work to be done at Winterfell and she still has a son that needs her care. It is the sole reason we are to stay just a couple of days, as I need to make haste to Winterfell.”

Lady Arryn gave Ned a knowing smile and put an end to their civil conversation: “I am sure you are a great help for my Catelyn, my Lord. If you excuse me.” She then left to greet some Knights; Cersei was known to enjoy singing and dancing and to keep the company of comely young men in society. It was a passtime Ser Elbert Arryn allowed his wife to pursue for what Ned was told.

“My Myrcella is taken with your son, Ned. The beast he calls Greywind is well behaved, but I am relieved that you will be gone soon, as the sight of a direwolf does scare me.”

Ned laughed; Grey Wind was not as big as Ghost. The Truth is, Ned had gotten used to the wolves, but understood how odd it looked, a boy of one and ten with a wild animal as a pet. “Runestone has more space and they can hunt; you had to see us on that boat, Elbert: the ship could not be anchored and my arms almost fell off from rowing so much weight.”

Ned really did not know how they had survived the trip; Greywind was not born to be travelling by ship. He cursed Brandon once again, for forcing him to sail:

“Come, my friend, we need to speak, in private.”

They walked through the corridors Ned had once knew; very little had changed. Ser Elbert was using Lord Arryn’s solar and ruling The Vale from the same old, black wooden desk, which brought Ned old memories.

“Do you remember Robert’s little boy, Ned?”

Oh, yes, the bastard he left in The Vale. “I went to visit the babe with Robert before he went with King Aerys in 278 A.C, never to return.”

Ser Elbert nodded: “Gendry Stone is his name. His mother raised him here, in the Vale, with our support and House Baratheon’s knowledge, but she died eight years ago. Lord Baratheon said he would pay for his education and we sent him to King’s Landing. He has apprenticed under Tobho Mott, a very skilled master armorer. Lord Baratheon tell us Gendry will soon complete his studies and wondered if you had a position for him up North.”

Ned would like to help Robert’s only known living son yes, but wondered why Stannis was hesitant in employing the boy at Storm’s End and have him train as a knight to serve House Baratheon.

“Stoney Shore is growing and we are in constant need of good and skilled workers. If the boy cannot read or write, I will order our Maester to teach him. But, why Stannis does not want him at Storm’s End? Robert would have wanted it…”

“Ned, you know you were more of a brother to Robert than Stannis; Gendry looks exactly like Robert at his age. I believe Stannis fears that he will behave like his Sire if he is to go to Storm’s End and that Lady Cassana could grow attached to the boy and indulge him. I cannot say I blame Stannis.”

The decision was not a hard one to make; Ned was sure Ashara would allow the lad to attend lessons with their Maester and stay in their Keep until he was to have his own shop or become a Knight.

“Very well, I will take the boy in. The only condition I have is that Stannis sends Gendry as squire to a Knight swore to House Baratheon. Robert would have wanted his son to be trained in arms. We
must honour him.”

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As they progressed direction south, Sansa could hardly contain her enthusiasm for the new life that was ahead of her.

*Soon, I will be on Dragonstone, to be trained to attend the future Queen; then I will move to King's Landing. There will be Balls and Tourneys, music and dance. Until my Lord father asks me home, I will enjoy every minute of my stay at Court.*

Sansa loved Winterfell, but it was an isolated life. Other than the visits of her cousins, Bethe Cassel, Jeyne Poole and the Harvest Feast, there was very little excitement around. After Brandon fell from the Tower, things started to change for the worst. Her Lady Mother, who had never been happy, became even sadder and her brother was not expected to walk again.

Father had also changed; Sansa knew her parents were not well suited for each other, but it was apparent that there was not even friendship there. When her father had decided to join her south, Sansa noticed that her mother smiled.

Despite not loving each other, Sansa’s parents loved her and Bran. The Royal Visit made her father even more proud of her, since Prince Viserys started to praise Sansa for everybody to hear. Even the King seemed to agree and invited her to join into the future Queen’s service, a great honour.

*His Grace and the Prince were the most handsome men Sansa had ever seen; she would blush every time Viserys spoke to her, even though she knew he was married to the Dornish Princess and that he saw her as a friend.*

“My child, you are lovely! Daenerys, our future Queen, will be very pleased to receive you at Dragonstone. The Queen Mother will teach you more in one month than you would be learning in a year so far North. Promise your friend to always write him, my Lady. Life at Court can be very dangerous; it will only do you good to have friends you can trust for advice.”

The Royal Progress was slow, but Sansa could not complain. Prince Viserys was not as talented as his Kingly brother with the harp, but he was twice as charming, always telling amazing stories of his travels and being the perfect guest to his Hosts.

When they reached Fairmarket, they were briefly joined by Maester Tyrion, a son of Lord Lannister, and his sworn shield, Sandor Clegane. Sansa was used to be around the men of House Umber, however Clegane was not only big, but scary. There was so much anger in his eyes that Sansa could barely look at him without trying to avert his gaze.

A hedge knight named Ser Dontos had offered to take Sansa and Lady to see a pond near their camp; everybody had been so nice and respectful that Sansa assumed this Knight would behave properly. Instead he tried to have her drink strong wine and held her wrist. Lady started howling and would have attacked the knight, if Sandor Clegane had not stepped in.

Sansa was so scared that she ran back to camp, not even thanking her savior properly.

The next day, her Lord Father went to speak to her: “You are a beautiful child that soon will become a beautiful woman, like your Lady Mother. You are a Stark, Sansa and that is why His Grace wants you by his sister’s side; because you are a Lady, but also a wolf. They need more of the North down South, His Grace told me. Princess Daenerys is being instructed in self defense and you will join her.
I want you to pay attention to your lessons, not only needlepoint, but how to wield a sword too. What do you know of your aunt, Lyanna?"

“Only that she was brave and the Knight of the Laughing Tree; you are always telling us the story!”

Sansa’s father laughed: “Yes, it is a good story. His Grace was kind enough to tell us when he first visited. She died before her time, but little Arya has the same spirit. You also have the wolf’s blood in you. You are both a Southern Lady and a She-wolf. Promise me you will never forget that, even if you do not return North. And that you will take this fat direwolf of yours for adventures while you are on Dragonstone. Now go and thank Sandor Clegane for coming to your rescue; bring him this pouch, and my thanks.”

Sansa found the man ready to depart; she called him “Ser” twice before he turned and answered he was no Ser, that he had not been knighted.

“But you are a true Knight, Ser. Knights protect the weak…”

“There are no true knights, no more than there are gods. If you can’t protect yourself, die and get out of the way of those who can. Sharp steel and strong arms rule this world, don’t ever believe any different.”

Sansa felt belittled; she was trying to be nice and thank the man who saved her, but he was being so awful. Why he was behaving this way? She could not know.

“Be as it may, you have my gratitude and that of my Lord Father. He sends you this. “ Sansa then handed Clegane the pouch; he took it and nodded. “You were very brave, Ser and…”

“Spare me your empty little compliments, girl … and your ser's. I am no knight I spit on them and their vows. My brother is a knight.”

_I will not let him have the last word, such a hateful man! _“ I know nothing of your brother. You saved me and I thanked you. Now I leave. Farewell, Clegane.”

***

Lady Catelyn was happy when she received a raven from Fairmarket; Sansa was loving the Riverlands and was looking forward to finally meet her uncle and grandfather at Riverrun. Her Lord Husband, as she had expected, was clinging to Jon as if he had fathered the boy himself for what Sansa had wrote, and was spending much of his time in the company of Prince Viserys who, although charming, was known to keep the company of prostitutes and courtesans when he was away from his Princess Wife.

_Let him find comfort in the arms of whores and wenches; as long as he keeps his word, I care little for him._

Bran took to spend more time in the Godswood, a place Catelyn never felt very comfortable and avoided at all costs. For her son’s sake, she would join him sometimes, fearing that he was spending too long by himself, with only the company of Hodor and of summer, his direwolf.

“Bran, it is almost time for lunch and you still need to attend lessons. “

“Yes, Mother, we should go.”
Brandon looked pale and unhealthy, despite spending some time outside. *I hope the special saddle will work; Bran sure needs the exercise.* Then Catelyn remembered about the raven: “I have good news, Bran; your sister and Father sent us letters. They found a Maester from the Citadel, the son of Lord Lannister. He has sent you a gift. Come, Maester Flowers will explain you everything.”

Before finally retiring to bed, Lady Catelyn went to speak with Maester Flowers about her son:

“Do you think the saddle will work? I pray it will. Brandon needs some change. He looks sadder each and every day.”

Maester Flowers was confident the saddle was the answer to her prayers: “Yes, it is a very clever design. It was a happy accident that Maester Tyrion came to meet Lord Stark as I was told that Archmaester Ebrose, the one I was corresponding with, took ill. Now we have found both an appropriate exercise for his body and stimulation for his mind. The nightmares are plaguing the boy, my Lady.”

Bran had told Catelyn about some of his dreams. The North is a strange place, where Old Gods lingered; Catelyn was devout of the Seven, but she knew Brandon had a greater affinity for the Gods of his father.

Better this way, as one day, he will rule over northerners, who keep faith with the Old Gods.

When Lady Catelyn was about to leave the room, Maester Flowers added: “I am increasing the amount of sweetsleep as much as his body can take…”

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House Arryn

Cersei had finished supper with Myrcella and Sweetrobin; Lord Eddard Stark had left in the morning, his visit a much briefer one than Ser Elebrt had anticipated, but enough to make Myrcella swoon over Lord Robb Stark.

“Oh sweety, the boy is handsome, but you must marry a Lord, not a Ser.”

“Mother, you married a Ser!” Myrcella was nine, the golden hair of Lannister and the blue eyes of House Arryn making her a pretty sight to behold, much too good for the Stark boy in Cersei’s opinion, but she had to remind herself that a child is allowed to have fantasies. *Like I had one day, when I was convinced I was to marry Rhaegar Targaryen, that I would become Queen and the both of us would ride a Dragon and be as beautiful and wise as Alyssane and Jahaerys.*

It would do not good to have Myrcella indulge too much, however: “Yes, I did marry a Knight, but your Father is heir to a Great Lord. It is good to know that you are already thinking about boys, as it only means that soon you will flower. But enough talking!”

Cersei then ordered their nursemaid to put both Myrcella and Robin to bed when her husband Ser Elbert, came to bid his children good night:

“Sleep well, valiant knight and beautiful maiden; tomorrow your Father will fight some bad men in the Mountains and will not be able to break his fast with you.”

Little Robert Arryn was almost eight and because he had started his martial training, offered to join his Lord Father: “I will capture a wildling and will make the bad man fly, Father, I know I can!”
“I would prefer you stay behind to protect your Lady Mother, Robert. Now, off to bed!”

The children kissed their father and left; Cersei watched the scene in confusion, but waited them to leave to ask her Lord Husband about such secret plans:

“Do you care to explain me, Elbert, or should I ask our steward?”

Ser Elbert asked her to sit and answered: “Your brother sent us a raven from Fair Market, close enough to the Mountains of the Moon. He was supposed to have arrived, Cersei. Today a couple of Knights came from the Mountains with a book they had found in a clearance, two days from here. It belonged to Maeser Tyrion, your brother. We believe he was kidnapped by the Clans and I want to lead our men to clean up the area from the bandits and rescue him, alive I hope.”

Cersei had heard about the wildlings in the Vale, but they had never been so bold before; at least, she had no knowledge of recent kidnappings. She knew that one of Lord Arryn’s nieces had been taken, but this had been before her birth, when the clans were much more active.

She was shocked at the audacity of the Mountain Clans and at Elbert’s silly ideas of honour: “Send someone else. Why must you go? What do you suppose they would do to you, Ser, if they get their filthy hands on you?”

Her husband reacted in surprise at Cersei’s sudden display of marital concern: “Why pretend you care? You would make a very beautiful widow. I am sure you would enjoy your freedom, my Lady. Mayhaps uncle would even allow you back at King’s Landing, far from the boring and honourable people of The Vale…”

Cersei rolled her eyes; Elbert could be unbearable sometimes, but he was her husband. If he was to die, how would Cersei become Lady of The Vale? He was also the father of her children and a good one at that. There was much to be profited from staying married to him, Cersei had long concluded, despite their lack of love:

“Join me, Elbert. It is time we have an honest conversation since you are so intent in dying. Would you not agree it is the perfect time for us to speak the truth?”

She poured them both goblets of wine; it was her third, but her resistance and thirst were increasing with the years. *It will help us speak plainly, it will loosen his honourable tongue.*

“It might surprise you, but I do not wish you to die. You are a good father, Elbert. Our children are beautiful and smart. I would always love anything that came out of my body, we both know this, but had you been less of a man, my children might not have been as perfect. Do you think I am so cruel as to actually want to see Myrcella and Robert crying over your body? “

Cersei enjoyed seeing the look of shame on her husband’s face; the dutiful son of House Arryn had been taught a lesson by the woman he secretly despised. “I owe you my sincerest apologies, Cersei. You are a good mother; overindulgent, yes, but there is no denying you love them. However, I cannot stay. Tyrion is your brother and it would look bad if I do not personally lead our troops. Do you understand that?”

*Oh, Lord Lannister would demand nothing less, of course.*

“Yes, I do understand. Go, if you must. Do your Duty. But remember, Elbert: I am not a Lannister. I could have been a fierce lioness had mother not died; Father would had not disposed of me so early. I do think your lot is boring and I dislike the snows, yes, but The Eyrie is my son's inheritance. If you return, mayhaps we could both learn how to work together, for a change; and, if you are to die
attempting to rescue the brother I never met, know this: I do not value my honour as a true Arryn would, but I will do everything in my power to provide Myrcella with a brighter future and to have Robert be the strongest Lord Arryn in centuries.”
Mothers, daughters and sons.

Chapter Summary

Jon and Sansa´s first impressions of their new lives;
Cersei and Maester Tyrion finally meet;
Queen Mother Rhaella suprises her son.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

House Tully 293 A.C

Ser Edmure Tully left Riverrun to attend Prince Viserys wedding aware that his Lord Father expected him to return home with a bride. There were dozens of young, beautiful and high born maidens in attendance, but Lord Hoster Tully made it clear he wanted the highest prize of all: a Targaryen Princess:

“There is no drop of Royal Blood in us. House Targaryen made us Great Lords because we were the first to support them in rebellion against House Hoare. Our lands are beautiful and fertile and made rich men of all of our nobles. It is a problem: the riverlords we are supposed to rule are as rich and as powerful as we are. Only with an iron fist, they obey, and begrudgingly. Catelyn marrying into House Stark lent us their prestige, a line dating back 8000. Lysa had to go to a bannerman, to strengthen our ties with our land. You, Edmure, you need a bride of Royal Blood. Even House Tyrell can be linked by House Gardener through the mother’s side. House Tully needs a Princess."

Edmure was quick to make his choice: while Daenerys was beautiful, he did not feel at ease with her. When it became clear that Ser Willas Tyrell had the silver haired Princess ears, Edmure was only happy to spend more time with Rhaenys, who was pretty, witty and fun. For over a sennight, they became inseparable and Lord Tully was more than pleased with the advancements his heir was making.

It was then that their plans went awry: his uncle, Ser Brynden, came to speak with his father in the morning after the bedding ceremony; they were to make an offer for Princess Rhaenys hand- she had given Edmure her blessing during the feast- but the situation had changed dramatically and the Kingsguard was sent to deliver the bad news:

“Queen Elia will be set aside; Daenerys is to be Queen and His Grace is giving his daughter to House Tyrell since he stole their bride. They delivered their proposal for Daenerys last night; His Grace just informed them now he would be willing to part with Rhaenys. I was told they accepted the trade and I was sent here to spare House Tully from sending their offer.”

Lord Tully was furious, but there was nothing to be done except to smile, drink their wine and return to Riverrun, pretending that the whole thing never happened.

“What a waste of our time! Do you know that my aunt, Lady Celia Tully, was supposed to have been His Grace’s grandmother, Edmure? King Rhaegar is a fool, and History is repeating itself for House Tully; another Targaryen falls in love with his own sister and we must part with our due reward.”
Edmure had just turned twenty. His heart had not been broken and he did not feel that House Tully had been insulted, despite his Lord Father’s opinion on the matter. Yet, the episode had left him some scars. Rhaenys was someone he could have loved, a Princess with a sweet smile and a gift for dance and music. Now, the prospect of marrying a neighbor did not seem all that pleasant, because Edmure knew he could have had Rhaenys as his Lady wife.

All that was left for Edmure was to go back to life as it was: the bachelor heir of Lord Hoster Tully without any great responsibilities except not dishonouring his House. Edmure would continue as before: travelling through their lands, meeting old friends, attending weddings...

His Lord Father only summoned him back to Riverrun from Seaguard, where he was visiting Lysa and his friend, Patrek, to receive the imminent visit of Prince Viserys, who was escorting Lord Stark and the niece he had never seen before Lady Sansa Stark to King’s Landing.

They were feasted as ravishingly as Lord Tully could have afforded; the old man was happy to receive the daughter of his dear Catelyn, who would become a Lady in waiting for the new Queen, a great honour indeed. The bitterness towards the loss of Rhaenys Targaryen as bride to his son had subdued; Hoster Tully was a practical man and he did not forget that his own brother, the Blackfish, was a respected member of the Kingsguard, which had been a surprise and welcomed honour to their House.

Edmure was enjoying Prince Viserys tremendously; in spending all his time with Rhaenys at the Red Keep, he had missed the opportunity of meeting the King’s brother, a mistake that was now being rectified. The Prince had nothing but praise to his niece, Sansa:

“Our Lady Sansa is the perfect mixture of North and South and her Tully looks will undoubtedly be the toast of the Court, once she moves to King’s Landing. Such a lovely child! Lord Tully, you must be proud, for Lady Sansa is the exact copy of her Lady Mother, your beautiful daughter.”

Hoster Tully could only agree and loved Sansa almost immediately; Edmure took the girl to dance and was also impressed at her poise and skill, which contrasted to her own Father, Lord Stark, already drunk and taking liberties with the maids.

The terrible behavior displayed during the Feast could have been dismissed as the result of excessive drinking, if had not persisted during Lord Stark’s whole stay at Riverrun. Both Lord Tully and his heir started to avoid Brandon Stark; Edmure spent most of his time conversing with Prince Viserys or taking Sansa to ride through their lands, showing his niece the places of her mother’s childhood.

Meanwhile, Lord Stark was either drunk, hunting with his nephew, Jon Stark, or visiting brothels.

The day before Prince Viserys was to depart, Edmure took Sansa down the Red Fork on a rowing boat; he decided to voice his disappointment in his dear sister’s husband. “I apologise, Sansa; Brandon is your Father, but it is very painful to see him acting as if my sister does not even exist. She is a good woman.”

“They are unhappy, uncle. Mother told me she tried, but Father had always been this way. I do not blame either of them; I love them both. Their parents, however, thought only about political gain.”

Edmure had never thought this way. He was raised to serve his House; his own happiness would matter little when it came to the legacy of House Tully and yet...he would be the one living unhappily if his Lord Father was to make another poor choice.

The children did pay for their parents mistakes, Edmure had to admit.
Yet, the situation was not as plain and simple as Sansa believed: “I was very young, but I remember that Catelyn was infatuated with Brandon. I thought him a true knight. Marrying for love is a luxury we do not have, Sansa. My Lord Father came to love my Lady Mother in time; he assumed the same would happen with your parents.”

Sansa’s grandfather had asked her mother to send her measurements and had gifted her with new dresses. As they went further south, the weather was getting warmer; the fabrics used and the styles were very different from what Sansa was used. Edmure thought how the change agreed with Sansa as he rowed the boat; the light gown of blue silk matched her eyes and made her auburn hair look even more beautiful.

She continued to speak about her thoughts on the matter: “I recently learned that true knights are hard to find, North or South. My father is many things, but he is no knight. I believe he is a good man, uncle, but mother deserved someone...kinder, gentler. There is too much woolf’s blood in Father.”

Edmure decided it was best to keep quiet; Brandon was Sansa's father and she loved him. Brandon married Catelyn out of Duty and love had not took root. Edmure could understand that. He did not fault Brandon for his obvious lack of love, but he could not forgive a man who would disrespect his sister at each and every turn.

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**House Arryn**

*Elbert, you fool...I told you.*

*Myrcella cries herself to sleep every night and Robert has nightmares. How do I know that, you ask? Well, it is because I am sharing my bed with our children since you died.*

*I am tired. They cry; I try to comfort them. Then I cry because I cannot sleep. When I wake up, I have a terrible headache. Maester Tyrion does not want to give me sweet sleep because “I drink too much”. He said I could die from mixing alcohol with medicine. I do not like him one bit, but I trust him.*

*So, I drink more and sleep less.*

*Oh, you should have seen the good people of the Vale coming to my side! Your uncle, he was so distraught when he first saw me! Now, they truly think I loved you, Elbert. Can you imagine that? Ha!*
I tried, Elbert. I did try to love you. You were almost handsome, faithful and you never mistreated me. But House Arryn is not known for producing charismatic, fierce and interesting men. No, no. To find such men, one must look for a dragon or even, go as south as Dorne.

Lord Arryn and Maester Tyrion said my Lord Father wanted to get his hands on our Myrcella; The old lion wants my daughter to wed Tyrek Lannister, Jaime’s heir. House Lannister is rich, powerful; I am told I was born there, at Casterly Rock, as a Lannister and that I should be happy to have Myrcella as the future Lady of the Rock.

They forget how this Father of mine threw me out when Mother died. Why would I be happy to have Myrcella there? Just because I spent seven years of my life as Lord Lannister's daughter? I just turned six and twenty; I might not be an Arryn, but a Lannister?

No, I am not a Lannister.

Yet, Myrcella deserves the best. A first son of House Lannister is a good match. I am just her mother; the decision, of course, is not mine. But I can play my part. I cried my bitter widow tears and Lord Arryn agreed Myrcella is too young; she will stay by my side until she flowers.

Princess Rhaenys will wed Ser Willas Tyrell in three moon turns, on her fourteenth name day. Lady Waynwood has convinced Lord Arryn to take us all to Highgarden, to “lift our spirits”. I already ordered some new gowns to be made, for me and Myrcella and I gifted Robert with a new poney.

We will be fine, Elbert. I will see to that.

Now, that I will no longer be Lady of the Eyrie and with Lord Arryn still strong and healthy enough to live at least five more years, all I have to do is to see that our children are raised well.

I will do that.

But I deserve more.

I am still young. I am rich. Beautiful. Unattached.
My time has come.

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House Lannister

Maester Tyrion survived his first battle not without an ugly scar that mared an already not beautiful face. His good brother, unfortunately, died in the conflict, but managed to slay Shagga, son of Dolf, of the Stone Crows, a man that, despite threatening to chop off Tyrion´s manhood and feed it to crows, had gained the dwarve´s admiration by fighting with a weapon at each hand.

The Knights of the Vale had suffered some losses, but emerged victorious and the roads were declared clean and safe once again. They were mere two days from the Gates of the Moon, and arrived in the Eyrie by the third day.

Tyrion´s sister, Lady Cersei Arryn was quick to understand the glances exchanged by the Knights she had known for most of her life:

“Ser Vardis, tell me what happened to my Lord Husband.”

Cersei was an extremely beautiful woman: the hair was golden and long, styled in a braid with a few curls framing her lovely face, the emerald of her eyes being the most vivid of her features. She looks exactly like Jaime, like they were one and the same.

She sat at the Weirwood Throne of the Eyrie and heard the tale of how Ser Elbert Arryn fought honourably and valiantly against the savages of the Mountains. Tyrion thought Cersei carried herself very well; she asked the steward to care for the Knights and the guests they were receiving, ordered the Captain of their Guard and the Master at Arms to carry the bodies of the deceased and prepare them while she would be writing a letter to Lord Arryn and inform her children their Father had perished.

Only after supper Maester Tyrion was received by his sister in her Solar:

“Little brother, it seems one should not invite you to a Castle that sits over a Mountain or a Rock without expecting some damage to be done to its owners.”

Tyrion realised Cersei had been drinking, but the bitter observation was not made in anger or meant to be humorous; it was rather a simple matter of fact observation.

He, however, did not know how to react.

Cersei rolled her eyes : “Oh, please, take a seat; pour yourself some wine. I do not blame you for both deaths. You are uglier than I thought, I must say. Poor mother!”

I am definately in need of a drink.

Cersei taste in wine did not disappoint Tyrion; the vintage was simply delicious, if not a bit too sweet.

After a sip, Tyrion started : “Cersei, I am very sorry for your loss. I never would have imagined that my visit would bring you pain. All I wanted was to finally meet the sister I always dreamed about
and yes, I know I am ugly but you are just as I had imagined: the light of the west.”

Cersei raised her eyebrow and gave Tyrion a smirk: “You are good with words, aren't you? Well, little brother, since you are here, I shall make use of you. Write our Lord Father: you will be staying and helping me rule The Vale. Lord Arryn is Hand of the King and while Lord Nestor Royce is a capable steward and castellan, he cannot possibly do all.”

Tyrion was sure Tywin Lannister would never agree, but Cersei waived his concerns: “Just tell Father that you believe I am incapable of seeing to my responsibilities; or say that you fear I would bring shame upon House Lannister if you are not by my side in this time of need.”

The next morning, Maester Tyrion was introduced to his nephew, Robert and niece, Myrcella, both blond haired and blue eyed. The boy looked Tyrion with suspicion: “Why are you so small?”

The Maester glanced at his sister: “Tell him, little brother. Robert has a curious nature.”

“I am a dwarf, Master Robert. I was born this way and I am not supposed to grow anymore. It is a condition I cannot escape, unfortunately.”

“Oh, this means you are sick? Does it hurt?”

It does, actually.

Tyrion was plagued with back pains for most of his life, but he had grown so used that it hardly prevented him from pursuing his interests. The looks of disgust and surprise he would get were much more painful for Tyrion.

“Yes, I have learned to live with a certain degree of pain; my bones are not as well formed as yours, of course.”

Three days after his arrival, a raven from Casterly Rock came.

“You were right, sweet sister. Our Lord Father is happy to allow me to stay, now that Ser Elbert is no longer with us.”

Cersei could barely hide the dark circles under her eyes with makeup, but the vivid green eyes smiled when Tyrion informed her of Lord Lannister’s answer.

“How did you know he would react in such manner?”

Cersei gave Sandor Clegane a knowing look: “Remember, Hound, when we came to the Red Keep and Lord Lannister had you follow me around, like a puppy? You were supposedly to guard my safety, but we all knew the real reason was to see if I did not get too friendly with the handsome knights there.”

“Is it true, Clegane?” Tyrion asked.

“Aye, it is true.” Clegane plainly said, before asking to leave the room; he was tired of Lannisters playing their games and wanted no part of it.

Cersei lounged comfortably in a divan facing a window with a breathtaking view of the Vale. Tyrion was glad to see she was actually eating a peach and not drinking.

“Jaime was very devoted to me when we were children. We barely left each other's side and every night, he would crawl to my bed and hold me tight until we fell asleep. We were curious- more than
curious mayhaps- about our bodies. I remember I wanted to be a boy and know how to make water like a boy would. It was that silly, but mother was alarmed when she saw us. It was time to grow up, she said, and to play with other children. Jaime was to be sent to Ashmarke and I was to continue at The Rock, with mother; she would teach me how to be a Lady. But Lord Lannister came unexpectedly one day. He had mother ship me off to Riverrun without delay.

She came to me before I was to depart, hugged me and said: *Your Father is not a man of half measures; stay at Riverrun, learn your lessons and be nice to everybody, from servants to Lord Tully himself; if you make your Father proud, in a couple of years I can convince him* ,

Mother would write often; I heeded to her advice, or at least tried to. She and Jaime went to visit me at Riverrun in that first year and I did not feel that lonely. Six moon turns later, mother died. Only Aunt Genna came to visit me afterwards. Of Father, I received a couple of letters, reminding me of my Duty to House Lannister.

For the next five years, I stayed at Riverrun. When I was two and ten, I flowered; Lord Lannister deemed the event worthy enough of a visit. I asked him if I was finally going home.

He laughed.

*“Home?” He asked; “The Eyrie is to be your home. I am taking you to your betrothed. There are too many Lannisters at Casterly Rock already. You are not needed there, Cersei. The Rock is to be Jaime’s home, not yours.”*

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**House Stark**

Dragonstone was very different from any other Castle Jon had seen since they left The North.

*“Valyrians had a way to work and manipulate stones through dragonfire and magic, Jon.”* Ser Arthur Dayne said as he noticed that the two and ten years old boy had slightly opened his mouth in awe at the sight of the many dragon faces carved in stone at the distance.

*“I imagined the island would be smaller, only big enough to fit a Keep and nothing else.”*

Ser Arthur shook his head. *“It is quite big, actually. Dragonstone has villages and even another smaller Keep at the other end of the island. They do not produce grains, but they do grow vegetables, fruits, keep animals and there is plenty of fish in the waters. House Targaryen controls the traffic of ships to Essos; they patrol this area of the Narrow Sea and collect tolls and taxes. The annual income of this island is actually on pair with the income of Winterfell.”*

Jon loved his uncle Arthur; he was not only the best fighter Westeros had ever seen, the bravest of knights, but also very intelligent and well spoken. There was always something to be learned when speaking with him. Jon knew he would miss The North, his siblings and Stark cousins, especially Arya and Bran, but he was very thankful to be given this opportunity of spending time with his Dayne relations.
“Mother said we could all sail to Starfall after the Royal Wedding. Do you think His Grace would allow you to go, uncle?”

Arthur thought it was very unlikely: “We are to stay on Dragonstone and guard Princess Daenerys for the next two moon turns; Prince Lewyn Martell already requested to take a leave to visit his nephew, the ruling Prince of Dorne and His Grace expects him to take Queen Elia with him. Prince Viserys and Queen Mother Rhaella are also to be assigned new guards and Princess Rhaenys made it clear she wants to have her sworn shield by her side.”

Jon really wanted to see Starfall as his Lady mother had told many wonderful stories of her childhood there, but he also knew being one of the squire's to the Sword of the Morning was a big responsibility and honour; Jon tried to hide his disappointment, but his uncle took notice:

“I see no problem in you going, Jon. You are well ahead in your training and you should visit Starfall; you are half Dayne after all.”

The Sun had not set yet when they finally docked; Ghost and Lady were the firsts to unboard the ship, much to Sansa’s shagrim: “Oh, Lady! You should know better!”

Jon saw no problems and came to the direwolves defense: “They are wolves, Sansa...and Lady always behave. You should not be mad at her!”

The castellan of Dragonstone, Ser Jorys Velaryon, was waiting at the harbour and escorted them to the Castle. They were assigned chambers and instructed to have baths and change into more appropriate garb; supper would be served in a couple of hours at the main Hall, where the introductions would be made.

Jon’s mother had made him swear he would dress appropriately; she had packed an assortment of fine shirts, long boots, breechers and a couple of doublets, knowing he would be attending a Royal Wedding. In about an hour, his uncle was already knocking on his door, cleaned and shaven, already donning the Kingsguard armour and wearing the white silk cape.

“Now, Jon...certainly Ned had showed you how to shave yourself! You must get rid of this silly moustache of yours.”

Jon was glad to have Ser Arthur show him actually, as his mother always insisted a barber to do this job something that Jon hated it. But Lady Ashara was used of getting things done her way; her husband and sons aimed to please her and Elia in every way they possibly could, with Jon and Robb going as far as to allow their little sister to braid their hair sometimes.

Lady Ashara, of course, thought the sight of Jon in braids lovely; it occurred to him that his Lady Mother might have done the same with her older brother, as Elia as but a copy of Lady Ashara: “Is it true that Mother would braid your hair when you were children, uncle?“

Ser Arthur gave a no answer: “Let’s no speak of the past, boy.”

Yes, of course Mother braided uncle Arthur’s hair.

His uncle had already spoken to Jon about the Royal Family, how to behave, how to address them and, most importantly, what- and whom- to avoid. It was no secret that Dayne was His Grace’s best friend; they knew each other since their early teens, when they squired together and continued their friendship when Arthur was made Kingsguard and moved to the Red Keep.

Between Winterfell and King’s Landing, they spent over two moons in Prince Viserys company. While his Stark uncle struck a friendship of sorts with the King’s brother Jon knew that his Dayne
uncle had a low opinion of Viserys. In fact, Ser Arthur one day complained about the Prince being more interested in “having a grand time than of working” as his Kingly brother had bid him before going to inspect The Wall.

Of Crown Prince Aegon, Ser Arthur had few, but harsh words: “The boy is sick, Jon."

Queen Elia was a sort of enigma to Jon. Despite them being childhood friends, Arthur spoke very little of her, which made Jon suspect that his mother’s dear friend was not the same woman Ashara had known at Dorne, but he decided to form his own opinion when time came.

Jon’s uncle, however, had nothing but praise when it came to the Targaryen women. He spoke fondly of Princess Rhaenys and had great respect towards Queen Mother Rhaella, whose health had been declining in the last years, but was still serving the Realm and her House the best way she could.

When it came to Daenerys, Ser Arthur told Jon the King’s betrothed was the definition of a Targaryen Princess: intelligent, proper and strikingly beautiful.

But he also gave Jon a warning regarding Daenerys: “The Princess is very special; you are to keep your distance from her, Jon. King Rhaegar is a good man, but had always been protective of his sister before and now that they are to be wed... His Grace has become almost jealous of her."

Jon’s mother was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. It was not a son thinking highly of his mother; it was a well known fact. Jon’s father was, understandably, very protective of his Lady wife, but Eddard Stark trusted Ashara enough not to be jealous.

Jon could not have asked for better, more loving parents. Their love was so strong as almost palpable. It became all too real one morning, when Jon and Robb decided to surprise their parents. What they saw in that room made they learn to knock before entering…

King Rhaegar was a very handsome man. The strangeness of marrying his own sister aside, His Grace seemed to be someone in control of his emotions, so Jon found difficult to understand why would King Rhaegar be so jealous of his betrothed.

Jon was only able to understand why once he entered the Great Hall of Dragonstone and saw her.

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Everything was just like Sansa had imagined.

Dragonstone was impressive. Sansa had seen some drawings at Winterfell, but the Castle was even more formidable, all made of stone and, they said, Fire Magic.

Sansa’s father had stayed in King’s Landing, from where he would board a ship to White Harbour. Because Jon and the direwolves would be with her, Sansa did not feel alone; quite the contrary, it was like having a piece of Winterfell at all times.

Sansa worried that Ghost and Lady would not be well received; while they were progressing, a couple of Lords had insisted their pets to be locked in the kennels and Prince Viserys was polite enough not to force his hosts to accept the wolves in their Halls. When her father explained Sansa that His Grace had given orders for the Stark pets to be allowed to sleep by their owners side, provided they would stay outdoors during the day, she could not help but to smile and think that King Rhaegar was not only handsome, but also a good man.
Sansa had chosen to wear one of the dresses her Lord Grandfather had gifted her for the official presentation to the Queen Mother and the Princess. Despite Prince Viserys assuring Sansa that his sister and mother were kind hearted and gracious, she was nervous.

*What if they do not like me? What if I do something wrong and they send me back?*

Once again, Prince Viserys proved he had been right: Queen Mother Rhaella was all smiles and courtesies and Princess Daenerys welcomed Sansa wholeheartedly.

Settling into her new routine was very easy because said routine was very stimulating. They would break their fasts, then write their letters and meet in the courtyard to train in arms everyday for an hour with Ser Terrence Celtigar; Sansa found that she was not very good with the sword, but had some talent for archery. *Mayhaps I could even beat Arya next time we meet at Winterfell!* Her cousin had been training every since she was a small girl; Sansa knew she could not hope to win, really, but it made her happy to think she would, at least, surprise Arya with her new found skills.

Lady Brienne of Tarth had been given leave to train an additional hour a day, sometimes even sparring with Jon and Ser Arthur Dayne, while the other Ladies in waiting would return to attend other duties. Lady Leonette Fossoway would instruct the Princess, Lady Myranda and Sansa on the High Harp for another hour before it was time to have lunch. Then the Princess would spend some time with her Mother, learning how to be a Queen, while her Ladies would have lessons with Dowager Lady Velaryon.

The youngsters were given some free time in the afternoon and they mostly spent it walking at the beach, in the company of the direwolves. Princess Daenerys loved to stroke Ghost’s white fur and play fetch with the Stark pets while Lady Brienne, despite her big size, was the last to accept the beasts, only relaxing when she realized that Lady would never think about biting her when there were plenty of lemon cakes around.

They would end their full day attending to the Maeste’s lessons, then praying with the septas before attending supper at the Great Hall.

By the time Sansa´s head would touch her soft pillows, she would be exhausted, but happily so.

***

Lord Eddard Stark had almost lost his wits when a raven from King’s Landing arrived: his brother, Brandon decided to sail to Dragonstone and, from there, he would attend the Royal wedding at Highgarden. He even dared to invite himself to sail from Oldtown to Stoney Shore, where he expected to receive the “full hospitality of his brother and his lovely Lady wife.”

His good sister, Lady Catelyn, approached him after supper as she sensed something was wrong: “What Brandon has done this time, Ned?”

After years of addressing him formally, Catelyn decided it was time for them to become friends, as Ned was the force behind managing The North. She told him she was very thankful for his personal sacrifice, in staying behind when Eddard had already enough work at Stony Shore, and added that he made life at Winterfell “bearable”, a great compliment in her own estimation.

Catelyn decided they could share her Solar while Ned stayed this time; it was easier, she said, as they would both work alongside each other. He had to concede it was a good idea that saved them time, from going to one side of the main Castle to the other when there were important business to be discussed.
Brandon is attending the Royal Wedding. I am sorry, Catelyn, but I am leaving to Stony Shore in two days time. I am writing Benjen to at least send Lady Jonelle and Rickon to Winterfell, to keep you and Bran company."

Catelyn gave her good brother a sad smile and thanked him for inviting Lady Jonelle over, before excusing herself and leaving to her chambers.

The ten days it took Ned to go home seemed like eternity; seldom had he travelled alone and spent so long parted from Ashara.

Thankfully, he arrived shortly before little Elia was to celebrate her seventh nameday and found the girl riding her direwolf as if it were a pony. Not that Seastorm seemed to mind; the only thing dramatic about his daughter’s pet was the name.

Ned’s wife received him with open arms; she too had missed her husband: “A sennight ago, we had a terrible storm, my love. I am ashamed to admit, but I went to Elia’s bedroom and slept by Seastorm’s side.”

Ashara kissed Ned again, comfortably nested over his muscled chest while he stroked her hair. Not really wanting to, Ned broke the kiss as there were important things to discuss.

“Before Elbert died, we spoke about many things, beloved. He wanted us to join our Houses and Lord Arryn seems to agree; he wishes to meet our Elia at Highgarden and is taking young Lord Robert Arryn, who is but some moon turns older than our girl, with him. “

Ashara looked at Ned incredulous; she had expected him to speak about them welcoming the late Robert Baratheon's bastard son, Gendry Stone, not to discuss betrothals.

“Ned, Elia still has at least five years before she is expect to flower. I would prefer our daughter to marry for love, like us. Besides, to become a Great Lady, I assume Lord Arryn would expect us to pay a very large dowry. We are doing well, but there is plenty of improvements needing to be done here. “

“Nothing would be decided now, Ashara; we just want them both to meet and see if we can arrange them to be fostered together. I do not wish Elia to be as unhappy as my good sister; I would never allow her to join a House I do not trust. Lord Arryn has mentioned the dowry would not deplete our reserves; Lord Lannister made them rich enough.”

A moonturn after Lord Eddard Stark came home, his ward, Gendry Stone, arrived in the company of Ser Justin Massey. The stormlander knight was instructed to spend one year with the boy; they had travelled from King’s Landing to Stony Shore through land and Ned had sparred with the boy and was satisfied with his progress.

Since Gendry was illiterate and Elia was learning her letters, the Maester was to teach them both. It was too late to make the six and ten years old lad into a scholar, but Ned insisted Robert’s son would, at least, be able to read and count.

When it was time to sail to Old Town, Ned decided to share with Gendry some stories of the Father he would never know:

“All Robert wanted was to join a sellsword company and roam the world in search of adventure. He never wanted Storm’s End; he was unsuited to become a great lord. Mayhaps, Gendry, you will grow to make your Father’s dream come true. Life is hard for bastards, but a knight can always prove his value in battle and sell his sword somewhere. I have trust in you.”
Prince Viserys finally made good on his promise to his Mother and sailed to Dragonstone with his wife, Princess Arianne Martell, to spend some family time at his Ancestral Home before they were to go to Highgarden.

Lord Brandon Stark decided to join the Prince once again and was very happy to dance with all the Ladies in waiting present during the Feast the Queen Mother had organized, which was a great success, with the most nobles from the Narrow Sea in attendance.

The next day, Viserys made sure to spend at least an hour discussing private matters with Queen Rhaella and Daenery, without the interference of guests of family members.

The Royal Family would speak in High Valyrian when in private. If he was to be honest, Viserys would have preferred all their conversations to be in what he considered to be their Mother Tongue; however, the King's brother was known to be mindful of his manners, and was aware that it would be considered rude not to speak in the Common Tongue.

Viserys kissed them both and handed them gifts from his various travels. He then sat by the round table while their Mother poured them tea:

He went straight to the point: “My dear good sister has been playing a very dangerous and duplicitous game. The situation with Aegon and his septon is alarming. Elia started to attend both services at the Great Septon and her son’s praying circle.”

Rhaella asked if there were new developments, as she was aware of Elia’s game; Viserys went in details:

“Aegon has been feeding the poor with his allowance and Elia has been in constant peregrination of orphanages and Septs. She is now dressing in plain clothes and has even sold some jewelry, mentioning now that she was only a Mother, that she has no need for adornments. So, yes, the situation is bad indeed, as they now have half a million of souls eating from their hands.”

“I assume the smallfolk blame me for Elia being set aside and that I will not be welcomed with open arms once I return.” Daenerys concluded without a hint of bitterness; she then continued: “Rhaegar should send Aegon on a long trip…visiting the Free Cities of Essos. Mayhaps seeing some of the world would make my nephew less...strange. He always scared me. Aegon would scream when Rhaenys and I would try to hug him; I believe I have not touched him since he was six.”

“The trip is a good idea, but not enough, my daughter; we need to cut this madness while there is still time. King's Landing is important, but is hardly the total of the Seven Kingdoms. We need to send Aegon away before the year ends; Elia should not be allowed to join his son. Mayhaps Aegon could take his septon with him? The Faith of the Seven has not many followers in Essos. Let them go to the Holy places and try to convert that lot while the people of King's Landing forget about Aegon and the smallfolk of Westeros continue to ignore the boy’s true leanings.”

Rhaella paused and looked at Daenerys with sadness. “Most importantly; you should leave Dragonstone and wed your brother as soon as Aegon sets sail. They must know you to love you, Dany. We will not manage to do this if you are locked at Dragonstone.”

Viserys knew his Mother was intelligent, but her newfound strength and smarts for politicking was
working against his carefully laid plans: however, Viserys knew he could improvise.

The idea of sending Aegon away was not altogether bad.

*I need Aegon to be as mad as a dog and him becoming popular with the masses was not helping anybody; I just need to remind Mother that I am a suitable option.*

After supper, Viserys went to see his Mother; she confessed what he had suspected:

“I am dying. The Maesters gave me a year, although I convinced myself I will live two. Mayhaps it is for the best that Dany weds Rhaegar in six moon turns...”

It was sad news; Viserys loved his mother dearly. “Mother, we should send for that Archmaester from the Citadel that Marwyn told us about. I fear for our House; Aegon cannot succeed Rhaegar. “

Rhaella agreed, but reminded Viserys of Houses Lannister and Tyrell, the allies of Elia.

“They do not want to displease Lord Lannister; the marriage will happen, Vis. Aegon being more suited to be a septon than a King can work in our advantage; nobody can force the boy to consummate a marriage and Lord Lannister cannot complain we did not keep our end of the bargain. Marwyn wrote me about what went on Beyond The Wall. Maester Aemon also believes the prophecy is about Daenerys. Yet, I fear; we never had three generations of brothers marrying sisters without consequences. I just ask you to support your brother and sister and swear fealty to them and them alone. You would be next in line if they do not have children; no Council would give Rhaenys the Crown because she is a woman. It has never happened before, and it will not happen.”

Then Rhaella held Viserys hand tight and looked straight into his eyes: “You do not need to scheme, Viserys. Just bide your time and you could become King. Even if Rhaegar and Daenerys have healthy children, they could marry yours and your line would still sit on the Iron Throne, albeit indirectly. Cousins are better matches than siblings; our blood would remain pure in both cases. But please, I urge you: do not go against them. “

Viserys did not know what to say.

Chapter End Notes

About the character’s ages:

In this A.U, Elia and Rhaegar bethroatal took just some months; Rhaella conceived Daenerys the same week as Aerys took off to Essos. There is a half year difference between Rhaenys and Daenerys.

I made a time jump between 292- and; in the first chapter on 293 I started already with Daenerys turning fourteen and going through her first months at Dragonstone, meaning from 292 going to 293

This is important because of the ages_ Daenerys is born between what would be Nov-Dec 278; Rhaenys around May 279. Aegon is born in the Jan-Feb of 281- The Tourney
is March-April same year.

Jon was born on the last day of 281; Brandon in the first month of 282, premature and Sansa about a year after...

Rhaenys is marrying next chapter, May 293, on her nameday. Rhaella wanted to have Daenerys wed Rhaegar in 294, when she would be sixteen; now it would be Nov-Dec 293, when she is fifteen.
Wedding

Chapter Summary

Rhaegar returns and tries to clear House;
Rhaenys and Willas reach an agreement;
Cersei, the merry widow.

House Targaryen

From Eastwatch, Rhaegar and his Party boarded a ship to White Harbour. The intention was to continue his progress through the Seven Kingdoms and go from Gulltown to Highgarden, but unforeseen circumstances forced His Grace to change his plans.

The first one was the death of Lord Arryn's heir, Ser Elbert; his Hand himself advised the King not to travel through The Vale and he would be returning to his homeland to attend the funeral, clean their roads from further problems and organize his household.

The Master of Coin, Lord Stannis Baratheon, was left in charge; Rhaegar had already decided upon returning to King's Landing in haste, when a raven came from Dragonstone.

His mother was asking Rhaegar to come to their Ancestral home and start preparations for his wedding to Daenerys later the same year; she added the situation in King's Landing was reaching a breaking point and the King should act at once or the safety of Daenerys would be jeopardized.

Rhaegar sailed to Dragonstone.

Rhaella was extremely concerned: “Aegon and Elia have the smallfolk favour; The High Septon is becoming isolated and Daenerys is being blamed. We think it is best to break their support now; send Aegon away, have Elia far from power and start showing favor towards Viserys, who is a much better option as heir until Daenerys is to conceive.”

“Believe me, Mother, it is not that simple to have Aegon removed. Lord Lannister knows the boy well enough and does not care whether he is mad or not. For the time being, what you suggest is the best course of action. Daenerys should be protected at all costs; I will take her to the Capital for a couple of days and force both Aegon and Elia to act kindly towards her in public; the smallfolk will see Dany and forget about those two.”

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Daenerys was surprised that her Mother had consented in her spending three full days in the company of Rhaegar at King's Landing. Rhaella would be joining them during this small stay and she selected Lady Leonette Fossoway to make the trip; there was no reason to move all their retinue to the Red Keep for such a short period of time.

The intensity of Rhaegar’s feelings towards Daenerys was clear to anyone near; Rhaella was both
pleased and concerned by his devotion. “Your brother has always been reserved and quiet, but he is a Dragon through and through. Now that you ignited his passion, I pity the man or woman who dare come between you.” Rhaella gave Daenerys a reassuring smile before asking her daughter a very private question: “Do you love him, Daenerys? Tell me truly.”

Daenerys knew the wrongness in how their relationship as man and woman had started. Would she ever truly forget that Rhaegar came to her when still married to Elia? She could not tell.

Yet, something in her was changed and Daenerys found that she much preferred the person she was now than the child she was before. Rhaegar had always been the one she felt the closest to; it pleased Daenerys that she was the cause of much of his sadness to have vanished from his beautiful face. She would dream of him, of them, together; she yearned for his touch and the way he looked at her made Daenerys feel loved, cherished, protected.

Daenerys was raised not to find the marriage of a brother to a sister strange; for many years, they all had assumed she would be tied to Viserys in matrimony. She knew their parents had been unhappy, but Rhaella always spoke fondly of Aerys as a brother. That Rhaegar and her were both used to each other and comfortable in being physical might seem strange to the whole Westeros, but not to her.

Was this love? Would that be enough to make us both happy?

She honestly did not know; Rhaegar was her brother, her king, her lover. She had no memories of life before him; Rhaegar had always been there, by her side.

“Yes, I love him.”

Rhaella looked relieved, if not altogether glad.

“Rhaegar will need your strength, Daenerys, and all of your love. You will be his only source of comfort, I know. Mayhaps I always knew it would end this way, but I sure hoped it would not. The men in our Family...there is a certain frailty in them. Their minds, their souls, are not as strong as ours.”

***

“Did you come to pray and atone for your sins, Father? There is still time to repent.”

Aegon would never become the man his Father hoped him to be; Rhaegar was the first to admit that his expectations towards his only son— that he would grow up to become to savior of Westeros— were indeed too big. As the years progressed and the strangeness in Aegon could not be ignored, Rhaegar decided to prepare him to a different path; others could fight while Aegon could rule.

Rhaegar remembered when he was two and ten, that his life started to change; he had read in a book that a Prince should be both a scholar and a soldier. His body and voice were changing; women were starting to appeal to him.

Aegon, of course, was different. Elia thought him special; Rhaegar pretended he was, for a time. Now, before him was a stranger. The hair was silver and his eyes, of a beautiful shade of light violet. But Aegon was small, thin and looked positively sick. His chambers smelled of the thick incense and candles.

“You seem to forget that I already confessed to the High Septon and took a vow of celibacy, son.”
Rhaegar gestured for Aegon to stand up; he had found his son praying before a statue of The Smith, the implication clear; Aegon was asking for the Seven to mend the broken marriage of his parents.

“My son, I waited long enough for you to come of age. Your uncle has shared with me you have concerns about life as a married man. You understand you have responsibilities. Do you think you could uphold them?”

Aegon looked at least ten years older and Rhaegar could see some rashes and small sores around his lips.

“I will honour my vows, Father. My septon has convinced me this is the Path the Seven has intended for me. I will pray every moonturn that my seed will take root in Lady Joanna, my betrothed, as I do not intend in overindulging in the pleasures of the flesh.”

Aegon’s septon has lost no time; no doubt Elia is happy about his influence over Aegon.

“It gladdens me to hear, son. The full support of House Lannister will be needed in the wars to come. House Targaryen has a great responsibility; the future of the Seven Kingdoms depends on our leadership. After the long summer, the longest of winters will come; we either stay together or we perish in the Long Night. Do you understand?”

Aegon answered without looking at his Father: “I do; you speak of The North, The Others and the Battle for the Dawn.”

Rhaegar nodded: “Yes; the enemy is real; has always been real. We either fight, or we will all die.”

There was no emotion in Aegon’s tone when he said: “Their Gods; their Demons. Mayhaps it is for the best; The Neck will protect us.”

Rhaegar asked himself what had he done wrong. Is it my blood? Did I love him less than I should have? Was he always like that?

Time would not help make things better. Rhaegar and the Seven Kingdoms still needed Aegon. Rhaegar would see that Lady Joanna Lannister would be Aegon’s wife, but how could he make sure their union to remain fruitless?

Mother is right; he needs to be gone. Aegon is an embarrassment to our House and a danger to my plans.

“The North is part of the Seven Kingdoms; you either become their King, or you will never become King, Aegon. I will announce you will take a year long trip to Essos. I will assign you two Kingsguard; a septon and a septa and a small retinue of attendants. My betrothed and I will take you to the harbour; you are to address her with respect and wish us a happy and blessed marriage before the eyes of the people of King’s Landing. You either learn, boy, or I will have you out of the succession line.”

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The visit to King’s Landing had gone exactly like Rhaegar planned. Elia and Aegon had become popular in his absence and there was indeed unrest among the members of the Faith, but Rhaegar acted swiftly.

Elia was simply told to cut her act; she was a political animal and understood Rhaegar held the
Power and could, if he wanted, remove Aegon at once. House Lannister would protest, of course, but despite Aegon’s gain in popularity, him exposing himself for the first time in years had also caused many nobles to fear his radicalism; anything to do with the masses being recruited would naturally not sit well with traditionalists.

His Grace took both his betrothed and Former Queen to several tours; they visited orphanages and attended Service at the Great Sept, together as a Family. Elia had to smile and address Daenerys formally. Rhaegar was satisfied in the way the dornish woman played her role, even though he knew too well she would not be gone without a fight.

When Daenerys held an infant in her arms in one of those visits, Rhaegar started to imagine their life as parents; he was thirty three years of age, not old.

*Our line will inherit the Iron Throne. I will see to that. Marwyn will help us conceive healthy, strong children.*

At the end of Daenerys visit, Rhaegar made two announcements: the first was the revelation that Dark Sister, House Targaryen Ancestral sword, had been found. The courtiers gasped at the sight and applauded wholeheartedly.

“Dark Sister in our hands is a signal of a New Era; gone are the internal fights of past and the doubts about the future. We will stand, together. Your future Queen and I will be wed soon; a sennight after my betrothed is to turn five and ten, she will become my Consort, my Heart and my Soul. Our firstborn son will be granted Dark Sister and the title of Prince of Summerhall.”

The crowd loudly cheered, but the only thing Rhaegar could hear was the beating of his heart as he watched Daenerys standing proudly by his side.

*We were born to be together...had I known this before I would have waited for you and not married her in haste.*

Rhaegar insisted in sailing back to Dragonstone and staying an additional day by Daenerys side. Not even their mother, Rhaella, could deny his heart anymore. He would wait until they were wed to take her again, but holding her hand while they walked through Aegon’s garden, or planting a chaste kiss on her lips as they said their good nights was within his rights.

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**House Martell**

Elia kept busy during her husband's absence.

Lord Arryn remained as both Hand and Regent. In the past, Elia would sit on the Iron Throne, hear petitions and take part of the Small council meetings when Rhaegar was elsewhere. With Aegon in the brinks of adulthood, the Prince of Dragonstone was expected to be granted his own household and move to the island, to rule it, the first step to become King one day.

Instead, both Elia and her son were relegated to a weak position in the Court. While it did serve her a purpose to have Aegon far from scrutiny, it also made their situation bleak.

Nobles could smell defeat and failure; they ran away in droves.
Elia then decided to make Aegon’s weakness into their greatest asset; the smallfolk were known to be religious and believe in superstitions. The marriage between a brother and sister was tolerated, not accepted.

The High Septon was content in being nothing more than a puppet to Rhaella and Rhaegar, but Elia knew there was more in the Faith than its high ranking ministers.

Aegon started to search for a septon that would offer him guidance and true inspiration while Elia continued to play her part, the spurned wife that still took her duties seriously. It was very important not to be seen as opposing the Faith; but it was vital to start working from bottom to top, to make sure the next High Septon would be theirs.

When it was apparent that Aegon had made his choice in the matter, Elia invited his septon for a conversation:

“His Grace is returning from The Wall and he expects to have a conversation with the Crown Prince; I fear that now my husband decided to make his sister his wife, that he will not only dispose of me, but of our son. We need your assistance, septon.”

Aegon’s friend agreed to help, of course; the Crown Prince was a fine and devout young man, who would make a much better King than his sire: “How could I be of any assistance, Your Grace?”

“The King should be assured that the Crown Prince will honour all the vows he will take when he is to wed Lady Joanna Lannister. House Targaryen must continue through the line of my son, not the line of the Princess. Aegon would want nothing more than to become One with the Seven; mayhaps, after siring enough children, he could take his vows and live the rest of his life in the comforts of the Faith. My Husband, the King, is sick with Lust; it has blinded him and made him forget his true allegiance should lies with his Wife and Son.”

“I pray that His Grace repents, my Queen, and return to your bed. The Crown Prince indeed has confided that he wishes to become a servant of the Seven; I will speak to him and explain that he could be of better service as our King.”

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House Lannister

While he was Lord Hand, Tywin Lannister had made one of his bannermen, Lord Westerling, Master of Whispers. He knew too well that it was the man’s wife, Lady Sybell Spicer who had a talent for acquiring information and delivering it to their Lord, but it did not matter as long as the job was done.

The previous man to hold the position was not a man, but an eunuch. Varys was a transport from Essos, hailing from Lys. When Aerys Targaryen perished, the talented spy disappeared in Essos.

Tywin decided to search for a replacement no further than in the Westerlands.

Whether because the Seven Kingdoms were not under any real threat and the rule of Rhaegar Targaryen was very popular, upon Tywin’s resignation as Hand, people simply forgot to reassign the position and the Westerlings stayed in the Capital.
There was nothing of importance that happened behind the closed doors of the Red Keep that failed to be reported to Tywin Lannister in due time.

He knew his dear granddaughter, Lady Joanna, would be marrying a madman; but he also trusted Queen Elia was more than capable of handling the situation to their advantage.

Through Lady Sybell, an arrangement was made. Aegon would wed and bed Joanna in due time; after a heir, a spare and a daughter would come out of this union, Aegon would be allowed to take holy vows. A Regency would be installed and a new King with Lannister blood would rule.

Lord Lannister was very curious about the soon to be Queen, Princess Daenerys; the upcoming nuptials of her cousin, Princess Rhaenys would give him an opportunity to observe the young woman. It was also the perfect setting to finally present Joanna to His Grace. The girl’s health was still delicate, but his Maester son had been right in changing Joana’s routine; she now looked somewhat healthier and stronger.

Then, three things happened that Lord Lannister had not anticipated: first it was the announcement that the Crown Prince was to sail to Essos for a “Grand Tour”, undoubtedly prompted by the young man’s rise in popularity due to his piety; the second was the new date for King Rhaegar’s wedding, still in the present year and finally, the unexpected death of his good daughter, Lady Mellara, changed the situation significantly.

Propriety made impossible for Ser Jaime and his family to attend the wedding in The Reach; but the Old Lion decided the passing of Jaime’s wife should not prevent him from re-entering the game.

Lord Lannister had several important meetings the sennight he spent at Highgarden. Lady Olenna Tyrell was especially intent in pushing one of her Redwyne granddaughters to be sent to Casterly Rock, not caring about Jaime’s mourning period: “Oh, do not look me like this, Lord Lannister! I know you are already looking for a new Lady of the Rock.”

“Still, my son has the right to mourn his beloved wife, as I did mine.” Lady Olenna said nothing, just looked rather unimpressed.

Tywin added: “I shall consider it when time is right; not before, not after.”

On the second day, Lord Lannister broke his fast with Lord Arryn, who was also in mourning; he was shocked to discover that the man brought with him not only the Arryn children, but also their mother: “Your daughter suffered enormously with the death of my nephew, Lord Lannister. Maester Tyrion has been instrumental in her recovery. She looks almost as beautiful as before; she lost some weight and was visibly distressed when I arrived at the Eyrie. The children too, are finally coping. Lady Waynwood convinced me to attend the Royal wedding would take their minds of the tragedy.”

_Could it be possible that my daughter reformed from her wicked ways?

Tywin met with her daughter and her children the same day, for a stroll in the gardens. He was very impressed with Myrcella, who was very witty and behaved like a proper Lady, knowing of all her courtesies. The boy, Robert, if not as clever as his sister, was not that far behind, not too different from his Tyrek, he assumed.

Cersei seemed more subdued, yes, but Tywin doubted the death of a husband she did not love would have moved her to the point of changing her.

Lord Lannister watched his daughter at the bedding ceremony and concluded he had not been
wrong.

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**House Tyrell**

Willas barely heard the words of the High Septon, who had travelled to Highgarden to officiate the wedding; he looked at Rhaenys and almost pitied her as much as he pitied himself; she looked miserable.

Despite the lack of love, his now Lady wife had never looked that good. Willas was not blind; Rhaenys was very pretty. Dressed all in white silk, with her dark brown hair pulled upwards and arranged in a bum, a beautiful tiara of diamonds decorating her head, she looked splendid.

The other Princess, Daenerys, was simply stunning. From head to toe, there was a new, sensual quality about Daenerys now, which made her even more desirable. Willas had to accept that she was now to be Rhaegar's wife, not his. The way the King, and his good father, held his intended's thin waist while they danced around the Great Hall made Willas sick.

*They truly look outwardly beautiful.*

As his Lord Father started singing bawdy songs, Willas grandmother, Lady Olenna took the hint and approached him: “Silly boy, you should at least pretend. Soon you are to deflower the Princess, who is indeed very pretty if I may say. Put a babe in her belly and get done with it.”

“Bedding! Bedding! Bedding!” the crowd shouted. Willas knew he should not but he looked around, trying to find Daenerys. He had noticed that the Princess was not taking any part in the bedding ceremony. She was by her betrothed’s side. Their eyes briefly met; she looked uncomfortable. Rhaegar must have noticed and gave Willas such an intimidating stare the young man turned his head, in shame.

Soon, they were alone in their chambers, consummation impeding.

Rhaenys spoke first: “How does one consummate without possibly conceiving?”

“Are you afraid of being too young to survive the birthing bed or do you simply want to thwart certain plans our parents are making this right moment?”

Rhaenys had just turned four and ten, but looked very mature, yet frightened. Willas would never hurt her; mayhaps all maidens would behave the same, he asked himself.

“Both; I will do my Duty to House Tyrell. Mother already said she will be visiting often; we cannot possibly postpone it for a long time. You have two brothers as heirs; there is no need to hurry things.”

Willas agreed. The main Tyrell line was secure; there were a multitude of cousins, uncles and relatives nearby too. Garlan would soon be betrothed to Lady Leonette Fossoway, who was to be Lady in waiting to the new Queen, and they all expected them to marry in a year. With all he knew of Rhaenys brother and now with Rhaegar marrying a second time and possibly starting anew, the chances of future contention over the succession to the Iron Throne increased tenfold.
No women had ever sat on the Iron Throne. A Couple of Great Councils had established the precedence, overlooking females with better claim.

If they could have a daughter, and this daughter would grow to marry Garlan’s son...this would be the best outcome Willas could possibly wish for.

Willas was not vain or greedy. A daughter with his blood to marry a nephew and both rule Highgarden was much better prospect than Lady Olenna and Lord Mace Tyrell leading thousands of soldiers into war so that a half dragon, half rose would sit on the Iron Throne.

“Mayhaps we should speak with your uncle, Prince Oberyn; he must be doing something to only sire daughters…”

Rhaenys laughed.

“Willas, I just realised we will be fine.”

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House Stark

Brandon was enjoying every last minute of freedom he had before returning to the confinements of Winterfell, the home he once loved that was now a sort of prison.

King's Landing smelled like shit, was too big for its own good, but made Brandon almost forget. Forget about Catelyn; about how his boy, Bran, had become a cripple.

He missed his Father; Lord Rickard Stark would have known what to do. Brandon was simply lost. The life he wanted was not his, but his brother’s. Ned had everything and behaved as if Brandon was asking too much of him. He had left Winterfell to Stony Shore when it was clear that he should have stayed. Bran was simply too young to be the Stark of Winterfell.

At least, Ned had the foresight of asking Benjen to leave that Tower of his and help ruling The North in its Lord’s absence.

The only person he wrote to, without being obligated by Duty, was Barbrey. Brandon was sure she missed him, being married to that old man Cerwyn. Sometimes, he missed her too; she always welcomed him with a smile, never denied his advances.

Barbrey was his youth.

Maester Flowers’s reports on Bran were not all positive. The saddle worked and his son was happier. Rickon, his cousin, arrived and kept him company. But Bran’s sleep was troubled with terrible dreams; he would have convulsions and involuntary spasms during the day and was in constant need of medication.

During the bedding ceremony, Brandon approached Ned, a goblet of the best Arbor in his hand: “Look at them! " Brandon pointed to Jon and Sansa playfully trying a new step while Robb attempted the same with Myrcella Arryn . "My daughter and your son, dancing together...Jon will be a great Lord of Winterfell, Ned.”
Instead of a smile, Ned was visibly angry: “You have a son, Brandon, who is perfectly capable of succeeding you. I agreed to a marriage between Robb and Sansa, in the event Bran could not sire sons; Jon remains as my heir. “

Brandon waived his brother’s objections: “I know I have a son; and although I am still young to sire many more, I will not commit the same mistake again and give my seed to that fish of a wife. Maester Flowers tells me Bran’s health is still of concern. I am merely preparing for the worst. What is wrong on a Father wanting to see his daughter happy, as the Lady of his Castle and to have his own blood continuing our line? I know she should stay in the South, but...I still dream, that is all.“

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Lady Ashara was sad to see the changes in her friend, Elia.

Gone was the good hearted, kind and generous young woman she met in Dorne.

Elia now was in a constant state of worry and anxiety; she had obviously trained herself to hide it under a mask of polite distance. Always saying the right thing, to the right person and smiling.

But her eyes did not lie: Elia was in pain.

In a rare moment of privacy, where they truly spoke to each other, Elia confessed her unhappiness: “Ash, believe me when I tell you: had I known it would be like this, I would have burnt that letter from King’s Landing before Mother read it. I still love him, you know? He looks at Aegon and at me with such...disgust. Our boy...it is true that he is not what we both expected. But he is far from being helpless.”

_Not according to Arthur._

The Crown Prince had only attended the ceremony at the Sept. A frail looking boy, he would have been handsome if not for his ailments. From skin to eyes to hair, Aegon looked unhealthy, more like an undernourished peasant than a Prince.

“I am going to Oldtown; I will find a Maester to treat Aegon. There is nothing wrong with his head, I tell you, but he lacks appetite. That is why he is too weak to train in arms, nothing else. As soon as his body is strong, Aegon will get better.”

Ashara knew it was not true and worse, she knew Elia also knew. But she said nothing.

Sometimes, Ashara asked herself whether he and Ned were the only ones happy with their lives. Everywhere she looked, there was misery.

When it came to meet Lord Arryn and introduce his heir to their daughter, Ashara was very nervous: “Ned, please, promise me there will be no betrothal! Elia is too young and we should value her happiness more than personal gain.”

Ned silenced her with a kiss: “I want all our children to have what we have, my Love. We are merely arranging things so they find their beloveds among the best possible Houses. We are not selling them to the highest bidder.”

“Not even your Lord brother, I hope. He behaves as if Jon was…”

“...his son. I know, Ashara. I already made it clear that Jon is not his. But Winterfell...I must concede
that Brandon...well, at least he is concerned with the future of House Stark. “

Ashara knew Ned was willing to go as far as have Robb wed Sansa. Although she would prefer their middle son to chose his own bride, the cousins grew up together and were very close; they would not hate each other.

Brandon was far from the only one showing Jon favour; Ashara saw His Grace sparring with her son and brother, complimenting the boy even. Now that Arthur was assigned to Rhaenys, Jon would be staying at Highgarden, Ashara hoped that Brandon would forget about making Jon his heir.

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House Arryn

Cersei was proud to see that her Myrcella had bewitched the odious man; no doubt her girl was far more accomplished than her cousin Joanna, despite being younger. She smiled and pretended to found Lord Lannister´s presence agreeable, all to ensure that her daughter would have ascend as high as possible, honour be damned.

Myrcella was comely; Cersei loved her daughter, but a great part of her was more than pleased to know that Myrcella would grow up even more good looking, but never as beautiful as her.

“Lady Myrcella has fine manners, Cersei. Maester Tyrion wrote me that she is far advanced in her lessons and that you already started training her for managing a Keep.” Cersei thanked for the kind words, as she was supposed to, and even extended an invitation for Lord Lannister to visit soon, being relieved when he explained Casterly Rock would not allow him to leave a second time in the year.

“Mayhaps in the future, now that the roads are safe again, I might take Lord Tyrek Lannister to meet his cousins.”

Then it came the introduction of her Robert to a potential northern bride, a silly idea based on sentimentality of both Elbert and Jon Arryn. Lady Elia Stark was indeed going to be as beautiful as her mother, Cersei had to agree, but this possible match would hardly bring The Vale any significant alliance. House Stark of Stony Shore was a cadet branch, and a not particularly rich one.

Cersei had to concede that Elia´s ancestry was impressive. Houses Stark and Dayne were among the oldest lines in Westeros, both hailing from royalty, and although House Arryn would not become any richer with such match, it would increase its prestige among the nobility.

There are no other Targaryen Princesses to be had; Elia Stark might be as close as we could get of a maiden with Royal Blood. The Tyrell brat will never set foot in The Eyrie as long as I live.

Lady Olenna Tyrell insisted in introducing her granddaughter Margaery, a girl of two and ten, to every available bachelor of some standing and the little thing was much too pleased with herself in playing the queen bee, even to a boy of seven, much to Cersei´s consternation.

His Grace was still the most handsome man in all the Seven Kingdoms. Once upon a time, Cersei was led to believe that she would marry Rhaegar and become Queen, only to wake up at Riverrun, having only Petyr Baelish as her servant. While she lived in the Red Keep, she had very little contact with the King, despite her standing as both Lady Arryn and the daughter of the Lord Hand.
She was sent to the Eyrie, not expected to return to the Court. For years, Cersei tried, but Elbert would not bulge. The letters Petyr sent her were the closest she would get, giving her a glimpse of how the game of thrones was being played.

Lord Stark had almost permanently moved to Petyr’s brothel, and he was far from the only one. Jon Connington had a predilection for male blonds, and Lord Baelish happened to have two boys from Lys with the silver hair the Lord of Griffin’s Roost craved. Lord Velaryon preferred women from the Summer Islands while Ser Jonothor Darry cared only for big breasted girls:

The smartest of all are, quite obviously, the Dornish and those associated with them; Prince Oberyn comes only to drink his fill, returning to the Red Keep and to the arms of his many lovers, all imported from Dorne while Prince Viserys keeps only to the bed of his Princess wife and their paramour, Ser Daemon Sand for what I heard. The arrangement only takes place at Dorne, of course; the knight never set foot in the Red Keep and while traveling through the Seven Kingdoms, the Prince showed great restraint I was told. When he happens to be visiting not in the company of Arianne Martell, Viserys has a very young Lyseni bed warmer he shares with Oberyn. I saw the girl myself; the resemblance to the Princess Daenerys is remarkable, although the original is far better than her copy.

Cersei saw Viserys Targaryen for the first time upon her arrival and from that moment on, she felt his eyes observing her movements, with a hint of amusement. Rhaegar was the best looking of the brothers, but Viserys more than made up with his charming manners and witticisms.

“Lady Arryn, would you give me the honour of the next dance?” The Prince asked, knowing too well Cersei would have to refuse him.

“Nothing would give me more pleasure, my Prince, but I am still mourning the death of my beloved husband, Ser Elbert.”

“Then I shall sit by your side and have a goblet of wine while we both watch others dancing; and you must promise me that your first dance, once your mourning ends, will be mine.”

Viserys’ wife, Princess Arianne, did not mind, at first; once she realized her husband was not leaving Cersei’s sid and was having a very good time, she came and demanded the Prince to dance with her.

“If you excuse me, my Lady, I must attend to my wife; she is usually very understanding, but your beauty must have given pause. I cannot say I blame her.”

Viserys stayed by his wife’s side for the next hour; Cersei took to speak with both Ladies Tyrell, Olenna and Alerie. It was expected in such occasions to spend some time complimenting the hostesses and thanking for the invitation, exchanging the empty pleasantries that separated nobility from the common folk.

Cersei was exhausted. She was served another goblet of wine and went for a walk. The gardens were beautiful, lit with enough torches to make walking even if slightly inebriated possible. She searched for a secluded enough place and found a gazebo, surprisingly not yet claimed by lovers.

She knew Viserys had been following her. When Cersei felt his hands gently touching her shoulders, she turned to face him.
The kiss that followed was just the beginning.
Chapter Summary

A year has passed since Rhaenys married Willas:
Daenerys and Rhaegar go to Volantis;
Elia is not yet defeated; a new Maester enters the game;
Viserys is still working hard.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

House Targaryen 294 A.C

Daenerys preferred to write private letters in her chambers instead of the Solar she shared with her husband. As soon as she finished with all her duties as Queen, Daenerys sat by the small round table near her vanity with parchment and ink.

Rhaegar entered their chambers; he seldom slept in his own rooms since they married half a year ago, unless, of course, Daenerys moonblood was upon her. Maester Marwyn recommended them to avoid a pregnancy in the first year, the same advice given to Rhaenys.

Her husband pushed a chair and sat by her side; he proceed to kiss her neck, trying to distract Daenerys from finishing her task.

“I am replying to your daughter, my Love. She says that now that Garland and Leonette are wed, she will try for a baby.”

While their friendship would never be what it once was, time had already healed some wounds. Rhaenys and Daenerys made peace that sennight they spent together at Highgarden.

The daughter and father relationship too, suffered, but their bond was stronger than the one Rhaenys shared with her mother. Elia Martell was spending most of her time between Highgarden and Sunspear. By the terms of their settlement, Rhaegar granted his former Queen a very generous pension, allowed her to keep her uncle Prince Lewyn as sworn shield and was rebuilding Summerhall- not in the exact location, but in the same lands- where she would take residence.

The Master of Coin, Lord Baratheon, tried to negotiate a better deal, but Rhaegar just wanted peace and to be done with his first marriage. Summerhall, he reasoned, would eventually become the Seat of his son with Daenerys, so he felt the expenditure was a good investment in the long run.

“Are they really following Maester Marwyn´s instructions, or Rhaenys has changed her mind?” Rhaegar had not expected that his daughter’s reaction to the news that her mother was the one behind her marriage to House Tyrell to be one of rebellion. When Rhaenys came to him, asking for assistance in the little scheme she had with Ser Willas, Rhaegar alerted her that Elia was nothing if not capable of being adaptive; he had to agree that no Council would give a daughter of a daughter the Crown, but there was the risk of Elia and Lord Tyrell using a future heiress to Highgarden with
dragonblood as a pawn regardless.

“She said it is, at least, worth the try. Rhaenys also writes that Ser Arthur has become more of a friend now that she is not a spoiled brat anymore and that his nephew, Jon Stark, might become a knight sooner than later. Apparently, he and his direwolf already saved a damsel in distress at Ser Garlan´s wedding. I would have liked to have seen that.”

Rhaegar said he too, would have enjoyed the sight: “ Arthur wrote me about it, of course. I am not surprised; the boy is Stark and Dayne after all.” He continued to kiss and nibble her neck while his strong hands held her by the waist, swiftly moving her from her chair to his lap. Daenerys was already wearing a silk nightgown, with a delicate myrish lace neckline, perfect for such warm weather and passionate husband, for it was both comfortable and inviting.

It was easy to undress Daenerys; Rhaegar only needed to expertly move the black lace straps away from her shoulders and reveal her breasts, big enough to fit in his hands. He sucked her pinky, rosy nipples, her moans of pleasure guiding him from arousal to a firm, solid erection.

Daenerys adjusted herself when she felt Rhaegar´s hard cock, by turning and straddling him; she was completely naked; he was fast in unlacing his breeches and freeing his rigid, throbbing member. She impaled herself on him, his hands firmly on her waist, directing her movements until she reached a steady rhythm they both were satisfied with.

When he identified the signs of her impending climax- her eyes shut, her head falling backwards and her walls greedily massaging his cock-, Rhaegar knew he could not hold it for much longer; he patted her back and Daenerys stopped rocking her hips, rapidly moving out of their erotic position and kneeling before her husband in order to drink from his desire.

Rhaegar carried Daenerys to bed in his arms and they slept peacefully.

The next day they would be travelling to Volantis; Aegon had left seven moon turns ago and was visiting the Free City. Rhaegar wanted to research about dragon lore with Grand Maester Marwyn and see for himself the progress his son was supposedly making. Some times after the Crown Prince left, Rhaegar allowed Elia to spend a fortnight with her son in Pentos; she returned saying that the treatment prescribed by her new personal Maester was working; that Aegon´s body was getting stronger and that he looked healthier.

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His Grace left his dear brother, Prince Viserys, to act as Regent in his stead, while he was on an Official Visit to Volantis.

In the year since Princess Rhaenys married Ser Willas Tyrell, Prince Viserys influence grew in the Red Keep, especially after his mother died, a mere fortnight after Daenerys became Queen.

When the date was set for Rhaegar to sail, Viserys was able to make a quick trip to Dorne, to visit his wife, Princess Arianne and their lover, Ser Daemon Sand.

The last thing Viserys needed now that his ambitions seemed to materialize without great efforts, was to have both in King's Landing. Their arrangement, he told them time and again, was only sustainable in Dorne.

“The Red Keep has thin walls, eyes everywhere. As of now, some courtiers might have heard I consider you both as mine, but they have never seen it. It is better this way; there is much to be lost in
terms of reputation if people start gossiping about us.”

Even with dimples, Daemon was a very masculine man; in arms, he was far superior than Viserys, but in bed, he submitted to his Prince. Only when their Targaryen mate was travelling, Daemon would assume a more active role with Arianne, being the only one Viserys trusted to pleasure his wife without beggeting her with a bastard.

Arianne was tired, but sated; since her husband had arrived the sennight before, they had been locked in their chambers for much of the day, only leaving to share meals with her family and household.

Even Daemon was complaining of soreness, despite having a smile on his lips. Arianne had already been fucked twice when she started to pout: “We would have better chances of conceiving if I was to travel with you, my love; I know you are a very busy man now that your brother trusts you more than his own son, but visiting us just twice a year is clearly not enough.”

Viserys reminded his wife that she had spent two moon turns with him at King’s Landing not so far ago and that, in between their intense sex sessions and constant travelling, they probably spent more time abed in one year than Lord Stannis Baratheon and his Lady wife, Ravella Swann, who were able to have three children in the last ten years despite being apart and meeting just twice a year.

What Viserys did not mention was that his secret mistress, Lady Cersei Arryn, had already become pregnant of him at least once.

Cersei now lived at the Red Keep, raising her two children with the assistance of their great-uncle, Lord Jon Arryn. Their affair started at Highgarden and had evolved. Cersei hated her Lord Father, but the Old Lion was the first to notice and, trying to avert disaster, tasked Lady Sybell Westerling, the wife of the Master of Whispers, to assist them.

Viserys was not even certain if Lord Westerling himself knew; Sybell was the one pulling tricks and doing the dirty work while her husband received full credit. The Prince expected Cersei to be given chambers near his own, but Lady Sybell decided it would only raise suspicions:

“Lady Cersei should stay at the Tower of the Hand, with Lord Arryn’s household. There is a passage a former Hand used to receive private and personal visits discreetly. We only need to move your own chambers, my Prince, somewhere close to this passage.”

Viserys disliked to be so dependant on one person, but better Sybell Westerling, a woman that despite being a social climber and ambitious, knew exactly what going against her Liege would bring to her House, than to have rumours spreading around the Red Keep and his good name in the mouths of petty nobles and poor knights.

Sybell had provided Cersei with moontea. His mistress was seven and twenty, not even six years older than him, already a mother of two.

This gave the Prince both hope that Arianne just needed time to get with child and a slight sense of discomfort, for she had not yet managed the feat, despite their efforts.

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House Martell
Ser Willas Tyrell was a Hightower by his mother’s side, so Elia Martell was received with great deference at Oldtown and used every minute of her visit to gain favour with The Faith, visiting the Starry Sept every day, and in finding a Maester to join her household.

Elia was met with great success in both fronts. Her brother, Oberyn accompanied her to The Citadel, as he had studied there for a couple of years, even forging some links.

They went to meet with the Seneschal; a large donation was made in Elia’s name to fund “the studies of poor novices” and a request was then made:

“My new household needs a very capable Maester, who would not only advise me in matters of State, but also care for the ailments of my son, the Crown Prince, when he is to visit. He is of a very religious nature and cares deeply for his soul and salvation, but forgets about his body. Grand Maester Marwyn said- and I believe he is right- that my son needs a new diet, exercise and fortificants, to give him strength to grow and develop.

However, the Grand Maester is overworked and now that my son and I are to spent some time travelling, he will not be able to continue to treat the Crown Prince. We need a very talented Maester, a man of great knowledge but also willing to use non orthodox methods, as many of traditional remedies so far employed did not work. Someone as capable as Marwyn, but more focused in the mysteries of the body and of similar disposition. “

Elia remained undecided for most part. The Maesters she met were just men in grey, not as daring and clearly, not even half as knowledgeable as Marwyn.

“Mayhaps you should search younger talents; observe and wait them before making your decision.” Oberyn offered half heartedly; he had already given up the search. Aegon was mad, not weak. In his estimation, even if Elia found a man of Science capable of influencing Aegon as his Septon would, this would not change the boy’s nature.

“I remember Rhaegar saying once that Marwyn was not like any other Maester and that he had even been disciplined once during his early years. The only reason he was elected Grand Maester, Marwyn believed, was because King Aerys was going mad and the Citadel considered Marwyn to be partially mad himself.”

The next day, Elia sent Oberyn to inquire about Maesters whose works in the field of health had received at least one reprimand.

Oberyn was provided with a list of names with observations about their work. It was done under the table; the donation had served to loose some of the ArchMasters tongues, but they were, basically, going against the rules in assisting Elia so thoroughly. Since she did not understand much of the scientific jargon, Elia asked Oberyn to help her translate what she was reading.

“Basically this Maester was held at the Seneschal’s Court for suggesting ArchMaester Ebrose start opening living bodies, when the condition was already grave enough and death imminent, for research purposes; he was Ebrose’s assistant for years. It seems he is a skilled healer and is still working at the Citadel.”

Qyburn was actually older than Marwyn, which confused Elia at first, before Oberyn explained that men of less means would take sometimes twice as long to progress in their studies than rich novices.

After half an hour, Elia decided that Qyburn was to become her Maester.
Prince Oberyn loved his sister and had always been by her side, but the last years made him realize that his Elia was gone.

He tried to tell her about the White Walkers and the need to have Aegon as far as possible from the Iron Throne. At first, Oberyn believed Elia was able to control boy’s worst impulses, but upon their return from The North, Aegon’s problems and his mother constantly enabling his fantasies had taken a turn for the worst.

“Rhaenys is the best option, Elia.” Oberyn tried to reason.” Aegon, the way he is living right now, I fear he might not be alive for much longer. He fasts more often than he eats...you either convince his Septon to feed him, or the boy will disappear.”

Elia got alarmed and Oberyn felt guilty; which mother would like to hear her son was trying to kill himself? She, however, was quick to recover once again and recruited the Septon to her cause. While Aegon still looked more dead than alive, his behaviour, at least socially, changed. He was seen eating everyday- plain soup and bread; no sweets or spices- and even started to take walks in the garden.

Prince Oberyn had agreed to the visit to The Citadel out of brotherly affection, but also because he wished to read about the Long Night. Rhaegar had enlisted his help in the possible future fight for the Dawn; As instructed, Oberyn had also conveyed the message to Prince Doran, who although did not take the revelation lightly, had his eyes still in the Game of Thrones.

It was then that Doran clearly stated that it was more than time to give up on Aegon and Elia :

“I have not seen Aegon in years, but heard enough to know that the Crown Prince, our nephew, is sick; while I pray he recovers, House Targaryen has a long history with such ailments. Elia is fighting a war she cannot win. We should save our reserves for this coming fight in winter and not put energy in this boy. Dorne can be the destination of many refugees; His Grace seems to understand the possibilities and has commissioned The Citadel to study how to double our harvests. Dorne and the future of House Martell should be our priorities.” Doran then added, as an afterthought: “Nothing is lost as of yet; there are other possibilities for the Iron Throne, two of the three with Martell blood.”

Viserys would have an even better claim than Rhaenys , at least in the eyes of a possible Council if Aegon is declared mad or dies, and he is wed to Arianne... 

If Doran had already thought of this, Elia was also not behind.

Oberyn started to divide his time more unequally, spending longer periods at Sunspear. His correspondence with Rhaegar grew, as he was tasked into reading and compiling dragon lore found on Dorne. Marwyn even went on a quick visit to read the forbidden books and see the accounts on how Meraxes had been killed and the Maester was, of course, guided by Oberyn himself.

When Elia invited Oberyn to meet her in Pentos, he went reasoning it would be only a sennight and nothing too grave would happen.

He was wrong.

Elia and Aegon were being hosted by a Magister called Illyrio Mopatis; Braavos had banned slavery in Pentos, but everybody knew the servants at Illyrio's manse were slaves.
There, Oberyn saw a man that many thought was long dead: Varys.

The former Master of Whispers and his friend were both very aware of the situation in the Seven Kingdoms; the way they hosted the disgraced Queen and her sick son, next in line to the Throne, going as far to accommodate them and not openly mocking Aegon in his misguided piety, left no doubts they had an Agenda.

Maester Qyburn had ingratiated himself with Elia and, surprisingly, Aegon. The man knew the Seven Pointed Star by heart, and would quote the book to convince the Crown Prince to follow his treatment.

A couple of days before he was to depart, Oberyn decided to ask when would Illyrio and Varys be moving to Westeros in a jest, but the Magister did answer him:

“The Seven Kingdoms is a place of Order. You have a King, you have nobles and smallfolk. Even your Religion is one to preach deference. Pentos, on the other hand...we elect a Prince and, when we decide he is of no use, we kill him. Braavos tell us not to have slaves and how many ships we can have. Queen Elia and Prince Aegon will remember their friends and show them favour...”

One of Illyrio’s “servants” was a Dothraki named Jhiqui. If seeing Elia courting favour with slavers was bad enough, what Oberyn learned Qyburn was doing with Jhiqui made it worse.

“You either stop, Elia, or you are no longer my sister. Jhiqui does speak the Common Tongue; Qyburn has been growing bolder with his experiments; soon, he might open the girl alive and let her die a slow death. If you allow this, I will never speak to you again.”

Elia claimed she knew nothing, but she would tell Maester Qyburn to stop; anything not to lose his love, she said.

Prince Oberyn stayed longer; he left Pentos in the company of Elia and Qyburn, to make sure nothing would happen to Jhiqui.

When he arrived at Dorne, Oberyn was quick to pen a letter to The Citadel.

Qyburn did not appear before his fellow Maesters to defend himself.

He lost the title, but proudly added he had "not lost the knowledge."

Elia kept the disgraced man into her service.

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**House Stark**

Lord Stark returned North only after King Rhaegar wedded his sister.

When he arrived at Winterfell, almost nine moons had turned. His younger brother, Benjen, had long returned to Queen Crown, but left behind his son and Lady wife, Jonelle, to keep Bran and Lady Catelyn Stark company.

He returned to his routine without much thought or reflection. It pained Brandon to look at his son, paralysed and depressed. Rickon and his nanny, a wildling named Osha, were the only ones to put a
smile in the sad boy’s face.

Catelyn was desperate: “If you just write your brother, to allow Rickon to be fostered here...he is almost ten and Ser Rodrik could very well train him in arms.”

Brandon had to agree the idea was sound and would solve many problems. Benjen came from his Keep to speak to his son in person; Rickon being an only son was very cherished by his parents, which was to be expected.

Benjen had conditions: “Rickon is the light of Jonelle’s life; we want him to spend alternate years at Queen Crown until he is of age. We agree Maester Flowers and Ser Rodrik are very skilled and that Rickon will also benefit from studying with another pupil, but he is also our son and we need him home. We will come to visit often too.”

Brandon could only agree, but decided to remind Benjen of his duties: “Rickon deserves a brother or a sister; Lady Jonelle is still young, brother.”

Benjen did not take the bait; instead he gave Brandon food for thought: “So is a Catelyn, brother; and a good looking Lady at that. “

His reunion with Barbrey had been a good one, but she had gone to visit her nephew, Domemic, who had returned home from The Vale for a while.

Brandon wondered if Catelyn was still as cold as a fish; she surely would not deny him of his husband rights.

He decided to have some fun and pretend his wife was one of the whores at Littlefinger’s brothel. Lord Stark called his Lady wife to his solar, and offered her wine; she refused:

“Come on, Catelyn; this is a good vintage. I want to talk to you about my trip. Surely you want to know everything.”

***

“...Surely you want to know everything.”

Catelyn knew enough: my lord Father wrote me that you are a disgrace; and that he refuses to allow my sister’s daughter to wed another Stark and would advise House Mallister to refuse the match.

Catelyn sat as she was told to and drank her fare; when Brandon was away and Ned was ruling The North in his absence, they would share a goblet of wine in the same Solar after a full day of work. Their conversation was pleasant and, for some moments, Catelyn would even forget about Brandon and Ashara.

Brandon could be charming still, but it was just an act, Catelyn knew. While he spoke, her mind drifted. The wine was going to her head and her defenses were slowly crumbling.

“At King's Landing, I made the acquaintance of a friend of yours; Lord Petyr Baelish. He is now very wealthy, working at the Customs and also...he owns a brothel.”

Catelyn knew that Littlefinger was under Cersei’s spell since they were kids. Her forster sister was a friend of sorts; at least she was good to Petyr, for Catelyn knew the Lady of the Eyrie was
responsible for him acquiring both positions, first at Gulltown and then in the Capital.

“He also owns one at Gulltown; I suppose you went to visit both establishments, as your ship made a stop in The Vale before sailing to White Harbour.”

Brandon considered the comment to be a joke and laughed: “My Lady, you know me well. You should drink more, Catelyn; you are almost fun tonight.”

He poured her more wine and moved closely; it had been years since Brandon had even tried anything. Catelyn did not know how to respond and blushed.

“Oh, some red in your cheeks.” he said with a smile. “Mayhaps my charms work on the rest of your body. Allow me to investigate this intriguing possibility, my lovely?”

Was Brandon really speaking to her? Catelyn was confused, but she nodded.

“Should I kiss you?”

Brandon never asked; he would usually take her and be done with it as fast as he could.

“Yes, my Lord.”

Brandon knelt before her chair; he made a gesture for her to spread her legs and removed her smallclothes. He then disappeared inside her dress and Catelyn only felt when he started licking her, his tongue playing with her folds and nub.

She closed her eyes and moaned.

Then Brandon stopped, he emerged from her private area, his face red. He drank more of his wine and started to unlace his breeches. He commanded Catelyn to bend over the desk; she did and he thrust inside her: “Now, I want you to say my name, you hear me, girl? Brandon is my name. You will scream my name, or I will not come back, girl.”

Is he speaking to me? Of course Catelyn knew her husband’s name...why would he command her so?

It did not matter, she found, as he started pounding his cock into her and slapping her ass.

Catelyn was soon screaming his name.

***

House Arryn

Cersei was jealous when Viserys had to leave her to go to Dorne, but even her agreed a Husband had certain duties to his wife.

Maester Tyrion had returned to Casterly Rock and they started to correspond; he had grown fond of his Arryn nephew and niece and would provide Cersei with information on House Lannister. Since Lady Mellara died, it was good to have someone to write to at Casterly Rock, especially if Myrcella was to move there.

Even Lord Lannister would send Cersei’s ravens on occasion. She would reply in a distant but polite manner, perfectly aware that she partially owned her present comfortable life to Tywin Lannister’s connections.
Lady Sybell Westerling had proved herself invaluable; both Cersei and Viserys agreed they would have to find a way to have Sybell be more loyal to them than to her Liege, but, at the moment, they had no reasons to complain: nobody knew of their affair; Lord Arryn was treating Cersei like the daughter he had never had, very content that his nephew’s widow was carrying herself with “honour as high as an Arryn.”

Myrcella and Robert still missed The Eyrie, but gotten used to life at the Red Keep. Cersei would have lunch with them everyday, inquiry about their lessons and hear their stories. Cersei could barely keep up with the names and faces of all the nobles at The Capital and she was astonished to discover that both her children knew the Court in terms of families and its members better than her.

When somebody greeted her while taking a stroll, Myrcella would discreetly whisper the name and position held to Cersei.

The nights belonged to Viserys, who would come as often as possible.

When he finally returned from Dorne, Cersei was ravenous: “I missed you, my Prince.” she said while frantically unlacing his breeches.

“I gave you leave to take a lover, lioness, but I must confess I am happy you did not hear my advice. I like to have you all to myself.”

Cersei had been tempted into seducing a couple of Knights, of course; but Lady Sybell reminded her that anybody she would show the secret passage could probably find out about her affair and, most importantly, she would have to report to Lord Lannister.

Besides, Viserys was such a skilled lover that Cersei was indeed afraid to jeopardize their plans for a night of disappointment: “You are the only one I crave, my Prince.”

She laid in his arms to rest after he took her for the second time; they still needed to talk: “How was Dorne? Do you think you managed to get her with child?”

A son of Viserys was crucial to their plans; Rhaegar was already leaving him to sit in the Iron Throne and act as Regent for as long as he would stay at Volantis. Aegon was Lord Lannister’s problem; most nobles at the Red Keep considered the boy to be unfit. Daenerys was young and, for what GrandMaster had told the Royal Family, very healthy and perfectly able to carry children.

Cersei and Viserys agreed that Elia and Tywin Lannister would not allow a new heir to the Iron Throne to be born. Viserys had already done his part, he said, and honoured his Mother's wishes: he had alerted Rhaegar to the risks.

But Viserys was more than prepared to profit from any tragedy; if Elia and Lord Lannister wanted to dirty their hands, expecting Aegon to ascend the Throne, they would find out that Dorne, The Vale, The North, the Riverlands, The Crownlands and the Stormlands would support Viserys if Rhaegar would die without issue.

Viserys would have to be able to further the line; Arianne Martell needed to give him a son.

He considered his mistress question for a second before answering:

“I fucked them both many times, lioness; if Arianne is not pregnant by now, Daemon sure is.”
Look, I am falling in love with Viserys; I much prefer my Viserys than GRRM’s Viserys.
All I can say is that they will serve for very different purposes.
Elia and Tywin make their moves, but so does Rhaegar; Brandon and Benjen go to Castle Black and Cersei and Viserys discuss an announcement from the Reach.

House Targaryen 294 A.C

Rhaegar saw no real changes in his son, the Crown Prince Aegon; at least not the ones he foolishly expected. The boy, he had to concede, looked healthier, but this fact in itself meant nothing, as if Aegon would have lost any more weight or colour, he would have died of a cold from the faintest summer breeze, so frail looking he was.

His Grace decided Aegon was not yet ready to return to the Seven Kingdoms.

Mayhaps he will never be.

Rhaegar gave orders for the boy to follow his wishes and allowed him to go on pilgrimage to Andalos, the hinterlands of Pentos, from where the Faith originated.

Grand Maester Marwyn urged His Grace to amend his will, in secret.

“The Lord Hand is an honest and capable man, but he has ties with Lord Lannister and Lady Cersei now lives in the Red Keep; lest us not forget our Master of Whispers is a westerlander. Queen Daenerys is entering the middle of her cycle and now, here in Volantis, it would be a perfect time to both conceive and change the will. Even the healthiest of woman can die in childbirth, Your Grace; I am positive our Queen will be with child in no time, but we must always prepare for the worst. “

The thought of Daenerys heavy with his child was enough to make Rhaegar decide to disinherit Aegon. They discussed some clauses and conditions as to make the Will legally solid. There would be always contention and internal fighting, but the document had to have enough support and read as legitimate in its concerns towards the Seven Kingdoms to be accepted by the majority.

They reached the conclusion that, for now, only Rhaegar’s inner circle would be aware of the will. Aegon would only be disinherit if a Conclave of Maesters, each appointed by every Lord Paramount, in addition to Maester Aemon Targaryen, would declare Aegon unfit to rule on the grounds of insanity.

“Lord Tywin Lannister and Elia are ready to use Aegon as a puppet; as long as he prays in the Sept and sires children with Lady Joanna, both would be content in ruling the Kingdom. While Casterly Rock is very powerful, you and Viserys have the loyalty of North, Stormlands, Riverlands, Crownlands, Dorne and Vale. Even if Lord Tywin buys The Reach to vote for him in this Conclave, he would lawfully be defeated. “

There was also the issue of Daenerys; Rhaegar feared for the worst, if he was to die unexpectedly.

If I allow Aegon to ascend The Throne, Elia will have Daenerys killed no doubt…
That night, when Rhaegar went to bed with Daenerys, he gave her his seed and prayed that would take root.

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Between Volantis and King's Landing, King Rhaegar and Queen Daenerys spent over four moon turns travelling. They made stops at Tyrosh and Lys to re-supply, but mostly stayed within the Black Walls of Old Valyria’s greatest daughter.

When it was time to return, Grand Maester Marwyn was the first to arrive at the Red Keep; the Royal Couple had decided to spend a couple of days at Dragonstone and had requested the Master of Ships, Lord Velaryon, to sail to the Island and escort them back to King’s Landing.

Once Rhaegar arrived, Viserys was relieved of his Duties as Regent. His Grace sat on the Iron throne and, before everybody, thanked his brother for a work well done.

After the public session, they went to feast the return of the King and Queen in the main Hall.

While the wine flowed and many courses of food were served, the three Targaryen siblings spoke in High Valyrian. Obviously, many of the nobles present were taught Valyrian by their Maesters, but the Royal Family indeed considered the foreign language to be their Mother Tongue. Among them, they made use of expressions that would not be fully understood by the casual listener and even their accent was unlike the pronunciation described in books and guides.

Regardless, they spoke only about their travel, nothing about the politics of Westeros.

Daenerys was very shocked with what she saw at Volantis. The city was virtually divided into two and the slaves there were treated so poorly that it had almost literally broke her heart. Daenerys had used some of her prestige as Queen of Westeros to have the Old Blood that was hosting them treat their servants with more respect, but wished she could have done more. She insisted in buying some handmaidens, brought them to the Seven Kingdoms and granted them freedom.

After many toasts were made, Viserys noticed that his brother was seen speaking in hushed tones with their second cousin, Lord Baratheon and in the next day, Rhaegar briefly met with Lord Jon Connington at the Godswood before attending a Small Council Meeting.

Prince Viserys thought nothing of it at first; he was also invited to continue attending the meetings as an advisor and saw that the Lord Hand seemed to be in control of things.

Stannis was, after all, their cousin and Jon Connington was a friend of Rhaegar; nobody dared to think that the King was trying to oust Lord Arryn.

It was only when Daenerys invited him to ride in the Kingswoods that he was informed that, in the event of hers or Rhaegar’s death without issue and upon declaration of Aegon’s insanity, the Crown would be his.

***

House Martell

Elia knew her brother had been the one to end her Maester’s career at The Citadel, but she decided that the damage done was not irreparable. Had she been Queen, it would be almost impossible to keep the disgraced Maester in her household without raising some eyebrows, but since Elia was no longer Rhaegar’s consort, nobody really cared about Qyburn’s change of status.

Officially, Elia kept the old man as her scribe and, indeed, was one of his many responsibilities, to write letters and documents to his employer, but far from the only one.
Aegon would be staying longer in Essos, a clear sign that Rhaegar had not been impressed enough with the health improvement of the Crown Prince to summon him home and officially announce his betrothal to Lady Joanna Lannister and set a date for the Royal Wedding.

Something had to be done.

“I assure you, Your Grace, that my experiments at Pentos were perfectly legal; my title is gone, but my knowledge was expanded. As you know, the Crown Prince's body already responded to my new treatment. It might have not convinced His Grace, but it is a first step.

You wish your son to become stronger, capable of leading troops and performing his Duties as a husband. What makes a man bigger, more powerful than others? I believe the answer is in how our bodies work. Everybody is different, even though we were all made the same. I theorize that substances inside of us are responsible for managing most of our functions. To make Aegon stronger, I need to find the human fabric of strength. A mighty warrior, a man of known ferocity ...that is what I have need of…”

Elia preferred not to have known, but Oberyn was clear in his descriptions of what Qyburn intended to do with the slave girl. She pitied the young woman and—of course—would not have allowed Qyburn to go too far.

But Aegon needed all the help she could give him.

Elia then wrote a letter to Lord Lannister; her son, Elia informed the Old Lion, was to travel through the heartlands of Pentos. Andalos was a notoriously dangerous place, “land of no one”, and Dothraki riders were known to attack the area.

The former Queen requested Ser Gregor Clegane to be sent to the Prince, to act as his sworn shield, as His Grace had left him with only one Kingsguard, Ser Oswell Whent.

Nobody will care if Clegane disappears. His reputation is terrible; everybody knows the brute killed at least two wives and tortures the smallfolk under him. I am doing those people a favour; I am saving mothers from having Clegane kill their babies and rape them.

The huge man was nothing more than a dog to Tywin Lannister; Ser Gregor went from Lannisport to King’s Landing and boarded the next available ship to Pentos, in the company of Qyburn.

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House Lannister

Sandor Clegane was called one day to Lord Tywin Lannister’s solar. The Old man was reading a piece of parchment and gestured Clegane to take a seat.

“House Clegane is a knightly House; the new Master of Clegane Keep must be a knight. Do you understand what I am saying, Ser Sandor Clegane?”

It was the happiest day of Sandor’s life; his brother and tormentor died, alone and miserable, in the deserts of Essos. What remained of Gregor's body was burnt; nobody cared to have his ashes shipped back home or save the bones for burial. Sandor assumed it was Lord Tywin’s idea, to save some coin, and could only thank for His Lordship wise decision, as he did not wish to have that in his lands, not even dead.

Ser Jaime Lannister was the one to knight Sandor that night; the Septon at Casterly Rock performed the ceremony with oils and heard his vows and Sandor had to agree that it was fast and painless.
“Ser Sandor” Maester Tyrion greeted him the morning after. “I had you for a man loyal to his own ideas, Clegane. I suppose a good parcel of land change one’s mind when it comes to knighthood…”

Not even The Imp would spoil Sandor’s happiness; he had agreed to the ceremony and to inherit the lands on account of his late grandfather. The man had been a kennelmaster under Lord Tywin’s father and had saved his Liege’s life. By all accounts, he had been a decent man. That his son and grandson were both monsters was not his fault.

“My brother was more beast than man; it makes me happy to know that he is dead, and that I am alive; I will have all that was his by rights. The only thing that would make me even happier was if I had killed the rabid dog myself, but Clegane Keep is good enough for the likes of me.”

Tyrion offered no comment; instead, he invited Sandor to the best brothel of Lannisport, to celebrate the joyous event of Gregor’s death.

Sandor took a prostitute to bed on Tyrion’s coin. When he was finished with her, Sandor returned to the table he was sharing with the Maester and found Ser Jaime also sitting there.

“More wine; Dornish Red.” Jaime ordered. “A round of your best vintage to everyone here tonight, in the name of Ser Sandor Clegane, the most chivalrous knight of the Westerlands!”

The crowd cheered; many went to congratulate Clegane, who would only nod and remained silent as all that approached him had only smile and kind words.

Tyrion and Jaime were, of course, having a grand time watching Sandor in all his grumpiness.

“Don’t give us this look, Clegane; we are very happy for you.” Jaime said while Tyrion ordered more chicken to be brought.

“You know what this means, right, old dog? “ Maester Tyrion was about to burst into laughter, Sandor could see it. “You will need a Lady wife…to further the line.”

Jaime, who was lounging on his chair with a goblet of wine, then sat straight; he made a stern face and said in a menacingly cold voice: “You must do your Duty to House Clegane, boy. You brother is dead; your father is dead; soon you will be dead. All of you, dead, rotting in the ground. Just the name survives! House Clegane must endure.”

Maester Tyrion almost choked on his wine listening Jaime’s impersonation of their Lord Father. Then, he realized this meant that Jaime had done something wrong in the eyes of their Father at least once.

Tyrion’s curiosity was aroused.

“He gave you the legacy speech too? What had Jaime, the golden son of Casterly Rock, done to deserve such honour?”

Jaime stopped laughing, his face became sad; he glanced at Sandor, who knew exactly where the conversation was going.

This is not for me to witness. Bugger Lannisters and their dramas!

“I will make water outside.” Sandor announced before leaving the brothel altogether; he did not wanted to see or hear Jaime explaining himself. It was no secret that the heir to Casterly Rock would sometimes become candid or prone to sentimentalism when drunk.
Tonight, Ser Jaime was definitely in his cups.

“What is this all about, Jaime? Why Father reprimanded so harshly?” Tyrion asked.

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Tysha...she was not a whore...she really did love me.

Tyrion was beyond himself; he loved his brother, how could have Jaime taken part in any of this?

“You do not understand, brother; I convinced Father I would handle the situation. Clegane put her on a ship to Old Town. She was sad, but alive, in one piece. When he found out I had not taught her a lesson, that I had instead given her coin and told her to go...he was furious.

Father...what he wanted to do... had I not stepped in, Tyrion... the things he is capable in doing for House Lannister…”

They left the brothel soon after; Maester Tyrion resumed his activities, but remained distant, refusing to speak with Jaime more than the necessary.

After some time of this treatment, Tyrion decided he needed to know exactly how his Father planned to handle the situation and came to Jaime one night.

“Please, brother. I know you acted only to prevent greater damage. I forgive you for lying to me all those years. Tell me what Father wanted to do.”

Jaime told Tyrion everything.

***

**House Stark**

Sansa loved to go with Lady to the Kingswood when time and her responsibilities as Lady in waiting to Queen Daenerys allowed.

Ser Brynden Tully, her uncle, would usually accompany her and the Queen in their outings. Lady would never become as big as Ghost, as she did not do near as much in terms of exercise as she should, but Sansa was proud to own the best behaved direwolf of Westeros.

Lady Brienne of Tarth was the one to accompany the Queen and King to Volantis; this however, did not mean that Sansa had nothing to do at the Red Keep. She took lessons with a Maester, helped the Steward manage the Keep and attended classes with a Septa on a regular basis.

Prince Viserys would always have kind words and a smile when he would met Sansa, which became a rare occurrence since he was acting as Regent:

“Such a lovely dress, my Lady, it brings the blue of your eyes. Are you missing my dear sister much?”

“Oh, yes, my Prince, but I am certain she is enjoying her trip; Her Grace always wanted to travel.”

The Prince smiled and also acknowledged the presence of Lady Myranda Royce, complimenting her hair style; Lady Leonette was only to return with her husband, Ser Garlan Tyrell, when the Queen was to end her travels, so all Sansa’s spare time was spent in the presence of Myranda, who loved nothing more than to watch the knights train with the master at arms and gossip about the indiscretions of nobles and servants alike, including her own.

“Are there any news from The North, my Lady? I pray that both your brother and Lady Mother are
well.” Prince Viserys asked.

Sansa smiled; she really liked how the Prince never forgot his friends:

“They are well indeed, my Prince, thank you for asking. My Lord Father is to visit The Wall; it
seems there is unrest among the wildlings, for what he wrote. Nothing of great importance, I
assume.”

***

Lady Arya Dustin had asked his Lord Father for lessons on braavosi water dance when she turned
two and ten; instead, her father offered Arya a new sparring partner:

“Your uncle Ned has fostered a natural son of a late friend of his, Robert Baratheon; the boy has
been recently knighted and searches for new opportunities. Soon, Ser Wynton Stood will have to
retire from his position as Master at Arms. For now, he at least needs an assistant.”

Ser Gendry Waters was seven and ten, had been trained by a capable knight from the Stormlands,
could read and write and, according to Ned, was a very talented Blacksmith.

Arya had never cared much about boys the way her cousin, Sansa had; she saw them as friends,
nothing more. When in Winterfell, Arya would spend more time outside with his male cousins than
inside, doing what Ladies were supposed to do.

Now that even Sansa claimed to have become proficient in the bow, Arya was eager to develop her
skills even further.

When Ser Gendry arrived, Arya officially entered puberty.

She was glad that Gendry was no match for her when it came to archery lessons, but with a
warhammer...Gendry was unstoppable.

"Why you only attack with full force when you train with others, Ser? I saw you with the hammer..."
Arya asked after an hour of practice, when she defeated Gendry twice with a sword.

"I was supposed to be a blacksmith; Ser Justin Massey said after he knighted me and left south that I
am competent enough, but only very good with the warhammer; I am sorry, my Lady, but it is such a
heavy weapon...and know this : you defeat me with a sword and a bow because you are better, not
because I am feigning weakness. I swear it."

Arya could not deny she was pleased that Ser Gendry considered her to be a good opponent; she
also knew that her Lord father would not have wanted the new Knight to hurt his only daughter and
heiress, but Gendry made it look so easy, to yield a warhammer.

"Why don’t you teach me then, Ser?"

Gendry looked incredulous. Arya was much smaller than him, how could she ask that?

"Once you grow up, my Lady and your Lord Father allows it...”

Arya hated to be addressed as such; she saw as Gendry went to help Ser Wynton clean the training
grounds and sighted.

*He thinks I am a child.*

***
Rickon Stark did not like when his Lord Father informed him he was to stay behind at Winterfell. Benjen explained his son he would be trained in arms by a proper Knight and attend classes with his older cousin Brandon, both things would be very beneficial to his education.

The boy tried to reason: “We also have a Maester and a Master at Arms at Queenscrown, Father.”

Benjen told him that being fostered somewhere away from home was an expected part of a lording’s training, and that he himself was sent to House Glover when he was nine, a year younger than Ricko, and there stayed for three years.

“You at least will be among your own kin and Winterfell is close enough from home. Your Lady Mother and Osha will stay with you too, Rickon.”

Rickon smiled, feeling he would not be left behind until he realized this meant his father would leave.

“If mother will be with me, this means you will be alone, Father. Or are you going to The Wall again?”

Benjen was surprised that Rickon had guessed it correctly. Brandon was planning to visit The Wall upon receiving a raven from Casterly Rock, that was in fact addressed to Benjen.

Usually, the responsibility to deal with Castle Black directly in matters of security fell primarily to Benjen and Hother Umber, the Lords established in the New Gift; they were sworn to House Stark, but paid most of their taxes to Castle Black and were required to visit The Wall at least once a year.

“I will accompany my brother yes; Lord Stark cannot cross Beyond The Wall, as it would be too dangerous. “

His Grace himself crossed it, but Brandon would not go anywhere without a brothel. “If there is need to cross, I will join a raging Party and Brandon will return to Winterfell. I will send a raven once I am home and you can come with your Mother to visit. Behave well, my son.”

Rickon felt happy that his mother would be staying; she would always cry when they were to be apart. Now, that he was ten, Rickon disliked being pampered, as he was a northern man. But it still made Rickon sad when his mother cried on his account.

Lady Jonelle would put her son to bed every night. When Rickon was a small child, she would tell him stories and sing. Now that they were at Winterfell and with Bran, the one’s telling stories was Old Nan.

There was nothing that Old Nan did not know or could not answer. One day, Bran challenged Rickon to ask the former Stark nanny why the sky was blue.

“Tis blue, Master Rickon, because we live inside the blue eye of a giant named Macumber.” she said with certainty.

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King Rhaegar had asked the Black Brothers to take the wildling named as Craster to Castle Black and “get some answers” from him.

While Lord Commander Mormont was against torturing a former ally, he would not go against the King who had been the greatest Patron of the Watch and The North in centuries.

Mormont postponed the mission as much as he could, but eventually, Craster was brought to The Wall. The Lord Commander then sent a raven to Lord Benjen Stark’s Keep, as he was the liaison to both North and King’s Landing, and was surprised when the eldest brother, Lord Brandon Stark
replied he too would be attending the meeting at Castle Black.

“Lord Commander, I heard Craster had loosen his tongue.” Benjen said as he sat on a chair facing Jeor Mormont and Maester Aemon; at his side was his brother, the Lord of Winterfell, who remained silent. “His Grace hopes the information will help us fight the ancient enemy.”

“Craster comes from a small village where people would worship not only the weirwoods but the Walkers; sometime in the past, they simply stopped with their offerings; they were turned into wights and the village lies abandoned. Craster ran away, married, built his Keep and, we do not know how, he renewed the pact.”

Maester Aemon explained that Craster had took his own life before he could say more about his Ice Gods.

“Craster was never accepted into the Free Folk society. We know that the White Walkers have been attacking the wildlings that crossed their paths for years. Craster seems to have been the only one practicing this religion. He gave us the impression that somebody would always take this role beyond the wall. Mayhaps the legend of the thirteenth Lord Commander, of the sacrifices done at the Night Fort...mayhaps they are not only stories, but a very detailed account on how it was done. They are incapable of reproducing and need our children.”

The Lord Commander produced a parchment with the Royal Seal: “This document is very important and it came through a messenger. His Grace says he has reasons to believe- and Maester Aemon concurs- that the White Walkers are recruiting to their numbers. The babies sacrificed are turned into white walkers and the walkers are capable of turning our dead into their thralls.

King Rhaegar thinks this might be the destiny of the hundred thousand wildlings that live beyond the Wall… and he fears that if they all turn…”

“...that The Watch would not be able to hold them. “Brandon complemented.

Maester Aemon nodded: “His Grace suggested we should welcome some groups into our lands; The Gift is all but deserted, its villages and farmlands, empty. There are different tribes of free folk, some more orderly and friendly than others.

My great nephew is prepared to allow them into the lands of the Night's Watch; they would pay us rent and continue with their way of life. If they go to your lands, they would be subjected to your rules, of course. They would either bend the knee or lose their heads.”

Brandon hardly believed this was the only option:” The Northern Lords would not accept this; some of your men would also raise in rebellion.”

“The wildlings in my lands came in peace.” Benjen confirmed. “They bent the knee, follow my rules and work as hard as any northerner. As a Lord of the New Gift, I would not oppose them into the lands of the Watch, as long as they do not cross; in this case, like Maester Aemon said, they either submit, or die.”

Lord Commander Mormont remembered that The lands of the Night's Watch were not under the Winterfell jurisdiction, but he agreed The North was an important ally of Castle Black and that the suggestion from King Rhaegar would bring a new set of problems.

“One of our rangers, Mance Rayder, is beyond the wall now. He came back after seeing the White Walker worried about the future of his people. We have reason to believe he is now trying to unite
the tribes; we heard reports of a man travelling through their lands and speaking about the White Walkers…”

Brandon interrupted: “He is a deserter, then.”

“I sent Rayder on a mission; I hesitate in saying he is a deserter, at least for now.” Mormont explained that Rayder was a wildling orphan, raised by The Watch; he could not fault a man trying to save his own people.

“The Lords of the New Gift would have to patrol their borders with the Gift, protecting The North from the Free Folk. I know Lord Hother Umber would not enjoy this new role.”

The plan to repopulate The New Gift had stopped at two Lordships, despite being a success; the lands by the Sea were being developed by Castellans.

“We either make two more Lords, strong enough to hold their lands, or start allowing the free folk into The Gift in very small numbers, as to not raise suspicion, on a trial basis.”

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**House Arryn**

Cersei enjoyed the moon turns her lover sat on the Iron Throne. While he spent the days sitting on that ugly chair, Viserys seemed to become even more ardent at nights in the bed they shared.

When he was listening to petitions at the Great Hall, Cersei could not prevent her imagination to run wild.

*How perfect would be if Viserys was King and I, his Queen.*

It was a fantasy, of course, and Cersei knew it.

For starters, Rhaegar and Daenerys were very popular now that Elia and Aegon were gone.

There were pockets of discontentment among The Faith, but for most part, the King and Queen were respected and loved. Minstrels and Bards would sing “Sweet Dany” in taverns and Castles in all the Seven Kingdoms- except for Dorne, for what Viserys had told her- and the courtiers agreed that life under the new Regimen was better; very few liked the constant smell of incense and candles Aegon’s septons would leave behind after their prayer circles and the austerity of Queen Elia in the last years.

Not to mention that Viserys was already married to Arianne Martell...

Cersei continued to receive the visits of her most loyal supporter, Lord Baelish; Viserys knew how special this friendship was truly and even made some suggestions on how his mistress could reward her servant, much to Cersei’s amusement.

Rhaenys Targaryen announced her pregnancy in the eleventh month of the year, while Arianne Martell remained barren. As if the raven from Dorne was not bad news enough, during supper, Viserys had shared with Cersei that his sister, the Queen, was thought to be with child; it was too early, he said and they would be waiting the coming year to make any official announcement.

She waited anxiously for Viserys to come that night; when he arrived, instead of being angry, her lover behaved as his usual self.

“Are you not disappointed, my dragon?” Cersei asked.
“The only time I was disappointed was when Rhaegar told me I was not to wed Daenerys. I was two and ten and, since the day she was born, I was told we were to be wed.” he said matter of factly.

Viserys then sipped some wine and asked for Cersei to spread her legs: “Show it for me, lioness.”

The Prince had sent Cersei the lysenni courtesan he shared with Oberyn Martell for a visit; the island was famous for their pillow houses, establishments where the bed warmers were taught many secrets of their trade. Among them was how to remove hair from the private parts, to allow more friction and thus, more pleasure during lovemaking.

It took Viserys over a year to convince Cersei to try it and now that she had submitted, he was interested in seeing the results.

“Sit at the edge of the bed, right in front of me; then start to raise your dress and, slowly, spread your legs.”

Cersei followed the instructions to the letter; Viserys analysed the result both from a distance, moving his head from one side to the other squinting his eyes; he sipped more from the wine, then stood up and slowly walked towards her, with the goblet still at hand.

“Take off your dress and go to the middle of the bed. Stay there, on your fours, your back to me.” Viserys instructed; Cersei was about to say something but her lover continued: “Do as I say, lioness. I must inspect you thoroughly, to see if Myera has done the job properly.”

As Cersei positioned herself as her his directives, Viserys also took his position behind her; she felt his tongue licking her, from ass to cunt. “You taste even better without the golden fur.” He then started to tease her, at times rubbing the tip of his cock on her, then massaging her cheeks while penetrating her with his finger. “Next time, I will tell Myera to bring us some toys; now you will have to make do with my cock.”

“Please, my dragonknight; fuck me!”

Viserys entered her at once, his cock effortlessly sliding inside Cersei, she started to moan almost immediately. “So much better now, my lioness.” He intensified the speed of his thrusts as the volume of her noises of pleasure increased and soon, Viserys too was cursing in valyrian, as he felt his mistress was nearing completion.

When he was about to spend inside of her, Viserys removed his member and allowed his seed to land all over Cersei’s back; she feigned annoyance. “Such a mess you made!”

He laughed; there was always some pieces of wet cloth, water and sponges around the room for such emergencies. Viserys pointed at the nightstand and Cersei handed him a square of fabric with a drawing sewed into it: “What is this Cersei? Your favour?” He said petulantly.

Cersei stared at him, arching her eyebrow, Viserys proceed to clean her arse. “The things I do for love…”

They embraced in bed, happy with the results of their experimentation; Cersei decided to resume the conversation from where they left off: “You are not unhappy with the pregnancy then?”

“No, really; mother explained me the facts of life before she passed. It was more than expected. You must also agree that is not our problem.” Viserys said, in reference to Elia and Lord Lannister.

Cersei was forced to agree, but was now worried about her lover’s feelings: “Do you…love her still? You said you were disappointed when Rhaegar said you would not marry Daenerys…”
Viserys took a deep breath.” Daenerys is my sister; Rhaegar is my brother. I love them both; she loves us too and, truth be told, Rhaegar and I love her best of all. She is sweet, strong and beautiful. While by rights she should have been mine, their marriage...it was part of my plans all along. Who do you think convinced Rhaegar that Daenerys would accept him?”

Cersei could not believe him, but Viserys shared the details that led to Rhaegar and Daenerys betrothal.

“How did you know he would take her maidenhead?”

“I did not.” Viserys answered. “Rhaegar was bolder than I had anticipated; I meant for him to speak to Daenerys that night, not fuck her. But it is what it is...we are of a different race, Cersei; our blood, the dragon blood... it does many strange things to us. We know the rest of the world consider sinnful for a sister and a brother to love each other in more than one way ,but we are Valyrians. For us, it is the most perfect union there is, the truest of marriages. Most of such marriages Cersei, happened out of love, I assure you; my father and my mother were an exception.”

Viserys kissed her again and noticed that Cersei’s mind was elsewhere: “ You think ill of me, to have desired my own sister…”

“Not at all; I understand you exactly.” As Viserys looked in shock, Cersei shared her own experiences. “ I have a twin, Viserys; for seven years our bond was very strong, so strong that we thought of each other as one and the same. My Lord Father considered this love to be a disease; since I was the cause of such illness in his estimation, I had to be removed to save his heir from further damage.”

Viserys saw Cersei in a new light. She does indeed understand me. “Do you think, had you stayed together, had your father not forced a separation, that the both of you would grow to lust and love each other in equal measures?”

Cersei had asked herself this question many times over all through the years; sometimes it would seem to her that they would grow up normal and adjusted while other times...she was sure she would have become his brother's lover.

“Who knows, Viserys? Mayhaps Father was right. What I do know is that , had we stayed closer, I would certainly not have ceased to love him as a brother. Now, Jaime is only but a distant memory.”
Her protector

Chapter Summary

Jon saves his Queen and is rewarded accordingly.

House Targaryen 295 A.C

Queen Daenerys entered her third moon turn of pregnancy but her husband, King Rhaegar, hesitated in making any official announcement, as he feared for her safety.

“Will be always this bad, Rhaegar? We, living in constant fear? You, not trusting your own blood when my life is concerned?”

Daenerys had never seen Rhaegar as happy and as concerned than when Marwyn confirmed they were to be parents. In the privacy of their chambers, her husband confessed the deepness of his feelings and worries:

“Our son is the Prince that was Promised, my love; His reign will be the Dawn of a New Age. Elia knows me well; she knows the things I believe. She knows I am trying to make right by Aegon, but not even her can deny that our love will save the Realm. Had not been for this marriage pact with House Lannister, the Prince of Summerhall would be named the Prince of Dragonstone…”

His Grace shared the news with only their brother and the members of the Small Council that were aware of the change in his will, meaning he excluded his own Lord Hand from his inner circle.

Daenerys pregnancy had also given Rhaegar hope that their bond with Rhaenys could be repaired and that the alliance that Elia had forged with House Tyrell could actually benefit them.

His Grace decided to take the first step and called his daughter to the Red Keep; he wanted to be present at the birth of his first grandchild and could not possibly leave King's Landing in the near future.

There were, in fact, plenty of reasons to have Rhaenys back, chief among them the intention of showing the Realm that the Royal Family was not broken, but rather, united by the undissolving links of blood and love.

Rhaegar also wanted to have his best friend, Ser Arthur Dayne, returned and to oversee the training of the, most likely, future Lord of Winterfell, Jon Stark. The present Warden of the North, Brandon Stark, had a son but, for what Prince Viserys had shared with his brother, the young Bran was not expected to live long; the fall had left the boy with many ailments that tormented his everyday life and not even Lord Stark hoped his Lady wife would provide him with more heirs; Lord Stark had already approached his middle brother, one of his bannerman, and requested his heir instead, a decision that Rhaegar wholeheartedly approved.

Daenerys was ecstatic about the impending visit: “ Rhaenys already accepted our marriage and I hope that by spending time together, we will get as close as before. Ser Arthur is also a dear friend,
and Lord Jon Stark surely will not leave Ghost behind…”

The party from Highgarden included Lord Tyrell, his wife, mother and also the youngest child, a daughter named Margaery, who was a year older than Lady Sansa Stark and was accepted to enter into Daenerys service as replacement for Lady Leonette, who had married and was acting Lady of Highgarden as the wife of Ser Garlan Tyrell. Lady Margaery was pretty, knew all her courtesies and was obviously going to be a success at Court, but was far from being trustworthy.

From her Ladies in waiting, Daenerys was only sure of Lady Brienne of Tarth, for she valued her honour above all, and Lady Sansa Stark, who was reaching womanhood under Daenerys eyes and had been trained by the late Queen Rhaella herself. Lady Myranda Royce was fun and very spirited, but she had a weakness for knights and gold that could potentially be used, albeit indirectly and unknowingly, by enemies of the Crown.

Security was increased as Lord Westerling had recently unveiled a plot to assassinate the Queen and even under torture, the hired knife had not revealed who had employed him.

The investigation implied it was an isolated attempt, probably in relation to some Poor Fellows, religious fanatics connected to Aegon’s faction in the Faith, no real link was found.

Rhaegar doubted it.

“This is Elia’s doing; I cannot exclude Lord Tywin’s assistance, however, but Elia... Even if she did not personally organize it, she gave those fanatics coin and supported Aegon’s followers for a long time. Pity we cannot find proof; I would exclude Aegon at once.”

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House Stark

Jon had spent less than a sennight at King’s Landing, and visited the Kingswood once, before boarding the ship to Dragonstone. He enjoyed life at Highgarden fine enough; it was very different from The North, too pleasant of an existence for his tastes, but Jon could not complain of his hosts and of the training under his uncle.

The Princess, Rhaenys was very unlike her aunt, the Queen, not only in appearance but also in personality.

While Her Grace was guarded, but warm and kind once you got to know her, Rhaenys was almost the opposite. At first sight, Rhaenys Targaryen was the sort of young woman only interested in flirting and in having fun, only to become increasingly distant as time passed. Jon had mentioned this to Ser Arthur, the only person that the Princess seemed to be herself from beginning to end, and he offered an explanation:

“You must understand that the Princess was raised to always be polite, but not to form attachments. If she was nice to you, but turned cold, it is because she has not decided yet to each group of people you belong: foes or friends.”

Jon asked for clarification: “Why would I be her foe, uncle?”

“You are not, Jon, but she is a part of the Royal Family and, to them, loyalty can only be shown
when there is a real threat. She has not see your true colours, so to speak; you are a son of The North and, for all she knows, House Stark is honourable, but every House serves its own purposes in the long run. “

Jon tried to understand Rhaenys´s plight; it was clear she was not close as she should be to her husband. They behaved more like friendly acquaintances than a married couple. Highgarden was filled with cousins named Tyrell and, surely, they all had secondary reasons to be nice to Rhaenys.

The only constant and familiar face the Princess had near her at Highgarden was Ser Arthur and since her pregnancy, Jon noticed, they had become even closer.

*Mayhaps, had I also been sold to such an ambitious family like a horse, I would also mind whom I consider to be a real friend.*

The first sennight of their stay at the Red Keep came and went without any disturbance; they feasted and made merry at the Great Hall. King Rhaegar took time to spar with Ser Arthur and Jon in the morning and gave the young man his leave to take Ghost for walks near the docks or Dragonpit, an activity that Sansa also enjoyed taking part in.

A hunt at the Kingswood was to take place, but it had been postponed twice on account of the bad weather. When the skies cleared and there was no rain for two straight days, the nobles, knights and their squires left the city walls for a much needed exercise.

Jon was surprised to see Queen Daenerys and Princess Rhaenys were allowed to join the hunt; they were to ride on a chaise. The light two wheeled type of carriage was designed for leisurely strolls, being wide enough to follow the main trail of the woods. They, obviously, would not actively hunt with the men, but follow the party in a safe distance.

Ser Arthur explained that, from the standpoint of a bodyguard, a hunt as an event presented many challenges because it “ was a nightmare in terms of logistics; too many people, horses and dogs everywhere, too much noise…”

Ser Barristan Selmy, Ser Arthur and their squires were to escort the Ladies; Jon was quick to discover that his uncle, once again, was completely right.

Ghost would usually stay in the deep woods, tracking preys for its master, returning to alert Jon of any movement, but Ttoday, as Jon was not taking part in the hunt itself, he expected Ghost would be at his side at all times, protecting the Queen, but the wolf’s behavior was surprising.

Since they entered the Kingswood, an area bith Jon and Ghost had visited before, something was very different, definitely wrong. Ghost and Jon both felt it.

Her Grace stopped before she was to take her seat at the chaise to pet Ghost. The albino wolf was as meak as a puppy in the hands of the Queen, who stroked his white pelt and called it “ a pretty boy”, much to Jon´s delight.

Ghost then parted ways with the group, disappearing in the sea of trees.

Time passed and Jon´s sense of insecurity grew; the air smelled vile; glimpses of two men hiding behind rocks and trees, following them in the woods, going from one secret spot to the next started to flash before Jon´s eyes.

Jon finally said : “I do not like how those riders are always behind everybody else; not to mention…I think there is something in the woods.” Ser Barristan and Ser Arthur agreed it was odd, but not suspicious in itself.
“We should say nothing; there is no use in alarming the Ladies; they seem to be enjoying the ride. Peasants are known to trespass from time to time, even though His Grace gave them more hunting rights.” Ser Barristan noted and Ser Arthur nodded; they continued, with both eyes open.

The chaise had been supposedly inspected before departure, but it was making strange noises and much more difficult to steer than usual, according to the Queen. “We better stop then, Your Grace, to see if something was damaged and needs repairing.” Ser Arthur suggested and they halted.

Ser Barristan crouched at the side of the left wheel as he had not seen anything wrong with the right. “Must be the axle; it looks overused, would you not agree?”

Ser Arthur was thinking it did not look overused as it purposely damaged, but had no time to air his conclusions as Jon suddenly screamed; “In the woods!”

Jon then jumped in the small body of the chaise, and brought the folding hood down as he quickly pushed both the Queen and the Princess on their backs; a couple of arrows flew from the right side of the trail, penetrating the folding; one of it scratched Jon’s back, but he did not feel it, his only concern being the Queen’s safety.

They are trying to kill the Queen; the arrows came from her side.

As the arrows stopped and Ser Barristan swiftly went to track the archer in the woods, Jon remained oblivious to anything that not the Queen, except for the part of him, in Ghost, that was in pursuit of the culprit.

Jon did not see when Ser Arthur removed Rhaenys from the chaise and comforted the crying Princess; or when men came from the hunting party, shouting and giving commands to each other: “Protect the Queen!” “Go find the villain.”

All Jon could hear was Daenerys heart beating fast under his own body; her smell was sweet, pleasing, alluring...and when he raised his eyes, he met hers.

Then, Jon tasted blood.

Ghost found the assassin.

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Lady Ashara Stark was beyond herself with happiness when she read the letter her favorite brother, Arthur, wrote her:

“Dear Sister,

You are now mother of a knight; Ser Jon Stark saved Her Grace Queen Daenerys, risking his own life. A poisoned arrow scratched him, but there will be no lasting effects, just a scar on his back.

Jon was rewarded for his bravery in a ceremony at the Great Hall of the Red Keep. The High Septon anointed Jon with the sacred oils; His Grace heard his vows and I had the honour to knight Jon myself with Dawn.

King Rhaegar also gave us both leave to visit Starfall in the near future. I suggest you speak to your Lord Husband so we could agree on a date, and mayhaps even see that
little Aly comes too; I miss home, Ash…”

*My Jon! Four and ten and already a knight known in all the Seven Kingdoms!*  
Ashara cried.

When she read the letter to Ned, she was sure he too cried; Elia could not stop telling the news to all the children in the Keep and Robb wrote from Runestone, asking if he too, would be allowed to meet “the famous Ser Jon Stark” at Starfall.

Ned was fast in asking Bronze Yohn Royce to send Robb to King’s Landing in the next ship; from there, Ser Arthur would sail to Starfall with his two nephews for the much anticipated family meeting. Ashara also wrote their sister, Lady Allyria, who had married Lord Beric Dondarrion three years ago, asking her youngest to join them at Starfall, so she could meet Allyria’s son, the heir to Blackraven, Ulryck.

“Best we sail at once, my love, otherwise a raven comes from Winterfell…”

Eddard knew both his brothers had returned from The Wall. Benjen had allowed Rickon to be fostered at Winterfell and Lady Jonelle to stay with their son. As his wife had recently announced she was with child and could not possibly travel to Queenscrown, Benjen had wrote Ned that he would be joining his family at their ancestral home once Jonelle’s time was approaching, and only return to his Keep after the birth, which meant that Brandon had no reason to possibly summon his middle brother.

“Do not fret Ashara, Brandon has no need of me at this time. For once, we shall not need to worry about our Liege.”

Ned wanted to believe what he said was true. *Yes, better we sail at once.*

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**House Dayne**

Despite being closer in age to Ashara and Arthur, Allyria could say she barely knew them both, as they had already left to enter in the service of the Royal family by the time she was old enough to form her own memories, and the visits they paid to Starfall along the years were far and in between.

Allyria was eleven years younger than Ashara, who married Lord Eddard Stark when she was six and ten and was partially raised by the eldest Dayne sibling, the present Lord of Starfall, Adam, old enough to be her father.

The Lady of Blackhaven received ravens both from Stony Shore and Starfall inviting her for a gathering. Allyria was happy to notice that Ashara in particular was very keen in meeting Ulryck, the probably only son Allyria would get from her Lord Husband, who much preferred the company of men.

She had gotten pregnant on her first time, which was not altogether bad; Beric was nothing if not gentle with her and for that and Ulryck, Allyria was thankful. But as the days turned into sennights
and moonturns, Beric did not return to the marital bed and was all too happy when his Lady wife belly swolled with his seed, as it meant he had done his Duty to House Dondarrion.

Beric was a generous man; Allyria was allowed to see to her needs in discreet ways, their Maester instructed to provide her with moontea and he was a very loving father.

“ In the future, my Lady, we shall try for a second child.” Her Lord Husband told Allyria one day, before gallivanting with his best friend, Thoros of Myr, the Red Priest best known for being drunk half the time.

Allyria arrived and was received with open arms by her brother, Lord Dayne. His son and heir, Edric, was a squire to Lord Dondarrion, usually, this meant that he would accompany the knight in his errands, but Allyria had convinced her husband to take her nephew, a three and ten years old boy, to finally meet his cousins.

Arthur was the second to arrive and took an immediate liking to Ulryck: “ He has our looks, dear sister; a very handsome lad, you should be proud!”

She could not help but to smile; Allyria looked at his brothers and nephews; they all had some of the typical Dayne features, except for Ser Jon, the eldest of Ashara’s sons, who looked ruggedly handsome, a pure northern warrior, a wolf of Winterfell.

Looking directly at Jon, Allyria had only to agreed : “We are indeed a beautiful family, brother.”

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Arthur observed how Jon reacted at the sight of Allyria and shook his head.

His sister was a beautiful woman and Jon had never met his aunt before, so there was no immediate recognition of family bond; his nephew had reached puberty and reacted as any man would when confronted with a woman of indisputable beauty. Robb, who was a year younger than Jon and also taking his first steps into adulthood, was also struck by Allyria, but while Robb quickly turned his attention elsewhere, Jon followed Allyria around as a puppy.

Arthur knew the secret reason behind the immediate infatuation.

House Dayne had distinctively valyrian looks; they were blood of the First Men but some had colouring not dissimilar to members of House Targaryen. His younger sister was named for such similarity: Allyria looked like a dragon princess from Old Valyria, with her light blond hair and violet eyes.

That Allyria, who looked like Daenerys, seemed to be also attracted to Jon in a way no aunt should, was also very clear to Arthur.

“How old is Allyria, uncle Arthur?” Ser Jon asked upon their first meeting.

“You mean Aunt Allyria? She is eight and ten, Jon.” Arthur answered, adding that Allyria married at five and ten and was already a mother knowing too well such facts were not deterrements to desire, but still, he could say he tried, he laughed internally...

Jon and Allyria became inseparable in the three days that followed; when a raven came from Oldtown, informing that Ashara and Ned were on their way, Arthur took the matter into his hands and went to speak with his sister.
“I decided to take Robb and Addam for a quick visit to High Hermitage; you should have three days to get better acquainted with Jon, dear sister, if that is your intention. I just ask you do not play games with him; he is young and has yet a lot to learn…”

Allyria was taken back by his bluntness.

She was, still, hesitant in seducing Jon, attraction et all.

Arthur was also not sure if it was a good idea, but it was definitely better than having Jon pining for the Queen. The Kingsguard hoped that by losing his virginity, Jon would leave some romantic fantasies behind and start to differentiate between love and lust.

“I know of Beric’s predilections, sister; you deserved better. Jon has never laid eyes on you before, so he does not see you as an aunt, but as a woman. I trust you will be discreet and smart about this; Ashara does not need to know if you do not want her to, but I can see she would laugh about it. Ned, on the other hand...better act now before they are to arrive.”

***

Jon learned every lesson Allyria taught him in the next two days, especially how to respect a woman willing to gave him her favour and body free of any demands. It was an honour to share such intimacy and desire was not something shameful. In this sense, Jon preferred the dornish customs than those of The North. Uncle Brandon lived his life as if he was a single man and Lady Stark seldom smiled, had both been dornish Jon was sure their marriage would have been happier one, for at least both spouses would be allowed to have paramours.

Despite the need of secrecy, Jon understood there was no wrongdoing in having sex with Allyria; they were both about the same age, consenting to the act and very aware of their peculiar circumstances. Their blood relation had give him pause, but he simply did not see Allyria as his aunt, no matter how hard he tried.

Jon was very nervous the first time he laid with her; it was quick, much to his embarrassment, but Allyria was very gentle and put him at ease.

“ It will get better; you just need more practice.” She then complimented him on his looks and youth, caressing the muscles of his chest and softly kissing his lips. In no time, Jon’s cock started to respond to the subtle stimulation. Allyria proceeded to pump him hard and, very soon, she was on top of Jon, riding him with a smile on her face.

As Jon took longer to reach completion and saw that Allyria herself had climaxed, he allowed himself to be proud and felt a wave of warm feelings towards the woman in his arms.

She is not the one I truly want, but she is very special and will always be.

Questions about Allyria’s marriage started to invade Jon’s mind.” You do not love your Lord husband...is he mean to you?”

Allyria kissed Jon in the lips and shock her head : “No, Jon... my husband is just not inclined towards women. He gave me a son, a Castle and my freedom; what more could I ask of him? We are friends. Yet...I cannot deny I would have preferred to have what your parents have, but that is very rare among nobles. I should uphold to my duties and enjoy the little pleasures life offers me...you, of course, is one of such pleasures.”
Allyria was not bitter about her situation, but Jon still did not understand how could one simply affect such arrangement with such calm: “Have you never fallen in love, Ally? Have you never desired someone you were not supposed to have?”

“Oh, yes, I have been in love...a cousin. He lives not very far from here. But even I could see that Beric was a much better man than my beloved was; Adam was right all along. Love does make things more difficult. I cannot honestly say though, that I suffered much once the deed was done, because I have now a son. Besides, I am still young...mayhaps, in the future, I will be luckier.”

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_I should have not listened to Brandon...Jonelle would not have bled to death had we not tried to give Rickon a sibling…_

Jonelle Cerwyn was a sweet woman and Benjen loved his wife. As a friend.

In the ten years that followed Rickon’s birth, Jonelle had miscarried twice. It was nothing of great concern, Benjen was told. His good sister, Lady Stark, had lost twice as many babies in her womb, and lived. He knew Brandon had given up hope of having more children by his Lady wife, not only on account of their mutual dislike, but also because the miscarriages had taken its toll on Catelyn’s body, as Maester Flowers explained.

Jonelle was plain, but plump and looked healthy. Life at Queenscrown was good, but harsh at times. After they married and arrived at their tower, any Lady would have cried in desperation: there was much work to be done at the Keep.

Benjen was expecting a dramatic reaction from Jonelle; instead, she simply smiled at him and started to work.

They did a great job in their first year; Queenscrown became their home and they welcomed Rickard Stark, their son and heir. Jonelle was happy and took to confide in Benjen; life at Castle Cerwyn was comfortable, but unhappy for her. Jonelle added that she knew Benjen did not love her, but hoped to have his friendship, she said, as she wanted to build a loving home for Rickon.

“My Lord Father would say terrible things every time a Lord or a Knight refused my hand...when Lord Stark came with the agreement, father got drunk...he yelled at me that he would marry Brandon’s whore so I could get out of his sight. You have always been nice to me; now you gave me a son…”

Benjen kissed Jonelle’s forehead and said he was grateful and proud to have her as wife. It was true, as so it was that he took no pleasure from their coupleings. He would never take a mistress and dishonour Jonelle the way Brandon did to Catelyn but Benjen would sleep with prostitutes and wenches when he was away. Sometimes, one would become a favorite, but no attachment was formed and Jonelle never asked what he had done, simply welcomed Benjen and was glad for what they had.

Benjen had already returned to Queenscrown when the raven came with news that Jonelle was in her third moon. He replied he would come to Winterfell and join his family in five moons time, right before their second child was to come to the world.

Lord Benjen Stark had been granted the lands west of his dominions, bordering the Bay of Ice, as a reward for his efforts in developing the New Gift. He went to visit the area, to inspect the few
holdfast still standing and small villages. Benjen already had a man in mind to become his first sworn bannerman and many ideas to develop those lands had already appeared his mind, when tragedy struck.

Jonelle had entered her fifth moonturn of pregnancy when she started to bleed; Benjen went at once, but arrived only to comfort Rickon and to take Jonelle’s body home, as she would not have wanted to lay to rest anywhere eles if not at Queenscrown.

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**House Arryn**

Cersei’s brother, Maester Tyrion, had asked to enter into her service no longer after his return to Casterly Rock; as he insisted for some moonturns and her children were actually missing their uncle, Cersei relented, but he came in that particular trying time, in the days after the attempt on the life of The Queen and the Princess, a period of great political turmoil in the Red Keep.

Maester Tyrion, surprisingly, proved to be of great help when it came to Cersei’s children, but he could not be trusted.

While he had shared the reasons behind his decision of leaving their Lord Father behind, Tyrion was still in good terms with Ser Jaime and could, in his many letters, provide the heir of Casterly Rock with sensitive information that would then be passed on to Lord Lannister. For this reason Cersei took great pains in what she said before her brother and never at once mentioned her lover in a familiar way when the dwarf was around.

Prince Viserys was visibly upset for days; he had no time to visit his mistress as he stayed by the Royal Family’s side for at least a sennight after the incident. Viserys was one of the few that could temper His Grace’s fury, and such task took much of his time and energy.

When her lover finally returned to her bed, Cersei noticed that Viserys had lost some weight and was exhausted; they did not have sex that night, but spent their their hours together snuggling in bed, drinking wine and speaking about the last developments.

“The wolf had already killed the archer by the time Ser Barristan arrived; the face was blood red, almost beyond recognition. Lord Westerling had already increased security, but not even him or his Lady wife claim to have an inkling on who was behind this attempt. Had the man lived...or had anybody recognized the body, we would know.”

Grand Maester Marwyn admonished His Grace caution; Elia was in Essos, visiting the Crown Prince and they could not possibly connect her. “One has to remember that Princess Rhaenys was also in the chaise; the former Queen would never plan anything as to endanger her own blood.”

Viserys was also of the same opinion; before he could venture his suspicions, Cersei spoke: “My Lord Father would benefit, of course, from the death of the Queen and the Princess probably losing her child would also be welcomed, but would he be so bold? This is treason...just the desperate and the mad would have thought of it…”

“You must be careful, lioness; my Kingly brother also does not believe Lord Lannister is behind of this, but if he is, not even I could make His Grace see reason.”
Lord Westerling tortured a couple of septons connected to Aegon, but got nothing from the poor fellows; Grand Maester Marwyn and Viserys convinced His Grace to stop with such nonsense, deliver both septons to their rightful leader, His High Holiness, and forget about such incident.

Queen Daenerys’s pregnancy was officially announced and she was then sent to Dragonstone with a small retinue including Princess Rhaenys, Ser Arthur, Ser Barristan and Ser Jon, the man who had saved her life.

_Thankfully, Her Grace also took all her ladies in waiting with her, including that Tyrell brat...the flirt has not even bled yet, but wears clothes too revealing._

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**House Lannister**

Ser Amory Lorch died and with him, his secrets; that Lord Westerling was still a Master of Whispers was something Lord Tywin Lannister was ready to use, and this time around, even though his plans did not bear the intended fruits, there was no real consequences.

Lord Westerling _did_ recognize the westerlander knight, but the unexpected assistance of a direwolf made his job of covering the trail to Casterly Rock easier.
House Targaryen 295 A.C

On her fourth moon of pregnancy, Rhaenys Targaryen sailed back to The Reach from Dragonstone, after spending only two fortneys in the Capital. King Rhaegar had wanted to be present at the birth of his first grandchild, but the attempt on the Princess and the Queen's life led to a change in the plans of the Royal Family and, as result, Aemond Tyrell was born on the second day of the fifth month of the year 295 A.C at Highgarden.

The future Lord Paramount of The Reach was a very beautiful babe, a copy of his Father, Ser Willas Tyrell, no hint of his valyrian ancestors to be found on his pretty features.

Although both Rhaenys and Willas had expected a girl, they fell in love with their son, who would remain the only fruit of their union, by mutual agreement.

While it was truth that roses are used for seduction and that the fire of dragons can warm hearts and bodies alike, their marital bed was cold, and their lovemaking, unsatisfactory.

“Best we stop this farcical marriage of ours, dear Willas, before we start hating each other. We are still young; we can find comfort elsewhere.”

Such proposition had been made before, by Willas himself, when they were first betrothed; if, by then, the idea of living the rest of her life in such an arrangement displeased Rhaenys, now that her heart had finally chose its owner, this scheme held great appeal.

The childish infatuation Rhaenys nurtured towards her father's best friend evolved; the day an arrow almost put an end to her life, only one man was able to calm her down and provide comfort and protection.

This man was Ser Arthur Dayne.

From the moment her water broke until the time Aemond eagerly sucked her breasts, Arthur was there. Ser Willas stayed outside his Lady wife’s chambers, quietly reading books and sipping Arbor Gold in the company of His Lord Father, patiently waiting for the Maester to come and announce if the birth had been successful.

Willas was not jealous; if much, he was happy for Rhaenys when it was evident that Arthur’s love for her had taken a new form.

“The Reach and Dorne share more than borders, Ser Arthur. We are just more discreet in such dealings.” Ser Willas was not an hypocrite; he had travelled to the Shield Islands and returned with a
pretty girl called Falia Flowers, who now served as Rhaenys handmaiden.

“Rhaenys has done her Duty as far as I am concerned. Our Maester explained us that sex is a good exercise for the childbed; he has suggested me a couple of times that I continue to visit her chambers, and while I know I should, I would prefer you, whom she loves, take my place.”

Ser Willas was acting Lord of Highgarden; without his parents and grandmother’s presence, he quietly redispersed their chambers to fit in their new intimate life: Falia, the titular handmaiden, was given an alcove between Willas and Rhaenys rooms. Arthur was given an adjoining room to Rhaenys and all four were content with such arrangement.

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The letters Elia wrote were filled with tales of Aegon’s miraculous recovery after his peregrination in the wastelands of Andalos.

“The warrior bestowed upon our son many blessings, my King; his body is now wider, stronger and his looks, healthier.”

The surprise was that Elia’s assessment on Aegon proved to be accurate, Rhaegar barely recognizing the young man upon their first meeting.

So dramatic the change was that Rhaegar asked himself if someone had actually given Aegon the body of another man in the space of a single year, which, unfortunately, was not that far from the truth.

Aegon’s new routine remained one of utmost commitment to a higher cause, with no time for frivolities; the difference was that the Crown Prince now cared about both body and soul, splitting his time between praying at the Sept and training with weights and ropes. Aegon also followed an extreme diet, consisting mostly of red meats, fried egg whites and beans, all cooked using generous amounts of lard and other fats.

The wedding of the Crown Prince and Lady Joanna Lannister was announced for the fifth day of the twelfth month, which raised His Grace’s suspicions, since the granddaughter of the Old Lion was but a girl of two and ten. He had agreed, of course, expecting that consummation would only take place once the girl turned five and ten, or even four and ten as it was customary, but Lord Lannister insisted Aegon to start doing his Duty by Joanna as soon as she would turn three and ten, mentioning the girl had already flowered.

Both groom and bride would have to pass through meticulous physical examination, a step that not even Lord Lannister would dare not take, and Grand Maester Marwyn was particularly interested in discovering what was behind the Crown Prince sudden transformation.

From dawn to dusk, Marwyn performed many tests, spoke at length with both the Prince and his healer, Qyburn, and went as far as read all the forme Maester’s notes and writings, all of this to confirm his diagnosis:

“Qyburn discovered the matter of strength, the substance our body produces that regulate how our muscles will develop, and has been providing the Crown Prince with a new treatment based on his findings. He claims to have conducted a necropsy of Ser Gregor Clegane, the Prince’s sworn shield, once the knight died after fighting a horde of Dothraki in Pentos- a much strange tale, as the horse lords are richly paid by the Magisters not to cause any trouble- and made such ground breaking
discovery.

As the Crown Prince was rather underdeveloped for his age, a treatment was designed, and while the results were very promising at the beginning, there might be everlasting damage to Aegon’s body…”

Aegon’s skin, especially on his back and face, was covered with zits and spots, and age four and ten, he had already lost some of his hair. There was discomfort when Marwyn pressed the areas of Aegon’s liver and kidneys, indicating that the excessive consumption of the substance and dietary changes were negatively affecting the balance of his organs.

“Qyburn is trying to establish cycles for such treatment, as the body seems to be under stress trying to work the extra amount provided of this substance...we must remember that the Crown Prince is, so far, the only person to undergo such treatment…”

Rhaegar could not fault his former Queen for seeking a cure for Aegon’s ailments, but it was clear that his first wife had only cared for the physical aspect of their son’s maladie and, although his physique had improved, Aegon’s mind remained unchained.

“I assume we must stop this madness at once, but what happens if the damages are not reserved ?” As a Father, Rhaegar wanted Aegon to get better but, as a ruler...he was not so sure.

“Nobody can possibly predict the risks of stopping as well of continuing. The best course of action seems to attempt new, smaller dosages and observe how his body reacts. As for the damages....there is one that directly affects the Prince impeding marriage to Lady Joanna Lannister, Sire.”

Aegon had started to experience arousal and sexual desire since receiving the substance, but oddly enough, his testicles, once of normal size, had shrunken and his prostrate, doubled

Marwyn’s conclusion draw light to the old lion’s strange request that his own granddaughter’s life would be put at risk in order to bring forth a heir to the Iron Throne with Lannister blood: “At this rate, the Crown Prince will be unable to sire children in the next three to four years, we suspect.”

_Elia was already aware and so was Lord Lannister...

Confronted with the accomplished fact, Rhaegar allowed Qyburn’s access to the Crown Prince and decided that, after their visit to Dragonstone, Aegon would be delivered into Elia full custody, as His Grace could not risk one of his first wives minions walking freely at the Red Keep.

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_House Stark_

The distance between excitement and disappointment was covered by Sansa in the first two days of the Crown Prince's visit to Dragonstone.

As Lady in waiting to the Queen, Sansa heard the rumours surrounding Aegon Targaryen early on.

She, however, held the belief that a young man so pious and famous for charitable works, a Prince that fed beggars and prayed with poor septons of the heartland in his spare time, that such man could
only be good and caring.

Aegon’s broad shoulders, visible muscles under the fabric of his clothes and stature, only a few centimeters shorter than his father, convinced Sansa that the courtiers at the Red Keep spoke of another Prince, since they always mentioned how weak and pathetic Aegon looked.

Introductions were made and supper was served; there would be no feasting, as Her Grace plainly explained: “The Crown Prince does not care for such social gatherings and mayhaps it is best this way.”

Aegon Targaryen did not address directly any of the ladies in waiting, nor his aunt, only speaking with his Kingly Father and his personal septon. The kitchen staff was given orders to prepare his food separately and Sansa assumed it had to do with his religious nature, expecting the Prince to be served soup and bread, but instead, the young man ate more meat in one meal than a peasant would see in a year.

They exchanged words the next day, at the Sept.

“You are a Stark, of The North...why are you here, girl?” he said in a harsh tone; Sansa was in the company of Lady Brienne, who was praying for the Maiden, while she herself was lighting candles for the Mother, asking to watch over her brother at Winterfell.

The heir to the Throne surely knew all about the Great Houses of Westeros and that Lord Stark’s wife was a riverlander. “Mother is a Tully of Riverrun and we do have a Sept at Winterfell.” Then Sansa added that she kept faith “with both the Old Gods…” but never finished to say the well known expression, as Aegon Targaryen started to rage.

“This is impossible.” Aegon said brusquely. “You either keep faith with one or the other; you either believe in your salvation, or you sell your soul to false Gods. I spent almost two years in Essos and even there, where most worship a Fire Demon, I came to respect them, for they are convinced their is the righteous path. But you, Lady Sansa, is intent in being wrong for the sake of your own stupidity, as you know the teachings of the Seven and yet, you have a beast for a pet and think a tree is a god…”

At this, Lady Brienne came to Sansa’s rescue before the situation was to escalate. “I beg your Pardon, my Prince; we already prayed our share, now we will give you privacy to pray yours.”

The heiress of Tarth dragged Sansa from the Sept, as she was paralysed with shock. “Sansa, you are shaking...calm down, pay no mind to the Prince…”

“What...what if he is right?” at two and ten, Sansa was constantly torn. She wanted to please everybody, like her Lady Mother had taught her, and bring honour to her House, but she was also a wolf, a member of a pack. If Aegon was right, then House Stark had been worshiping false Gods for thousands of years...” He is a Prince after all...and King Rhaegar, he is so wise and, do you think that the Old Gods…”

“Sansa, listen, you are both North and South. You do not need to chose just because somebody said you should. King Rhaegar has been honouring The North since he ascended the Throne. What Prince Aegon thinks just shows that he is immature.”

And mad...that is what they say about him. He did look mad, his face was almost inhuman with anger...

Two years ago, Sansa would have brushed this incident aside. But after what happened at the Fair
Market, where a brute of a man called Sandor Clegane saved her honour from a knight with honeyed words but evil intentions, she understood that not many people partook of her optimism and desire to please; some people wanted confrontation and took enjoyment from being cruel, even if they were supposed to be brave, noble and fair.

Aegon had offered her bitter words, that was true, but what really changed Sansa’s opinion on the Crown Prince was his eyes...

Sansa wanted to find solace in her wolf, but Lady did not come to her that night; a fever took over Sansa and she spent the next three days in bed, burning, delirious.

She only recovered the day the Prince sailed.

The next morning, Lady’s body was found by the beach, beaten and stabbed many times.

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As Jon Stark completed his apprenticeship under Ser Arthur Dayne, he was in no obligation to continue to follow his uncle, so he sailed from Oldtown to Stony Shore with his family.

Lady Ashara Stark suggested Jon to join his Lord father’s Guard. He did and would have happily stayed there for some time if not for a raven from Winterfell.

“You could say no, Ned … Jon is our son; Jon is a Stark of Stony Shore.”

Ned wanted to say that Brandon only wished to honour them with the offer, but this would be a lie and he could not lie to Ashara.

“Since news came of Jon’s deeds, I feared this would happen, Ashara. My tears were not only of joy, but of fear. It is not Brandon who writes, but Lord Stark; Winterfell wants Ser Jon to join their Guard. We are but a new House and Lord Stark is our Liege…”

Ser Jon left for Winterfell the next day and was assigned to be on his uncle’s personal guard, following him around at all times.

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Only two moonturns Benjen and Rickon spent together at Queenscrown, mourning the death of Jonelle and what would have been a sister to their son, before Duty once again called the youngest of Stark brothers.

As Lord of more than half of the New Gift, Lord Benjen was responsible for developing the area in preparation for Winter. He needed men, women, resources and was constantly travelling through his lands and to The Wall. Benjen Stark was happy this way; he had not been born to be locked inside a Tower.

Had Brandon not given him a Lordship and a family, Benjen would have gladly joined The Night’s Watch and become a ranger.

Rickon was sent to his foster home while his Father went Beyond The Wall to track Mance Rayder; he would either strike a deal with the Crow or chop his head for desertion.
It did not take long for Benjen and his men to find the runaway ranger. They allowed themselves to be captured by wildlings scouts, agreeing to turn their weapons to show they came in peace and asked only for an audience with their leader.

As he entered Rayder’s tent, Benjen saw a couple of wildling chieftains and a very beautiful woman, a blond that would have turned heads even at Court. “I believe your mission was accomplished, Rayder and that you should return. Or, at least, listen to what I have to say…”

The woman was introduced as Val and looked to be impressed with Benjen’s castle forged sword, an obvious great improvement over the crude weapons and utensils the Free Folk was known to use.

Lovely as she was, Benjen had work to do:”I have a proposal, but such discussion is to be had in private; after you hear what I came to say, you can speak with your people and I will gladly wait for your reply for as long as it is reasonable.”

Mance Rayder addressed his companions in the Old Tongue and they promptly left; Benjen could not help but to glance one last time at Val, but she was soon gone and they went straight to business:

“Lord Commander Mormont has not named you a deserter. Yet. We were there, Rayder...you know His Grave, King Rhaegar, is working to fight the White Walkers. Our King wants to save as many of your people as we possibly can and we all believe you could help us.”

Mance was willing to listen: “Tell me about your offer, my Lord.”

“His Grace extended my lands to the Sea of Ice...there are villages, towers, holdfasts, farmlands that need tending and I cannot do all. Lord Mormont has enough men at Castle Black; we are manning The Wall with the men His Grace and Lord Stark are sending us. They have no need of you there anymore, but I, as Lord of the New Gift, need bannerman.

For your fellow crows, you are on a ranger on a long mission...upon your return, you will be released of your vows if you accept to wed Lord Commander’s niece, Lady Lyra. House Mormont knows the waters and the lands well; you would need their alliance if you are to be given a holdfast and become a landed knight swore to House Stark of Queenscrown.

Our plan is populate your lands with more of the Free Folk. The ones willing to accept bending the knee in exchange for our protection. My experience tells me there are many willing to pay lip service to me, pay you rent and be left alone to go on with their lives…”

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Rayder asked for a sennight to speak with many of the leaders and send the offer to the ones he felt would be more willing to accept.

Benjen agreed; it was also, in his mind, an opportunity. There was much he wished to learn about the Free Folk, if they were to become his vassals. The wildlings he had received at Queenscrown chose his lands precisely because “The Benjen” was known to be a reasonable “kneeler”, as opposed to Whoresbane Umber, the other Lord of The New Gift.

Rayder had been attempting to unite all the tribes North of The Wall and march to demand passage. In order to achieve such feat, the former Crow got close to many of the Chieftains, one of them being the father of Val. Some believed Rayder was to marry Dalla, Val’s sister and, with this alliance made trough blood, that Rayder would be declared King Beyond the Wall in no time.
Benjen decided that, if someone was to marry a wildling, it would be him, the Lord of The New Gift: His heir was born out of a union with an established Northern House and, while many could raise an eyebrow, marrying Val would show the Free Folk they could expect some degree of respect from Benjen Stark.

Not to mention Benjen could see Val was exactly his kind of woman...he would be dammed to allow Brandon to give him another bride.

Rayder laughed: “Val is no southron lady; you do not simply go to her Father and ask for her hand. That is not the way we do it, Lord Benjen”

“I am willing to marry her in the fashion of the Free Folk, if necessary... tell me what to do.”

Rayder complied and the Lord of the New Gift went about with his plan.

Benjen found Val outside, sharpening her long bone knife. She acknowledged his presence with a nod, but said nothing.

“I was told you are a capable rider and also good with spears and knives. Mayhaps I could teach you how to wield a sword when we go south of The Wall…”

Clad in white from head to toe- even her high leather boots were bleached- Val barely spared Benjen a second glance: “I am a woman of the Free Folk...if I wanted to wield a sword, I would have no problems finding myself a man…"

Benjen laughed; his interactions with the fairer sex were limited to Jonelle, paid companions and the occasional wench. He was not, in short, used to courtship.

He felt he was not making progress, but would not give up. I must marry my wildling bride before Brandon finds me another wife…” The Mance speaks highly of you, Val...do you know of my offer?”

“He said nothing of you though.” Val said matter of factly. She then finally stopped what she was doing and looked at Benjen. “I knew Jarmund from before he went south; he says you are serious, that you would give us land and have us tend it, all we have to do is to give you a share for yourself, pretend you are a Lord and pay you no mind…”

Jarmund was one of his men Benjen brought with him North, a way of showing the Free Folk that he was trustworthy: “Yes, that is the right measure of it. You will find many like Jarmund in the New Gift. There are forests to hunt, rivers and sea to fish and land to be tended. “

Val stood up and started to walk the camp; Benjen followed. “You do not seem to think it is a good deal…”

“Might be the best deal we get...many will not take it, though...what would happen to them?”

Benjen did not have an answer to this question, at least not one Val would like to hear, and said as much: “The Wall would hold them, Val. We have enough Crows now that King Rhaegar helps the Night's Watch...the other Lords followed his example and most of The Castles are either manned or being repaired. It is to the advantage of both our peoples that the Free Folk chose not to stay behind…”

They arrived at the area where the goats were being kept. “Don't you have nothing else to do, kneeler? I must milk a goat now…”
“No, I have nothing else to do, but I can leave you in peace, Val…but not for long. I intend in kidnapping you one of these nights…”

Val was not impressed : “If you want to be gelded, you are welcome to steal into my bed any night you dare…”

Once Rayder and some of the leaders accepted the deal, among them Val´s father, Benjen indeed managed to take the free woman; they married in the custom of her people, a scar on his inner thigh the proof that she fought him valiantly.

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**House Arryn**

Cersei rolled her eyes and sipped more of her wine as Maester Tyrion continued to complain about their Lord Father.

"Joanna is to start birthing heirs at three and ten! The Others take Lord Lannister, he is truly without a heart,“

She handed Tyrion a goblet and sat : “You are only stating the obvious, little brother…Joanna´s father is named Jaime; Father does not have a heart, but he sure has a head. Your brother, though...has no balls, apparently.”

“He is also your brother, Cersei. Jaime does what he can, but you know as well as I do that is Lord Lannister the one signing the deal, as Head of House Lannister; Lord Arryn might also do the same in the future...even if Ser Elbert was alive, Jon Arryn would be the one deciding.”

*Well, but I, at least, would show my claws , whereas Jaime …*” Lord Arryn and I are of the same mind when it comes to my children and he does listen to me; Myrcella was to be fostered at Casterly Rock, but I made it clear she is only to go there after she flowers, with a marriage contract signed and to start living with her betrothed for a couple of years before they are to be wed, as any good parent would …”

Tyrion, obviously made no reply; he knew his sister was right; Jaime was weak, but anybody would be weak when compared to Tywin Lannister.

Cersei´s sympathies were to Lady Joanna, her mother´s namesake, but the problem was not hers, she was quick to turn her attentions to other more promising matters. "My dear friend, Lord Baelish, is now in the organization committee of the Royal Wedding, him being so talented with numbers; it will be a lavish affair and Father is paying for half of it, no doubt Lord Baratheon´s idea to save the Crown´s coin.”

Tyrion as not amused :“If Father is paying for half, we can very well expect a Lion banner for each Three Headed Dragon…”

Cersei was glad to see that Tyrion´s hatred for their Father had took root, but while he still held hope for their brother, he could not be trusted, so she did not say anything about her plans for the royal wedding, namely that Joanna Lannister would escape the terrible fate of marrying that Mad Prince…

Viserys was also not happy with the Royal Wedding, but whereas Cersei was seeking revenge, to
thwart her Father's ambitions, her lover was worried about the sudden change of dates, as Aegon was only expect to wed in the coming year: “Mayhaps this means Rhaegar doubts my ability of siring sons, as he considers my to be a much better option as heir than Aegon…”

Cersei enlisted the assistance of Lord Baelish: “I heard that your male whores are well trained, able to seduce both sexes...if you have a younger one that could pass as a Knight and leave Joanna in a compromising situation, mayhaps this would give His Grace an excuse to end the betrothal...or at least, make my Lord Father look like a fool, the thing he hates the most…”

Cersei could ask anything of Lord Baelish, but her ideas tended to be reckless; as he would be the one facing consequences, he took to adapt her notions into much better plans, in his own estimation:

“Leave it to me, my lioness...seduction would not be a problem if the target was not so high; with torture, people do talk, especially pretty boys used to feather beds. Allow me to research other possibilities. As member of the Committee, I am privy to sensitive information, I am sure we will come up with another idea.”

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**House Lannister**

Nothing would stand between Tywin Lannister and his legacy, not even his own family. Jaime was the heir and paid the price for such privilege without complaining. He married young, to a woman his Father chose, and sired the daughter and the sons he was expected to.

Mellara was a friend; she loved Jaime more than he loved her and turned a blind eye for his eventual indiscretions. Casterly Rock was their world, but Jaime had ventured out many times over and discovered he loved the lands he was to inherit.

He was proud of his children; Tommen was obviously not gifted with wits or strength, but was a good lad. Tyrek would grow up to be a fine soldier and Joanna…

Joanna was the price Lord Lannister was willing to pay to have a half lion on the Iron Throne.

Jaime thought it was too high.

He was aware of his daughter’s delicate health. Tyrion was upfront about the risks of having Joanna birthing children before her body was ready, something her own grandfather had chose to desconsider when negotiating the marriage contract.

Father and son spoke only the necessary now; there was a shouting match and things better left unsaid were said.

Jaime would have changed fates with any of his cousins at Casterly Rock; being the heir to Tywin Lannister was not the same than being his son.

Daenerys not only surviving the attack, but becoming pregnant given birth to the Prince of Summerhall had changed the game; Lord Lannister started to speak about Jaime marrying again.

“Lady Margaery Tyrell is four and ten; if you are willing to marry her, I will inform His Grace I changed my mind and that I insist that Aegon waits until Joanna is five and ten to consummate the
wedding.”

Jaime had already gone to Tyrion, who had agreed to, discreetly, provide Joanna with moontea. Cersei, he said, was also willing to cooperate to anything that would shatter Tywin Lannister’s dreams.

But he felt like they were still children, planning mischief behind their Father’s back.

Jaime took the deal: “Joanna is not to have children until she is six and ten…” Lord Lannister nodded and Jaime continued. “I suppose I am to sire another daughter, now that a better candidate for the Iron Throne was born.”

Lord Lannister smiled. Aegon Targaryen was beloved by the common folk of King’s Landing, but despised by all nobles. Tywin expected the young man not to become King, but to live long enough to sire one.

However, Tywin Lannister much preferred Aegon to be altogether gone, as his madness was indeed a risk and Prince Jahaerys would obviously become his Kingly Father’s favorite:

“You are paying attention, I am impressed. Very well, then: nobody wants Aegon. We just need him. For now. Your sister is the mistress of the second best option, Prince Viserys. I understand your hesitation in allowing Joanna to marry this early, but we must move and play the waiting game. In three years time, Joanna might be back at Casterly Rock, unspoiled and happy, while we have House Tyrell as an ally and another contract with House Targaryen.”

Jaime was to meet his intended at the Red Keep and start courting her; their betrothal was to be announced the sennight before the ceremony at the Great Sept of Baelor, once King Rhaegar agreed to the change in the contract, which he would, as he himself had suggested House Lannister to amend the clause at any given moment before Joanna’s name day.

The bride of the Crown Prince was feasted upon their arrival. On the other side of the hall, Jaime saw a beautiful blond woman; he smiled at her, trying to be charming- Jaime was not against having a dalliance- but the woman gave him such a look of hatred, he knew immediately who she was: Cersei.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so basically, Aegon is taking testosterone. Since, obviously, Qyburn does not know what he is doing, the dosages are too high. The body works a way to have a balance...by producing progestosterone. I did not mention, but some men develop breasts...the symptoms I did mention: hair loss, zits on the back, liver malfunction, testicles getting smaller while the prostate is bigger, are typical of testosterone.

So, yes, of course I added roid rage...which is something that scientists are still arguing about. But it has a dramatic purpose.

Strange enough, bodybuilders do take this treatment in cycles, as Marwyn suggested but
yes...stopping altogether would actually be good for Aegon...it is just they do not know...( maybe they do not care...)
A wedding to remember...

Chapter Summary

Houses Tully, Stark and Targaryen make important moves towards their successions...
The big day of the Royal wedding arrived...

Chapter Notes

Okay, this chapter has a LOT in terms of development.
I hope you enjoy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**House Targaryen 295 A.C**

King Rhaegar surprised no one by showing favour towards his brother once again, leaving Prince Viserys to hear petitions and attend Small Council meetings in his stead.

He then sailed to Dragonstone just in time to attend the birth of the new member of the Royal Family.

The only people in the birthing room were Grand Maester Marwyn, a septa named Mylla, who was a trained midwife of some renown, and the King himself. Usually, any Royal Birth would be considered not a private event but rather a matter of estate, with many nobles invited to stand vigil with the King.

Desconsidering centuries of tradition came easy for Rhaegar when Daenerys safety and well being was concerned. He had, after all, been the second King in centuries to take a second wife while the first was still alive.

The attempt on Daenerys life was the perfect excuse for them to guarantee their privacy; they were both secretly afraid the baby would come damaged; they would not allow any gossip if they had such misfortune.

The Queen was expected to *take to the chambers* in last moon turn of the pregnancy. This meant that Daenerys would be locked in a comfortable, but silent and dark room in anticipation for the main day, when she would mostly probably be restrained to the bed during whole ordeal, praying for the pains be bearable and the birth, swift.

Grand Maester Marwyn had suggested a different approach: “Your Grace needs fresh air, good food and light exercise: you are young and healthy, not a sickly woman to be constricted in such a way.”

When her time neared, Daenerys started to apply special oils and massage her intimate area to stretch her muscles, in hopes of avoiding cuts; when Rhaegar arrived, he was the one to take this
responsibility.

One day, Rhagar decided to turn this duty into foreplay:

“Are you not ashamed?” Daenerys teased; they both knew Marwyn believed intercourse would only improve her chances of a successful birth and that Rhaegar was all too happy in providing her with such relief.

“No, I am doing only my Duty to you, sweet Dany…” Rhaegar licked her folds, tasting the oil he had just applied; he did not mind. “only my duty…”

Daenerys had long ago learned to fully enjoy her husband’s affections; she had left the past behind and decided that, despite not having any choice in the match, yes, she loved Rhaegar and craved his touch.

Only after the second time he took her, they were satisfied enough to fall asleep…

...two hours later, it started.

“Rhaegar...Rhaegar…” Daenerys heard the strange sound, not unlike uncorking a bottle of sparkling wine, and then, warm water between her legs. “ Rhaegar!”

It was like trying to wake up a corpse; Rhaegar barely moved and had a stupid smile on his face.

Daenerys got angry and slapped him hard on his back; he woke up immediately: “Ouch...you have a heavy hand for such a small woman, wife!”

“Rhaegar, you would not wake up...it is time…”

Rhaegar jumped from the bed and started to search for his clothes; the movement on the mattress prompted Daenerys to puke. By the Seven, nobody said it would get this messy right from the beginning. The bed was soaked and a small pond of vomit formed by the floor, the sight awful enough to induce Daenerys to puke a second time…

Her husband then disappeared; the Kingsguard by the door was Ser Jonothor Darry, who kept the Queen company until the household members that needed to be informed were made aware. He had the grace not to comment on the mess, telling Daenerys that “soon, it will be over, Your Grace, you will see…”

Ten hours later...

Marwyn congratulated Her Grace on a flawless birth, making sure to also compliment himself tangentially, by noting that Daenerys strict adherence to his instructions obviously paid off.

She rolled her eyes. Yes, but I was the one pushing...not you, nor Rhaegar...

Rhaegar kissed her forehead many times, thanking Daenerys for “the most perfect Prince, my beloved son, Jaehaerys”, then handed her the bundle and disappeared for the best part of the day.

When Jaehaerys fell asleep after his first feeding, Daenerys demanded a hot bath to be brought to her before she was to receive anybody. She soaked in the water and was assisted by all her Ladies in waiting, who, at least this time, managed to do so in hushed tones, as not to wake up her angelic son.

They placed Daenerys in her bed, all dressed in lovely maternal clothes. A maid came with a tray,
and Daenerys discovered she was ravenous: she devoured the venison stew and the bread loaf in a matter of seconds, leaving the water and honeyed milk to be consumed in a more ladylike manner.

After receiving the Septon, the household members and all the noble visitors, Daenerys noticed that Rhaegar had still not returned. *He must be writing letters and working on the announcement.*

“Lady Brienne, would you mind informing my Kingly Husband that I already saw to my social duties and will now sleep my share, alongside the Prince of Summerhall?”

Brienne blinked twice and looked at the other ladies in waiting…” Your Grace, the King...he said the night was very taxing and that he would be sleeping...he wished not to be disturbed…”

Daenerys wanted to scream, but laughed instead.

*This is ridiculous. I did not sleep...I birthed and fed a baby...I bathed and changed into clothes...received visitors and gave orders...but Rhaegar is the one who is tired. How is he going to save Westeros?*

She concluded she would have to do it…

***

**House Stark**

Lady Barbrey stayed at Winterfell for a couple of fortnights before she was to ride south to the Rills, as it was decided she would be staying at Barrow Hall as a favour to her childhood friend, Lord Dustin, for the time he and his daughter, Arya, would be attending the Royal Wedding as part of the Northern delegation.

Brandon had argued against it, of course, but both Maester Flowers and Barbrey agreed it would be of bad taste to have his mistress warm Lord Stark’s bed outside the safety of The North, where people knew and care little about the affair.

Lord Stark then summoned both his brothers to Winterfell; Benjen would be staying as the Stark in Winterfell and would introduce his new wife, a woman many Northerners took to call the “Wildling Princess” to the rest of his family.

Brandon laughed when he heard the news that his little brother had married by abduction because, in his head, the unexpected decision had all to do with him:

“Ha! Little Ben was obviously scared I would force him to wed another ugly chit. He literally took the first passable option the minute it was acceptable for him to marry again! I cannot say I blame the boy...I was indeed thinking of a betrothal between him and a cranogwoman…”

Lady Catelyn just shook her head and thanked the New Gods that poor Rickon had gone for a ride with Brandon and their cousin, Ser Jon, and did not listen the insult at his departed mother.

“Do not speak disrespectfully of the dead, my husband; Lady Jonelle was a decent woman and your brother was a good husband to her.”

Brandon waved his hands: “Aye, a much better husband than another Lord Stark we both know,
right Catelyn? You must be worried about a wildling in your Halls...a southron lady like you, so very proper, with a savage to call sister…”

“I trust my good brother’s judgment; he is the Lord of the New Gift after all and most of the people tending his lands are originally from Beyond the Wall.” Lady Catelyn had understood at once the political step behind the sudden marriage and agreed with Benjen; why expect his brother to use him as pawn for a second time, when he was perfectly capable of being politically savvy?

”According to what Benjen wrote us, Lady Val Stark is the closest they have of a noble, as she is the daughter of a tribe chieftain. And no, I do not expect her to behave properly, Brandon, but I will not look down on her...mind I remind you I am very used to the she-bears of Bear Island?.”

Not even Brandon could deny the truth in his wife’s words, but he would be damned if he let her win the argument: “Yet, I remember you were less than understanding when Lord Jorah Mormont married his niece, Dacey, because he had impregnated her less than a year after his Glover wife died in the childbirth.”

Catelyn made no reply; she had not rescinded the invitation for the Harvest Feast, but was relieved when Lord Jorah had had the good sense to decline, avoiding any situation with Lord Glover.

Yes, Catelyn also suspected that Jorah Mormont was the “bear” that had fathered the children of another of his nieces, Lady Alysane, for the woman claimed to be a skin changer that mated with bears.... And the only bear capable of such feat in that island would be Lord Jorah himself.

When Benjen arrived with his new bride, and the woman proved to be a beautiful blond that, like Catelyn had predicted, behaved much alike Lady Maege would, she offered her visibly upset husband a winner’s smile.

***

The Ladies Ashara and Val Stark turned heads everywhere they went at Winterfell; surprisingly, the two women struck a friendship of sorts and Val was, if not particularly sweet, very nice with Rickon, joining him and Benjen in visiting the godswood and when they went to hunt at the wolf’s wood.

Perhaps feeling her husband’s uneasiness around both his brothers wives, Lady Catelyn decided it was more than time to warm herself to her good sisters. She took Val for a tour of the Castle and went as far as to apologise to Ashara for her coldness towards the dornish Lady.

“It is in the past, Catelyn; we should enjoy this trip to King’s Landing and , I dare say, it will do you good not to work so hard. Winterfell will not fall while you are away; Bran looks happier with Jon is here, and I am sure that Benjen and Val will do a splendid job while you are south. Not to mention you will finally see Sansa again...”

Lady Catelyn hoped that Lord Stark would not request Ser Jon to travel south in consideration to their son’s delicate health.

But she was wrong; there was no limit for Brandon’s selfishness and, although she feared their son would be the first target, she had not considered Lord Stark’s boldness when it came to his lust.

The initial respectful instance towards both his brothers wives gave way to what could only be described as lewd advances; Brandon would try to flirt with Ashara everytime Ned or Jon were not around, and went as far as to follow Val one day to the stables when Benjen was otherwise engaged.
Maester Flowers, as usual, kept tabs on Brandon, ensuring that at least the servants would not gossip about their Lord’s less than becoming behaviour and informed Catelyn, who took upon herself not to leave Brandon alone with neither of her good sisters in order to avoid a scandal.

The night before their departure to White Harbour Brandon visited his lady wife’s chambers; he was carrying a package with him and, after he crossed the threshold and had the door barred, he placed the package at the table, near the wine and water, and gestured Catelyn to join him.

“You know, Catelyn, you would not be so behind in looks to both Ashara and Val if you would smile more, and dress in a way to show your natural gifts instead of hiding them in such a display of noble austerity. You are so dull...”

Catelyn was always cold at Winterfell; she dressed well and comfortably as she saw no use in trying to entice a husband she did not particularly like. “Another visit to my rooms in less than six moon turns? What is happening, Brandon? Barbrey is gone and the girls of Wintertown are not to your liking?”

Brandon laughed:” This and the fact that you will not let me have my way with neither Ashara or Val. Truth be told, Val would geld me and Ned would kill me in a duel, but I suppose it is a good enough of a passtime to test my limits.”

Then he made his move and pointed at the wine and the package .

“I brought you a gift; I will order you a new wardrobe once we arrive at King's Landing. I know you can only enjoy our time together if you are drunk, so I took the liberty of ordering more of that expensive vintage you so eagerly drink when we are to do our Duty.

My intentions is for this to happen more often now that Barbrey has other responsibilities. As for the girls you mentioned...do not flatter yourself, Catelyn: they will continue to handle my needs during the day but I see no problem in us to continue with our games...I dare say you liked last time around.”

Brandon opened the packaged and handed the gown to Catelyn.

Her stomach turned, a bitter taste in her mouth: “How dare you try to make me into your whore?”

The dress was completely see through...she imagined the prostitutes at Littlefinger's brothel would be wearing such things when he went to visit the establishment, but to suppose she would do it...

Brandon spat: “Enough with your stupid ways! A wife should be her husband’s whore if he asks to, Catelyn; it is time you learn that. Were you less of a fish and more of a woman, I would not need to fuck half the wenches I do.

You do not even try damn it ; you just lie there, waiting for me to spent inside of you so that you can clean yourself of my seed... The Others take you, Catelyn, you must stay the whole time praying for me to finish sooner...

He restrained Catelyn and made her hold the sinful dress: "You are my wife and yes, I will use you as it pleases me...and it pleases me to have you do more than spread your legs. Now get dressed!”

***

Jon tried to argument against leaving Winterfell and Bran behind, but he was, after all, one of his
Lord Uncle’s guards and not a foster son, like Rickon.

Even his Mother, usually so keen in having the family together, complained about Lord Stark’s decision: “ Poor Bran...he looked devastated...I know it is you job, like your uncle told him, but still…”

“We should give Bran more credit; I think he showed incredible restraint and listened to his Father’s explanation why I must leave. “ It was easy to forget that young Brandon Stark was not even a moonturn younger than Jon, who would turn five and ten at the last day of the present year, and had done a much of growing up, if not physically, but emotionally, every since he fell. “

“He will be a fine Lord of Winterfell when time comes, and I will be his warden; we have both decided it will be this way.”

At this, Lady Ashara gave one of her proud mother’s smiles : “ Oh, Jon...my son, Ser Jon, future Lord of Stony Shore and Warden of the North!”

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Last Month of the year 295 A.C- King's Landing- A sennight before Crown Prince Aegon Targaryen’s wedding to Lady Joanna Lannister

Lord Baelish was among the first to visit the chambers assigned to House Stark at the Red Keep; he had sent a raven to Winterfell before their departure with an official request to meet his beloved " childhood friend, Cat”

“My dear Lady Catelyn Stark!” They hugged warmly. “Had Lady Lysa Mallister not be with child once again, the brood of Riverrun and their foster siblings could sit and share memories of our glorious riverlander past!”

“Oh, Petry, you have such a gift for words! I am very proud of you...and I am looking forward to meet with Lady Cersei Arryn, our dear foster sister.” Cersei and Catelyn ha always exchanged letters of course, but since the tragedies in their lives and especially after Lady Arryn’s move to the Capital, the letters had become more frequent.

“Lady Cersei is one of the most sought after hostesses in the Red Keep, Catelyn, but she sent me here to say that she wants to have, at least, one private meeting with all of us. I dare say Ser Edmure, however...well...he is helping me with the bookkeeping at one of my establishments and…”

Catelyn rolled her eyes: “ Ah, please...Edmure is at the brothel, of course. Father must marry him at once, he needs a wife!”

Littlefinger smiled:“Cat...I happen to know who your Lord Father will turn to…”

Lord Baelish and Catelyn sat at the comfortable divan; she served him tea and listened to his words with amazement:

“As you know, Princess Rhaenys was very fond of Ser Edmure, but our beloved King offered his daughter to House Tyrell, to make amends for stealing their bride. There are only three available and suitable brides of Great Houses with Royal Blood at the moment. Although House Tyrell claim is through their maternal ancestor, they do have Gardener blood; House Arryn were Kings of the
Mountain and Vale and...House Stark has a lineage and pedigree many envy...

Lord Baratheon was not keen in having Margaery Tyrell to marry his heir, Lord Robert Baratheon. The strange relationship between Ser Renly and his squire, Loras Tyrell made the Master of Coins weary...as a result, Lord Tyrell already signed a contract with Lord Lannister. They will announce the betrothal tonight.

The old Lion wants Lady Myrcella for his heir’s heir, Tyrek Lannister and Lord Arryn is inclined towards the match. Our Cersei, however, wants to wait Myrcella to flower to sign the deal, but you must consider it done.

Of course, Lord Tully could choose any Hightower or Redwyne girl for Ser Edmure, both Houses had their Kingdoms once, but I happen to know that he will ask for your daughter, Lady Sansa. Your Father has learned his lesson and will not wait for having Stannis Baratheon reaching out; it was this way he lost Princess Rhaenys.”

Marriages between uncles and nieces were not unheard of; the Faith did not see such unions as incestuous and Catelyn knew her brother would change his ways once he was given a bride. However, while such marriage would make her happy, Catelyn also had to consider what Sansa would think of, as this meant that her daughter would not return North any time soon.

If the last letters were any indication Sansa was happy about her life as Lady in waiting but wished to see her brother again...the loss of Lady had hurt her deeply and this could also influence Sansa in how well she would take the news, if it ever came to pass.

Catelyn was torn; on one hand, Sansa would be perfect for Riverrun; she knew her brother and father loved Sansa already and would treat her with care and respect.

On the other hand, the current Lord Paramount of The North would never allow a second son of House Tully to take the name Stark and inherit Winterfell after Bran’s passing.

If that was her Lord Father real intentions in seeking the match, he would be disappointed.

Brandon cared little for keeping appearances; it took a couple of days at Riverrun for Catelyn's father to realize what a disaster her husband was. Now, that they would be staying in the Capital for many days to come, Hoster Tully would soon understand that Brandon was grooming Ser Jon to become his heir.

But the match, Catelyn reasoned, was still a good one...

The second person Catelyn met that same day was her Lord Father and, much to her obvious delight, Winterfell was not in his plans.

Quite the opposite, actually, as she found out: “Cat, The North is a terrible place; a land that only brought you sorrow and an unworthy husband. Please forgive me for this mistake and allow me to rectify things.

I couldn’t care less whom your Lord Husband will place behind our Brandon in the succession; it is, after all, his prerogative as a Lord Paramount. As it is mine to ensure that House Tully remains the undisputed overlord of the Riverlands. Lady Sansa is exactly what I want for our Edmure.

Besides, I will not allow Sansa to return to that wasteland, and to have that Father of hers marrying her off to another northern savage with the Stark name...

No, no; I mean to reclaim Sansa for Riverrun; she has the name and the royal blood, but she looks
like us and, in time, she will become a Tully. I will see to that, Cat, this I swear to you.”

Brandon rejoiced; he agreed to all of Lord Tully’s terms as the marriage contract would grant him, Lord Stark, full reign in disposing of the succession of Winterfell as he saw fit, even if that meant disinheriting Sansa and her line.

He did not notice that the same applied to Lord Tully and Riverrun; Catelyn's father was so suspicious of Brandon Stark as a man without honour that he felt the need to protect his Mallister’s grandchildren from the “savage’s greed.”

*Oh, Maester Flowers would never have agreed to such terms...*

Catelyn’s father was thankful for Brandon’s stupidity: “Imagine if I die tomorrow, no contract signed and Brandon decides to marry Sansa to this Ser Jon of his? Their Stark children would be ahead of Lysa’s...”

Brandon was eager for the match, but surprised even Catelyn when he agreed Sansa should have a say:

“Little pup, tell me truly: would you come to love Ser Edmure? I think your Lady Mother will agree that a marriage built only on Duty is likely not to be a happy one... There are also other options we could consider, all south of The Neck, of course.”

*Yes, of course...*

Sansa’s answer was song to Catelyn’s ears: “I find the match more than acceptable; Ser Edmure has showed me consideration and respect. I enjoyed my time at Riverrun and I hope that I will grow to love him when we spend more time together.”

When Great Houses intermarried with each other, they needed the approval of the King; His Grace not only approved, but gave his blessings, first to Lady Margaery and Ser Jaime and then, to Lady Sansa and Ser Edmure.

After the announcement was made, Petyr Baelish came to pay another visit, bringing both Catelyn and Sansa gifts: a necklace for the bride to be and a beautiful hairnet for Lady Catelyn.

“You would make me very happy if you are to wear the gifts at the reception…”

***

Queen Daenerys avoided much of the preparations for the wedding celebration, but could not possibly escape *everything*.

The day before Aegon was to be married, Her Grace was overseeing the details of the Banquet that would be served in the gardens after the religious ceremony at the Great Sept of Baelor. It was the end of Summer; Autumn was expected to come within the next year, but King's Landing being so south, it meant that even though the temperature was dropping, the weather would still be amenable enough for an outside feast.

Lord Baelish explained the seating order at the High Table and Daenerys gave her approval, wishing to be done with it sooner better than later.

As Ser Arthur had returned with the delegation from Highgarden, he was accompanying Her Grace
in this outing. Daenerys then decided to visit the Godswood to greet Ser Jon before she was to be reunited with her babe.

She found the young man much changed; Jon had always been handsome, she thought, but now Daenerys could finally see the makings of what he would grow up to be.

As he bowed to her, Daenerys spoke: “Ser Jon, it is a pleasure to have you once again among us. How is life at Winterfell?”

“Your Grace, I am very happy...my Lord Uncle gives me many responsibilities and tasks, but I still have time for my cousins. I would like to thank you again for your generous gift, my Queen.”

Daenerys had bought a couple of Valyrian Steel daggers at Volantis and forgot about it. After Jon saved her, she had commissioned the dragonbone hilt of one of the daggers to have a wolf carved into it and presented the weapon to Ser Jon, as a token of her appreciation.

Before the conversation could evolve, Ser Oswell Whent arrived to escort the Queen to her chambers.

Daenerys did not hear when Jon’s uncle complained he was staring at her: “The Queen has a good heart.”, the young man said.

“Stop staring at her good heart, then.”

***

Daenerys fussed over little Jaehaerys, then fed him and watched entranced as he fell asleep in her breasts; instead of a cradle, she placed him in the middle of her bed, cushioning around him as to make the place safer.

Daenerys laid by her babe’s side and closed her eyes; a sound coming from the window disturbed her.

She stood up and saw a strange crow; Daenerys shushed the bird, too lazy to actually do something more physical.

The bird, however, seemingly understood her meaning and kept quiet.

She fell asleep and dreamed.

***

“You are not to take part in the feasting then; do not speak to anyone about this, Dany, not even Vis...he is in love with Lady Arryn and might say something... you are to attend the ceremony at the Sept... then you pretend to take ill, and return to your chambers...I will place two Kinguards and Lady Brienne will be by your side at all times.”

Rhaegar trusted Daenerys visions completely; he decided to use the opportunity to finally have some answers. We are a step ahead of our enemies...they do not know daenerys has the sight …

She said a voice entered her dream and said, clearly: the ones sitting right by the Crown Prince's side will die today...
The vision showed two faceless figures, choking to death...

Daenerys was supposed to sit at the right of the Crown Prince and his wife to be, Lady Joanna, by his left; Elia would sit next to the King, as a rare display of respect to her status as the first wife of the present Monarch.

“Who will sit there, Rhaegar? If the voice was to believed, the person sitting by his right will die from poison...on the other hand, my vision...I saw two people dying…”

“I will leave the seat empty...mayhaps I say you will join us later on?

The message could literally mean the ones sitting at the High table...everybody would be at Aegon’s side, one way or another. It could also mean only the ones by his right were to die...very hard to tell.

Lord Lannister is surely not involved: he already got what he wanted. Elia, on the other hand...she could use the opportunity to cover for her recklessness; she is desperate. I cannot simply declare there will be no feasting…”

Rhaegar had to be sanguine about how he would play. The Master of Whispers was a Lannister creature; Rhaegar would tell Lord Westerling to increase security around the kitchen and the servants area. If poison was the weapon, it stood to reason that one of the servants would be used, either unknowingly or under promise of a hefty reward.

His Grace decided to have as many Lannisers and Martells sitting at the High Table. He would find a way of sending Rhaenys to visit Daenerys in her chambers and he himself would only briefly sit at the table, make the first toast, pretend to drink from it and go about other tables and play host.

He reasoned that, if House Lannister or House Martell, under Elia, would be behind this attempt, that they would be forced to change plans when the seating order would be reversed; he expected them to commit a mistake and be caught in time.

***

Aegon Targaryen was pleased with his bride.

Lady Joanna was small, frail and looked pure, just like The Maiden herself; she had even spent the previous evening in deep prayer with him, asking for the Seven to bless their union.

The whore of his aunt went to her chambers directly after his wedding; when Rhaenys, the adulterer, also disappeared in the Red Keep before the feast would commence in earnest, Aegon was glad.

His father made a toast; Aegon saw that he did not drink from his goblet, meaning that his words, wishing Joanna and him happiness, were empty. The King then left his place of honour and went to sit by the Starks.

Another round of toasts; Aegon was supposed to make small talk with all the nobles coming to present him and Lady Joanna with gifts, but he would only nod and thank them for their attendance. He could not believe how many had come to his wedding…

“Thank you, Lord Baratheon...Thank you, Lord Penrose...Thank you, Lord Royce...Thank you, Lord Baelish…”

After Lord Baelish was seemingly gone, Aegon made a quick pause; his throat was dry.
“Son, here...take my glass of water, I see that you dislike the wine. “

Aegon drank from the water and continued to thank the nobles…

“Oh, may I try from the wine, dear good mother?” Aegon overhead.

“Here, I pour you some, dear Joanna...you must dilute in water as you are still too young for Dornish Red.”

Aegon knew his mother would teach Joanna well...she was a Princess now and had to play this game, attend silly feasts and speak the right words, but this could be done while following the righteous path. To toast one time was completely acceptable, as to have wine diluted in water.

“To you, my daughter…” Elia and Joanna giggled.

The next thing Aegon heard was their screams.

***

The Red Keep was closed; nobody would leave the city while they investigate who had tried to kill the Crown Prince and Princess Joanna on their wedding day.

King Rhaegar dismissed the Master of Whispers at once; he decided to entrust the Lord Hand, Jon Arryn and his brother, Prince Viserys, with the job.

When the truth behind the assassinations would emerge, His Grace promised Lord Lannister and Prince Oberyn Martell would sit by his side for the judgement and execution.

His Grace then announced that his son, Aegon, had renounced his claim to the Throne and would join the Faith, in order to become “one with the Seven”.

***

Cersei went to see her brother for the first time in over twenty years.

They were alone; Viserys had told her there would be meeting with Lord Lannister to discuss the investigation and suggested she use this time to meet with her brother in private:

“Lioness, I know you...your heart broke when you saw Jaime holding Joanna as she choked to death. Forget about the past: he is your brother. Go and comfort him.”

Viserys then kissed her forehead, and added. “But return to me afterwards, my love…”

She found Jaime sobbing; Cersei took his hand and they both wept.

***

Cersei had a much needed conversation with a certain Lord of the Fingers the very next day.

They took a stroll in the gardens; guards were everywhere, but Cersei and Littlefinger managed to
have their meeting fast enough as to not raise suspicions.

“An accident; it was clearly meant to the Crown Prince...I was near enough to see when Elia Martell took Aegon’s goblet, poured some to Princess Joanna and they both drank...many others saw the same. Lord Royce and I were still nearby; we have both been interrogated and we gave them the same story...you see...an accident.”

So, Littlefinger wanted to kill Aegon...a young man out of favour with his father, without friends other than Lord Lannister and Elia Martell, that the nobles hated with a passion...surely, Rhaegar would not be going to look much into the assassination of his unwanted son.

“The people behind it, I imagine, must be scared, as they should; Lord Lannister will not stop until he finds who killed his granddaughter and King Rhaegar...they say he is ready to serve Justice...it seems that, whoever done it, has accomplices here at the Red Keep...it must be one of the High Lords...or Ladies, don't you think? Why would a small lordling have done it?”

He will implicate me if ever comes to be...

“ Information is power; if the accomplice plays the cards correctly...and is smart enough...might end with a great reward. If one of the Great Lords is involved...a bannerman might suddenly rise...a marriage to a beautiful bride mayhaps…”

Power is Power...you overstepped, Littlefinger.

***

Viserys was not surprised when Cersei told him the truth, while they were in bed...she whispered in his ear the whole thing, after they made love.

How, after she finding out that Lord Baelish had ingratiated himself enough with the Small Council to be selected as bookkeeper for the Royal Wedding, she had tasked her friend into embarrassing her Lord Father, suggesting for one of his male whores to be caught with Lady Joanna; that all she had asked was for something to happen to “disturb the wedding”... and that Baelish had seen that the death of the Crown Prince would make the King much happier, assuming that His Grace would not pursue the assassin with much passion...just to have Elia Martell spoil things...

That, in short, was an accident, caused by a minor Lord ,who was trying to force her to marry him by blackmail.

“Lioness... fear not, I will be your valiant knight and will save you from an unworthy suitor. Thank the Seven Arianne was very stupid and brought dear old Ser Daemon Sand along; I will ask him for a favour...”

***

Prince Viserys Targaryen uncovered the whole plot.

He brought his suspicions to the King; His Grace ordered the City Guard to bring Lord Baelish and his workers for questioning, along with books, letters and any evidence they were to find in his possession.
When they entered Lord Baelish’s offices, they saw his lifeless body and a signed letter - a confession addressed to the King.

His workers told the same tale: how Baelish feared this wedding to Lady Joanna would bring influence to the Crown Prince, who was known for his piety. Most of his wealth came from his brothels and, many times, Aegon’s supporters had sought to intimidate him and others who profited from prostitution into going out of business.

The letter confirmed that Aegon was the intended target; Lord Baelish apologised for the step, but in his own words he sought to “liberate the Seven Kingdoms from a dark future under the hands of another mad Prince” adding that he was very sorry that “poor Elia Martell shared the wine intended for Aegon with Lady Joanna…” and ended the letter asking for forgiveness.

***

The order of succession for the Iron Throne was confirmed in the last day of the year 295 A.C

His Grace adopted a new understanding of the Great Council of 101 A.C: instead of completely barring the female line and their descendants from ascending to the Iron throne, he adjusted the succession to have uncles coming before daughters, thus showing favour once again to his brother, Prince Viserys, while also confirming that the line of Rhaenys and Daenerys in her own right could both legally inherit the Throne if it ever came to be.

The Crown Prince was now Jaehaerys Targaryen; any son coming from a lawful marriage of his would be his heirs, by order of birth. Then it would come Viserys and his male descendants and, only then, Rhaenys.

Daenerys would become Queen Regent in the event of Rhaegar's death and the Throne would pass to the Prince of Dragonstone when he reached majority.

Most of the nobles had already left after the investigation of the deaths of Elia and Lady Joanna were concluded; the document with the new succession was sent to the Great and major Houses by raven.

Rhaegar decided they would try to give Jaehaerys a sibling already in the coming year; Daenerys wanted to wait for another year to pass, but Rhaegar would not hear any of it:

“Gods be good, Viserys has a daughter and we have Jaehaerys wed his cousin. We still need a Princess to honour the Pact of Ice and Fire though…”

Daenerys was taken aback by the sudden mention of the old agreement between Houses Targaryen and Stark: “Husband, has Lord Stark said anything? For what I know, his son is but four and ten and not expected to marry or sire children...Ser Jon even asked my leave to give his cousin the valyrian dagger I gifted him, reasoning it would return to him upon the boy’s death…”

“No, you misunderstand; I meant for Ser Jon to have a bride of Targaryen blood...he would be as old as I was when we married by the time for him to claim our Princess.” Rhaegar kissed Daenerys, already undressing her. “But Ser Jon would also be Lord of Winterfell by then…”

--------------------------------------------------  END OF PART ONE  --------------------------------------

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Chapter End Notes

Do not, for a second, think Aegon is going for good...

Brandon, Hoster Tully and Littlefinger being jerks? Colour me surprised!
PART 2- chapter 15- The Warrior´s son

Chapter Summary

Rhaegar and Viserys look to the Future;
Lady Margaery and Lady Olenna talk about their alliance with House Lannister;
Brandon Stark goes too far and
Aegon Targaryen joins the Faith.

Chapter Notes

Please, be aware that domestic violence will be tackled in this chapter. I am sure you know well of whom I am talking about.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

------------------------------------PART 2------------------------------------

House Targaryen 296 A.C

For vultures, death was an opportunity.

Daenerys had learned not to be sentimental when it came to life at Court, but it always suprised her how unashamed nobles were when it came to attain more favour and power. A former Queen and a Princess had died, poisoned by a petty Lord, but while very few were honestly in mourning, many were already working on moving up the food chain- after all, the positions of Master of Whispers and Master of the Customs were now available, with the firing of Lord Westerling and the suicide of Lord Baelish.

Rhaegar had praised Viserys openly and warmly when the Prince revealed that a failed attempt on Aegon´s life had claimed both the young man´s mother and wife at once, but being the Lord Spy would not suit Viserys talents, and the Prince was the first to agree he would only be warming that seat at the Small Council for the time being.

His Grace was now of mind that only a complete outsider from the Game of Thrones would do.

The King had already spoken with Grand Maester Marwyn about his idea and, although the old man was not particularly enthusiastic, he saw benefits in having an essosi filling in the role.

Rhaegar would not take any further step, however, before he was to get the truth out of his brother.

“Lord Baelish´s reasons for attempting to kill Aegon were sound: he was, after all a whoremonger, and we all know that my son would see as his sacred calling to close all brothels and send the
prostitutes to the silent sisters. However, a suicide? Tell me, Viserys: who was really behind it?"

Daenerys had an inkling it had to do with the woman that gave Lord Baelish his position in the Customs, so it was no surprise when Viserys told them exactly what had happened:

“Littlefinger just wanted to raise his status even further by marrying Lady Arryn and he decided some good old blackmail would do the trick. He got greedy, that is all. Lady Arryn dislikes her Lord Father and wanted to embarrass him at the Feast; it was that silly, she meant no ill towards anybody, all she wanted was to prank her Father in the day of his triumph. Baelish simply used this as an opportunity to indirectly implicate her to make his dream come true and he reasoned that...well..you would not look much further if Aegon was to die. Elia, like always, spoiled things. “

Viserys was telling the truth and Rhaegar had to agree Cersei Arryn would not have profited from Aegon’s death, while it was clear that Littlefinger would not only eliminate a possible enemy but also become directly linked to two Great Houses.

“How did you convince the idiot to commit suicide?” Daenerys asked as she did not believe it for a second such a vile creature would have felt remorse for killing two women by mistake.

“My beloved knight paid him a visit, of course. Cersei came to me for help and well, Justice has been served, one way or another. I only saw that his wrong doings would not make her and by extension me embarrassed. “

Rhaegar could not possibly judge; if somebody would have tried to harm Daenerys’s reputation, he would have reacted in the same way.

Despite being obviously in love with Cersei Arryn, Rhaegar knew that Viserys would never keep only to her bed; and this was good news, but seemingly, not good enough for their plans:

“Brother, your love life is...very interesting, I must admit. You keep hoarding lovers, never tiring and always having time to meet their needs...and yet, Arianne is still barren.”

Viserys was visibly disappointed by this failure: “I know the problem is not in me, as both Myera and Cersei had to drink moontea a couple of times and I continue to do my duty to Arianne and yet, after all these years, I am starting to think it would be easier to impregnate Daemon than her.”

Rhaegar chuckled; he could not help but to imagine Daemon Sand’s stomach swollen with Visery’s child...

“Oh, Vis” Daenerys said in a loving tone. “We really need you to make us an Alysanne for our Jaehaerys...go and speak with Marwyn about it; invite Arianne to stay longer at Court...I know it would be asking you too much to stop seeing Lady Arryn altogether, but mayhaps you should concentrate on your lawful wedded wife for the time being.”

***

Pentos was very close to King’s Landing geographically, but politically, it was another world entirely.

The city was not allowed to have a navy or an army; they had lost a war with Braavos and slavery was banned. It was, of course, not true; there were slaves everywhere King Rhaegar could look.

This trip would be a short one and Rhaegar decided to bring Viserys this time, leaving Daenerys to
sit on the Iron Throne. Both brothers agreed she was, after all, the best of the three, and would be a vision as a Queen in her own right, but the laws of inheritance were clear and she was, after all, the last in line.

Viserys brought his wife and their lover for this trip; it was Daenerys’s suggestion that maybe a “change in scenery” would make them conceive. Prince Oberyn suggested they discreetly visit the Red Temple, give them gold to have their priestesses pray for a fertility miracle.

When Viserys made the suggestion known to Rhaegar, he surprised his younger brother by agreeing: “You know that Elia only conceived Aegon because the High Septon fasted and prayed for seven days? Prayers have Power, Vis…and, I must concede that a child born out of the Red God could not possibly be any worse than Aegon.”

The Royal Family should not be seen in a Red Temple; the news would offend the High Septon and the last thing they needed was to have the Faith protesting against Rhaegar’s rule.

They were being hosted by Magister Illyrio Mopatis, who had a history in trying to ingratiate himself with westerosi nobles. He had been extremely accommodating for Elia and Aegon, and Rhaegar was interested in knowing how far his interests in Westeros would go.

Not to mention, King Aerys’s former Master of Whispers, Varys, was a friend of the Magister; Rhaegar was toying with the idea of bringing the spider back to King’s Landing. The goal of this visit, however, was only to observe before moving any piece on the board.

Unbeknownst to Rhaegar and Viserys, Varys had a long-standing hatred towards magic and the Red God. However, he had learned to compromise: Varys lived in Pentos after all, where there was a Red Temple in each corner.

Eventually, pragmatism prevailed and Varys allowed his partner to organize a meeting with the local Red Priestess.

A woman Varys knew had had a very brief sexual relationship with the Dragon King.

He decided to use this fact to his advantage and start advising the King even if the job was not his yet: “Your Grace, I must warn you that is the Lady Melisandre the Temple is sending; she is a woman of great influence and knowledge. They believe she is capable of conceiving shadow babies and her powers of seduction are legendary. Are you certain this is such a good idea?”

King Rhaegar was visibly impressed that Varys already knew of this past relationship; truth be told, Melisandre only warmed his bed for a sennight, but still, not many would have known of this in King’s Landing, let alone in Pentos: “I agree with your assessment, Lord Varys; however, this business is my brother’s, not mine. Let them at least try.”

***

House Stark

Because he missed his family, Ser Jon had suggested they join him at Winterfell, instead of returning to Stony Shore by ship. As his father remained undecided, Jon argued that, since most of the management of the North went through Lord Eddard Stark and Lord Benjen’s hands, that a visit would be probably a good idea and save them many ravens and time.
There was also, a more secretive reason for Jon to request his father at Winterfell, and it had to do with the terrible things he had witnessed happening between his aunt and uncle.

He had never been close to Lady Stark, but he was sure she was a dutiful wife and suspected that his uncle was less than kind to her during his nightly visits, as he had seen in her face and neck unmistakable marks of physical struggle that she tried her best to hide with scarfs and makeup.

Jon knew there was difference between bruises and “love bites”; Lady Stark would look very sad and ashamed when some eyes would linger on her, as opposed to playfully oblivious to their existence.

“We are not here to judge Lord Stark, boy, but to guard him.” Jory Cassel once told Jon.

For some reason, Jon thought that his father's presence would bring in some change in Lord Stark. Everybody knew Lady Catelyn and Lord Brandon were not a happy with each other, but it had not always been that bad.

Or I never noticed because I was too young?

Lady Ashara convinced her husband to go; for once, she actually wanted to stay at Winterfell. Robb had travelled to King's Landing with Lord Royce to attend what was now being referred to as “The Purple Wedding” and their family had been briefly reunited, which made Ashara even more eager to spend more time with her “pups”.

Jon knew it was only a question of time until his father would change his mind and it did not take much long, just a couple of days of being locked at the Red Keep. When Elia and Ashara were both making sad faces and sighting, Ned had no other choice, but to concede defeat: “Very well; we go to Winterfell, but we shall not linger.”

Two nights. That was how long they stayed at Winterfell and they left the place in a worst state than they arrived.

Jon finally understood that good intentions were not, by any means, a guarantee of success.

I should have kept quiet…

***

The only places in her own home that still offered Lady Catelyn a certain degree of emotional comfort were the small Sept and Bran’s room. Since her Lord Husband decided to claim his rights every night and in increasingly rougher ways, Catelyn had found that even bad things could take turns for the worse.

Their arrival was pacific and celebrated with a Feast. Catelyn was happy to have returned, as she missed Bran enormously. She was quick to thank Lord Benjen and his wife for their efforts at Winterfell as she knew Brandon never cared to extend any type of compliments and show real appreciation towards anybody save for Ser Jon, his “boy”.

She promptly resumed her routine of work and duty. Some changes were made to accomodate Bran, who was now four and ten and ready to take in more responsibilities; while not yet fully prepared to be the Stark at Winterfell, the young man was ready to start training. Catelyn was very keen on it, as she felt Lord Rickard Stark had made a poor job with his own Brandon, and she wanted her son to succeed in all that his father had failed.
Catelyn had spent years avoiding speaking much to Ser Jon; she was, after all, offended that Brandon had always showed more interest in his nephew than in their own son, but time had showed the absurdity of this aversion: Ser Jon was a fine man who loved his cousin dearly. His uncle had no influence in the kind of man he was to become, as Jon was clearly Ned's son.

While it was too late to play the role of a doting aunt, Catelyn had never been less than polite with Jon and, at the feast, she left her reserve behind, thanking Ser Jon warmly and openly for the splendid gift he offered to her Bran:

“You are a good cousin and a good man, Ser. The dagger, I was told, is the perfect weapon for Brandon to wield now; I am happy Her Grace gave you her leave to gift it to Bran and I hope to see you teaching Bran how to use it.”

Catelyn left for her chambers soon afterwards, praying that her husband would leave her alone. If before she had considered the constant presence of Lady Barbrey as a bitter reminder of her failure as a wife, now that Brandon had started with his “games”, Catelyn found herself on the verge of writing her mistress and begging for her to return from the Rills at once…

It was not the roughness, or even the fact that Brandon would force her to pretend she was simply a “girl eager for his cock and coin” that deeply disturbed Catelyn; what really scared her was that, sometimes, her body would betray her and she would enjoy it. Seeing that Brandon cleary was pretending she was a nameless whore, she too started to pretend; much to her misery, the only man she could imagine giving her pleasure was Ned.

Her prayers were left unanswered as Brandon did come to her bed, but fortunately, he was too drunk to do anything else than to make her suck his half hard cock while offering her his “words of incentive”.

Catelyn was all too happy when Brandon fell asleep a minute into the filthy act.

The next morning, Catelyn went to the Sept, to cleanse herself from Brandon’s filth.

Lady Ashara was there with little Elia, who was now seriously being instructed in the Faith as she was expected to be sent to The Vale and marry Lord Robert Arryn. She was speaking to Ashara when Ned came by and, while Catelyn was lighting some candles with Elia, the girl's parents went to a corner, talking in hushed tones.

Ashara came and offered her daughter her hand: “Elia, my dear, it is time for you to wash Seastorm.”

They left but Ned stayed behind; he wanted to speak in private: “I was hoping we could talk, Catelyn. Jon worries; he does not know much of the world, but understand that, what my brother does to you...that my brother is less than kind. Is there something I can do to help? “

Catelyn broke down in tears.

***

Eddard tried his best to comfort his brother's wife, but what one could do in such situations? Other than speaking with Brandon and asking him to treat Catelyn with respect, all Ned could offer her was his shoulder.

And so he did.
“Oh, I must return to my duties…” Catelyn’s eyes were as red as her hair. “I need to answer some ravens before lunch.”

Ned gave Catelyn his arm. “I will escort you to the solar then, my Lady.”

They arrived at the spacious room, too warm for Ned’s tastes; he would not stay for much longer, just enough to make sure his good sister was feeling better, he told himself, but then, she started to cry again, resting her head on Ned’s chest; he hugged Catelyn, speaking in a comforting tone, and soon, she calmed down.

Neither noticed when the door opened.

Before Ned could break the embrace, Brandon confronted them.

“Well, what a touching scene! I suppose living by the seaside all those years made you appreciate the taste and smell of fish, brother…tsc tsc tsc...what Father would think of you now, perfect Ned? Seducing your brother’s wife…”

Ned decided enough was enough. “Father would know better, Brandon; you are the one vile enough to try it, both with my Ashara and now, with Lady Val. You are not the man Father hoped you would be, Brandon, and you know this better than anyone.”

Catelyn was too stunned to say anything, too scared to even move.

Brandon smiled. She knew him too well; he was not mad at all, but amused. “I am not complaining, brother...in fact, if you wish Catelyn, you should have her. I know she would be happy with the downgrade. Of course, this could only mean that Ashara...“

Ned was smaller than Brandon, but much fitter. He screamed at his brother and Lord Stark, for once, shut his mouth and listened: “You dishonour yourself, Brandon. I will leave before I become a kinslayer. Do not bother sending for me anymore; I will only come back to Winterfell if we are under attack or when you are dead. I will return to Stony Shore, with my wife and my son.”

Ned then turned to Catelyn, who was still silent, and said, in a much more calmer tone: “I am very sorry, my Lady. You are welcome to visit us anytime.”

Brandon was now red with rage: “You are to serve me, Ned...anytime I deem appropriate, you are to come to Winterfell, do you understand? This time, however, you have my leave to go home. You may even take your lovely wife, who should have been mine anyways...how do I regret not visiting Ashara at her tent that night. “

Ned was already by the door when Brandon informed him that Jon “would only go as far as Torrhen’s Square, to escort Lady Cerwyn from Barrow Hall to Winterfell. Ser Jon is a member of my guard; he is to serve Winterfell; he is not your son anymore.”

***

True to his word, Lord Eddard Stark left with his family the very next day.

Because Benjen took pity on Bran and Catelyn, he allowed Rickon to stay until the Harvest Feast; after that, the boy would split his time equally between Winterfell and Queenscrown, as per the foster agreement.
Val did not understand why her husband - or anybody really- had to put up with Lord Stark’s antics: “The man is drunk most of the time and, when he is not, is even worse...and you leave your son here!”

The more Benjen thought about it, the more he regretted having signed the damn paper:” It is the custom, Val. Besides, Rickon and Bran are as close as brothers. I do not want to punish my son because my brother is a fool.”

Val despised Lord Stark and was very hard for her not to speak her mind, so Benjen also started to avoid his brother altogether and took to spend more time outdoors, with his wife, son, Osha and shaggydog.

Sometimes, Bran would join them on his horse, much to Val’s admiration. Benjen had explained his nephew could not walk as he knew the Free Folk believed in the gift of mercy and he wanted to avoid any awkward situation.

But much to his relief, Val, seeing how good a rider Bran was, came to agree the boy was fine. She even taught Brandon how to properly wield the dagger his cousin had gifted him in a fight from his position in a wheelchair.

Bran had to stay behind one day to see to his responsibilities. His Lord Father had tasked him into reviewing the log books and replying to some official letters and he had to do so under the vigilant eyes of Maester Flowers.

The solar assigned to Brandon was very close to his Lady Mother’s chambers and, in this particular day, some strange, muffled noises were coming from there.

Bran was no longer a child; he knew exactly what was happening: “I am afraid Father is hurting her.” Maester Flowers only nodded; he stood up and pushed Bran’s wheeled chair through the corridor, reaching the door from where the noise came from.

Jory Cassel was standing guard. Bran asked him to move and the northerner looked at Maester Flowers for guidance.

“Do as Master Brandon says.”

Lord Stark´s huge frame was covering his wife. He was pinning her against the mattress, restraining her arms; her skirt was raised to her waistline, the bare ass visible. Brandon´s other hand was guiding his cock into her anal cavity.

Without much thought, Brandon wheeled himself next to them. “Stop this! You are hurting her! She is crying!”

This brought Lord Stark out of his trance; the hand that was hurting Catelyn was now pushing his son. “Get out of here, boy; it is my right...I can do with her what I want.”

But Brandon would not go; instead, he took the Valyrian Steel dagger and stabbed his father’s hand.

Lord Stark was stunned. “You dare try to kill me, son?”

“A cut in your hand will hardly kill you, Father.” Bran said coldly. “But a fall from a Tower...that could have killed me, yes?”

This made Lord Stark stop; Maester Flowers went for Catelyn and noticed that she was bleeding. “My Lady, we need to go to the infirmary.”
“I cannot leave Bran with him …”

Bran looked his father with eyes as cold as Ice; he told his mother he would be fine. “Go and get help, Mother; Father and I must have a much needed conversation.”

***

After Brandon’s hand was tended and Catelyn was in conditions to speak again, their son and Maester Flowers insisted they were to be physically separated.

Bran’s message was very simple :“I fear for your safety, Mother.”

Lord Stark decided he was the one to communicate the decision : “You are free to go, Catelyn; this is my home. Go to Riverrun; visit your sister at Seaguard or stay at the Red Keep...I care not. Sansa is to wed your brother in the coming year; we can tell everybody you will be there to oversee their courtship...or any other polite lie will do."

Bran knew it would be this way; his Father would only leave Winterfell on his own accord, by his own terms. Even if his wife was the wronged party, he was Lord Stark; him allowing Catelyn to leave his domains and live her life independently was part of the bargain Bran was able to strike. His memories of falling from the Tower had returned; he played with his father's guilt feelings, but Lord Stark would only go this far.

“We can leave in three days time…” Catelyn said, looking at Bran.

“Bran stays.”

“No. He is my son...he should come…”

“Bran stays. He is the heir to Winterfell, isn't he?”

Catelyn understood it at once; if she insisted her son would go with her, his Father would probably disinherited him, on which account she did not know, but she hardly had the strength to try and find out.

She told herself that Bran, at four and ten, was old enough; that he did not need her anymore, that he would be fine and, in less than two years, at Sansa's wedding, they would meet again.

“Go, Mother; I will be fine. My destiny is in The North.”

***

**House Tyrell**

Lady Margaery made sure to console her future husband, Ser Jaime Lannister, over the sudden and most horrid death of his only daughter, Lady Joanna, attending all services and the funeral, and seeking him and his sons out. She offered companionship to the boys, taking them on excursions while the investigations were made, when her role as Lady in waiting was not demanding her full attention.

And she meant it.
Her Duty was to marry this man she barely knew, but Margaery was a believer that duty should not be a chore.

She was to become Lady of Casterly Rock; it was her job to be an available, caring, compassionate partner for Ser Jaime, and this included, of course, having a good relationship with his sons, even though they would be ahead of hers in the line of succession.

The point of this union, however, was to have a daughter as Margaery was informed early on by her grandmother:

“You are to receive lovely pieces of jewelry upon the birth of a girl, dear child. The Old Lion has made it clear he needs a granddaughter as soon as possible; he will force another betrothal, you see? The Westerlings are gone, but there is a lot they already informed Lord Tywin and one secret in particular, they sold to their Liege and not to their King. Not even Princess Arianne knows it, but she is barren; the Maester at Sunspear confirmed it to Prince Doran. It is in our interest that she remains married to Prince Viserys for many years to come...and that we are the ones to produce the only viable candidate to the Prince of Dragonstone.”

Margaery was apprehensive; Ser Jaime was very distraught, as he should be, with the death of his only daughter to pay her mind. Lady Olenna said she was on the right track to gain his affections in the long run: “Concentrate on his children; give him time to heal. The boys will be telling him how fun and lovely you are once he returns home. Next time you see him, the pain will have subdued; then you spend time with him and his sons, together. Make yourself part of his life, the best part there is. “

Ser Jaime was very handsome and Margaery looked forward to become his wife; Highgarden was filled with cousins of both sexes and Margaery was skilled in all things except the main thing: her maidenhead was intact and would be his, of course. She dreamed of the day and had decided that she would make things work; she liked everything she had done this far with both boys and girls and could not fathom a life without such pleasures. If she was to be faithful to Ser Jaime, she would make sure the sacrifice would be worthy it.

But any girl of four and ten would have insecurities, and Margaery could only admit those to her grandmother: “What if he doesn't like me, nana? What if Rhaenys has a daughter of Willas next?”

Lady Olenna gave Margaery a knowing look:” Oh dear, Willas is never returning to Rhaenys bed; they have an agreement, one that made us also happy. We already have our Aemond for Highgarden and while he is in line to the Iron Throne, it is very unlikely he would ever ascend. Still, he is our link to the Royal Family, for the years to come.

If Rhaenys is to get pregnant, it will be from Ser Arthur; so, you see...our only real chance to have a half Tyrell sitting on the Iron Throne is through you and Ser Jaime.”

Ollena held Margaray’s hands very tight and , looking into her eyes, said with conviction: “ As for your future husband...Margaery, I was good...very good. But you...you will be better! Make his bed warm, very warm; so warm as to make any other woman he might fuck cold in comparison to you ; have his sons happy and Casterly Rock well cared for...make this and I assure you, Ser Jaime will be incapable of denying you anything. I know his type; he is born to be a soldier, not a Lord. Good for us, we can use that.“

***
Aegon Targaryen took his vows; but not as a Septon, like his sire had expected. No, he joined the Holy Hundred, warriors that served as guard and army to the Faith.

No, Aegon would not serve the same High Septon that had his Mother set aside. She was the only family he had. His Father took everything from him, all to give to his whore and their abomination of a son. Aegon saw that the King did not drink the wine; who is not to say that he himself was not responsible for the whole thing?

Aegon gave up his rights to the Iron Throne yes, but this did not mean he would not save Westeros. His healer, Qyburn, was appalled when Aegon signed the document, reminding him that he was Elia’s legacy.

But that was precisely the point; Aegon would be honouring his Mother by bringing Justice to the High Septon and the King; and he would do that by becoming One with the Seven, as he had been born to.

Aegon never considered himself to be the child of a ridiculous prophecy; no, he was a miracle of the Faith. His conception was blessed and now that he was a man, he would show everybody that he could do more than pray and fast for salvation.

Aegon was determined to save the Realm, even if he would have to fight for it.

His Septon had showed him the way: “When time comes for us to clean Westeros from the sins of your father, to reclaim the power that was stolen from us by corrupted nobles, greedy men that bleed our hearts and souls for their own profit, and to save the Faith from this position of weakness, you, Aegon Targaryen, will be the Warrior’s hand to draw the first blood. “

Chapter End Notes

I do not think I am going too far with Brandon and Catelyn; in canon, there are hints that Brandon had forced himself on women. Lady Barbrey famously said that he was not shy in taking what he wanted. I think Brandon and Robert are very alike in that. I never read Bobby B as anything less than a monster to women; Ned loved him and was blind for his vices because they were vices of their time period and him, as most men, could simply not see a friend as a sexual predator or anything less than a ”nice guy”.

Bobby B raped Cersei many times. She was the one that took upon herself to offer him oral pleasure as to run away from that man, one way or another. The wenches and other women he took might have been willing because of his position as King, not because they thought him attractive.

So, yes, Brandon Stark would be capable of raping Catelyn in this AU, that is heavily based on my headcanons and assumptions. I only change the setting and context, but I try to work their personalities as closely as possible of what they would be, had the situation be different.
Brewing Troubled Times

Chapter Summary

Houses Targaryen and Martell apparently reach an agreement, but did they really?
Lord Stark decided to be a wolf; Maester Flowers averts a disaster, for now.
Ser Jaime Lannister weds Lady Margaery Tyrell.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

House Targaryen 296 A.C

The fertility ritual started with Lady Melisandre chanting in High Valyrian, asking the fire within Arianne to warm her womb and make it home to Viserys seed. The strange red woman was a vision, her round shaped breasts would dance as she moved swiftly from Arianne to Viserys, painting their flesh with a red paste made of seeds and blood of a sacrificed cow. It smelled surprisingly good, for what the Targaryen Prince was thankful; he did not want to puke and ruin all the lady´s efforts, the ruby in her choker gleaming with her power.

Melisandre blessed the huge bed and they all undressed. Much to Arianne´s displeasure, Daemon Sand was not allowed. “ Do not worry, sweet wife” Viserys said when informed of the ban “ I will make up to you afterwards.”

The Red Priestess was a very skilled lover, Viserys had to give her that; she sucked him slow, deep and hard, while her hand was rubbing Arianne´s nub gently. In no time, the couple was panting.

Viserys came as Melisandre furiously pumped him and filled her mouth with his seed; he then saw as she divided the thick fluid into two. One half went inside a strange device, a long and thin cylinder made of a material unknown to the Prince.

The other half of Viserys seed was inserted into Arianne by Melisandre, who kissed the Princess of Dorne´s cunt and transferred her husband's seed with her sensual tongue. No drop of the precious liquid fell out, as Melisandre continued to press her mouth, covering Arianne´s intimate parts, while raising her ass up a bit, to ensure that everything went to the right place and there, stayed.

After some minutes, Arianne was instructed to turn over; Melisandre guided Viserys in professionally penetrating his wife with the strangely shaped artificial penis. There was nothing arousing in this action; it had to be performed with meticulous care and precision, things Viserys had no patience for.

Melisandre gave Arianne a fertility potion that had the Princess knocked out in a matter of seconds; “ She needs to sleep for a couple of hours; hopefully, by then, she will have conceived.”

The Red Priestess then proceeded to ride Viserys with great passion while his wife laid by their side, unconscious and blissfully unaware.
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King Rhaegar made Lord Varys the new Master of Whispers before their departure from Pentos. Arianne and Ser Daemon Sand would stay for an additional fortnight and, from there, they would sail back to Sunspear.

Unsurprisingly, Lady Melisandre had also been invited by the Princess of Dorne to visit the Martell Court as, in the days after the fertility ritual, the two had become almost inseparable.

Rhaegar felt it was necessary to alert his brother of the risks of such liaison and, while Viserys agreed it was very stupid and naive of Arianne to have formed this attachment, he was of a different opinion: “Let my wife have a new plaything, brother... what happens in Dorne, stays in Dorne. As long as Arianne will not bring her to King's Landing, there is nothing to be feared. Prince Doran would never allow his heiress to be that foolish.”

Well, at least Viserys did not fall prey himself. “Brother, you are smart and never gave me any trouble. I trust you with my life and you are a dragon, loyal to our House. The only weakness you have and I am afraid it will be explored, are your romantic attachments. Adding Melisandre to your list of lovers would have been stupid...and yet, I feel you did not do so because there is a woman in your life that casts a huge shadow on whoever you occasionally sleep with.”

Viserys had always been rather unrepentant in the way he lived his life. He was discreet and careful; there were no bastard around and his lovers tended to be understanding of his appetites. Except for Cersei: “You mean, you worry about my lioness? Yes, I love her, Rhaegar, but you have nothing to fear from us.”

“Us? Is that serious, Vis?”

Why deny it if it was so obvious? “Yes, it is. I never thought it would happen, but I found my match. She is selfish, jealous and unpredictable, but she is also loyal, fierce and loving. What I have with Arianne and Daemon, I cherish...yet, I would prefer to have Cersei as wife, if only because I would have been father for a second time by now…”

Rhaegar pitied his brother. He had been in the same situation before. Damm Martell women! Setting a wife aside was very difficult for the followers of the Faith, but possible. The High Septon only agreed to have him betrothed to Daenerys while Elia still drew breath because his first wife was unable to continue to perform her marital duties for health reasons and issued a special license due to the old Valyrian custom of multiple wives.

Had the High Septon not been persuaded, Rhaegar would have to force Elia to join the Silent Sisters, freeing him of the bonds of marriage, while keeping their children as legitimate.

He could not see Arianne ever agreeing to join the Faith; she was of age when she married Viserys, of course, and it would be difficult, but not impossible, to convince the present High Septon that she had took the Oaths under duress...

However...he had to consider Dorne. Dorne. Rhaegar had been very careful in making sure that Rhaenys and her line were mentioned in the succession line, both because he loved his daughter and would not use an old and tired Great Council decision just to disinherit her, but also because of her Martell heritage.

But while Rhaenys was his niece, Arianne was Prince Doran’s daughter, and the ruler of Dorne desired to maintain this link with the Royal Family intact.
“We proceed with caution, Vis; we give Arianne more time with you, a year perhaps... if nothing works and Marwyn confirming the infertility, we could force them to reach an agreement with us.” Rhaegar said with confidence.

Viserys could not afford to be hopeful for nothing, and decided to press the matter further: “You would have to offer them a much better deal, brother. Or threaten them.” He shook his head, his hand half covering his mouth. “It should have been simple…”

“It never is.” As the mood soured, Rhaegar decided to remind Viserys that this was, after all, their Father’s and Lord Lannister’s fault: “Your hand was offered to Cersei, you know...but the Old Lion preferred to wait for a son of mine, a Prince of Dragonstone.”

Viserys did know it, of course: “The plight of the second son: always losing to the firstborn.” Then he sighted “Well, if I ever need Cersei to hate her father even more, all I must do is tell her of this.”

Rhaegar wished to go home as soon as possible, but he had come to the conclusion that a visit to Sunspear was inevitable. “You go to King’s Landing and help Daenerys, brother; I will sail to Dorne...to pay my respects to Elia’s grave of course and to speak with Prince Doran. I must also take the opportunity to meet our loyal subjects, from Dorne to the Crownlands. Wait for my arrival to announce Dany’s pregnancy...it is early yet; I do not intend in staying longer than a day in each Castle, but it is another necessary step I must take.”

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House Martell

King Rhaegar and Prince Doran played their parts flawlessly; His Grace thanked for the hospitality and announced he came to visit his “beloved first wife’s resting place.” to which the ruler of Dorne replied what a honour it was to receive his goodbrother, that yes, he would gladly take him to Elia…

After the farce was over, the supper, served and the guests, spoken to, they took their conversation to the privacy of the Prince’s solar, where they were joined by Oberyn.

“To what do we owe your visit, Rhaegar.” Doran plainly asked.

“I am of the opinion that Arianne and Viserys need to spend more time together, but I start to wonder if it would actually make any difference.” Oberyn raised an eyebrow but said nothing; Rhaegar continued. “In hopes of conceiving a much needed Alyssane for my Jaehaerys, I allowed them both to take part in a fertility ritual at Pentos...to which I am now sorry, as Arianne is now infatuated with a Red Priestess, and I know for a fact that the red woman has her own agenda. “

Prince Doran knew the daughter he had and was not surprised to hear it: “Arianne has a vivid imagination and spends too long in the company of Ser Daemon Sand; of course, you are aware of the arrangement they have with your brother...Viserys surely is not blaming Arianne for taking a new lover. I personally think she is only reacting to her husband spending more time with the Lannister woman...”

“...who already got pregnant from my brother twice, hence the problem is not in him.”

“Lady Arryn could be laying with others, if I know Viserys well, he would not mind…” Oberyn playfully announced, then his expression changed, from soft to hard. “Besides, Arianne was with
Rhaegar cleared his throat; it was never easy to speak with the Martells, but he had learned to use their own poison against them: “Or you might just have given me more reasons to believe that Arianne is barren; if she was indeed pregnant from Daemon, she had to abort it...a wrong dosage or a bad reaction to the tea and it could have ruined her womb.”

Prince Doran did not even flinch: “You came here to have Arianne set aside then, regardless of what we tell you...why bother telling us if you have decided already? The High Septon surely will not deny you this...”

Rhaegar was happy with the results; they would reach an agreement since he had now the upper hand: “You wound me, Doran. We were a family. Before she became what she did because of Aegon, Elia was good to me. I am here to warn House Martell that your heiress, my good sister, brings home a former mistress of mine, known for being a religious fanatic. It took me a sennight to notice this, and I could not be fast enough to get rid of Melisandre.

But Arianne is young, she might be too open to such influence; you should not allow this Melisandre to linger longer or acquire any political acumen, lest you risk having problems with the Faith and yes, the High Septon is a friend of mine...if the Princess embarrass herself worshipping a Red God or not getting pregnant in the next year...well...I will be forced to seek an annulment.

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Arianne missed the times when it was only her, Daemon and Viserys.

*Now that he has the Lannister woman...I can have my own bed warmer too.*

Melisandre was always very warm; her skin was soft and her kisses, wet and sensual. They worked well in bed but while she and daemon enjoyed the new dynamic, both missed their husband.

There were, of course, other reasons to keep the red woman around, reasons that had to do with the future of her marriage to Viserys.

They needed a heir; Arianne was not idiot: the moontea she took when she fell pregnant of Daemon while Viserys was in The North could have made her barren. She reacted badly to it: bled for days, had fever and the pain in her mid section was almost unbearable.

Afterwards, her moonblood would come every time without fail, but it was very different from what she had been used.

Melisandre was the one to confirm her suspicions: “ My Princess, your womb will not quicken...the magic in the tea you took was wrong for you, much too cold, it froze you from inside.”

Arianne cried. “ What should I do, Lady Melisandre?I must conceive...otherwise, I will lose Viserys...they can even force me to join the Silent Sisters.”

“Oo, no...the Lord of Light would never allow this, my Princess.” Melisandre then suggested an alternative method of conception.

“Your husband is a virile man; the dragon blood in him makes him warm and strong. There are other ways, yes...a carrier would be a safer option...a child of fire could potentially kill you.”
Arianne insisted there should have been another way: “My Father would want his line to live through Viserys offspring; in Westeros, may things are different, my Lady.”

“The situation is dire, my Princess; as you said, it is not about your Father’s line, but about your future. The Lord of Light is in a constant fight with the Great Other and cannot possibly turn such Ice Magic without grave consequences. The child born out of you with pure fire magic would probably be your death; it could burn you inside out. I could survive such ordeal, but I spent years beyond count developing my powers.

A carrier, one of your choosing...the child would be conceived in your marital bed, with your husband...my spells and potions could make you look pregnant. You must consider this carefully, my Princess.”

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The brothers had to wait until His Grace left Sunspear to start with the Royal Progress until King’s Landing to finally speak freely.

“Had I known, dear brother...I would not have said what I said. Rhaegar is not stupid; he already put two and two together...”

Oberyn was right, Doran knew it. Things always got in the way of his most carefully laid plans and this time, it was not different: “Maester Caleotte was only sure of the diagnosis a day before we sailed to King’s Landing. You must agree the Red Keep was not the right place to have this conversation...and then...Elia died.”

Prince Oberyn was aware of Arianne’s secret pregnancy yes, but not of the consequences. ..he had just arrived at Sunspear to visit Elia’s grave and, had Rhaegar arrived a day later, Doran would have told him and prevented such misstep.

“Speak, brother of mine.”

Doran explained that Viserys trip to the North took twice the expected time. Arianne found out that she was pregnant, and could not possibly be Viserys; the dates did not add up. She went to Maester Caleotte and he himself brewed Arianne moontea, unaware that she had drank pennyroyal tea in the morning, as she had woken up with an indigestion and the tea was highly consumed in Dorne to induce vomit after a heavy night of drinking.

Arianne feel sick almost immediately, but she eventually recovered and her cycles returned. As the years passed and Caleotte was able to observe the changes in Arianne’s cycle- the frequency remained more or less the same, but the bleeding was heavier, and accompanied with back and pelvic pain- and the lack of pregnancy, despite having enough relations with Viserys, only recently the Maester was confident enough to deliver the terrible diagnosis.

“Now, the dragon comes and give us an ultimatum; the High Septon would not hesitate in giving Rhaegar what he wants. Your friends at The Citadel...do you think they could help us? We do have one year...”

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House Arryn
Viserys had arrived a fortnight before his mistress was to turn thirty and they were now celebrating the date with wine and sex.

The Prince, of course, had brought Cersei many nameday’s gifts and insisted she was to try out all her presents before his eyes: “You look splendid, lioness. One could say I was seduced by this much more sophisticated Lady, that you took advantage of me and that I cover you with extravagant gifts because you entralled me with your golden cunt.”

Cersei was naked before the mirror, admiring the emerald necklace, the beautifully crafted golden chain and the stone falling between her breasts: “Nobody would say that; you have much more experience than I and the things you do to me…are wicked! You are the one spoiling me, actually.”

“Good; I hate the idea of sharing you…” Viserys laid spread in her bed; he made a gesture for Cersei to join him, and when she did, she started to kiss her, greedily.

“I noticed you had not given me your leave this time to take a lover in your absence. One would think that you are becoming jealous…” Cersei was playful, but they both knew things were even more serious now than before. The death of Lady Joanna and Cersei’s second pregnancy had brought them even closer.

The hard truth was that, this time, both had hesitated in making use of the moontea; the decision could only be one, but it did not make any less painful: “I have missed you so, my dragonknight…the last days were very hard; I cannot possibly bear the thought of…”

“I know, beloved…neither can I; nothing would bring me more joy than you with my child…but we should not torture ourselves; we have reasons to hope.”

Cersei placed her hand on his cock; it was hard again.” Have you no limits, Vis? “

Viserys would have liked to show Cersei how unbridled his enthusiasm was, but they had much to talk: “Rhaegar was able to send me a private message; he is about to cross into the dornish marches. A deal was made with House Martell; in one year’s time, if Arianne is not pregnant, one of us will request an annulment, possibly hers…and we will be wed.”

This, of course, was better than any piece of jewelry Viserys would have given her; Cersei laughed: “Oh, my handsome Prince, this year cannot pass fast enough; but us, from lovers to husband and wife…tell me, would you be faithful to me?”

Viserys had not been faithful to anyone but himself, could he really be capable of such devotion?” By the Seven, lions are greedy creatures! I will not say I would, Cersei. The truth is, I do not know. Myera has done nothing wrong to be cast off and Ser Daemon would want to visit me from time to time, don’t you think?”

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House Stark

Arya Dustin had always disliked Lady Barbrey Cerwyn, but now she positively hated her.
“You know, she is just toying with you, Gendry.” the Dustin heiress told the knight after their first practice together since she arrived from King's Landing. “She is my uncle’s mistress and only lays with him.”

Ser Gendry was touched by Arya’s concern, but he was older; if not experienced, also not that naive: “It is what Ladies do; they flirt with lowborn knights to pass their time. I know my place, my Lady.”

Arya offered him a sad smile and Gendry decided to change the subject: “Tell me about the trip…”

“Well, I was not allowed to go to Flea Bottom, if that is what you are asking…” Gendry had told her that, after his mother died, he was taken into apprenticeship at Tobho Mott, a famous armorer of Qohor, one of the few who could still work with Valyrian Steel. “But I did not need to; His Grace is fond of Starks, and especially, of my late mother, so my cousins and I managed to spend most of our time together. Sansa is even training at arms now...the only bad thing was that our direwolves had to stay most of the time in the kennels; we would only take them to daily strolls at the nearby beach, but the place stank so bad…”

Ser Gendry winced; yes, the smell was the worst part of King's Landing, but Arya had only stayed near the Red Keep, so she did not really experienced it.

“One day I did get outside the Red Keep’s Gates and got into a fight; I won, of course...they did not know I was a girl and, well...Hot Pie is not much of a fighter.”

“You mean the fat boy that now works in the Kitchens?” Well, that explains the thick accent. “How did you convince your Lord Father to bring the boy North?”

“Hot Pie is an orphan and one of his friends, Lommys, thought it was a good idea to join The Watch. So, we met them after we left Riverrun. It was my idea to offer Hot Pie a place to stay with us...I really do not think he would survive The Wall…”

Ser Gendry had to agree with this assessment.

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Nymeria was the first to know that Jon- and Ghost- were near Barrow Hall and informed her mistress, who was at the Gates to welcome her cousin into her Castle:

“Jon! I am so happy to see you again, especially because I know you are taking our dear Lady Cerwyn away from us.”

“Arya, you are terrible at using a Lady’s armour.” Jon had not against Lady Barbrey, but he could see Arya had a different opinion. “What uncle’s special friend has done to displease you so?”

“She insisted I wear a dress for supper...everybody knows I only wear dresses when we have visitors and on special occasions.”

Jon could have rolled his eyes, but he pretended to be scandalized “Oh, poor Arya Dustin...my Lady, I am here to fight for your honour...Ouch!”

Arya knew the punch did not hurt. “Sorry, I am stronger than I thought...you think me spoiled, right? Ser Gendry is the same…”
“No, you are not spoiled...just willful.” Jon was being honest, but he could also see that Arya’s behaviour could be misinterpreted as spoiled; she was, after all, a single daughter of a much loving father. “I heard you had quite an adventure through the Riverlands with Yoren’s group.”

“Oh, yes...I rescued some prisoners from a fire.” Arya then showed Jon a very strange coin, and said, in a whisper. “One of them gave me this coin... and told me, if I ever needed, to show this it at any ship with a braavosi flag, that I would travel for free...”

***

Queenscrown was surrounded by apples and Oak trees; the Inn at the village would take most of the visitors for the holdfast, which was nothing more than a Tower. Benjen had invested much of Jonelle’s dowry in repairs, to make the place comfortable for a small family, but he already set his mind in building additions and walling.

Because of it, Benjen would be spending the coming moons overseeing the construction, probably the longest he would be at Queenscrown since he became its Lord.

The messages he had received from Mance Rayder at Bay of Ice were positive; they were settled and he was, if not happy with his Lady wife, at least content. “The She-Bear is as though as you said she would be; good, the Free Folk already respect Lyra.”

Benjen vowed not to drag Val again to Winterfell; she hated his brother and disliked his ancestral home: “You said the Tower is not much, but is all we need. My people is nearby, we have the forest and the outdoors and the air is fresh. Winterfell smells of death.”

“Winterfell smells of shit, because this is what my brother is made of.” Val agreed and, as usual, brought the subject of Rickon returning home.

“Burn this paper you signed...if you want, invite Bran here; he is indeed far from an invalid and your son does love his cousin.”

Benjen did not want to talk about it and spoil the mood, as he was trying to undress Val and get her to bed:” After the Harvest Fest, yes...Lord Stark will enjoy some time alone with his mistress...he always wanted to turn Winterfell into a brothel anyway.”

He knew that Val would never admit it, but she was happy with her life as a Lady as long as nobody would dare call her so at Queenscrown; and best of all, his wife was happy with him. “Tonight, I will put a baby in you, you will see...Rickon needs a brother, or sister...and your sister is expecting too, so it is about time, Val.”

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Lady Barbrey stopped at Castle Cerwyn only for a night; the next day, she was received at Winterfell, escorted by Ser Jon, and from the minute she stepped in, Barbrey was treated as the de facto Lady Stark, managing both the Keep and the appetites of Lord Stark.

Bran would never again be warm towards Barbrey, the woman he had once loved as an aunt. However, he only blamed his Father for his fall; Barbrey showed more remorse and guilt than his father over the accident and, because of it, Bran had already forgiven her.
Bran was distant, but polite; Barbrey respected his decision, as one should, and, for a time, life was peaceful at Winterfell.

They sent the ravens with invitations for the Harvest Fest by midsummer; as The North was so big, some would need about three fortnights to reach Winterfell, give or take, and Lady Barbrey was very busy with the preparations when they received terrible news from the Dreadfort: Domeric Bolton had suddenly died.

Barbrey was inconsolable and convinced that the death was not of natural causes: “It was the bastard; I travelled there twice and the stories they told about him...Roose is as cold as a snake; he knows exactly what his wretched son does and it amuses him. But Domeric...he was different; more Ryswell than Bolton.”

On the second week of the ninth month of the year 296 A.C, Lord Stark received many of his bannermen for Harvest Fest. Lord Reed did not come, but sent his heirs, Lady Meera and Jojen and they both became Bran and Rickon´s most constant companions in the days that followed.

The pregnancy of Her Grace Queen Daenerys was announced, as it was the official bethrotal of Lady Sansa and Ser Edmure, the wedding to take place in about nine moons. Both announcements were celebrated with toasts by the Northern Lords, but Domeric Bolton´s unexpected death remained the most discussed topic by far.

In the absence of Lord Bolton many rumours were heard at the Feast; they were in fact so numerous, that Lord Stark decided to speak in private with the Lords neighboring Bolton lands, Barbrey and her father: “As the Lord Paramount is my responsibility to see for my people´s safety. Therefore, I beg of you: if there is any real proof, or witness, of foul play in the death of our beloved Domeric, bring this matter to me, discreetly, and I will demand that Lord Bolton deliver us his bastard. If there is no truth in said rumours...I ask you to stop speaking about it, at least here at Winterfell.”

Personally, Brandon had already concluded Barbrey was right; he would have sent Lord Bolton a raven demanding Bolton to send Ramsay Snow to await judgemt at Winterfell, if not for Maester Flowers, who convinced him of this folly: “I am not saying the rumours are not true, my Lord; merely that we need proof, before you are to serve Justice.”

Brandon disliked Lord Roose and was greedy for more land; House Bolton was a historical rival of House Stark, always making trouble. Brandon knew that Lord Bolton still followed the tradition of the First Night, which was outlawed, but so did his best friends in The North, House Umber, and he could not possibly bring one to Justice without acknowledging the other.

Besides, Lord Bolton was one of those, like Lord Karstark, that were raising their voices against the Free Folk at the New Gift. Benjen had done an amazing job and even the Mountain Clans living is his lands were tolerating the wildlings. They were keeping to themselves, as agreed; Lady Val had explained marriage by abduction would be acceptable among their tribes, but not among the Northerners and, so far, only one man disobeyed and paid with his head for the offense.

Despite the signs of peaceful integration, Lord Bolton was indeed trying to use the wildlings of the New Gift as means to create a divide in the North.

Brandon would not allow it; and Domeric Bolton´s death might be exactly what he needed to bring Lord Bolton to his knees.
House Tully

Catelyn had stayed for a fortnight at Seaguard, happily playing with Lysa’s four children and visiting the vibrant markets near the harbour, where she bought enough fabric to give the seamstress at Riverrun lots to do.

Lysa could not believe Littlefinger had been bold enough to have killed both a Queen and a Princess: “Petyr had always been intelligent; he was doing very well with Cersei at The Vale. They said he wanted to kill the Crown Prince...do you believe it, Cat?”

It was not a matter of believing, really; he was working with the organization and had access to poison due to his many connections. “Lysa, people do change; the Prince was a terrible boy; many were fearful of his ascension. He almost attacked my Sansa at Dragonstone, the vile creature. Petyr’s undoing was that Aegon disliked wine, but Elia and Lady Joanna, no. It was an accident.”

She then left for Riverrun; her brother would be taking the river road to attend the wedding of Ser Jaime Lannister and Lady Margaery Tyrell at Casterly Rock and he Lord Father gave her his leave to attend the event, as Sansa was taking the Golden Road with Prince Viserys and his retinue and they would all meet and make merry in the Westerlands.

Catelyn said nothing of Brandon and neither her father or brother asked.

Sansa, however, wanted to understand what was happening; Catelyn could not possibly break her daughter’s heart and tell her the whole truth: “My daughter, soon you will marry our Edmure, who is loving and caring. I am sure you two will be happy together, but I was unlucky. Your Father became more...difficult of late and he allowed me to travel to be with you and my family.”

“Bran is also our family; I should write Father and ask him to send my brother...I miss him so, and I know you would never have parted from him if given the choice.”

Catelyn could not deny that, if somebody could convince Brandon, it would be Sansa. Her daughter wrote, but no raven came from Winterfell to Casterly Rock.

House Lannister

Ten moon turns after the death of his beloved daughter, Ser Jaime Lannister married a five and ten years old girl at Casterly Rock, in a lavish ceremony at their Sept. Since Her Grace was pregnant and the King decided to stay at King’s Landing, Prince Viserys and his wife, the Princess of Dorne, were in attendance.

Lady Myranda Royce stayed at the Red Keep to attend the Queen; the two others ladies in waiting, Lady Sansa and Lady Brienne of Tarth also came to take part in the Feast. Ser Jaime was told that his niece, Lady Myrcella, and an Yronwood girl were being trained to take the places of Margaery and Sansa.

One after the other, nobles from all the Seven Kingdoms came to congratulate him on his beautiful bride; Jaime thanked each one of them, of course.

Margaery was indeed pretty and nice to his sons, but he only agreed in marrying her to save his
beloved daughter from a terrible future and now that Joanna was dead, the deal he struck with his Father was all for nothing.

Sandor Clegane and Tyrion, as usual, were the ones to understand Jaime’s internal turmoil, but they hardly were understanding types.

“Bugger that! What are you, a prized horse for breeding?” Clegane spat when Jamie told him about the upcoming nuptials.” One day you should grow a ball, you know, and tell your Lord Father you have done enough…”

“Precisely because I have balls that my Lord Father wants to me to keep giving House Lannister golden haired beauties for him to bethrote to House Targaryen.” Jaime had no illusions; he was a noble with no talent for politicking, therefore, his value was in the battlefield and in his fertility. Westeros had been in peace for over thirty years; Jaime was a good soldier, whose only experience in battle was winning Tourneys.

Being asked to marry, bed and sire daughter with a lovely girl, he reasoned, was not that bad.

But then, Joanna died in his arms, and a part of Jaime died with her.

Tyrion had urged him to, at least, postpone the wedding to Lady Margaery for a couple of years, hopefully giving Prince Viserys enough time to have daughters on his own : “Lord Father will expect a girl...are you going to commit the same mistake again, Jaime? Allow your own to pay for your Father's ambitions?”

Jaime knew their Father better than any of his siblings; the notion that a couple of years would make a difference to the Old Lion was ridiculous: “Have you perchance heard the Rains of Castamere? That was our Father; the man did that because he could not live with people laughing about House Lannister. And he was but a boy. What do you think he would do now, in his old age? How far do you think he would not go to see House Lannister above all other Great Houses?”

Lord Tywin Lannister took his good daughter's hands and they danced in the Great Hall; he was fit and muscular even in his fifties and jaime, for a second, decided to pretend it was his Father who married the doe eyed girl and not him.

But no, they would have laughed of him; an old man lusting after a young girl...

Jamie looked around and everybody looked happy...it was like Joanna not died; they had all moved on, clearly, or , at least, they pretended better than him. Even Sandor Clegane was speaking with that horrible woman, the Maid of Tarth; they had been training at arms and, apparently, she had defeated him a couple of times already.

He was imagining the sight of Clegane being beat up by the immense and strange woman when Prince Viserys came to speak to him: “ It was a beautiful ceremony, Ser; your sister is sad she could not be in attendance.”

Jaime doubted Cersei was sad, but it was the expected and socially accepted feeling to have, when missing a brother’s wedding. “ Well, mayhaps next time she will come, right?”

Jaime raised his goblet in a mock toast; Viserys did the same: “Mayhaps you needed more time to recover, but your Lord Father...he is not known for being a sentimental man.”

No, Tywin Lannister is not. “ While I appreciate your candour in speaking truthly about my feelings and my father's decisions, I know you for a player: what do you want?”
“My sister is pregnant; my niece suspects she also is, but my wife...my poor wife, she is not. House Lannister had an agreement with House Targaryen and we kept our side of the bargain; destiny intervened in a much horrid and unfair matter- even my brother would have prefered his disgusting son to have perished instead of your sweet daughter, but the Gods are cruel.

So here is what I came to tell you, and only you. I want what was promised; what was promised to me. In less than an year, I will have an annulment; I will wed your sister and we will have a daughter and our daughter, she will become Queen.

To answer your question, I am telling you this not as a warning, but to give you hope: you do not need to fear losing any more of your children in the crossfire. Lord Lannister will have a half lion as Queen, but not from your line.”

Chapter End Notes

For every magical thing in ASOIAF, there is a partial scientific explanation behind it:

http://awoiaf.westeros.org/index.php/Moon_tea

Moon tea is based on natural abortifacients. According to George R. R. Martin, he added some fantasy touches, as the actual recipe can be very dangerous, and should not be tried in real life.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mentha_pulegium

As you can see...pennyroyal has many uses but what happened is that Arianne overdosed by accident. Even today, with ultrasound and modern medicine, a doctor would most probably only give an infertility diagnosis after a year of unprotected sex without results.
The worries of mothers

Chapter Summary

House Stark marches.
The Queen worries and Lady Catelyn suffers in silence.

House Targaryen 296 A.C

Daenerys was midway through her second pregnancy when she felt a need to return to Dragonstone, the place she called home.

Since his return from his Royal Progress, Rhaegar had been rather insistant in his attentions; not that Daenerys wanted to deny him, but this pregnancy felt different; she worried more, ever since she became a mother.

Daenerys worried about everything.

What kind of world were they building? What if they were taking the right steps, but going the wrong way?

Rhaegar was so obsessed with the prophecy, with saving the Realm, with the future, that he forgot the present.

Aegon was, once again, being ignored by his Father; it was like he had never left...the former Prince was seeking his revenge by travelling the Realm, convincing the smallfolk that Daenerys was a whore and Rhaegar, a worshiper of false Gods.

She was Queen and Rhaegar was King; if somebody could change things for the better, it would be them and that was what she felt they should be doing: working to leave the world a better place for Jaehaerys. This meant dealing with Aegon, once and for all; this meant acting to make the lives of the smallfolk better, when all Aegon was doing was promising them a place in the Seven Heavens.

This meant Rhaegar raising above the Game of Thrones.

Because while Rhaegar was convinced she was the Princess that was Promised, the one to finally defeat the Great Enemy, Daenerys knew their son would be the King to rebuild Westeros, one of the many who would bring the Dawn after the war was won.

Daenerys feared that Rhaegar was being engulfed by the Great Lords and their squabbles.

“I wish to leave for Dragonstone, my love; our child should be born there. I am tired of life at Court.” Daenerys said after Rhaegar was satisfied for the night; she was in his arms, enjoying the after bliss of their lovemaking, when her husband finally noticed there was something more behind her eyes and asked.

“You wish to leave now? Why not in two moon turns, when you are near the date?”

She could lie and say she had a dream; Rhaegar would create no problems and allow her to leave immediately if she wanted, but he was both her brother and husband...lying to him was an
impossibility.

“I just feel I must go; there is something there I cannot find here. Peace, for once. “

Rhaegar caressed her growing belly; it was rounder and it looked heavier than when she carried Jahaerys at this stage. “Do as you must, beloved…I would much prefer you stay, I will miss you very much.”

He then moved down south, his face between her legs; his seed was still warm inside and the smell ever present, but if much, it made him ever more eager to try her. Rhaegar licked and sucked her until she moaned and said his name, spreading her legs and inviting him in again.

The next day, His Grace announced that Queen Daenerys would be joined by a select group of trusted friends and her ladies in waiting at Dragonstone.

***

House Bolton

“The drunken wolf is demanding I deliver you into his custody, bastard; his dear mistress is the sister of my late wife. They believe you killed my only legitimate child and heir, Domeric…the last time I saw him alive and well, he decided to pay you a visit. I obviously told him not to…that you would kill him and so you did. “

Roose Bolton was cold; everybody with half an eye and ear could see and hear there was no emotion left in him. The loss of an only son would be a terrible blow for any father and a tragedy for a House like Bolton, without any living uncles, cousins or other relations.

Lord Bolton, however, was not any father. In his mind, he had alerted Domeric of his impending doom; the boy had chose his destiny, so be it. He went on, as nothing had happened. Lord Bolton contacted House Frey, asking for one of their daughters; Lord Walder was pleased, offered the weight in silver as a dowry. He went to the Twins as fast as he could and chose the fattest one.

The wedding would take place in a year time.

This, of course, if he survived this folly.

“Are you giving me to them, Father?” Ramsay asked matter of factly; he cared very little if he was to die, but, if he was to live…he would make sure no more sons would come out of his Lord Father's loins.

Ramsay knew his Father respected him for this, but even Roose Bolton had to answer to his Liege Lord.

“No. I am just giving you fair warning. You have friends and time. You can either go to White Harbour and run to the Free Cities, become a sell sword…or, you can continue to serve me, by leaving a trail of destruction and chaos in The North. “

Lord Bolton could not abide to be seen as weak; to deliver Ramsay Snow would be admitting his bastard had killed his heir and he had done nothing to either prevent or avenge the death of a noble born man in his own lands.

People would think he was trying to protect his only living son, but in truth, The North should be
protected from Ramsay Snow.

Lord Bolton solved this dilemma as soon as he received the raven from Winterfell, announcing that enough witnesses and proof were found to prosecute Ramsay.

He would do nothing.

If he sent Ramsay, the bastard would spill all his secrets; the witnesses Lord Stark had would corroborate everything and the wolf would march with all the might of the North on House Bolton; they would fall.

If he allowed Ramsay to go away, at least his bastard would survive when him and his House would die out a painful death.

If Ramsay chose to fight, his bastard could probably end some noble Houses, make House Stark look weak and give time for Lord Bolton to prepare for a siege; House Bolton would then bend the knee; he would marry Fat Walda and in years, everything would be forgotten.

Ramsay did not need much time; his choice had been made long time ago: “I choose violence.”

“Good. Get as many of your men and leave our lands, unnoticed; they will come here and you, you will go there; do not go to The Neck...you would not see them, but they would see you in a matter of days. Kill as many Starks, Cerwyns, Ryswells, Dustins as you possibly can…”

Even if Lord Stark was smart enough to storm the Dreadfort, Roose trusted his bastard to bleed The North.

"Remind them why we were called Red Kings once."

***

House Stark

Brandon read the parchment from Dreadfort and start cursing: “The leach! Lord Bolton says his bastard escaped to White Harbour. Does not even write that he tried to stop or send men after him. He is defying ME!”

Maester Flowers is concerned this laconic answer hides secret meanings: “Why would Lord Bolton tell us his bastard’s whereabouts? We could of course send a raven to House Manderly and ask to close the harbour, but it still begs the question of his participation in the crime, as he is doing nothing to prevent a criminal from escaping when he claims to know exactly the route of escape.”

“This is a trap; Roose has no blood, nor heart; he does not care for Ramsay, or anything really...we are his playthings, you see? This is all a game for him.” Lady Barbrey had observed her good brother for years and, from all the people at Winterfell, she was the one to know Lord Bolton best. “He is the last Bolton; Domeric died and he went straight to the Twins for a new bride. Roose is not the kind of man to stay in his Castle contemplating the end of his House. He has a plan; he is preparing for war and he thinks he has a chance at winning or, at least, of surviving long enough to bend the knee when Winter comes and we will have no other choice then to return home.”

Both Ser Jon and Jory Cassel agreed with Lady Barbrey’s assessment.
“No siege then; we march and storm the Castle. We must return to Winterfell by the third month of the coming year. We send ravens to every House informing that Lord Bolton refused to deliver us the fugitive Ramsay Snow, and that we are marching. We must say we have enough evidence of both Lord Bolton and his bastards wrongdoings.”

“If I may suggest something, my Lord.” Maester Flowers said: “We should list the crimes both are found to be guilty of in the letter and that you are personally going to the Dreadfort to bring Lord Bolton to Justice; he is a noble and would be seen as too harsh if you are to declare war when he is not in open defiance. We could say that any movements by Bolton men outside their lands is to be considered an offense. Only then, we should declare war.”

Brandon Stark would always prefer to solve such conflicts with war, but he also liked to be seen as a just leader. “We send this ravens as you suggested and march with the men we can gather in a sennight; send an additional raven to Houses Hornwood, requesting their men to meet us in the borders of the Bolton Lands, and Houses Umber and Karstark to also move men to their borders and wait for our summons, if it ever comes to that.”

***

Jon Stark requested to remain at Winterfell to protect his cousin, Bran. At five and ten and already knighted, Jon was not eager for any piece of glory a man could find in war; all he wanted was to keep his family safe. Rickon had left for Queenscrown after the Harvest Fest and Jon had a feeling his uncle Benjen would not be sending the boy back anytime soon.

The way uncle Brandon was preparing, it would only leave Winterfell with a small garrison; while Jon could see the wisdom of trying to end the conflict in no time, as the Maesters expected Winter to come in a matter of years and the idea of laying siege to a Northern castle during Autumn was laughable, their ancestral home would be left in a position of weakness for at least two moon turns. The men of Wintertown were being trained upon Jon’s insistence, but it was still a great risk they were taking.

“Uncle, nobody knows where this Ramsay is...Lord Manderly has not found any trace of him and all we have is Lord Bolton's word he went to White Harbour: I should stay to defend Bran if Winterfell is attacked; we could hide in the crypts with our folk, with enough supplies and wait until you return if danger comes to us.“

Lord Stark disagreed:” You are my guard; you should be second in command, Jon. I already wrote Benjen and Ned; they are sending troops here for protection, but we need to move very fast and get Lord Bolton unprepared.”

***

Benjen Stark just wrote a congratulations letter for Mance Rayder, as Lady Lyra had given him a son. Since Rayder was, by blood, First men from Beyond The Wall, but ruled over a stripe of land between the Bay of Ice and the Mountains, Benjen recommended his boy to be fostered among the Clans, either Wulls or Flints, and betrothed to a woman of their kin.

As he himself was northern and his wife, a free woman now waiting for the birth of their first child together, Benjen also hoped to have Rickon wed to a girl of the Clansm in order to link his family by blood to all the populations living in the New Gift under his rule.
He wrote to The Wull and The Norrey, asking if he could send Rickon to spend the year before the winter among them while extending them both invitations to join him at Queenscrown for the Winter. They had enough grains, he added, and the lands were peaceful, as having Val as a Lady had made the Free Folk that went south even more amenable to their new “Lord”

Traditionally, the clans would either winter at Wintertown, join the Night's watch or die in the snows, so Benjen was offering them a new alternative, one that would, hopefully, make many realize that the repopulation of the new Gift was the right step at the right time.

Queenscrown was being walled; the moat around the tower that was filled with water was partially drained and moved forward; it was still not a big castle, but now they were finishing an additional three store building and a stable; the new moat would be refilled with water and a drawbridge, built.

Benjen had finally finished for the day when a raven from Winterfell came.

Benjen read and went red.

“What has your brother done this time?” Val asked; ravens from Winterfell only meant trouble…

“He is doing the right thing, but, as always, in the worst possible way… this time, his lapse of judgement is endangering Winterfell and he is probably the only one not to see that.”

Benjen organized his own defenses, left Rickon and Val in charge and went south with some forty men to join the small token force Brandon had spared for his own Castle.

***

Lady Ashara almost burnt the letter from Winterfell with the seal of Lord Stark without reading it.

“The fool is taking our Jon to war!” she screamed.

Ned just buried his face in his hands in utter disbelief. “ Anybody can take Winterfell if they know where to strike with so few men he left there...and he even sent us this information through raven! If we had enemies in the south, somebody could have intercepted it…”

He knew Benjen would be riding as soon as he would receive this letter but Queenscrown was almost two fortnights from Winterfell...and Stony Shore was closer only by a few days.

Still, Ned had to go.

***

Lord Stark stormed the Dreadfort; his forces were a mix of Stark, Cerwyn and Hornwood men.

The soldiers of House Bolton were well trained and fierce, but they were overpowered.

Lord Bolton had, after all, moved some of his men to the borders and Lord Stark had actually the good idea of luring them into trespassing; they did and they started the war in great advantage, saving them many days of trouble.

It was not, however, enough.

“You played well, Lord Stark, but I am afraid my bastard is already wearing some wolf's pelt at this moment.”
Jon went pale. “Bran!”

Before he could suggest to question Lord Bolton about his son’s whereabouts, Brandon, in fury, severed his head, ending House Bolton once and for all.

***

Ramsay waited the change of guards to strike; he did not have much time to do as much as he wanted, that was true.

There were other targets he needed to hit before enforcements would arrive after all.

Unfortunately, the cripple was nowhere to be found and Ramsay was forced to wait.

"A naked man has few secrets; a flayed man, none."

***

Maester Flowers had most of the household and the nobles inside the Castle moved to the crypts...there were some supplies already there and he hoped it would be enough for them to hold out until they were liberated.

About two days in, the bastard of Bolton decided to burn Winterfell.

They could hear commotion and Maester Flowers assumed reinforcements had arrived.

“It will be over soon, my Lord.”

Then, they heard noises coming from the entrance.

***

Jon and Benjen arrived almost at the same time. “Uncle, I will go after the bastard...he left for Castle Cerwyn, for what the survivors told us. But I cannot find Bran…”

Lady Meera had been knocked unconscious and Maester Flowers was injured.

Bran, Jojen, Hodor and Summer, missing.

“There are some corpses...skinned…”

***

A messenger from Castle Cerwyn arrived at dawn at Barrow Hall.

“House Bolton fell, but the bastard is attacking many holdfasts and villages. Most of our men left for the Dreadfort and Ramsay Snow took advantage of it...instead of White Harbour, Lord Bolton sent him to Winterfell; even with few men holding it, he could not take it, but tortured enough to know the weaknesses; they say he stormed the crypts and he has burnt towers and destroyed the glass gardens. Lord Stark’s heir and Lord Reed’s are missing. They say they were skinned alive.

When we saw the smoke and the smallfolk started coming, we sent scouts and started to prepare our
defenses; but he surprised us...for what I know, he and some men managed to escape, my Lord. “

Lord Dustin had seen the bastard once, the same strange eyes of his father. If what Lady Barbrey said was true, this Ramsay was on his way to the Ryswell and Dustin lands, to seek retribution.

“I am sending some troops to patrol my lands, if they are just few, they will try and use of surprise...they will attack the smallfolk and they need to be informed. House Ryswell must also be imade aware, as Lady Barbrey is there for what I know…”

Lord Dustin then gave orders to close the Gates of the Castle and prepare archers.

***

House Martell

“How is that I am suppose to conceive if my husband lives far and never visits?” Arianne asked her Father.

Prince Doran cursed Dornish inheritance laws. Arianne is utterly useless. He had quickly grown weary of the Lady Melisandre, his daughter’s misterss, and had already given the woman a sennight to leave Dorne, but he knew too well this would not solve his problems.

“He was fond of you once...you could go to the Red Keep, of course. You do not need an invitation, you are his wife. His Grace is still hopeful you will get pregnant.” Prince Doran had forbidden Arianne from laying with Ser Daemon Sand; if, perchance, she was to fall pregnant again, she could not survive another abortion.

Oberyn had consulted with his friends from the Citadel and Arianne was now on a special diet of yogurt, nuts, cod fish and lean meat, while also drinking a potion of royal bee jelly mixed with red berries and nettle leaf tea.

According to Maester Caleotte and Arianne herself, this treatment helped her with the menstrual pains and excessive bleeding, but if this would actually make a difference, nobody knew.

“Viserys hates surprises, but you are right, Father; I will leave for King’s Landing at once.”

When Arianne returned to her chambers, Lady Melisandre was lighting a fire for divination purposes. “What troubles you, dear Princess?”

“The usual...we must leave for King’s Landing; Father wants you to return to the Free Cities, but he did not say when . We still have time.”

Melisandre then turned her attentions to the flames. “The Lord of Light showed us the way...you are to conceive at Dragonstone.”

***

The Red God

Melisandre always prayed for glimpses of the Lord's chosen and the images that would emerge were
of a great fight at the edge of the world, where fire would meet ice. but the faces...she could not truly see.

But she saw dragons, she knew she saw them.

And this meant Dragonstone, this Melisandre was sure.

Arianne Martell wanted a child, but her womb was ruined and the children Melisandre could provide her would come with a price she was not sure the Princess would want to pay.

Deception was not usually one of Melisandre’s weapons, but, for the greater good, she would use whatever means necessary.

More to the point, Arianne Martell was powerful enough to open doors for Melisandre. She knew she needed to be at Dragonstone, this was important. What would happen there, how the dragons would be born out of stones, this she was not certain, at least not for the time being.

Melisandre was needed at Dragonstone; Arianne Martell was irrelevant to her plans, but she was still a friend and Melisandre would try to help the Princess in what she could, or, at least, not harm her.

"Dragonstone, Princess; we must go to Dragonstone!"

***

The Faith

Aegon spent the last days of the year in the Riverlands, visiting villages too small to have their own Septs, praying with the old, the feeble and the poor. As one of the hundred warriors, he was to be under the command of Ser Bonifer Hasty, a man many said had loved his grandmother once and, upon losing her, chose to serve the Maiden.

The roads were dangerous and the travelling Septons and Septas were now numerous, their movement was spreading through the Realms. They would save the Faith from the Nobles and Westeros from the Demons and, to do that, they had to bring The Word of the Seven Pointed Star to all places.

Aegon had argued that the travelling Septons needed protection and Ser Bonifer agreeded and allowed him and others to join the Poor Fellows.

There was disappointment everywhere; the Lords took more than their share of the grains and, with Autumn coming and soon, Winter, the smallfolk feared for their lives.

Many were already dying from diseases, especially the younger and the old ones; Aegon had already observed that some villages were suffering an increase in the cases of red spots and pox.

It was clearly a sign that the Whore Queen was spreading her curses through the Realm.

But they were fighting in their own way, spreading the message around and bringing hope where there was none.

Soon, The Seven would be manifested again in flesh and walk among them; the world would, once again, be immersed in its blessings and the ones responsible for the shadow of wickedness spreading
over, would be judged.

Their visits would end with Aegon’s Septon preaching his words of comfort and wisdom; then they
would make a circle of pray, sing hymns and, in the end, Aegon would feed the poor with bread and
soup, sometimes even eating with the smallfolk himself.

The good people of Westeros started to call Aegon “The Blessed”, their True Protector.

***

House Lannister

Maester Tyrion was the first to congratulate his brother on the news: “You are to be father again; I
must admit, I am very surprised you kept your part in the bargain, Jaime. You are indeed a man of
honour.”

Jaime shrugged. “It was not that hard, little brother, after all Lady Margaery is pretty. She makes
herself available every time I need and bedding her is the least I can do to her. She quite like it,
which is surprising. You must admit the poor girl works hard and deserves a good time. The Tyrells
taught her well.”

“Very well indeed.” It was past midday and they were lunching in Ser Jaime’s solar; the first bottle
of wine was already gone but the Maester stopped his brother from opening the second one.” You
said you were down to one bottle a day; you already had half...leave the other half for dinner.”

Jaime’s face went blank; suddenly, he had tears in his eyes: “I still see her in my dreams...choking…” Jaime somehow, stopped himself from crying and collected himself while
finishing his goblet, the last drops of wine before dinner, if Tyrion had his way. “House Stark is
fighting House Bolton as we speak...His Grace sent some contingent to White Harbour I heard;
mayhaps I should join in the war…”

“If our Lord Father does not have his way this time around, you can count on war, sooner of later.”

This was news to Jaime and he was surprised it was that bad. “What do you know that I don't?”

“Aegon, the Blessed they call him...the smallfolk there is. Your former good son walks through the
Riverlands talking about some sort of awakening. It would mean nothing, if not for who he is...and
he is being called Aegon, the Cruel by the knights...already killed a dozen, I heard…protecting the
weak, as they say.

He and his septons are coming our way...they have a militia, so to speak...they attack who they see
as sinners, have little respect for Lords and Knights and are out of control. His Grace is worried
about the North and too busy with Dorne...he has done nothing yet to prevent this madness from
spreading.

As for our Father...he is already pushing for a new agreement...if the baby is a girl, he will remind
His Grace of the traditions of nobility: a brother should honour an alliance through marriage after all.
It has done before many times and he counts on it.

If Rhaegar refuses and Aegon creates problems in the Westerlands...our Lord Father will act.”
House Arryn

Cersei was sad to see her Sweetrobin leave, but a ten years old was expected to be fostered and to eventually start esquiring for a knight of renown.

Her son would be, after all, Lord of the Eyrie and Warden of the East, he had to be trained at arms and learn his lands.

His mother was happy to see that Robert would be as tall and strong as his Father was; Ser Elbert could have been called handsome in Cersei’s opinion if he was not always serious and quiet...

Cersei prayed that her son would not fall pray to the Arryn honour, the same that had killed his father.

She agreed Robert was to be fostered, but balked when Lord Jon Arryn mentioned Casterly Rock: “Our Myrcella is now Lady in waiting and cannot possibly be sent to the Westerlands to be a cupbearer. Your Lord Father was the one to suggest the change.”

“Robert is not going to wed a Lannister, nor we need the alliance at the moment; he should spend the next years in the lands he will one day rule. House Waynwood has enough youngsters for him to play with and Lady Waynwood would be honoured to have Robert as foster son. Lord Lannister already requested our Myrcella, I do not see why he must have both…”

The argument had its merits, Jon Arryn admitted: “You are truly no longer a Lannister, Cersei. I will write Lady Waynwood at once.”

Cersei was asked to write her Lord Father and explain their decision; she also had to inform that Myrcella had flowered at two and ten, but, since she entered into Her Grace’s service, House Arryn would not yet sign any betrothal agreement.

She hoped that, in time, a better match than Tyrek Lannister would appear for her Myrcella or, even better, that her Lord father would die before her daughter was ever to set foot at the Rock.

House Tully

Catelyn had never felt so hopeless; not even that fateful day when her husband had gone too far and Bran had to save her, not even then, bleeding from his intimate attack, marks of his depravity all over her body, had Catelyn known what was truly to be without hope.

Sansa would write to her; she also did not know what was happening in The North; the talk was that Lord Stark had ended House Bolton, but Winterfell had been attacked. His Grace had sent Lord Velaryon to White Harbour; there was no need, at least for now, they said, to send troops, but King Rhaegar wanted someone to see the situation first hand and report to him, as ravens were being killed and messengers would take too long.

The year was drawing to a close and still, no answers.

Bran...Bran will turn five and ten in the first moon of 297 A.C.
Where is Bran? Why they do not answer our ravens? Where is my son?
Chapter Summary

In the North, Lord Stark returns from the Dreadfort.
In the South, Lady Melisandre meets with the Queen

**House Stark 297 A.C**

Ser Gendry was told not to leave Lady Arya Dustin alone at any time; they were not to leave Barrow Hall until Ramsay Snow was captured and dealt with.

Arya was visibly concerned: “What happened to my cousin, to Brandon? Father would not tell me anything...he just said that nobody knows. Have you heard anything?”

*Yes, that they found many corpses, skinned and beyond recognition...and that nobody knows for sure if one of those corpses belongs to Brandon or to Jojen Reed.*

“No, I know as much as you do, my Lady...but I heard terrible things about this Snow...this is not a game Arya; I will give my life to protect yours...but you must listen your Lord Father...if anything happens to you, he will die of heartbreak.”

Arya knew it was true; no, she would show them she was not a spoiled girl playing at swords. If this Ramsay would dare come to them...he would die a painful death.

For two days, they waited.

Then, Ser Jon arrived with the bastard of Dreadfort, chained like an animal.

“Lord Dustin...I suggest we judge *this* here. We already killed his men, his horses and his dogs. I have been riding with this *beast* for four days now. I cannot, on good conscience, endure *it* any longer.”

Lord Dustin agreed: “Let's not lose any more time then.” Lord Dustin then addressed his steward. “Tell Arya to come, she is to attend the trial.”

Ser Jon was appalled: “Arya is just a girl...the list of his crimes alone...”

“Arya is four and ten and my heiress” Lord Dustin cut him. “She must know; she must listen. One day, she will judge men as bad as this Ramsay, Jon...”

When Arya was told she was to take part, her Lord Father explained she was not to show any emotion; she was to hear, make questions and then, listen as her Lord Father passed the sentence and swung the sword.

She tried her best to look dignified, not to show how affected she was by what she heard.

Arya tried; Arya failed.
When Ramsay taunted them about “skinning the cripple alive while his frog friend was being raped by his dogs.”, Arya lost it.

“Nymeria!” she screamed.

The direwolf jumped at Ramsay and ate him alive in front of everybody.

Jon knew Arya was a warg; that Arya had been...inside Nymeria. It had happened to him too...all Stark children were wargs.

He came to see his cousin before he was to leave. “Arya...what Ramsay said...he was lying. His dogs were bitches and Bran...Lady Meera said they left the crypts before Ramsay found them...she thinks Bran and her brother went Beyond The Wall. Do not lose hope.”

***

Lord Stark arrived to find Benjen and Ned already at Winterfell, overseeing the repairs in the Keep.

Ser Jon had also sent a raven from Barrow Hall: the bastard of Lord Bolton had been executed...by Arya Dustin.

Jon was riding to Winterfell escorting Lady Barbrey, who was found safe at her Father´s Keep.

Maester Flowers was maimed, but as sharp as before: “They severed my left hand...I can still perform my duties, my Lord, but would understand if you are to request a new Maester from The Citadel.”

“No, your place is at Winterfell.” Lord Stark said firmly. “Tell me what happened to Bran and Jojen Reed.”

Lady Barbrey was forced to stay at Castle Cerwyn; her husband had made it clear that she would not return to Winterfell until she had performed all her duties as Lady Cerwyn, which meant for the next five moon turns, she would be detained there, as Ramsay Snow had destroyed at least one of their towers.

At lunchtime, Lord Stark noticed a very pretty girl; she was small, with long brown hair and beautiful green eyes. “Who is that one?” he asked and Maester Flowers answered the girl was Lady Meera Reed.

Lord Brandon demanded Meera to sit in a place of honour, by his side.

He then went for a long, closed doors meeting with Maester Flowers and spent the rest of the afternoon writing letters.

Before supper, Lord Stark called Ser Jon, Lord Eddard and Lord Benjen to his solar: “Some believe that Bran managed to escape with Hodor and Jojen Reed. For what I have been told, Howland´s boy is sickly; his sister is the one with survival skills and Hodor...well, Hodor has only size.

I sent three of my best men to try and track them, but I think he is dead.”

Ser Jon was the first to object: “No, Bran is alive; Lady Meera said her brother has the greensight and that Bran too...they were talking about going Beyond The Wall, to find a wizard of some sorts...the Three Eyed Raven for what Meera told us. I intend in going after my cousin.”
“The Three Eyed Raven cave?” This gave Benjen hope. “His Grace also went after him...they believe the last greenseer lives in a cave with the Children of The Forest. It was near there that King Rhaegar found Dark Sister; we never saw the cave, but we must have been near...I go with you, Jon.”

“Benjen can go; Jon not.” Lord Stark said coldly. “I am prepared to name Jon my heir, at least until another son is born from my loins.”

Catelyn, that bitch; not even bastards I have because of her. House Stark had traditionally raised their bastards within Winterfell walls; some went to become valued members of the family, warriors and fierce women, serving their House to the best of their abilities.

But Catelyn Tully was southron; she would not tolerate bastards. To placate her and avoid problems, Maester Flowers saw that Brandon’s guards always had moontea; they were to make sure the tea was properly brewed and consumed by Lord Stark’s many companions and they did their job very well, as no Snow was born from Brandon.

Ned looked at his older brother with nothing but anger: “What do you mean, Brandon; Lady Catelyn and you are all but separated. Are you going to force her to give you more children, after all you have put her through?”

Brandon shook his head. “I will never touch that fish again, brother. No , I have other plans. I always wanted Jon to be my heir, but I learned that we do not always get what we want. I am being practical: it is my duty, as a Lord, to ensure that succession runs smoothly...even if Bran is to return, he will not become Lord of Winterfell, I will see to that.

I sent Lord Manderly south, to King’s Landing. Lady Catelyn Tully left Riverrun to the Capital to visit her old friend, Lady Cersei Arryn and wait for Sansa to return from Dragonstone.

Lord Manderly was instructed to start negotiating with Catelyn on my behalf.”

Ned could not believe; he was married to a southerner and had spent part of his formative years in the Vale. He understood it at once: Brandon wanted an annulment. House Manderly follows the New Gods ;the Faith has stipulations for annulment. The High Septon is known for being accommodating, if certain requisites are followed, especially when it concerns powerful men like Brandon Stark.

What Brandon needed was to convince Catelyn to claim their marriage was invalid on grounds of coercion, since they had obviously consummated their union.

It was either this or forcing Catelyn to join the Silent Sisters; Ned doubted Hoster Tully would ever agree to this option since people would think his beloved daughter had somehow done something wrong and was being punished.

“Catelyn will never agree to an annulment...even if Bran is dead, an annulment means that Sansa is disinherit; it is the same thing as saying that Sansa is no longer your daughter.”

Jon was incensed: “You cannot be serious, uncle! Sansa is a Stark...”

“Oh, not according to the betrothal agreement I signed with Hoster Tully...the old man asked for Sansa to be disinherit as a condition for her to wed Ser Edmure.” Brandon spat. “Everybody thought I was being stupid in accepting all his demands. But I was not...what matters is that Sansa will be happy at Riverrun, as a Tully of Riverrun and that The North will remain under northern rule. “
“Who is the one, brother?” Benjen asked matter of factly. “Who you want to be the next Lady Stark?”

Brandon smiled: “The Lady Meera of Greywater Watch...Lord Howland needs some compensation, as he lost a son...what better reward I am to give a bannerman than Winterfell?”

***

They had almost crossed with Stark men from Queenscrown, but the oak trees near his uncle’s Tower had kept their presence a secret.

They were low on supplies, but Summer had been able to make some kills on the way, so they did not starve.

At the Nightfort, Bran and Jojen met a Night Watchman named Samwell Tarly; he said the words and the hidden passage of the Castle opened and they crossed Beyond The Wall.

A sennight after, an undead servant of the last greenseer appeared; Coldhands was their guide and their keeper.

In the last days of the trip, Jojen was not doing much. He was mostly silent, his face, sad, and his eyes, once green, were now of no colour. Jojen was disappearing in itself and there was nothing Bran could do, but to watch him go.

They entered the cave, following one of the Children.

On a throne made of weirwood, he sat.

The Three Eyed Raven had been a man before...and he was called Brynden, like the uncle Bran was supposed to esquire for when he still could walk.

But this was before; Brynden was no longer Brynden and soon, Brandon would not be Brandon anymore.

*Darkness will be your cloak, your shield, your mother's milk. Darkness will make you strong*

***

**House Tully**

“I am sorry, my Lady; understand I am here not because this gives me any pleasure, but because my Liege bid me. You are a fine Lady and does not deserve any of this. But Lady Sansa will make you very proud at Riverrun and life will go on.”

Brandon, her husband; Brandon, her tormentor. This Brandon was alive.

Where is her Brandon, her beloved son and guardian?
Nobody knew.

“Is it true, what they say? That the bastard skinned my boy?”

Lord Manderly was a big, fat man; northerners would laugh at him, call him “too fat to sit on a horse”, but from all the Noble Houses of The North, his was the richest and most powerful.

“No, my Lady...the daughter of Lord Reed was adamant that Bran escaped, but Lord Stark...he does not believe your son will be found alive. He was going beyond the wall, of all places, with Hodor and another sick boy as company. Lord Stark sent men after him, but nobody has been able to track them...Ser Jon and Lord Benjen still hope to find the boy alive and are searching as we speak.”

Catelyn wanted to believe that his cousin and uncle would find Bran as she knew they were guided by affection in their search, whereas Lord Stark had not done even half as he should have done to find their son, simply because he had no love for the boy.

“My Lady...there is another thing...the real reason I was sent here.”

Catelyn listened in silence. Brandon was not stupid; Lord Manderly was a follower of the Faith and had come with enough gold to get him the annulment he wanted.

Lord Manderly paused to drink some wine.

_I will never agree to this; Bran is alive...if my marriage is null, Bran will become illegitimate; I cannot take Winterfell away from my son._

When Lord Manderly resumed speaking, Catelyn’s hopes for Bran were shattered.

Catelyn would not cry; no, she would not give Lord Stark this pleasure: “Even if they find Bran...Lord Stark will send him to Riverrun, to be taken in by House Tully, is that what you are telling me?”

Lord Manderly cleared his throat and went red with shame: “Yes, my Lady; Lord Stark wishes to remarry and, if no sons are born from this union, he already made Ser Jon heir apparent, behind _him_ in the succession for Winterfell. I delivered the papers to His Grace and it is official. Even if you do not agree in seeking an annulment, my Lady...Bran is disinherited.”

Lord Manderly continued: Lord Stark was willing to repay Catelyn’s dowry as compensation and wait until Sansa was wed to announce the annulment; he also added that, as a follower of the Old Gods, Lord Stark was in his rights to bring her back to Winterfell, take her to the weirwood tree and, before witnesses, dissolve their marriage bound.

Lord Manderly concluded that, what Lord Stark was offering Catelyn was a _dignified_ way to end their marriage; he had already paid the dowry for Sansa and was willing to send her son back. The way Lord Stark saw it, he was observing the traditions of _her_ Religion, out of _respect_ for her and their daughter.

That, in short, Lord Stark was doing her a _kindness._

“Lord Manderly, I invite you to Riverrun; you are to walk my daughter, Lady Sansa down the aisle in three moons time; after that, if my Lord Father is willing to accept the terms, you are to return to King’s Landing and deliver a letter by my own hand, to the High Septon. In this letter, I will state that my marriage was forced on me and, therefore, is not sacred, true or legit.”
House Martell

Princess Arianne arrived at Dragonstone with Lady Melisandre, her personal advisor; they were given adjoining chambers, as she requested, and a raven was sent to King's Landing informing her husband of their safe arrival.

Her Grace was not very receptive, but hid her displeasure under an armour of courtesy: “My dear Arianne, we were surprised to receive you...and your advisor on such short notice. My brother, is , after all, detained in the Red Keep and I imagined you would be missing him dearly.”

“I am, Your Grace; but I could not simply pass the opportunity to spend time with you, dear sister, especially when you glow with the product of the love you share with my dear goodbrother, King Rhaegar. Besides, Viserys is to join us at any time.”

Daenerys then gave Lady Melisandre a cold look: “You must be the Lady Melisandre; welcome to Dragonstone. Prince Doran already wrote, telling us he is sending another ship to be at your disposal as you are to depart for Volantis soon.”

“I am and I will, Your Grace, when time is appropriate. For now, I am to keep company to the Princess.”

After supper, both retired to their chambers.

They shared a warm bath, filled with exotic oils and salts: “You do have King´s blood in you, Arianne...my visions would be much powerful if you could spare me a few drops. It would help us find a better way to achieve our goals.”

Melisandre had explained much of her religion and magical practices to Arianne; while she was not an official follower of the Red God, the Princess was much interested in her lover’s experiences with shadow binding and blood magic.

“What must I do? I assume it will not hurt or place me in any danger...I need all my strength to be able to bring forth life.”

Melisandre kissed Arianne’s neck; she moaned and the Red Priestess hand found the Princess sensitive spot and started playing with it, making circles and massaging her folds. “I would never hurt you...all I want is to serve you, my Princess.”

It was a simple cut in Arianne’s pointer finger; when the drops fell in the flames, they started to dance.

The vision ratified Melisandre’s purpose; she had been right, in Dragonstone, she would find her destiny.

Arianne found her bed empty the next day, Melisandre's ruby choker by her side and a note:
“Dear Princess, the time has come and I can no longer be by your side; I leave you my most treasured possession, my necklace of power. No harm shall befall you if you wear the jewel; anytime you fear threatened, this ruby will give you strength.”

Arianne left the next day for King's Landing.

***

House Targaryen

One egg was black, alive with scarlet ripples and swirls.

Another was pale cream streaked with gold and the last one, deep green, the burnished bronze flecks comes and goes depending on how Daenerys turns it.

She had dreamed of them many times; Rhaegar had considered buying some eggs from the Shadow Lands and Magister Illyrio had offered to broker the deal, but Daenerys asked him not do. “We need an egg from a dragon that shares our blood; I am afraid it would be much too dangerous to attempt hatching eggs from other sources.”

The dreams continued and they all led Daenerys to one place.

Dragonstone.

They were nested deep in a hidden pond, in a dragonglass cave.

She wrote Rhaegar and Viserys at once and they were on their way to Dragonstone, bringing Grand Maester Marwyn to inspect the new findings.

Daenerys proudly placed the black one on Jaehaerys bed, standing vigil until the beautiful child fell asleep.

***

The King and the Prince arrived and found Dragonstone in turmoil.

“Her Grace is bleeding, Your Grace...the maester fears for the child.” Lady Brienne informed the King; Rhaegar ordered Marwyn to attend the Queen. “ The Crown Prince, is he in good health?”

“Yes, Your Grace; Prince Jaehaerys is with his nany and being guarded by Ser Oswell Whent.” The blond haired woman replied and then added, in a hushed tone: “ We believe Her Grace was given an abortifacient.”

“Have you apprehended the culprit?” The King asked.

Lady Brienne nodded: “ It is a very old and frail lady; she speaks with an essosi accent and is now in the dungeons, awaiting trial. She has been questioned by the jailor, but said nothing.”
“I am sorry, Your Grace; the Queen has lost the Princess, but she will recover. She is now asleep.”

Daenerys ordered her servants to take two of the straightest trees, hack the limbs and branches from them, skin off their bark, and split them, laying the logs in a square. Its center was filled with straw, brush, bark shavings, and bundles of dry grass.

The wood was laid from east to west, from sunrise to sunset. Daenerys herself piled the dead Princess Rhaella’s treasures on the platform: a couple of dolls and a beautiful dress with a three-headed dragon sigil.

Another layer of brush was piled about the Princess possessions, and bundles of dried grass scattered over them.

The third level of the pyre was laid from north to south, from ice to fire, high with soft cushions and sleeping silks.

The sun had begun to lower toward the west by the time they were done.

“Brother, what is she doing?” Viserys asked; he was scared...there was something in Daenerys that day, something he had never seen before.

Rhaegar looked at him with tears in his eyes: “She is doing what she must.”

Just the most loyal members of the household were there: Ser Barristan Selmy, Prince Llewyn Martell and Ser Oswel Whent from the Kingsguard; Lady Brienne of Tarth and Lady Sansa Stark of the Ladies in waiting; Ser Terrence Celtigar, the Master at Arms and Ser Jorys Velaryon, the Castellan and Grand Maester Marwyn.

Daenerys addressed them: “I was a child yesterday. Today I am a woman. Tomorrow I will be old. To each of you I say, give me your hands and your hearts, and there will always be a place for you.”

Then, she climbed the pyre herself to place the eggs around her Princess.

The old woman did not cry as the jailor dragged her to Princess Rhaella’s pyre.

Daenerys locked eyes with the woman. Melisandre. “I thank you for the sacrifice, but the price is too high; I would not have paid it.”

“You will not hear my screams; Only death can pay for Life and mine, I give freely. The Princess...it had to be done...and for that, I am sorry.”

Daenerys took the torch from Rhaegar and thrust it between the logs.

The flames whirled and writhed, racing each other up the platform. The dusk shimmered as the air itself seemed to liquefy from the heat. Dany heard logs spit and crack.

As Melisandre said, she did not scream as the flames consumed her.
Daenerys entered the Pyre.

The flames writhed before her, spinning their yellow and orange and crimson veils, fearsome to behold. Daenerys opened her arms to them, her skin flushed and glowing. This is a wedding, too, she thought.

*Only death can pay for life.*

She heard the screams of Lady Brienne, of Sansa and Viserys...the others, cried, all except for Rhaegar, that prayed.

When the fire died at last and the ground became cool enough to walk upon, Rhaegar found her amidst the ashes, surrounded by blackened logs and bits of glowing ember and the burnt bones of princess and a woman.

Daenerys was naked, her beautiful hair all crisped away... yet she was unhurt.

The cream-and-gold dragon was suckling at her left breast, the green-and-bronze at the right. Her arms cradled them close. The black-and-scarlet beast was draped across her shoulders.

Rhaegar was the first to kneel before Daenerys.

They all did.
The Dragon has three heads

Chapter Summary

At Dragonstone, Daenerys, Rhaegar and Viserys try to adapt to new realities.
Time comes for Sansa to be wed and Lord Stark rides to Riverrun.

Chapter Notes

This week, I will be updating my three current other fics; as I will travel on weekend,
this means that probably I will not update this in the coming seven days.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

House Stark 297 A.C

Bran walks through the trees, a dense canopy before his eyes. Soldier Pines, Ironwoods, Ash and Chestnuts over old, packed earth. Because he walks, Bran knows this is a dream. The feeling, however, is real; he is barefoot and steps on moss and humus as he gets closer to a group of people gathering around the heart tree.

It is night; the waters from the pools are reflecting a full moon. Bran knows the place, a familiar sight of his previous life; he recognizes the faces of the men and women by the weirwood, the old carved face bearing witness to a wedding.

Her hair is golden and she wears a green dress that matches her eyes; she is small, but looks even more so near a tall and muscular man, who is holding her hands.

Bran wants to say something, but his thoughts are interrupted by the warm voice of his companion: “It is dangerous to linger; they cannot hear you. Listen to me...we need to go.”

“I do listen...you said the past is written and the ink is dry. “ Bran says calmly. “ This is not past...this is future.”

The old man nods; he smiles with his one eye. “ Good; you have learned to differentiate between what it was...and what it will be.” He then touches Bran’s shoulder, and they return to the cave.

His physical body still needed tending and nurturing, but this would soon also disappear once he was to be joined with the tree.

Bran noticed how his need for food had subdued. With Jojen gone, Hodor living in state of stupor and Summer hunting in the woods for himself, the fishes, mushrooms and berries of the cave held no great appeal for Bran.

He could not remember the last time he ate solid food, but in truth, the only thing to really sate him, to sustain his body, to really feed him was the weirwood paste the children served him.
It had tasted blood at first, but now...its flavour was akin to freshly baked honey cakes.

So many greenseers before him, Bran realized, had merged with the branches after sitting on that weirwood throne for years to end; their memories, their knowledge, their faith, all the things that had shaped those individuals upon their physical deaths had mixed into a plexus of consciences inside the trees.

While Bran would one day become one of those many voices, presently there was a part of him who still felt like the young man he had been once; he still cared about loved ones and now, he was especially concerned about the beautiful girl in his vision.

***

Ned Stark sent a raven to Stony Shore. Ashara will be furious; she dislikes holding the Castle by herself.

He hoped, however, that his Lady wife would understand his reasons for staying at Winterfell at least until Benjen and Jon were to return.

He could not, in good conscience, leave Howland Reed's daughter alone there.

Ned supposed he should be happy; Brandon was not planning on making Meera his whore, after all.

Had Brandon been a better man, him wanting to wed Meera would be cause for celebration.

Brandon Stark, however, was not a good man.

He was very charming around Meera: polite, attentive and respectful, gifting her with new gowns, making sure she was always sitting near him and sharing stories with her, tales of his many great deeds as Lord Stark...

Meera obviously had no idea. She was young and obviously unused to life in society, seeing Lord Stark as nothing but a paradigm of virtue, the Liege of her beloved father.

He had fooled Catelyn Tully the same way at Harrenhal and looked how it ended...

For Meera, Brandon was a friend of her family, someone she could trust. She had been raised listening to her father praising the Starks, especially Lyanna, who had defended his honour in the Tourney of Harrenhal by entering the jousts as the Knight of the Laughing Tree and defeating two men who had bullied the crannogman during his travels.

Brandon always gets what he wants, one way or the other...

Ned’s legs led him to the godswood. He prayed for the safe return of his son, Jon, brother Benjen, and of Bran, Jojen and Hodor. He prayed that Howland Reed would not be found in the Neck by the time Catelyn had agreed to the annulment.

He prayed for something to stop Lord Stark to have his way.

***

The girl is flat chested, but very loving, almost beautiful. The best thing is that she looks up to me.
Crangomen are loyal, faithful and keep to themselves. She would never make a fuss like Catelyn. If what I heard about the women from The Neck is true… that they are earthly and inhibited, Meera and I will understand each other very well.

I will be good to her.

Ned has the most beautiful woman as wife and Benjen is married to a gorgeous wildling he himself kidnapped; they are undoubtly very good at making their Lord Husbands happy while...I ... I was given a fish.

A fish!

My beautiful Sansa is now very proper and southron; she will do well in the Riverlands. Even her wolf died in the south; soon, Winterfell will be all but a memory for her, as it supposed to be, since women are to be married off and come of age far from their homes.

As for Bran...the boy would never have amounted to much anyway. He would have depended on his cousins to fight their wars for him. The fall...it only served to make his flaws even more apparent.

What kind of son tries to kill his father?

It is good that he escaped the bastard of the Dreadfort...he would have suffered in his hands. If Jon ever finds him and return in time, we will go south to attend Sansa's wedding and there he will stay.

They will understand; The North is a harsh place, unfit for a boy like him.

I am glad Maester Flowers survived; it would not look good on me if I was to do what I wanted, to drag Catelyn by her hair and to spurn her before the Old Gods. House Stark has never been richer; under my rulership and with King Rhaegar’s support, The North hasprospered. Now that House Bolton is no more, we can even appoint a Castellan to their lands and have their revenues reverting to Winterfell. Lord Lannister has done that to Castamere, why can I not do it?

I will happily pay her dowry back and wash my hands on her.

Jon must be returning at any moment; then we will ride south, say our goodbyes to Sansa and go to the Neck, to ask for Lady Meera’s hand in marriage, a proper northern bride for Winterfell.

Barbrey will understand.

If Meera gives me no sons and only daughters, I will marry the eldest to Jon, my heir. He can wait.

***

“My Lord, there is still the issue of the Broken Tower...we must discuss what is to be done. If you could accompany me and inspect the place…”

Brandon had planned a visit to Wintertown’s brothel, hoping only to return by supper. Ned, he was told, was at the Godswood and would be taking Lady Meera to the crypts, to light candles in memory of those who perished during Ramsay Snow’s attack.

He would gladly pass such obligation to his brother, but today...he would have to do it himself

“Aye...we go…” Brandon said in a dispassionate tone. At the window, an ugly bird stared at him. “Would you please keep your ravens in the rookery? Some do wander around the Keep too often for my liking.”
Maester Flowers looked at the bird. *Strange, this is not one of ours.* He then went to the window and shushed it.

The bird flew away.

He said nothing to his Lord.

Jory Cassel and another guard escorted the Lord of Winterfell to the Tower, where a carpenter and the Master Builder already waited.

The strange bird is somewhere near, following him, observing him.

Brandon just knows it.

“Jory, after we finish here, we need to discuss increasing the security.” Every since he returned, Brandon felt like he was being watched; he feared there might be men mad enough to be loyal to House Bolton to try and attempt taking Winterfell, mayhaps another bastard even...

“Maester Flowers, lead us…”

The third floor had partially collapsed long time ago and nobody bothered to rebuild it; Brandon did not see why he should be the one to finally rebuild the damn Tower, but since there were renovations, Ned had suggested they finally do something about it.

The place brought him terrible memories of King Rhaegar’s second visit.

*The boy was not supposed to climb the walls...we told him many times not to do it, but no...he did not listen.*

It was a tragedy, Lord Stark thought, one that should have never happened.

Then, a recurrent thought crossed his mind. *In old times, someone would have given Bran the gift of mercy.*

But Brandon was not one to dwel in the past and quickly recovered from his reverie.

While the Master builder discussed with Lord Stark the costs of the renovation, Maester Flowers pondered about the strange bird, the raven of before.

*Yes, I have seen it before...when Master Bran fell...the Grand Maester mentioned a three eyed crow by the window. Then the dreams came... and only sweetsleep kept the boy calm.*

Flowers turned to the window, where a strange picture was forming before his tired eyes; one by one, ravens would fly, then land, side by side, on the rampants opposite the Tower.

The ravens were surprisingly orderly in their movements... almost, deliberate.

*The North is a strange place...wild...dangerous...even the birds prey on humans.*

***

“Bran! BRAN!”

Ser Jon and Lord Benjen managed to track the cave without difficulties.
The trip was uneventful, peaceful.

*Much too easy...are we really lucky, or is this a trap?*

They arrived in an area near the Antler River, where some hills could be seen in the distance. “It was around this place that we had set camp and His Grace said he found this greenseer and he gave him Dark Sister, but did not allow him in the cave.”

In a cleft on the wooded hillside, halfway up, there was an ominous formation of weirwood trees. “It should be here where the Old Gods sleep.” Jon said in reverence.

“Old Gods are cruel Gods, Jon. And this lands also have Ice demons, wights...we should make haste.”

It was decided that Jon and Ghost would enter the cave while Benjen would stand vigil by the entrance.

Tunnels that branched within more tunnels and darkness; that is what Jon found.

Something guided him however.

*Bones...men...beasts...children of the forest...giants.*

Those Halls were as large as Winterfell’s and Jon descended, and descended until he reached a great opening- a black abyss- where a natural bridge connected the route to two thrones of weirwood roots.

In the smaller one, Bran sat, eyes white.

***

“Take the dagger to my Mother and Summer to my sister. There is a bag of dragonglass sharpened tools...you should also take it with you. Then go. Do not look back. Tell them that Brandon Stark died in your arms. Jojen is dead. Hodor soon will die.”

Jon wanted to argue, but Bran, his cousin, was no more.

“Now, leave...peril awaits you, Lord Stark .”

***

Jon emerged from the cave, pale and forlorn.

One look at his nephew’s face and the presence of Summer told Benjen that Brandon was dead.

“Let's go back home, Jon.”

They rode their horses for an hour in silence and stopped before it got too dark. They made a fire, melted snow for water and ate salted cod. Ghost and Summer went in the wild, hunting for their dinners.

The next day, the cold was almost unbearable.

They continued to ride, but something was very wrong with the weather.
"Jon, I am afraid they are coming for us."

It had been this way, Benjen remembered...a sudden wave of cold that would break skin and pierce through flesh and bones, landing straight in their brains and paralysing them with fear.

Three undead men, wearing the garbs of the Night's Watch...and a creature, tall and clad on Ice, holding an ice spear.

"Uncle...the dragonglass...Bran said we would find trouble and made me take this bag..." Jon had told Benjen about Bran’s destiny the night before. He had to share it with someone, otherwise he would go crazy.

They could not possibly avoid being seen; their only chance was to prepare and hope there would not be others nearby.  "You think those crudely made weapons can kill them." Benjen stated; he then handed Jon some primitive knives, as quietly as he could.

Jon prayed they would not kill the horses, otherwise it would take twice as long for them to cross. *What am I thinking...we can very well die here...*

"They saw us."

Summer and Ghost went to attack the wights; Jon decide those creatures would not care about chivalry oaths, stabbing the one who was still standing and harming the wolves; as he fell to the ground and died, Jon proceed to finish the other two who already down.

As Benjen was risking being overpowered by the taller and mightier being of Ice, Jon made his way to his uncle.

*No more dragonglass knives.* In despair, Jon attacked the white walker with Bran’s Valyrian Steel Dagger.

The Demon immediately melted and disappeared before their eyes.

***

They arrived at Castle Black a sennight after their meeting with the White Walker and shared their findings with the Lord Commander and Maester Aemon.

“I will write my grand nephew and inform him...Dragonstone has many mines of obsidian; they should be mining it and shipping us as much as they possible can before Winter comes, which will be about two years and a half...”

Lord Commander Mormont had not only left Bear Island to his son when he joined the Watch, but also their Ancestral Sword, Longclaw. "My son needs to be informed; we need to have the support of all Houses that own Valyrian Steel weapons."

As Val’s time was approaching, Benjen was getting restless to return home; they rode as soon as their horses were well rested and arrived the next day.

At Queenscrown, Benjen found he could not possibly leave his wife, who would be giving birth anytime.

So it was that Jon rode to Winterfell alone, with two direwolves as company and the head filled with sadness and regret over Bran’s destiny.
Had I stayed, it would never have come to this...I would not have allowed Winterfell to fall.

***

The flock of ravens stayed in formation for a minute.

In fascination, Maester Flowers watched them watch him. Suddenly, the first one to arrive at that rampant, the one who had been earlier by Lord Stark’s solar, flew.

“Maester Flowers, what is your opinion on the matter?” Lord Stark asked to an obviously unfocused Flowers.

“I beg your pardon, my Lord...I was distracted watching those strange birds...those ravens do not belong to us.” Lord Stark said nothing; he also got distracted observing such birds...their behavior seemed odd, purposely so.

He turned to the window as Maester Flowers was being made aware of the costs and the time that would take to rebuild the Tower.

Brandon had asked if it would be less expensive to simply destroy it; he came to detest this broken part of Winterfell; the Castle would survive another eight thousand years without that damn Tower, he had concluded, but it was his work to listen to all parts involved before announcing his decision, so he put it with this tremendous waste of his time.

Lord Stark was brought back to that day. It was here; I was fucking Barbrey and the boy...the boy saw us...he fell from this same window...

As he neared the window, suddenly, everything went dark.

“ Argh...stay away from me, bewitched bird!”

The raven attacked Lord Stark without mercy.

Fighting against the bird, Lord Stark lost his balance and fell to his death.

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House Targaryen

“A dragon is not a slave; the dragonpit was the beginning of the end of our House...they are to stay here, at Dragonstone.” A moonturn had passed and Daenerys hair had grown at an amazing speed; it was still very short, making her beautiful features even more evident without the natural frame of silver.

“The smallfolk of Dragonstone was used to the presence of dragons, even before the Conquest; I read some documents where it stated they were taught to, upon sight of a flying dragon, leave livestock behind and run for their houses.” Grand Maester Marwyn had been busy in compiling all available dragonlore and decided to send the Maester of Dragonstone to act as healer in the Red Keep.” House Targaryen would then pay them compensation for their losses and it is implied that the dragons somehow learned not to attack houses and Castles unless they were commanded to do so.”
Daenerys named the cream dragon Viserion, in honour of her brother and Rhaegal, the green one, for her husband; strangely enough, the dragons decided to swap allegiances. Rhaegal was now sitting on Viserys lap and being fed cooked meat while Viserion nested on Rhaegar’s shoulder.

“Your Grace, the world The Citadel is building has no place for magic. The Maesters were the ones that killed the last dragons after the storming of the Dragon Pit. Now that we have Aegon going from Realm to Realm and inciting rebellions...and that the North faced a civil war, I am afraid Westeros will not be safe for them, until they are big enough.”

“We could sail to Volantis for a time.” Rhaegar had not returned to King’s Landing since the birth; Viserys had, for a short period, to announce that the Queen had lost the Princess.

They were holding the revelation that dragons had returned; no ships had sailed from Dragonstone, other than the one taking Viserys to King’s Landing. The vessels coming to the island would be inspected thoroughly and the small beasts were closely watched by their masters and not seen by strangers.

The Royal Couple feared that the followers of Aegon would spread rumours that Daenerys had traded the life of her daughter for the three dragons on purpose. “We would be ready to return in one year, no more than eighteen moonturns, time enough to prepare for Winter.”

Queen Daenerys would be travelling to Riverrun with Lady Sansa to attend her Lady in waiting’s wedding to Ser Edmure Tully; there, she would spin the truth and announce, after the bedding ceremony, that Prince Jaehaerys dragon egg had hatched; and that they would be travelling to Essos for a year, to seek knowledge on how to tame their dragon, as most books on dragonlore were lost during the Reign of Baelor, the Blessed.

Viserys was to be their regent, a role that he had filled in many times, but now he felt the task would be a very hard one: “The political situation should become even more unstable once you both sail; I know it is the right decision, but it does not make it any easier. I am four moonturns away from annulling my marriage to Arianne, Lord Lannister has already expelled Aegon and his septons from The Westerlands and The North just faced a rebellion.”

The High Septon was losing space and prestige within the Faith he was supposed to lead; many felt that the revival movement led by Aegon and the strict adherence and interpretation of his nameless Septon meant that The Seven was about to be broken into two very different Religions.

Daenerys agreed with the assessment, of course. But she had other worries, chief among them the uncomfortable legacy the dragonlords left in Essos: “There are millions of slaves waiting to be freed at Slaver's Bay; their civilization is decadent and retrograde. We need to test our dragons for battle and Astapor has only slaves soldiers for protection.” The Queen was adamant dragons were only to return to Westeros when they were big enough to carry their riders.

”We should free the Unsullied and estabilize the region for self sufficiency in an year...this could help Braavos force other cities in ban slavery…”

Marwyn agreed Slaver's Bay would indeed fall if they were attacked with dragons- but other problems would arise.” The Dothraki are the main dealers in the slave trade and they are a force to be reckoned with. You could eliminate one market, yes, but the others would absorb their loses...and what to do with the elites of those cities you plan in conquering? They would revolt as soon as you left for Westeros.”

“My intention is to be the spark...I cannot possibly solve everything in a year. The past cannot be changed; Valyria was built on the suffering of slaves. I want to use the dragons that once enslaved
those people to free them. After we leave Essos, making Slaver's Bay into an example to be followed, we should seek Braavos and have them lead the change. House Targaryen was the only one to survive the Doom for a purpose. We must strive to leave the world better than the one we found. For Jaehaerys.”

Daenerys looked at her cherubic toddler, happily playing with her dragon, Rhaego; she had lost a daughter because she had been naive enough to allow a sorcerer into her home...now she was about to leave her Kingdom for a dream.

Who is not to say that their enemies would not try and bring them down in their absence? Try to use Viserys, who was to be their regent, against them?

Her brother was in love with Cersei Arryn; both her and Rhaegar favored the match, yes, mostly because Jon Arryn was the sort of man who would honour any alliance he formed, but he was an old man; healthy, but old...older than Lord Lannister, Cersei's father, whose greatest ambition was to have a Lannister Queen sitting on the Iron Throne.

Daenerys was torn; if they were to stay, they risked their dragons being killed before they were old enough to be used in the war to come; if they leave, by the time they were to return, they could find that darkness had spread through Westeros and be forced to bring Fire and Blood upon their own subjects.

There was an alternative that Marwyn had brought to them earlier, one that would bind the three siblings together and prevent anyone to come between them.

Rhaegar was against it...but Daenerys saw it as the only way to ensure Viserys would not fall prey to Lord Lannister’s machinations.

She ordered the nanny to be brought in and take Jaehaerys to play at the beach. Then Daenerys kissed the toddlers cheeks until they were red: “Go, sweety, Mama loves you...we will take a nap after lunch.”

As they left, Daenerys turned and nodded at Grand Maester Marwyn: “The glass candles we brought from Volantis are burning...they were used by Valyrians for long distance communication. One should stay at the Red Keep; the other, travel with us...if there is trouble, Viserys could easily callt us back... and we still need to discuss Marwyn’s proposal ...”

The Three Heads of the Dragon.

Marwyn picked up from where Daenerys left: "Only the members of Houses Celtigar and Velaryon, of Valyrian descent both, and Lady Brienne of Tarth, who is descended from Princess Daella Targaryen and is the closest to Her Grace, would be in attendance for the Valyrian wedding ceremony...the household already swore oaths, and the ones present at the wedding would swear an additional one, of secrecy. The Faith should never hear about this, lest they will rebel. “

A dragon hatcher is far more rare and powerful than a dragon rider in the tradition of Old Valyria...if Marwyn was correct, it was the reason Rhaenyra Targaryen was her father's heir, the only woman who sat on the Iron Throne, albeit for a short and tumultuous time. Rhaegar’s findings in Volantis confirmed the theory to a certain extent, that a woman could be raised as the Head of their House, based both on merit and in dragon hatching abilities, which made Daenerys, in short, his superior by the rules of their ancestors.

Rhaegar was King, but he was growing more and more tired of the Game of Thrones.
Power was Power and he would gladly share it with Daenerys. Only with Daenerys.

To share Daenerys, however...this was another thing entirely.

“Do not fret, dear brother.” Viserys playfully said in an effort of comforting Rhaegar. “This only means that Daenerys is our Aegon; you shall be her Rhaenys and I, her Visenya; for every ten nights you spend with her, I will only have one…”

Rhaegar was not amused by the jape.

***

Old Valyria worshiped many Gods and each were served by their own Priests, had temples dedicated to each in separate and very distinctive sacrifices rites were followed by those who sought their blessings.

The Faith of the Seven would only recognize a marriage if performed by a Septon, but while Old Valyria had an organized Religion too, they would also see as valid marriages officiated by dragonlords or people of high enough social standing; all that was needed was the presence of groom and bride, witnesses and the exchange of words before a sacred burning fire.

When their vows were heard, Grand Maester Marwyn pronounced them wife and husbands, using the customary words in High Valyrian: “Daenērys, gūrogon aōha valzỹrys Rhāegār se aōha valzỹrys Visērỹs; aōha perzys kessa gaomagon zirỹ jorrāelatan se bāne”*

***

Viserys had found love with Cersei and there was nothing he wanted more than to be open about their relationship and have his heirs with his Lady love.

Despite his very honest and deep feelings towards his lioness, Viserys could never forget that Daenerys was his sister.

In a family like theirs, it meant everything.

This was his opportunity to have a part of Daenerys, something he always had wanted.

and he would take it.

The witnesses were informed that their secret marriage was to be a symbolic one, the sign that Daenerys was Aegon reincarnated and that the three children of Aerys and Rhaella were what the Prophecy had promised: their line would usher a New Age of prosperity and peace; the seasons would be aligned as soon as the Enemy would be defeated and Westeros would emerge as the leading force in the world, a new and better Valyria.

In reality, marriages had to be consummated to be valid...while this was not spoken, even the obviously virgin Lady Brienne understood Daenerys would welcome both her brothers into her bed that night, otherwise those words spoken were only words.

Grand Maester Marwyn had confirmed she could resume having sexual relations now, six sennights after losing the Princess for sorcery, and she would lay not only with one, but with two.
At the same time, by Viserys insistence: “I am sure Aegon himself done it a couple of times...if not, he knew nothing.”

Viserys had insisted they shared the bed not only because it came naturally to him. He also considered that Rhaegar was a very jealous man and, with this gesture, wanted to show his brother that he was not stealing Daenerys from him.

Rhaegar, however, was even more possessive than Viserys could have anticipated: “If you think I am to be your Daemon Sand, brother...you do not know me.”

Rhaegar was wider, stronger and much more menacing than Viserys would ever be; he was dead serious and no amount of witty observations and smart comments would convince him to really share his wife. “We do this only once, and you must follow my rules. Disobey, and you will find yourself out of favour; your role is to marry Cersei and give us our Alysane, as we agreed. Do you understand?”

Viserys did.

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“You do not want to do it.” Daenerys said as Rhaegar started to mechanically undress, obviously in distress. “We need this, Rhaegar.”

“Only this time, Dany...he will never touch you again after tonight.” Rhaegar grabbed Daenerys by the waist, pushed her against his body and claimed his wife's lips with double the usual intensity, to prove she was his and nobody else's.

Viserys entered through the adjoining door and saw them in lustful embrace. He poured himself a goblet of wine and was tempted to sit and watch; he had long come to appreciate sex in all its forms and being an spectator to two of the most beautiful creatures the world had ever seen was already affecting a certain part of the Prince's body.

He touched his hardness while enjoying the view.

Rhaegar was sucking Daenerys's breasts when she turned her head to where Viserys had sat and commanded him: “Come, brother.”

Daenerys had lost almost all the weight she gained and looked every inch the Queen she was; her stomach would soon be as flat as before and her breasts were still tender, the nipples, rosy.

Viserys walked towards them and knelt, lifting Daenerys buttocks some and then, he licked her, from cunt to ass.

She moaned as Viserys stood up, placing himself behind her, and rubbed his erection on her, massaging her intimately.

“We should move to bed.” Rhaegar said without looking at Viserys. He told their brother he was to fuck her first, the privilege of being, in his mind, Daenerys true and only husband.

Viserys did not mind coming second; he had an alternative plan.

When they finally moved to the largest bed they could find at Dragonstone, the Prince was almost intimidated at the sight of his brother. Rhaegar is as hung as a horse. He took a deep breath. His own
member was of a good size and, well...Viserys was confident he was far more skilled than his brother when it came to bedroom activities.

*He might be my superior in all things, even in looks...but not in sex. And If I am not to return to Daenerys bed, as he wants it, tonight she will scream my name.*

Prince Oberyn Martell, after all, had an average sized penis and could bring any men or women to ecstasy with his passion and knowledge.

Viserys had learned from the best.

The Prince laid down. Daenerys sucked him while being mounted by Rhaegar.

Her mouth was warm, sensual; her eyes were open, the violet now almost black. He closed his own eyes, imagining they were both alone in that bed. Usually, he would not have minded the presence of a second, a third or even more men, but Rhaegar was intent in showing his prevalence instead of sharing the joys of their sister's body.

*Oh, Daenerys is good... so very good...she knows exactly how I like my cock to be sucked.* Not even the implication- that Rhaegar, being so far the only man she had ever laid with, was the one to have taught her how to orally service a man- would rob Viserys from this delicious pleasure.

“Oh, Dany...yes...oh....fuck!” Viserys spent inside her mouth; she drank until the last drop and he smiled.

Being on fours now, Daenerys turned and stroked Rhaegar’s back, prompting him to move with her, laying on the bed by Viserys; he did so without pulling his cock out.

Daenerys laid by her side, facing Viserys; she started to kiss him on his lips while Rhaegar continued to fuck her. When the thrusts became too intense, Daenerys broke the kiss and Viserys watched as both his siblings reached their releases, her facial expression going from soft and relaxed to a grimace of pain and pleasure and Rhaegar, deep in rut, oblivious to anything.

“Rhaegar!...oh…”

“Yes, come for me…”

She did, and so did he.

The after bliss moments were shared in a surprisingly rather natural and sweet manner. Rhaegar would stroke Daenerys hair and nib her neck, while Viserys kissed her face, breasts and lovely hands, the three of them whispering words of devotion in their mother tongue.

“*Love ....only love...that is how it should be. “ She said while turning to Rhaegar and kissing him.” Nothing will change; we are now only more .”*

Viserys got hard again; as she was facing Rhaegar and playing with his cock to make it come back to life, the Prince swiftly touched her cunt, spreading his brother’s seed around his intended target.

Daenerys showed her acceptance by touching the Prince’s member with her free hand, guiding its head to her asshole.

It was tight, very, *very* tight. To break inside took some effort, but, if in life Viserys was not very patient, in bed, he *was*. 
He allowed Daenerys to adjust and breathe; when she relaxed enough, Viserys pushed forward, slowly and carefully working his way inside.

_He most possibly had not touched her there._ The burning sensation had definitely gave way to a much more enjoyable one, as Daenerys was rocking her hips and helping more of her brother’s cock going in.

“Oh...Viserys...yes...so good...yes...”

Daenerys was the one to prompt Rhaegar in claiming again her now leaking wet cunt; her walls greedily swolled his very large cock at once and he, begrudgingly, agreed that this was _heaven._

He meant what he said to Viserys earlier and had, in fact, not changed his mind.

However, Rhaegar had decided to make use of all additional stimulation and, in the future, when alone with his wife, he would be sure to go wherever she wished him to.

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Viserys eventually made his way to Daenerys cunt.

Finally, in the eyes of the Gods and Men, the Prince _consummated_ their marriage the moment he gave her his seed.

He slept peacefully afterwards.

When they broke their fasts at the Great Hall of Dragonstone, pretending that nothing had happened, an unnerving thought crossed Viserys mind.

_Cersei will have a fit._

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**House Arryn**

Viserys was right.

Cersei had a fit.

“How could you? Arianne...Daemon...Myera...now I have to share you with your siblings!” Viserys would be amused if he was not so scared. Cersei in fury was a sight. “Why you must have us all? A normal man would have a wife and mistress….perhaps even visit a brothel sometimes. But you...you marry them!”

“Lioness, this step was needed; they will sail very soon and take my dragon away from me. I will sit on the Throne for over a year and, with Aegon trying to break The Faith in two, The North recovering from a civil war and, according to Varys, with the Ironborn planning on rebelling...they wanted to make sure my loyalty was theirs.”

Cersei only calmed down when Viserys reminded her of their impending wedding: “In less than four moon turns, Prince Doran will make sure Arianne go to the High Septon and demand an annulment herself, stating she was married against her will. Rhaegar wrote the letter we are to send to
your Lord Father, and he will speak to Lord Arryn before they are to sail. You will be the mother of
the next Queen, beloved...you will be a Princess of the Iron Throne.”

“Why I had to fall for you? The Gods are cruel.” Cersei pouted. ”Show me the letter your Kingly
brother wrote.”

Viserys rolled his eyes and extended Cersei the parchment: “ Now you will only believe me if you
have proof? Do not be like that, lioness; you know my heart is yours.”

“Yes, I know...and mine is yours, dragonprince...” She finally relented and kissed her prince.” I only
meant to read how he phrased it; my Lord Father could be persuaded this is the only way he could
hope to have a Queen with Lannister blood; not a half lion, but his line would still sit on the Iron
Throne.”

She read the document twice; it was good...would it be enough? “ My Lord Father is no man of half
measures; this is indeed a good offer, but also a compromise. House Lannister association with
House Tyrell, however...it complicate things.”

“Yes, it does. But you, as my Princess , and our daughter as Queen will have to suffice…” Dorne,
however, would have to accept defeat and settle for less.

“The Lady Myrcella could also be a Princess...” Viserys said as he started to unlace Cersei’s dress. “
Arianne is barren; her heir is Quentyn, and his heir is Trystane until he marries...he is five and ten
and so far, not betrothed.”

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**House Tully**

A day after Sansa, in the company of Her Grace, the Crown Prince Jaehaerys and many knights,
arrived at Riverrun for her wedding, Lord Tully’s steward approached Lady Catelyn with an
apologetic expression.

“They say Lord Stark is at the Gates, my Lady.”

The last ravens exchanged with Brandon dated from less than two fortnights. Catelyn had decided it
was perfectly fine to have Lord Manderly stand in for her husband in the wedding ceremony, when
Sansa's father was obviously so intent in forgetting about both his children.

Catelyn had forgotten to mention to Lord Stark that Sansa was now marrying Ser Edmure a full
moonturn before the original agreed date.

_Mayhaps Lord Manderly mentioned the change without knowing this was not the agreed date. _If he
had, Lord Stark indeed had time to come this far south, provided he left Winterfell immediately upon
their last raven and travelled at full speed.

Lady Catelyn would actually welcome him if that was the case, as it showed he actually still cared
for Sansa, whom he had always doted on anyway.

Before Catelyn, however, was not Brandon, but Jon Stark.
“I am sorry, my Lady.” Jon handed Catelyn the Valyrian Steel dagger her son had bequeathed her. “Benjen and I found Bran, but it was too late...he was beyond the wall...they all perished there. His last words were about you and Sansa. Please, take the dagger; it is yours now. He wanted you to be safe.”

*Oh, my poor boy...my son.* Catelyn did not ask about the other Brandon; instead, she inquired of Summer, Bran's direwolf.

“It is his gift to Sansa, my Lady...this way, a part of him will always guard the both of you. If your Lord Father allows it, of course; otherwise, I take Summer back to Winterfell.”

*No, Summer stays.* “I...I thank you, Lord Stark.” Catelyn said with a trembling voice. “For trying to rescue my son; for risking your life in doing so. And for coming to Riverrun to attend the wedding. Please, go and rest...I know you and your men must be tired. Do not...tell Sansa...not yet…”

Jon nodded.

Catelyn went to speak with her Lord Father; they gave orders for Summer and Ghost to be taken to the kennels, washed and fed. Lord Tully disliked the idea of having such a beast in his Castle, but it was a fine wedding gift and the only thing they had of Bran, so he said nothing.

His Sansa would soon be a Tully of Riverrun and the wolf there at least would serve as a reminder she descended from Kings of Winter.

***

The day after the wedding and bedding ceremony, during Supper, when all in attendance at Riverrun were recovered from the feast, Queen Daenerys addressed her subjects:

“My Lords and Ladies, I, Queen Daenerys of House Targaryen, hereby announce that the Crown Prince Jaehaerys dragon egg has hatched. His Grace, King Rhaegar and I decided it was best to travel to Volantis, where their library holds many writings on dragon lore. Prince Viserys will be Regent for the rest of the present year and part of the next. We count on your loyalty towards the Royal Family and your future King, Jaehaerys Targaryen, now and always.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope I surprised you on how Bandon died and the immediate consequences of the birth of the dragons.

It was hard to let Brandon go...he was so disgusting...The North is better off without you, jerk!

* As we have no details on the ceremony performed by Visenya Targaryen, that made Alyss Harroway her son Maegor’s second living wife, I kind of adapted the Lord of Light rites, where there must be a fire...and made up some vows:
  "Daenerys, take your husband Rhaegar and your husband Viserys; your fire shall keep them loved and warm."
I used this translator:
https://lingojam.com/EnglishtoValyrianTranslator
Chapter Summary

Sansa learns the news; Jon meets with the King and his brother; Houses Tyrell and Lannister welcomed new additions and Aegon finally makes his move.

Chapter Notes

The pause was needed as I had to update the other fics( there is still one I need to work on) and well...life got in the way.

House Tully 297 A.C

Lady Sansa Stark was happy to see that her cousin, Jon, had come to attend her wedding. But, in the confusion of the last days, she simply did not have the time to speak to Jon, to inquiry about her brother’s whereabouts. All Sansa knew was that Bran was still alive, having fled the Boltons when they tried to take Winterfell, and that people were searching for him as she prepared to walk down the aisle.

While it had not been spoken, Sansa assumed Bran’s disappearance prevented her northern family from making the trip south, as only Jon and Lord Manderly were in attendance.

Sansa could not, however, fathom the reason House Tully insisted the wedding to take place almost a moon turn before the previously agreed date.

“Why is that, mother? If much, we needed to postpone the date, until Bran is found…”

Her Mother had travelled to King’s Landing to escort Sansa to Riverrun and was clearly avoiding answering Sansa’s questions or speaking of anything other than her upcoming nuptials.

Sansa decided not to press her Mother; Lady Catelyn was under an extreme amount of pressure. She had admitted to Sansa that her daughter’s father had sent her south for “an extended period of time”, implying they would live respectful separate lives from then on. Wishing to avoid distress her mother, Sansa decided to give Catelyn more space and to wait until a time she was strong enough to have a real conversation.

Sansa was also, after all, keeping secrets from Lady Catelyn.

*nobody is to know how the dragons were born...they would not understand it was not the Queen’s fault and would call her witch when all she had done was to perform a miracle.*

In many ways, her going South had challenged many of the things she was raised to believe: Sansa saw how some knights ignored their vows to serve their own sordid purposes; she met a Prince who
was not valiant and brave, but deranged in his madness and hatred and she witnessed the single most important event in the recent History of the Seven Kingdoms with her own eyes.

It was tragical that the birth of dragons was caused by the death of an innocent child. It was a bitter lesson Sansa would never forget: how people would take advantage of the dutiful and harm the good in the pursuit of hidden agendas.

Queen Daenerys was only doing her Duty when she extended guest’s rights to Princess Arianne and her “advisor” Lady Melisandre, although she disliked and disapproved of their particular relationship, one that Sansa did not even know it was capable of existing.

In the end, Daenerys did not even blame Arianne for her folly: “The Princess is in love - or in lust- with the sorceress; she cannot see the dangers of this association.” Her Grace said to her ladies in waiting when Prince Viserys wife took to her chambers after arriving from her trip.

Sansa blushed. “But...how is that even possible?” she asked in earnest; Myranda made a joke once about an “odd couple” of widows in the Red Keep, but Sansa had learned to take the Valewoman stories with a grain of salt by that time and paid no mind to what she considered gossip.

Now, the Queen herself was telling Sansa and Brienne that no, such things were known to happen. “You are to be married soon and is time I start explaining what really goes on between a man and a woman and...in some cases, between a man and man or a woman and a woman. This lesson no septa ever teaches you. I myself had to learn the hard way...”

Daenerys went to explain, in detail, states of arousal, foreplay and intercourse for all kinds of couples and “alternative arrangements” in a very matter of fact tone. “Mayhaps this lesson will save you years of intimate problems and guarantee you will have happy marriages. Sex can be a great source of comfort and pleasure for both spouses, if done the right way.”

Sansa found everything the Queen said fascinating and yes, she doubted her Mother would have been so open and honest about the subject.

Poor Brienne was as innocent as a newborn baby, redder than a dornish pepper, but even her bombarded the Queen with questions. “Is the pain really bad, Your Grace?”

Daenerys had given leave for both Ladies to address her by the her given name when they were in private, but Brienne would sometimes forget and be reprimanded for it: “The Queen is not speaking at the moment so you must call me Daenerys...and yes, the pain is bad, if the man is not experienced or is overwhelmed. If he is careful and considerate- also depending on his size- you will feel a burning sensation that subdues with time. The most important is that you are prepared for the intrusion- you must convince your husband to...well...give you the Lord's kiss if nothing else helps...It is of utmost importance that you are properly lubricated, so the parts can fit...do you follow?”

Sansa nodded.

When her Lady Mother gave an hour length talk on “doing her duty to the best of her abilities”, Sansa silently and respectfully listened like a good daughter would.

She then decided to ignore all her mother’s advices where marriage was concerned and found that her betrothed, Ser Edmure, was just too happy about said decision.

He was being a perfect gentleman to Sansa and had only dared to hold her hand when they were taking a stroll in the gardens of Pinkmaiden, where Edmure came to meet and escort Sansa and the Queen to Riverrun, when she suddenly announced they had to start “learning about each other” and
kissed him.

It was just a peck really, but enough to melt some of Edmure’s reserve and, from them on, he always sought to kiss Sansa in the lips at least once a day.

They also managed to have a frank conversation about their relationship and the strangeness of being brought together this way, since they met as relations and now were about to be joined in matrimony. “Does it bother you that I am your mother’s brother, Sansa?”

Had Edmure been Benjen, yes, it would have bothered Sansa, for she grew up with him as a constant presence in her life whereas Edmure...Sansa briefly met him when she was going south to enter into Her Grace’s services.

So, no, their close blood status meant little to her: “You are my uncle in name, but we never had this sort of connection...when we met, you treated me as a friend and listened to what I had to say. No, it does not bother me. Besides, in the history of my House, uncles had married nieces before…”

Although Sansa felt the Queen had done an excellent job by preparing her for the first night as a wife, she was still four and ten, and very nervous about everything. She had barely managed to eat, knots forming in her stomach as the time for the bedding ceremony approached and, when they finally started to chant “Bedding! Bedding! Bedding!” Sansa froze.

Her mother saw it; Catelyn came for her daughter, kissed Sansa in the forehead and told her that everything would be fine. “This is your House and we are your Family...Edmure loves you, Sansa.”

Edmure was just a few centimeters taller than Sansa, so kissing him had never been a problem; she had learned to like his thick, fiery red beard tickling her face and well, her now husband had always made her feel protected and cherished. Because of that, when they both were deposited in the bedroom they were to share that night, Sansa immediately relaxed when left alone with him.

He grabbed her hand, took it to his lips and kissed it. “My lady...Sansa.” Edmure took her to bed and she undressed under his eyes.

He was pleased: “You are very beautiful.”

Sansa had no illusions about Edmure; this was not his first time, but she could see he was nervous nevertheless, his hands cold as they touched her breasts. For a second, she was afraid of the pain and feared the experience would be awkward and invasive, like Daenerys had said it could be, but then she remembered the Queen also said there was another way, one that could also be...pleasurable, if the husband was willing to cooperate.

“I must be prepared...” Sansa said as she saw that Edmure was already adjusting himself. “I was told...it does not hurt this way...if you could...help me?”

Edmure chuckled. “Not going to argue with the wisdom behind these words; I apologise for not having considered this. I will do as my lady commands.” He then disappeared between her legs and only emerged when he was sure Sansa was properly prepared.

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Lady Catelyn had expected to break the fast with her daughter and tell Sansa about the terrible news from the North, but neither Sansa nor Edmure left their chambers that morning.
Her Lord Father was beaming. “Let the lovebirds stay longer in their nest, dear daughter; this is a good sign; it shows that we were right in seeing to the match.”

Catelyn had prayed many hours in the Sept for this marriage to be a good and happy one, as she would not abide to see her Sansa being as miserable as she was, but it was rather unsettling to even contemplate why Edmure and Sansa chose to stay abed other than join their family.

Lysa giggled at Catelyn’s obvious discomfort.

When lunchtime was nearing, Catelyn took matters to her hands and knocked at their door, not out of concern, but because Duty awaited them. *Lord Stark and the Queen are leaving in the morning; we must announce the deaths by this afternoon and enter in mourning period.*

An obviously dishelled Edmure opened up a slip through the door when Catelyn announced she herself was knocking and would not be leaving until they answered; it was clear that they were awake, as Catelyn heard whispers and some movements. “Good morning, good mother?”

Catelyn rolled her eyes. “You must put an end to...whatever is happening inside...clean yourselves and come down. Sansa’s cousin came with terrible news; I just postponed telling my daughter, but she needs to know…”

The gravity of the situation struck Edmure, his face changed from slightly annoyance at the interruption to an apologetic expression. “I am sorry, dear sister...we will be down shortly. “

Catelyn and Edmure took Sansa for a walk outside the walls where Jon was waiting with the direwolves. She started to cry when she saw Summer, finally realizing the truth.

“Did he...suffer?” she asked Jon...

“No...he died in my arms” Jon lied “and made me promise to come south to see you...Summer is your wedding’s gift. They are all at Winterfell for the funeral...I had the sculptures made and it took some time for everybody to arrive from all corners of The North...that is why I am the only one here."

Sansa stroked the silver grey fur of her new friend, while Catelyn told of her father’s accidental death and was forced, for the first time, to reveal the details of her betrothal contract. “It was agreed your line would be excluded from the succession of Winterfell, your father wished a full blooded Stark, a follower of the Old Gods to inherit The North.”

She barely reacted to the news of having been disinherited; all Sansa could care about was that her brother died and she would never be able to see him again. “We should make the announcement then...we need to mourn my brother...and father, too. I assume you are staying with us at Riverrun, mother. Who is the new Lord Stark? Uncle Ned?”

“No.” Catelyn answered with calm. “Lord Jon Stark is the Warden of the North. Your Lord Father made him his heir before he died and I agree there is no one better for the role than Jon, except for Lord Eddard, of course, who is now acting in his son’s stead.”

“Lord Stark…” Sansa said with a sad voice. “Would you please join me in making the announcement? Riverrun has a beautiful Godswood...I think it would only be fair if we were to announce their passings before the heart tree.”

Jon agreed, knowing full well that Bran would be watching.
House Stark

Lord Jon Stark joined Her Grace´s retinue to King´s Landing the next day, as House Tully entered the mourning period. The hunt that had been organized for the day as part of the celebrations was canceled and most nobles in attendance started to leave Riverrun, the sole exceptions were some members of House Frey, always eager to enjoy good food and wine at the expenses of their Liege, who would be obliged to lodge them for the time being.

Not a full hour passed from the official announcement and Lords approached Jon with marriage´s proposals: from House Blackwood to Bracken and, of course, the ever grasping Freys, they all coveted the title of Lady of Winterfell for their daughters or sisters.

Black Walder Frey invited Jon to stay at the Twins when he was to return North, mentioning he could chose from over “ten beautiful Ladies of bearing age; Father will gladly pay whoever you chose’s weight in silver as a dowry.”

Jon decided to return North with Lord Manderly, by ship.

The night at the wedding, Jon had danced with many young women, but none had made his heart beat faster. After Lady Allyria, Jon had not had the time or interest to seek out female companionship, despite Uncle Brandon always inviting him to join in his trips to Wintertown brothel. But now, after surviving a war and an encounter with a white walker, Jon had to admit he was made of flesh and had needs.

So lonely in fact that Jon was considering seeking a professional in King´s landing. He knew of the establishments of the street of silk, some better than others, and reasoned that was wiser to pay for an hour of pleasure than marry the wrong woman in desperation.

Queen Daenerys was still as beautiful as he remembered, but sadder.

Jon wondered how hard it must be to lose a child. His parents were blessed with three healthy and perfect children, but they were exceptional in that. Lady Catelyn had had at least three dead babies that he knew of and each time she lost a child, she would smile even less. Poor Lady Jorelle died trying to give uncle Benjen a second child and he was so distraught at the possibility of losing Lady Val in childbed that he refused to leave Queenscrown.

As the days progressed, Daenerys started to open up to Jon, possibly because Ghost was constantly running for her and demanding some of her attention and even the Crown Prince, a toddler, had all but lost respect for Jon´s wolf and had tried to mount the beast at least once.

“dagon! Dagon! “ Jaehaerys would say everytime Ghost was around.

Daenerys apologised to the wolf as if Ghost was a person; then she turned to Jon, trying to explain: “It is his first word...pity that he is confused.”

Turning to her son, Daenerys corrected the boy: “ No...wolf...WOLF!”

Jaehaerys shook his head: “Dagon!” Silly mama.

Jon remembered when Elia was learning how to speak that she would call every woman “Mama”.

“Mayhaps he is referring to Ghost as an animal? Children tend to generalize as they do not have a large vocabulary…”
This brought a smile on Daenerys face. “You must be right; of course...you do have younger siblings and cousins. This means my son is a genius in his own right. Thank you for this gift, my friend.”

Daenerys sailed to Dragonstone the day after they arrived; her husband stayed behind to deal with the last details of Viserys Regency and was only expected to leave for good in a fortnight.

King Rhaegar received Jon in his Solar as soon as it was possible; Jon only had time to bathe, eat a light meal and change into clean clothes before being summoned.

Joining His Grace in this closed doors meeting were the Grand Maester, Marwyn and the Prince Viserys.

“Lord Stark, we were very sorry to hear about the passing of your uncle and his son, but your bravery in tracking and defeating the bastard of Bolton makes us believe that you are the right man to pacify The North and help them prepare for Winter. “ Marwyn then took the word, adding they were mining dragonglass as per Maester Aemon’s instructions and Lord Manderly had been approached to organize the transportation to White Harbour.

As for Valyrian Steel...when time would come, the Houses that owned weapons made of this metal would be conscripted into temporary service at The Wall; but there was more. “Some armourers can still work Valyrian Steel, reforging weapons. One of those is based in King's Landing: his name is Tobho Mott and we suggest you pay him a visit while you are in King's Landing.”

“Ser Arthur Dayne considered him to be the best and I remember visiting his forge. A knight in the service of Lord Dustin is also a former apprentice of Tobho Mott and speaks highly of his skill.” His uncle had always told Jon that Rhaegar Targaryen was a very intelligent man and capable ruler when he was not drifting into daydream or composing a song...Jon could see that the King was all focused and that there was another meaning to this suggestion.

*They are speaking of reforging Valyrian Steel...since it cannot be replicated. Who would have enough Valyrian Steel to find reforging an interesting prospect ?*

From the Seven Kingdoms, just two houses had ceremonial swords of such material: Houses Tarly and Stark.

“If you are suggesting Ice is to be made into two swords, I have some conditions.” As they did not deny the intention, Jon went on. “First, Lord Tarly would also have to agree to it...secondly, I would only pay for the reforging and incur in the risks if there is a signed document stating that both weapons are to remain as property of House Stark. And finally...the second sword should be granted, as a loan, to the Night's Watch, for the duration of the war, and returned once the war is won. I would have liked the Watch to have its own sword, to be passed from Lord Commander to Lord Commander, but I must think as Lord Stark: I cannot possibly take this away from the next generations.”

King Rhaegar was visibly impressed by the young Lord before him.” Arthur and I were right about you, Lord Stark...very well, I accept your demands. I should send word to Lord Tarly and, hopefully, he will also agree to the terms, that are fair on both sides. “

Jon thought the meeting would soon be over, but Rhaegar Targaryen was full with surprises “You mentioned the next generations...I also worry about that and we must discuss the joining of our Houses. I wish to finally honour the Pact of Ice and Fire.”

“There are no Targaryen brides to be given away, Your Grace…”
“Not now.” The King said. “I was eight and ten when my bride was born; you are now six and ten. Grand Maester Marwyn has confirmed that Her Grace is perfectly able to have more children. We will wait another half a year, to give her time to rest. One can wait for the right one to come along, Jon...it is perfectly acceptable if seek companionship from time to time, as long as there are no bastards and you remain a bachelor...”

The childish infatuation with the Queen had so far never really left Jon entirely- something in him still burnt everytime he looked at her- but the Lady Allyria took some of the edge and innocence away; he was the first to admit that he seemed to have a type, as his uncle Arthur had put it, and since marriage was far from his mind at the moment and King Rhaegar wished to honour House Stark with this proposal, Jon saw no problems in accepting the offer.

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**House Targaryen**

What kind of red blooded, intelligent and obviously virile northern Lord would accept to wait almost two decades for a bride, possibly endangering the succession of Winterfell during a time when House Stark was preparing for war?

Viserys Targaryen had his answer that same night. During supper, the night before Daenerys was to set sail to Dragonstone to join their dragons, he observed Lord Jon´s interactions with the Queen.

*The Lord Stark is enamoured with my dear sister...she hides well, but she also finds him attractive. If Rhaegar only knew his favorite Lord lusts for his wife...*

A goblet of wine in hand, Viserys approached Jon after the dessert had been served and the guests were happily making small talk: “My Lord...we have never had time during our travels, as you were rather young and training under your uncle, but now that you are the Head of House Stark and I, the soon to be Regent, I think we should take this opportunity to rekindle our acquaintance.”

You were rather busy with my uncle at that time, yes...and I was but a child.” *Oh, I can see he does not trust me. Smart of you, my Lord...*

Viserys decided the best course of action was to use Jon´s distrust to his advantage in this case. *We will never be friends...but I will make sure I have someone in The North to see to my interests.*

“You are not of the same disposition of your late Uncle, a dear friend of mine...however, as my brother said, you do not need to be alone in the years to come and ...well...I need your assistance with a rather private problem.”

Straightforward types like Jon Stark would not respond to subtlety or innuendo, Viserys had long ago learned, but they could be swayed nevertheless.

This northerner, despite having dornish blood, was not liberal in his affections. Viserys was walking a thin line trying to lure Jon without seeing to be attempting to seduce him; not every man was born to enjoy both genders in their differences.

*Poor creatures* .

“What can I do for you, my Prince?” Jon asked with some degree of irritation. “And what this has to do with my present status?”
“Meet me in one hour hence; there is a place I wish to take you. It is very safe, but you should bring your guards. I will explain everything on the way; it seems to me that your most natural needs can actually solve my present problem. “ Then Viserys winked at Jon in mischief. “ Yes, you were right; I mean to use you, in a sense, but it will be beneficial for the both of us. If I can give you an advice, always go for deals that are good for both parties...if someone is offering you too much, you must suspect something is wrong.”

The house was located around Visenya’s Hill, a simple but charming two store building. Viserys had the key and opened to reveal the place was luxuriously decorated with carpets, divans, mirrors...a maid came, shy and middle aged. She bowed to Viserys, and he gave her orders for Jon to be served refreshments.

He then apologised profusely and explained that “ poor Myera” was not aware of his intentions: “ The idea just occurred to me; she is with me for some years now...I need to speak briefly to her...she still struggles with the Common Tongue.”

As they made their way to this house, Viserys had told Jon he was “ three or two moon turns from getting an annulment”; they had already settled on Lady Cersei Arryn as a replacement for the Princess Arianne, but there were problems with the woman’s temper. “ The truth is that Cersei has been my mistress for some time; I love her, but she is a jealous woman and Myera has been the source of many of our fights. I want to be a good husband to her, but I cannot possibly throw my paramour in the streets... She is unprepared to live on her own and used to serve only one client. “

Because Jon still looked unsure, Viserys made a comment he knew would change the Lord of Winterfell’s mind. “ Myera is very delicate and strives to please...I cannot possibly have poor Myera be rented by the hour. It would be too cruel...she looks very much like my sister!”

Jon relented. “ Fine...I go and meet your paramour, but I still have not agreed to it.”

Viserys already knew Myera would be perfect for the job and that Jon would take her eventually. He played his part well enough, trying to “sell” his mistress future misery and her many skills in “avoiding getting with child...bed warming...discreet handling of singular preferences” for Jon not to notice the trap for what it was.

Myera spoke the Common Tongue rather well; actually, except for her accent, she had great command of the language and was literate.

Even being far from Jon, Viserys spoke to his paramour in High Valyrian: “You are to go North...and speak only in basic sentences...and report to me about Lord Jon´s business…”

“You want me to spy for you?How boring!” Myera was a social butterfly; to ask her to barely speak was torture.

“Only for a time...you can pretend you are learning, to please him...so he can start sharing things with you...but nobody is to know you can write, yes?”

The best spies were the ones who did not know they were spies, like Sansa Stark, who would often send Viserys well written letters about life on Dragonstone. The Prince was able to know exactly how sharp and intelligent Daenerys had become under their mother’s guidance, and, most importantly, what Daenerys knew and did not know about the courtiers, their true allegiances and motives.

Viserys took Myera by the hand and to the living room. The silver haired, violet eyed small woman bowed to Jon and gave him a naturally sensual smile, the kind that only good whores were capable
of, immediately convincing potential customers that they were “attracted” to them.

Jon smiled in return.

Myera sailed to White Harbour not soon afterwards.

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House Tyrell

Things were going so well in the marriage of Rhaenys and Willas that they decided to give little Aemond Tyrell siblings.

*Half siblings* that is.

Rhaenys wanted to have a child with Arthur; she loved him too much, she said, and he relented when Willas gave them their leave. “I had brothers and a sister and, while Highgarden is filled with cousins for Aemond to play with, it is not the *same*. Falia also wants a child...if Rhaenys agrees to have my bastard raised as a Tyrell, I will gladly grant the benefit of my name to yours.”

Ser Arthur Dayne never expected to become a father and was, understandably, conflicted: “We cannot possibly expect to fool everybody at Highgarden into believing that Rhaenys had twins...not to mention, what would I be to this son or daughter? How would Falia be able to mother and raise her child this way?”

Rhaenys loved babies; she would hug and kiss them until they cried for help. Ser Arthur knew she would be incapable of mistreating any child and trusted Falia would be the same...however, this could potentially bring its own set of problems in the future:

Where Arthur saw problems, Rhaenys could only see benefits: “Falia will be addressed as Mother Falia by all our children...Aemond is perfectly happy in her arms anyway. You will be Father Arthur, or Uncle Arthur...Willas and I will be Mother and Father. Many noble children address their caretakers this way and, once they are of age, we will explain their parentage and why we had to do it. They will be *fine*...more than fine, really...happy and rich!”

“I must agree with Ser Arthur that Highgarden is not a good place for keeping secrets.” Willas thus, proposed a practical solution. “As soon as both are pregnant and in the first stages of showing, we should embark on a trip to Pentos...there is a great market for Dothraki horses and many trade opportunities House Tyrell wishes to explore in the Free City.”

They also agreed Rhaenys could not become pregnant with twins a second time around, so they would only have this chance at growing their family and would keep things this way.

Falia fell pregnant first; a moonturn later, it was Rhaenys’s turn.

They discreetly sailed to Pentos two moon turns after Princess Rhaenys announced her second pregnancy, only returning by the end of the year. They stopped at King’s Landing in time to present the twins to their Kingly grandfather: Dyanna Tyrell, sand blond hair with violet eyes and Alester Tyrell, who, according to Willas, looked exactly like Loras when he was a baby.

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Ser Jaime Lannister was found passed out drunk by his brother when the first contractions announcing the upcoming birth of his first child with Lady Margaery came upon her.

“Brother, you need to wash up and come...NOW!!” the dwarf slapped his brother's face to get his attention.”I am not joking...wake up!”

Jaime laughed at Tyrion’s desperation, but stood up and went to wash his face in the Washstand near his table.

Tyrion insisted there was no time to lose : “Lady Margaery is about to give birth...you should come, brother!”

Jaime was drunk, not ignorant. He remembered it well how long Mellara took to deliver their children. With Tommen, it was two days of torture.

*Tyron must be not experienced in such matters:* “Women take hours to birth babies...we have enough time for me to have a bath and eat something...it helps with the bender.”

“You do not seem to understand...the girl you married is a *breeder*.” Margaery, according to Tyrion, was the lucky type of woman made specifically to birth babies. He had never seen something quite like it: his good sister dilated so much in the space of mere couple of hours that a head would easily pass in no time. “ She is about to start pushing...I am telling you.”

As Jaime continued with his toilette, Tyrion considered his job done and went to attend Margaery.

When Jaime finally made to his wife’s chamber, the sight of his Father, Lord Twyn, holding the newborn baby girl with pride in his eyes was enough to immediately heal his hangover.

Just the *thought* ...

It made Jaime’s skin crawl.

Margaery looked positively maternal, wearing a simple white gown, her brown hair brushed and braided and her bosom undoubtedly filled with milk. “Oh, my Lord Husband! You came at the right time...you need to name our daughter, my love.”

They had discussed so many names... well, it was mostly Margaery proposing girl names and Jaime refuting each and every one of them.

One day, he jokingly came forth with the name “Tywna” as a “tribute” to his father; seeing that Margaery was actually considering it...Jaime simply stopped contemplating the birth of another daughter and would only suggest masculine names.

But the girl... she was *beautiful*. His heart sank- she reminded Jaime of another girl... *Poor Joanna.*

Jaime took his daughter away from his Father arms, turned to Margaery and said with resolution: “Marei...she is to be called Lady Marei Lannister. My daughter.”

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The night they celebrated Viserys first day as a Regent was a memorable one: he gingerly informed Cersei that he sent his paramour North and agreed to remain faithful to her once they were married.

But the best was yet to come: during sex Cersei had such a strong orgasm that she actually ejaculated like a man.

It was so violent that surprised even Viserys. “Lioness“ he said an hour later, as they were still recovering from the visceral experience. “I knew I was good...but not that good!”

“You are wonderful, my Prince…” She was sure they had conceived their Alyssane that night and told him so.

“Prince Doran has sent word?” Cersei asked; Arianne had already taken residence in King's Landing and was enjoying her last days as wife to Viserys by flaunting her relationship with Ser Daemon Sand.

“Yes...he is sailing as we speak and is bringing Quentyn with him. They want to meet your Myrcella.” Her girl had flowered; she was now three and ten, a very pretty blond with deep blue eyes. Cersei was secretly glad Myrcella would not be as beautiful as her, but proud that her daughter was definitely more intelligent and adaptive than she ever was, perfect for the role of the future Princess of Dorne.

Lord Arryn had been won over after all; Lord Tywin was driving a hard bargain regarding the dowry to be paid and, as Cersei had pointed out, House Arryn already had an alliance with House Lannister through her.

And Prince Doran had been very receptive to their offer, seeing that Arianne was barren and Myrcella, one of the few available daughters of a Great House, would soon be of bearing age, the betrothal was all but a fact.

“Quentyn will eventually succeed his Father...Prince Doran is tired of Arianne’s behaviour. I told him she should be more discreet when it came to her paramours. King’s Landing is not Sunspear; Aegon and his Septon are getting close and closer to our walls and I fear that now that Rhaegar is gone, Aegon will finally play his hand…”

Viserys had always disliked Aegon and feared the boy had inherited some of his mother’s intelligence when it came to the Game of Thrones. Although he had joined the Faith, it was not as a Septon, but as a warrior and instead of taking a vow of silence, Aegon was actually speaking against the “corruption of the Court and the soiled High Septon” openly.

Lord Arryn had suggested the High Septon to publicly reprimand Aegon and his followers. They were, after all, trying to revive the Faith Militant, which had been banned precisely because they created problems for everybody- mostly to House Targaryen.

The old man, however, feared this would only mean the breaking of the Faith in two and instead of shutting down their movement, called Aegon’s Septon and the warriors for a meeting where he would "pacifically disband" the group.

Viserys doubted it would work, but had to be seen as at least trying to solve the situation without resorting to violence.

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The Warrior´s son

The High Septon was a vile man and a scared one at that. He had been found abed with a whore at least once by a former personal assistant that so disgusted by the sight, had joined the Poor Fellows.

Nevermind they could not actually be called The Faith Militant in broad daylight; this was what they were and the time for false pretenses had come to an end.

Because he knew the wrongness of his conduct, the High Septon feared holy retribution and, in fear, had invited Aegon and his Septon for a meeting, a sign of weakness.

Aegon had been sending some of his brothers to King's Landing for days before he finally arrive; they should not be drawing attention to their numbers, as the experience in the Westerlands taught them. His personal healer, Qyburn, was admitted to the High Septon´s residence with Aegon´s group and the young man told him to act “ discreetly”.

Their conversation was dragged for days, time enough for the High Septon to fall ill and die from natural age complications.

Aegon’s silent sisters were quick to work on the body; all the formalities were observed, seven days he was placed on a bier and prayers were intoned.

When the Most Devout actually reunited, it was more of a formality than anything else.

Aegon’s Septon entered the room, carried by the warrior's sons, the poor fellows...Orders that were not even recognized by the Faith, as the Militants had been disbanded centuries ago, but they continued to exist with other names and without weapons.

This was about to change.
The Problems of Rulers

Chapter Summary

Varys works on solutions for problems he might be creating himself;
Viserys tries to take Aegon down
Jon organizes The North and Daenerys, Meereen.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Spider- 298 A.C

Lord Varys was a man of many hidden talents.

For instance, people knew he had been a mummer in Lys before he became what he became: an eunuch; but now that he had risen - again- as Master of Whispers, they all assumed that this was the only role Varys played. And while he had a vast network of spies, Varys knew there was no better spy than himself.

So it was that Varys, of the many talents, had also many faces.

Nobody cared to really look at eunuchs; in a city where power and sex meant a lot, Varys, who dealt with information and lacked what many would desire, was overlooked.

Master of Whispers; Master of Disguises. Different clothes, foreigner accents, unremarkable faces...Varys could play it all. Jailor, stable boy, messenger...the spider was always on the move, working for the good of the Realm.

Presently, Varys was called Yan, a sailor from Volantis, meeting the Captain of a vessel from Pentos to discuss employment and...well...the conversation took a turn to the political situation of the Seven Kingdoms.

“Aegon the blessed took over the Faith and at least part of the City. Chaos is spreading and now...well... someone interested in creating even more chaos must have suggested to the former Crown Prince the imprisonment of the Princess Arianne...they found a magical necklace in her possession and she was abed with her paramour, Ser Daemon Sand, at the time of her arrest.”

Varys, who claimed to have little understanding of human’s passions, assessed that Arianne could be used in his plans due to her terribly naive and sensual nature, which he observed during her stay at Pentos.

It was a pity. Such a young and beautiful woman at the mercy of religious fanatics .

Varys shrugged; he had tried to alert House Targaryen of the danger...

Since they did not listen, it was fair to play this fact to his advantage.
“Astapor has fallen...dragons...no bigger than horses, but breathing fire.” Illyrio Mopatis said; his hair was blue and so was his long beard. He could not possibly get rid of his fat and was wearing black and simple clothes to look slimmer, his disguise nowhere near as good as Varys, but not that anyone cared to pay attention to two foreigners at the docks.

“Prince Viserys is trying his best. However, he is used to please others and dislikes making tough decisions.” Varys considered both the Regent and the King unfit to rule for different reasons: Rhaegar was very good at ruling when he was not thinking about prophecies or playing his harp, but had committed some terrible mistakes along the way.

Instead of retifying said mistakes, His Grace left the inexperienced Viserys to deal with the consequences of his own inadequacies as King.

Since his marriage to Daenerys, Rhaegar Targaryen produced a viable heir, traveled the Realm to see first hand the problems he was to solve and endeavoured to fix the problem of his brother’s marriage. All good steps, Varys agreed, but that the main and real problem was left unsolved, it grew out of proportion and now was threatening to undo all the good work previously done.

Fanatics.

Varys hated magic yes...but he also despised religious fanatics.

This is not to say, however, that they could not be used.

Viserys was the opposite of his brother: not as capable or gifted as Rhaegar, but very interested in doing a good job. The sad part was that nature had chose correctly in this case: the Prince was born to be a second. He hesitated when making decisions; listened for too long before speaking his mind and changed his opinions like he changed his clothes.

If not for the Lord Hand and the Strong Small Council Rhaegar left, Viserys would have failed already.

Which was exactly what Varys needed to happen.” Aegon went ahead and armed The Faith, at least in King’s Landing... somebody suggested the Lord Hand go to the Riverlands and The Reach to speak with the Faith Authorities and make sure other Realms are not on the verge of breaking from inside. I fear that something will happen with Lord Arryn in this trip…”

“The dragons remain undefeated in the East…” Illyrio expected dragons to come at some point...but not through the Targaryen Queen. He was working on some scheme to either kidnap one before it was to grow larger...or kill them if this failed. The Queen had many enemies in the East and Illyrio, many friends.

“Dragons nobody saw…” Varys replied. “Many do not believe dragons were born...many say the Royal Couple went to the Shadow Lands, where they will engage in sorcery...others that the Princess was born a winged deformity, but alive and well... and that her parents are seeking a cure. Nobody knows exactly what is happening.”

Master of whispers...master of rumours.

“They say House Greyjoy will attack The North now that is recovering from the civil war...others that they are secretly aligned with House Lannister, to claim part of the Riverlands...Lord Tywin Lannister wants to force the King to bethrote the Crown Prince to his granddaughter.” Cersei Arryn is pregnant; Prince Viserys did not receive his annulment as the High Septon died before he could grant it, and his former good father, Prince Doran, was pressing him to announce that he had
forgiven Arianne for her adultery and offer her a Royal Pardon and life in exile, a good enough offer that would end their problems.

Except for one detail: Aegon is adamant a trial should take place and he has the men to force his hand, if needed to be.

Varys was counting on that; Viserys had to be left with very few choices.

“Lord Lannister is said to be marching with troops to King’s Landing...to liberate it from the Faith. Prince Doran has moved his spears to his borders and Prince Oberyn had their Lead Septon declare Aegon and his followers heretics.” Lord Arryn asked the same position from the Sept of the Moon, while The Reach and the Riverlands remained undecided on how to deal with the issue. “Some of Aegon’s followers infiltrated the Red Keep...they were caught and tortured, of course, but they managed to burn the Grand Maester’s books and the glass candle, which was burning. Aegon denies having anything to do with it.”

Lies, of course; his people knew exactly where to look. Aegon must have told them about secret passages and Varys knew some had actually escaped. Grand Maester Marwyn took many of the parchments and books with him for their travel, but the intention of purging the Realm from dragon lore was what guided Aegon.

“War seems imminent.” Illyrio said. “But for how long this war must go on...and will the information arrive at Slaver's Bay in time?”

Varys was doing a good job at controlling information and disseminating rumours; he counted on Lord Lannister and Aegon to force Viserys in a corner, but there was much he did not control...

The Golden Company, Illyrio said, could be mobilized in less than two moon turns...however, the success of their plan depended upon a Westeros torn by war and at least half the Realm tired or against House Targaryen.

Not to mention, both the King and Prince would have to perish to give way to a new and better ruler.

Daemon, son of Illyrio and Serra Blackfyre, was being raised in secrecy and prepared since infancy to ascend to the Throne, was the only King Westeros needed.

Varys and Illyrio agreed that Daenerys would make a perfect Queen for their Daemon; they wished to combine both lines of the last dragonlords of Valyria into one family. Under the banner of the black dragon.

This could only be achieved if Daenerys was to arrive from the East, a widow, with less or no dragons, defeated and weakened; if she was to find the Iron Throne already claimed and Westeros, united behind Daemon, Daenerys would be forced to become his Consort, and to bear him children.

Provided Daenerys would play by their rules, they could even allow Jaehaerys to marry a second born Princess from hers and Daemon Blackfyre’s line; they would generously grant the former Crown Prince a small Castle in the Crownlands, and take care that he understood the responsibilities and duties of a bannerman to his Liege.

Varys hoped Daenerys would take the deal; he had a soft spot for a woman who was freeing slaves.
House Arryn

Jon Arryn had lost two wives, a daughter, a foster son he doted on and a nephew he loved dearly, but, despite all the tragedies, he had found purpose and contentment in working for the Honour of His House and, as Hand of the King, for the betterment of the Seven Kingdoms.

His job, however, was far from easy, especially when you had a King like Rhaegar Targaryen. The son of an almost mad father, the present king was, simply put, the most intelligent and capable person Jon had ever met. Despite his many qualities, Rhaegar was a Targaryen...a strange and deeply mystical man whose family was a constant source of trouble and distress.

Lord Arryn was already sitting as Hand of the King when Rhaegar set Elia aside and took the Princess Daenerys as wife. House Targaryen was built on incest and Westeros had learned to overlook such unions. Still, Lord Arryn was perplexed. Aerys and Rhaella had been married by force; Jon Arryn assumed most of the unions between brother and sister in that family were done in the same way. He was unprepared to see that something in that Family actually lead a brother to desire a sister as he watched Rhaegar losing his mind with lust.

Only Elia Martell thought Rhaegar meant to have his sister as whore; Jon Arryn was called by the King the same day the young man made his mind and tasked in reaching a separation agreement with the former Princess of Dorne.

Now, another Princess of Dorne was about to be set aside. Arianne was barren; it was nobody's fault and Jon Arryn was a man who understood that nature was cruel sometimes. Cersei Arryn, his niece by marriage, was not known to be honourable, but gave House Arryn an heir and a daughter to marry off and for that, he was thankful. The Lord of the Eyrie had learned to value Cersei and overlook her many flaws; she was an Arryn in the end...she had become one without even Elbert or Jon realizing it.

As High as honour. Cersei would forget about the “Honour” part, but was inistent in House Arryn flying higher than any other Great House. When negotiations for an union between Tyrek Lannister and Myrcella Arryn started to sour, Cersei came up with a desirable Dornish alliance:

“Even if Prince Doran does not disinherited Arianne, she cannot bear any children; her heir is her brother and this brother needs a wife.” Cersei said one day during supper. “Prince Viserys mentioned our Myrcella and Prince Doran is bringing Quentyn to the Capital…”

Lord Robert Arryn was being fostered by Lady Waynwood and was squiring for his cousin, Ser Harrold Hardyng. It had been a suggestion of Cersei, and a good one at that. Jon Arryn concluded that, at least when it concerned her children, Cersei was to be listened.

The Lord of the Eyrie and the Prince of Dorne reached an agreement in less than two days. Lady Myrcella would remain in the Capital and not join Her Grace in her travels, despite being a Lady in waiting. The next year, after her fourteenth name day, Myrcella would move to Sunspear and wed Prince Quentyn Martell in 300 A.C when she would be five and ten.

Lady Cersei was to be the new Princess of the Iron Throne by the time Myrcella was to become a Princess of Dorne. Lord Arryn disapproved of the affair, of course, but admitted it could have been worse. Cersei had remained faithful to his nephew for the duration of their marriage and only embarked in his liaison much after his death; she was being discreet for a change and Prince Viserys was to rectify the wrongness of their relationship by marrying Cersei.
But then, Aegon Targaryen came with his Septon and took King's Landing by storm.

Had the High Septon followed my suggestion and not invited the mad man into our home, this would never had happened.

Lord Varys had done a decent enough job with the information he provided - that Aegon was moving some of his men into the City and that had kept his personal healer as an assistant- but the Small Council was divided about how to act on the threat: Lords Baratheon and Arryn himself were of mind that the Crown should interfere and expel Aegon and his followers at once, while Lord Varys and Velaryon pointed out that the Most Devout would be electing a new Septon and they should focus on placing one of the same mind as the last.

Lord Varys was always very cautious, almost lenient in his assessments.

Prince Viserys did not want to incur in the fury of other Septons- he needed an annulment to marry Cersei- and favored a more careful approach; the Small Council agreed that the candidate of the Riverlands should be the next High Septon and Varys was tasked in working to get the man elected.

Once again, Aegon defeated The Crown in its own game by electing his own Septon by force, arming the Faith and defying the Law by re-establishing the Militant in all but name.

Mayhaps feeling he needed an additional hostage, Aegon imprisoned his own cousin, Arianne, accusing her of witchcraft and adultery and, unfortunately, both accusations had merits, proof and witnesses.

Lord Arryn had by then learned not to argue with the insane and the fanatic; royal blood or not , Aegon Targaryen was both:

“Aegon is beyond saving; His Grace has a heir and a healthy wife to provide him with more. His former son is now an Enemy of the Crown. We should apprehend him and his followers, send for the King to return at once and judge Aegon. The Wall is in need of good men...”

The Master of Whispers agreed... with reservations. “ I suggest the Lord Hand negotiate with the Riverlands and The Reach, forcing them to declare Aegon an heretic...Lord Lannister previously expelled the former Prince from his lands, Lord Baratheon agrees the fanatics have to be dealt with and Dorne already condemned Aegon and his group. We would not even need His Grace to return so early if we have the vote of the other Realms in this matter.”

Understandably, Prince Viserys wished for the King to remain abroad; to call back his eldest brother would be admitting he could not handle a crisis. However, for Lord Arryn to travel such great distances was also detrimental to his needs; Cersei was already pregnant...

And Viserys, while not as intelligent as Rhaegar, was far from stupid. All things considered, Jon Arryn thought The Prince to be a good Regent. His moments of doubt and hesitation made them lose time yes, but Viserys was very focused in the work to be done and malleable without being over compliant.

Rhaegar had the markings of a Great King, with his big plans, knowledge and charisma, while Viserys was the better manager, dealing with problems as they came and very skilled in the social and political sides of rulership.

Viserys was very practical and his solution, logical: “We send Lord Velaryon to Oldtown...all we need is a parchment with the seal of the Septon at the Starry Sept...Lord Arryn should visit the Stony Sept and return with a similar document. In a moonturn, we will have Aegon, his septon and
most of his followers either in our dungeons or sent to the Wall... and the new High Septon will grant me the annulment and life will go on…”

By exposing Arianne’s personal life, Aegon had made impossible for Viserys not to punish his former wife in some way, even though he knew and took part of the infidelity himself.

Prince Viserys was placed as the wronged party and, as a member of the Royal Family, he could not abide to be seen as weak.

Lord Arryn, the Prince of Dorne and the Regent met the night before the Hand was to travel to discuss what was to be done with Arianne.

Prince Doran had a suggestion that was readily accepted by all parties. “ My daughter will be removed from the succession; Quentyn will become my heir and the Lady Myrcella, his Princess. I suggest my Arianne travels to Norvos, where she will join her Lady Mother in exile, never to return and shame us more. “

The morning he left, Lord Arryn informed Cersei that the betrothal of Lord Robert Arryn to Lord Eddard Stark’s only daughter, Elia, had been agreed upon. Both were one and ten; Elia was to join Robert in his fostering by House Waynwood and stat training to become Lady of the Vale.

Since both mothers insisted, the betrothal would only be announced after the girl flowered and if the youngsters were not against the match.

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**House Stark**

Lord Jon Stark only took Myera of Lys as a lover for the duration of their trip to White Harbour.

She was as skilled as Viserys had promised her to be, but something the Prince had said- that a deal that benefits only one party was probably not a good one - stuck with Jon. Prince Viserys simply had too many rich friends who would gladly take Myera in, and yet, he went far and beyond to have her go North.

When Myera’s Common Tongue started to show incredible signs of improvement overnight, Jon was sure the Lysenne woman was being set up as a spy.

_The Prince himself said we were not friends; he knows I am loyal to the King, but distrusts anyone he cannot call a friend._

This lesson Jon had learned at Highgarden; members of the Royal Family would always distrust, even friends.

Jon spent little time with Myera during the day and observed as she took to speak to his men, becoming particularly close to Jory Cassel, whom Jon had grown to value during the war against the Boltons and the aftermath of Brandon Stark’s death.

The present Lord Stark found this relationship, purely sexual, to be stale. Myera was a good person and a beautiful woman. He understood that former slave had no other thing to sell than her own body and could not fault her for this. The novelty of their attraction had soon worn out; Jon craved other
things from a woman than merely a “willing cunt”, like his late uncle so crudish used to say, and, because she was ordered to spy on him, he could not really trust her as a friend.

The Bolton lands were to be divided. His Father proposed making three new Knightly Houses, all directly sworn to House Stark. This would ensue no big player would emerge from the rich forests that for centuries housed the Boltons and would provide Jon with good rewards for bravery and loyalty displayed during the brief war.

The lands to the south of the Dreadfort, from the Weeping river to the shore, would be granted to Jory Cassel. Landed Knights of House Bolton were all but extinguished; the new Masters would have choices of small Holdfasts for their new seats and two full years to pacify the areas and prepare. Lord Stark knew this task to be doable: the smallfolk hated the Boltons, but were hard workers and their last harvest had been successful.

Owen Norrey was offered the Wolfsfort and a bride of House Umber; Rickard Liddle was already betrothed to a daughter of The Wull and accepted the offer of the lands near Hornwood - a good solution for all involved, since the Hornwoods had no available daughters to give- and, as for Jory Cassel…

“Son, are you sure that Jory will not be appalled at the idea.” Ned had expected Jon to reach out for House Manderly for their second born daughter for Jory and not a woman who was rumoured to have been his bed warmer. Myera was a foreigner and, although Jory was by now sleeping with her on a regular basis, not every man would agree to marry his mistress.

“Jory was the one to ask for her when I went to discuss the options...either one of the she-bears or a Lady of House Glover.” This surprised Ned; he never took Jory for the romantic type.

“I will give away the bride and, as far as I am concerned, they met at White Harbour. “What he truly meant was that Myera moved away from his bed to Jory´s as soon as they docked. “I gave them my blessing and my word is final.”

Lord Eddard Stark had to agree with his Liege.

Life was finally returning to normal at Winterfell. Except for Robb, who was still esquiring for Bronze Yohn Royce, Jon´s family was by his side. His Lady Mother was overseeing the last renovations of the Glass Gardens and training Elia in managing a Keep while his Father was working on a letter to Lord Arryn.

Jon also had letters to write...and one was to be sent to Blackhaven, inviting its Lady for a visit…

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The girl was named Ygritte, after a brave spearwife of the Free Folk her mother admired. “She is beautiful, Val...we are good at making babies, would you not agree?”

This Ygritte had blond hair, like her mother and a long face with grey eyes, typical traits of House Stark. “The next child- if I ever allow you near my bed again- should have your blue eyes and be a boy. I told Rickon that free women also train in arms, but your son really wants a brother to sparr…”

Benjen sighted; Rickon was hurting. A brother...for the one he lost beyond that Wall.
After the birth of his sister, Rickon left for the Mountains with Shaggydog and Osha. Benjen was to join them in about two moon turns to see how well Rickon was faring with the Clans. His son was four and ten and Benjen expected him to find a suitable girl in the near future. Flint, Norrey, Wull...Rickon had the freedom to choose, as long as the next Lady of The New Gift was one of the Mountains.

The days passed with Benjen overseeing the additions to Queenscrown; he had refused to attend Brandon’s entombment, as it meant he would probably miss the birth of his daughter. He knew Ned and Willam Dustin would be there to represent the family and had a suspicion that, if their places were reversed, Brandon would definitely think twice before spending almost two fortnights on the road just to gaze upon a dead body.

If much, Benjen felt guilty for not being able to travel south to see Sansa getting married. Jon, as the new Lord of Winterfell, took upon himself the hard task of delivering the news to his cousin and Benjen was sure he would offer both Sansa and Catelyn his support in this terrible time.

Benjen read and wrote his letters in his personal chamber; Queenscrown had no room to spare for its Lord to have a personal solar. When he was sure that Jon had already arrived at Riverrun, Benjen sent a raven to that Castle with a long and personal letter to Sansa. Benjen had requested more birds from Winterfell and the new Maester at Queenscrown was quite good with them; apparently, some ravens could be taught to fly to two Castles and luckily, they received one with this ability. This bird could fly to Barrow Hall and Riverrun, which was very practical. How exactly this was possible, Benjen did not know, but was not complaining.

Benjen was expecting another letter from Riverrun to arrive when he received a raven from Castle Cerwyn. Strange, since the Old Cerwyn cares little for Rickon.

It was actually an official announcement and invitation: Rickon’s uncle, Lord Cley Cerwyn, was going to marry Lord Manderly’s granddaughter, Wylla, by the end of the year.

A rather unexpected development that spoke volumes...

Jon is now Lord of Winterfell and Lord Manderly had his ears all for himself in the South and even welcomed his Liege at the Merman's Court for days... but now, the richest man in The North is settling for the Cerwyn heir...a good enough match, for sure...only not the one he was expecting.

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House Targaryen

Coming from a position of strength, as Queen and King of the Seven Kingdoms and Dragonlords in their own right, meant that the taking of Astapor, Yunkai and Meereen by Daenerys and her dragons, while far from being peaceful, saw less than expected opposition.

Internally the situation was chaotic and the former Masters tried to fight back with all the tools and methods they had available.

Daenerys was forcing the hinterlands of the area to reach self sufficiency; she had placed former Masters as temporary peasants and established local Councils of rulership formed by members of the different sectors of society, that were to report to her every turn of the moon.

Rhaegar was more interested in warfare, in taming the dragons, in getting them ready to battle Ice Demons... “We should attack a Khalasar; only one, to show them the might of our Dragons. They
need to be trained for combat and there are no warrior as fierce as a Dothraki on an open field.”

Men and war; he speaks as if this is a game. Rhaegar was at his best as a ruler when he was in a melancholic mood; now he was simply too happy and carefree to think straight. Far from home, immersed in the exoctiness of a new land, with a wife and a son he loved, Rhaegar was being blinded by his own happiness.

Daenerys worked; she had tried to bring the ruling classes into this new age, but was repaid with treason. They had delivered her their own children as hostages, in exchange to keep part of their riches; The new Queen had even taken their leaders into her Council and briefly courted favour with the Green Grace, just to find that more than half of the former slavers were against her.

Instead of killing their children, Daenerys burnt those who disobeyed. Their civilization was built on slavery...they were given a chance and a choice, but they chose to die with their old ideas. The Queen had decided to spend even less time there. Marwyn had confirmed their dragons, free from any restraints, were growing at a much faster pace than expected and ,by the end of the year, they would be big enough to be ridden.

Instead of preparing to attack the horse lords, Daenerys was strengthening the Guilds and trying to extend them to Yunkai and Astapor. The Meereenese had a good assortment of skilled workers, but the other two cities had been almost all dependable on selling human beings and soldiers for gold.

In less than one year, Daenerys would leave.

As their ruling class was being brought down to their knees and the conspirators, killed, Daenerys still did not feel Meereen was safe to her, to the dragons and to her family. She only trusted the Unsullied and her Westerosi household with Jaehaerys, who was basically confined to the Pyramid. Rhaegar was intent in taming the dragons and worked with scrolls and books, while his wife ruled a land she disliked because she vowed to show the world that the end of slavery was possible.

The Bay of Dragons shall be an example...the spark. Daenerys worried about the other Free Cities. Lord Varys had enlisted his friends to feed them with information, but Magister Illyrio also owned slaves...he could not be trusted when he sent word that nobody cared about what Daenerys was doing, that the Dothraki were simply taking their slaves from other sources and selling them at higher prices.

No, I need intelligence on Volantis...on Qarth...

As she could not expect a former Unsullied to enter into the black walls of Volantis, Daenerys settled to have Greyworm speak with the people outside the City Walls. Even servants and slaves know when war is coming.

The Unsullied were foot soldiers, now trying to fit in the mold of the Golden Cloaks. Ser Barristan and Rhaegar were seeing they were trained to patrol and support military the Bay of Dragons when they were to leave. Daenerys had already spoken with them about the future: they were free. They had to choose where they wanted to be stationed or if they wanted to return to their homes.

Neither had a home or a family anymore...in some cases, to go back was to risk being enslaved again.

Daenerys took all the five thousand Unsullied.They would be divided into the three cities and tasked in supporting the local Councils.

No, she would be leaving as soon as the Dragons were big enough, before the eighteenth moonturn
they gave to Viserys. “We are not to attack anyone at the moment; Greyworm just left to see if
Volantis is planning a siege, as I suspect...we need all our strength here. The Dothraki might come
for us...let them burn outside our walls. Viserys said Aegon was in the city...after that, he went silent.
There is something wrong in the Seven Kingdoms…”

Marwyn had suggested to reach Viserys through dreams. The glass candle that was left might have
been damaged or stopped working due to the magic of the dragons leaving. One way messaging
through dreams was thought to be possible though; all they needed to do was to try when the moon
was full...and to expect Viserys would understand the dream was real and not an hallucination.

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Viserys nightmare had a man’s name.

_Aegon._

Lord Arryn had not arrived at the Stony Sept alive; he had crossed the border and was ambushed.
Ser Brynden Tully was able to disband the outlaws and kill many, but choose to try and save the
Lord Hand’s life other than search and capture the bandits that escaped.

The Knight feared the arrow was poisoned. Lord Arryn’s personal Maester was treating the wounds,
but needed more supplies.

Unfortunately, the Lord Hand did not resist and perished.

Lord Velaryon, however, arrived with the document Viserys so needed and The Riverlands also
declared Aegon and his followers to be outlaws.

The only mistake Viserys made was to open the Gates for Lord Tywin Lannister.

Chapter End Notes

The discussion of rulership is interesting- I tried to show that, for Varys, who is aligned
with the Blackfyres, anything Rhaegar or Viserys do will be seen as a negative.
Lord Arryn, on the other hand, has no hidden agenda; what he says is that a great King
rules for the future and a good one, for the present. Rhaegar overlooks many local and
present problems, but is laying the groundwork for the war for the Dawn; Viserys is
good at immediate problems and in the networking; he is also a Regent, not a King,
dealing with a crisis to the best of his abilities. He was right in his decisions, but Varys is
seeing that anything that can backfire, will.

there is no perfect ruler, but an almost perfect one will balance working on the present
while considering future questions; in this sense...Daenerys and Jon are , at leats in
theory and in this fic, trying to be such rulers.
Arianne Martell faces trial; Viserys faces rumours, lies and rebellions; Jon reunites with his family.

**House Lannister 298 A.C**

Few people remembered the Reign of the Late King Aerys Targaryen; Tywin Lannister, however, had a good memory, especially for the really bad things. Had not been for Grand Maester Marwyn healing abilities, Lord Lannister’s former friend would have fallen prey to the madness that affected some of his family members, and made his job as hand even harder.

Destiny intervened: Westeros breathed in relief after the sinking of the *Windproud*. The recovery from the shocking deaths of King Aerys, Lord Baratheon and his heir was fast and soon, Rhaegar Targaryen was being wholeheartedly welcomed as the new King, a popular, capable and dutiful replacement for the pleasure seeking predecessor.

Madness surely have skipped a generation in that family and probably because Aerys had been moderate in his illness, Rhaegar expected his son to respond in the same way. Nobody could have blamed a Father for not seeing the truth, or a King from being honorbound to follow through a betrothal agreement, but, in all honesty, Tywin Lannister cared little for the Crown Prince or his capable Mother.

They were, however, his allies. *For a time.*

As the world changes, new alliances must be forged: some through the official ways of diplomacy and bethrotals, while others, of a more transitional nature, needed secrecy and discretion to flourish.

Prince Viserys wished to wed Lord Tywin's daughter; Cersei was already pregnant and would soon start showing.

Tywin Lannister’s ambitions remained unchanged despite the upcoming wedding.

The way Lord Lannister saw, it was only natural to expect that Lady Marei Lannister was to be betrothed to the Crown Prince Jaehaerys Targaryen; it would be the fullfilment of the old pact signed between Houses Targaryen and Lannister. The traditions of nobility should be followed: a disgruntled Valeman had prevented the union from taking place in the first attempt, so it fell to the youngest brother to wed the sister of the deceased.

Viserys and Cersei were of little concern; an alternative plan, if you will, that Lord Lannister would only honestly endeavour to pursue if the main prize- the line of Rhaegar- would come to an abrupt end.

Madness was far from a straight road; Aerys danced around it for a while. He would avidly and
obsessively pursue an interest just to quickly drop it, like the irrigation project of dornish deserts he had commissioned and then, forgot.

Aerys would offer his patronage to a Guild, like the time he fancied himself an alchemist, or even show favour towards a courtier for a sennight to, out of the sudden, ban said courtier for the smallest of offenses…

Lord Lannister had not returned to King’s Landing since the tragic death of his granddaughter and many of the faces present at the Great Hall as he walked towards the Throne Room, to publically offer his assistance to the Regent in dealing with Aegon’s supporters, were new to him.

One man, however, stood up. He was someone who witnessed first hand Aerys struggle with madness for a couple of years. Lord Tywin wondered whether the new Master of Whispers could confirm some rumours he had heard from the time he was still Hand and Aerys, still King...

Lord Varys was a foreigner, a political player of great importance without true links to any of the Seven Kingdoms. Devoid of passion, he was a pragmatic man; his own line of work depended upon his unorthodox methods of acquiring information and in dealing with rather unpleasant matters.

Varys was, in other words, used to act independently and the nature of his position allowed him to work on the grey areas, sometimes even without the full knowledge of the King, who should be far above such questions anyways.

Lord Lannister decided to speak with Lord Varys about the old times...

Later that day, Prince Viserys welcomed his soon to be goodfather into a Small Council meeting to discuss the upcoming trial of Princess Arianne.

The Warden of the West and the Master of Whispers exchanged knowing glances.

“Due to Security reasons, we recommend the Regent to leave the premises right after he is to publicly forgive the Princess for her indiscretions.” Lord Varys claimed he feared the presence of the wronged party would only inflate the crowd during the listing of Arianne’s many crimes, or worst, cause her to have a very emotional reaction, possibly making things even more difficult for herself.

Prince Doran did not protest; he knew his daughter was prone to theatricals and agreed Viserys was to discreetly leave the place as soon as he possibly could.

Good, thought Tywin Lannister.

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Lord Lannister might have wanted to consider Jaime as his only son, but the world knew Cersei and Tyrion were also from his loins.

For the sake of his House, it was his Duty to see that both were well cared for.

The Red Keep was filled with opportunities to his less than loved offspring and Lord Lannister would be pushing for their success. “That wretched boy came to be as smart as his mother was, but intelligence and boldness only gets you as far as an Army can take you, and Aegon’s starving Host of former peasants is no match for the best trained and equipped soldiers in the Seven Kingdoms. “

Maester Tyrion Lannister, his father said, had a part to play: “Grand Maester Marwyn is far in the
East...his replacement at the Red Keep is nowhere near as competent as he is, but you, on the other hand, should be trained to take Marwyn’s place when he is forced into retirement.”

Tyrion always knew his Lord Father had a plan, but only at that moment he realized the Old Lion included him in his schemes of taking over King's Landing during the crisis.

He smiled. *This will be your undoing, dear Father.*

Tywin Lannister was not a warm person; there were no hugs, patting in the backs or great displays of affection, even when he was pleased to meet someone. Lord Lannister would either give a silent but eloquent nod or vocally state his joy.

No smiles...no, *never* smiles.

Tyrion kept tabs on his father; there was a discreet conversation with Lord Varys in the gardens...a trusted messenger sent to the Street of the Sisters…

What was Tywin Lannister planning this time?

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**House Martell**

Prince Doran was a sick man, used to hide his mind and intentions behind his useless legs. He had long stopped accepting invitations to travel; his place was in the Water Gardens, in Dorne...even when his sister was Queen, it was Oberyn he sent to attend Small Council meetings as a Guest or to deal with any problem that required his assistance.

His daughter, Arianne, was the only person who could make Doran leave the comforts of his home and embark on a physically painful trip; his Maester was busy, constantly draining his legs and Areo Hotah, his personal guard, would wheel the Prince around the Red Keep when he was needed somewhere.

*Princes are not supposed to be seen like this ... vulnerable...sickly...defeated.* Prince Doran had given Arianne the same education he had received, but whereas he, like Quentyn, had always been dutiful and like Trystane, mindful of his position, Arianne seemed to thought that the sole business of being a Princess was to seek everlasting enjoyment.

Arianne was intelligent, but had no discipline; when given a book on Dornish Laws, she would read some pages and be able to discuss such pages with ease, just to reveal that she got “bored” and opted to re-read “the Loves of Queen Nymeria”, a book that had a historical inaccuracy as a title.

*We were, and are, Princes...not Kings or Queens...*

Prince Viserys was the only kind of husband Arianne would abide: handsome, fun, liberal in his affections...but also intelligent and aware of the many responsibilities and tasks to be performed. Prince Doran was glad; Viserys would be the force behind Dorne in the coming years when he was no longer there. He counted on that, but the political landscape was about to change and they, would be forced to adapt.

For a time, it seemed that House Martell would be able to maintain the firm grips on House Targaryen, despite of any disturbances.
Prince Viserys focused his energies in King's Landing after he wed Arianne. This just showed Doran how well equipped Viserys was for rulership. Aegon was mad and would get even madder with age; Elia could not give Rhaegar any more children and Rhaenys, being a woman, was barred from ascending the Iron Throne.

A Great Council would be called upon the death of King Rhaegar...there was a precedence for excluding a mentally unfit heir from inheriting the Throne that could be used and the best candidate, in this case, would be Viserys.

Elia Martell was his sister, but Arianne was his daughter.

*How ironic it is...that I was prepared to usurp Elia’s son and give my daughter a Crown...just to see this unwanted son to imprison Arianne*

Viserys would marry Cersei, the daughter of the Old Lion; Lord Lannister was already making his moves, showing his power...there was a vacancy for Hand of the King to be filled, and while Rhaegar was away and Viserys, as Regent, had no authority of appointing one, it was definitely in his rights to have a substitute for the time being.

*Soon, Viserys will be surrounded by Lions.*

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**House Arryn**

It was important, Viserys said, that he was seen arriving with Princes Doran and Quentyn at the Great Sept that morning; the statement he was to read for those in attendance was co-signed by the Prince of Dorne himself.

The intention was to remind Westeros they would always be part of the same family. Princess Rhaenys was the living proof Houses Targaryen and Martell were linked by blood and Aegon, although no longer part of the family, had been convinced by his Septa cousin, Tyene, that executing Arianne for adultery would place him in mortal danger, that her sins should not make of him a kinslayer.

“Are you certain Aegon, the Cruel, approved of this statement? That annulment and exile will be enough?” Cersei asked after reading the parchment for a second time.

Viserys actually feared Aegon would demand Arianne to be humiliated and hoped no physical harm would befall her, but was confident the agreed punishment would stand. “Yes, he even insisted on some changes...do you believe I would be referring to Arianne as a lustful, small and misguided soul?”

Cersei was to remain at the Red Keep, her brother as her companion; a table was set for them at the gardens, with a view to the Great Sept. As they leisurely broke their fasts, messages would come with news concerning the trial.

Tyrion read the first one: “As Viserys feared, Aegon made Arianne go through a walk of shame...they had her hair shaved, her gown, tore, and she entered the Sept barefoot and alone. “

Cersei had just briefly interacted with her rival and found Arianne to be silly, but beautiful. She knew Viserys pitied his former wife and this did not bring them any pleasure.
The next message was the one Cersei was waiting for: “It is done; Viserys spurned Arianne and is returning with our Lord Father as we speak. Aegon and the Most Devout will now hear witnesses and the Defense; he will then announce their sentence and, by the end of the day, Arianne is to sail. Prince Quentyn will be next in line for Dorne.”

They moved to the Gates. Viserys left the carriage and smiled at Cersei; he was holding a piece of parchment with the seal of the Faith. *The annulment.*

They would be sending copies of the document and the announcement of their upcoming wedding in a sennight that same day.

There was no time to lose.

Cersei desperately wanted to break protocol and kiss her betrothed; her hand was absently cupping her swollen stomach when she felt the ground shaking beneath her feet and a muffled, terrible sound came from the other side of the city.

A huge cloud of green flames and dust formed as the Great Sept of Baelor collapsed.

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As Viserys, Lords Lannister and Lord Baratheon were leading a contingent of Gold Cloaks, attempting to dissipate the fire from a safe distance, Tyrion took Cersei to the Godswood.

“They should not know we know, sister…” he said in a serious tone. “This was our Lord Father with the assistance of the Spider. They had a brief meeting and then...Father sent a message to the street of the sisters...where the Alchemist Guild is located. Wildfire, Cersei...they used wildfire.”

“The Rains of Castamere.” Cersei murmured. “Father was just a boy then; now he is an old man. This is not about me or Viserys getting an annulment, is it?”

“No,” Tyrion replied in a bitter tone. “This is about control; Father has surrounded King's Landing with his troops...a soldier to each Gold Cloak. We were able to move through the Riverlands because we came to assist the Crown. In a single day, Father killed most of the Faith Militant and many nobles ... Vacancies will now be open to be filled and Father came prepared... the Regent will need the support of the richest Realm to rebuild part of the city without incurring in high cost to the treasure. Not to mention, this is an opportunity to reform the Faith...Father simply put an end to its breaking. And there is more...lots more father plans in doing, I am sure.”

*The Dragon has been trapped by the Lion.*

“I cannot allow Lord Lannister to usurp Viserys and our daughter this way…” Cersei and Tyrion would never share a deep family bond, but their hatred ran deep.

They were natural allies.

“For the time being...they cannot know we know. We do nothing; you marry Viserys and take care of giving birth to a healthy Prince or Princess. Lord Father is capable; he will spin this...place the blame on Aegon. The Spider is very good at finding secrets, but even better at creating news...allow them to work for you, dear sister...we deal with them once your baby is born; until then...let them clean up their mess.”
Ser Robb and Lord Royce were received with a feast at Winterfell; Lord Stark’s brother was a handsome six and ten years old young man with brown hair and violet eyes. “My Liege.”

“Come on, brother…” Jon said with a smile. “We are not in the south anymore; out with the pleasantries, give me a hug!”

Jon had grown an impressive beard and behaved as the Alpha Wolf of their pack; Robb looked around and saw that their Mother was already fighting tears, seeing her boys together, their Family finally reunited.

It would be for a brief time, of course; Lord Royce was to escort Elia and Lady Ashara to The Vale, where their only sister would be fostered and, in all probability, married off.

Jon summoned his brother for a private conversation in his solar. As the wine flowered, they spoke. Robb met the future Lord of the Eyrie before he departed and Jon asked his honest opinion. “He is only a boy; two and ten. But looks and behaves like an Arryn, so I am hopeful he will be a good husband. Elia is a handful, but I heard the same about the boy’s mother, so, all in all, he is used.”

“Good to hear. I love them both but…” Jon never finished. “You are now the heir of Stony Shore and in need of a wife as Father said. Is there any Lady of noble blood and gentle heart in your life, brother?”

Robb was of the same age as Lady Ysilla Royce and they had grown up together; he supposed she would be a good wife to him, but was not sure he was in love with her. She was not yet betrothed and he suspected it was so because they expected him to propose.

Jon understood the hesitation well: “The problem is that we grew up with Lord Eddard and Lady Ashara; what they have is very rare and of course we want the same.”

“Are they still...you know?” Robb had memories of odd noises coming from their chambers…and the images he saw one day when they accidently entered their room were better left unspoken.

“Oh yes…” Jon answered in pain. “They are getting worse with age; even poor Elia caught them at least twice...I had to give her the talk. Ugh.”

Robb started to laugh and thanked the Old Gods for not being the one to witness such awkward conversation.

Seeing his brother finally relax got Jon curious: “Should I also tell you about how babies are conceived?”

Robb was not a virgin anymore thanks to good Lady Myranda Royce, niece to the Bronze Yohn and married to Lord Corbray. She was halfway through her first pregnancy when she asked Robb to escort her to the stables, her husband and their host away hunting in the Mountains. “Her breasts were huge with milk...I am afraid I was too eager, but the next time she looked pleased. It was a good week…”
Ned watched Jon becoming more and more agitated as the days passed and his family continued to stay at Winterfell without setting any date of departure.

“When will Mother and Elia go to The Vale, Father?” he finally asked.

The Lord of Stony Shore tried to look innocent. “I do not know, Jon...you are being such an elegant host to Lord Royce...I dare say another sennight will pass. Your Mother is in no hurry; she is enjoying the last days of having her boys and girl all by herself.”

Jon attempted to smile. “Sure...yes, I am also very happy you are all still here…”

“If I did not know any better, I would think you want us to leave you, son.” Ned said plainly. “is it because Lady Allyria is coming and you wish to...entertain her by yourself? I am sure your Mother would love to see her dear sister again…”

Jon’s face dropped. “Mother knows it?”

“Yes, and she does not care, Jon. I, on the other hand...it took me a while. You should give Ashara more credit; she knows you and the brother she has and...more importantly...she knows the servants at Starfall.” Not wishing to give his son a false impression, Lord Eddard clarified. “You are intelligent enough to see that Lady Allyria is married and out of reach. Do not fall in love with a married woman, Jon...it is not right.”

“Did you speak with Jon, my love?” Ashara said before Ned would try to seduce her; they needed to talk, this was serious business!

Ned rolled his eyes. “Yes, Ash...Jon will turn eight and ten by the end of the year...time for you to stop treating him like a boy.”

“He will always be my boy, Ned.” Ashara trusted her sister not to fall pregnant with Jon; had Allyria been unmarried, she could use a pregnancy to trap her first born. Like some people claimed she did with Ned anyway...still, Jon was now Lord Stark and a well known hero, knighted in a lavish ceremony at the Red Keep.

And a very handsome man.

“Hopefully, Arthur taught him to be more dornish. I was always afraid he would end up like you...a Valeman in Northern clothes.”

Ned suddenly stopped undressing in protest. “I thought you loved me, Ash...to hear you consider me to be a poor example for our children is insulting.”

“Ah, please...I am speaking about all this honour and duty. You are very different from Benjen in how you carry yourself. Of course you are of The North, but Benjen even married by abduction. “

This is it; I will teach this dornish a lesson. “If I remember correctly, I was bold enough to forget all about my honour and well...dishonoured you during that Tourney...twice. You were visibly pregnant when we wed, much to my Father’s shame.”
It was true; the day they wed, Lord Rickard took a deep breath, looked at Ned with blood in his eyes and gently took Ashara’s hand, helping her out of the carriage at Riverrun.

“We are far from the only ones, Ned...Lord Lannister is now rebuilding the Great Sept with the gold from Casterly Rock; they say it is Lady Cersei’s dowry that is paying for the costs. The letter announcing The Regent’s annulment was the same that announced his wedding and only a fortnight later we receive another raven stating that Princess Cersei is with child...the dates simply do not add up.”

No, they didn't... but this was a small detail to be overlooked: the situation of King's Landing was far from being stable and, in fact, there was talk of war.

Since the assassination of Jon Arryn, Lord Eddard was sure that the Seven Kingdoms were on the verge of a tearing apart. He spent an afternoon in contemplation before the heart tree that day. Robert...Elbert...and now his foster father. All dead. The years he spent in The Vale were definitely in the past and he feared for the future.

The Princess Cersei had now full custody of Lord Robert Arryn; she wrote Eddard confirming her intention on following through the agreed betrothal, provided Elia and Sweetrobin were partial towards each other. Elia was now the sister of the Lord of Winterfell, a very desirable match. Jon’s bannermen did not complain because it was known the negotiations had started years before, when Brandon was still alive, but this meant that Robb needed a northern bride because Jon...Jon was very particular about the women he bedded, and such women were not the found in the North.

Ashara might have been amused by her son seeking his aunt for companionship, but she was deeply uncomfortable with the secrets reasons that made Jon forget about Allyrias’s marital status. “Arthur alerted me... he desires the Queen, Ned...look at Lady Myera...and my sister. This is dangerous.”

Ned agreed it was more dangerous; however, they raised Jon to be better than this; he was not a green boy, but a Lord. “Jon wants a Valyrian bride yes...and agreed to wait. The King favours him…”

“...but loves his wife fiercely. Arthur told me Rhaegar is not himself when Daenerys is concerned. I pray to the Old Gods and the New that this Princess, his Bride of Fire, is born very soon…”

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Lady Allyria was accompanied by her son, Lord Ullryck Dondarrion, who was five, and her nephew, Ser Edric Dayne, of age with Robb, employed as her sworn shield since being knighted by her husband, Lord Beric.

As his father had predicted, Lady Ashara wanted to see her sister and did not mind the relationship; the acting Lady of Winterfell arranged for Allyria’s rooms to be near Jon’s, hoping they would be discreet and that no bastards would come out of their bed.

Ned will see that Jon do not lose his mind to lust. Ashara told herself as she said her goodbyes two days after her sister had arrived, and finally went south with Elia and Lord Royce.

The same night she arrived, they took off from where they left at Starfall; Allyria was still as Jon remembered, beautiful and warm, very responsive and patient with his explorations of her body.

“You are a very good lover, Jon...” she said one night as Jon went to service her orally before taking her a second time; most men would not think of tasting their own seed mixed with female arousal,
but Jon was not most men.

His mouth, his tongue, his beard...Jon wanted Allyria to scream his name as she peaked and to drink from it: “mmm...yes...mmm...oh...Jon!”

The best thing, however, was the peaceful dreams Jon would have post coitus.

Alyn, the guard in charge, insistently knocked at the door: “Maester Flowers wish to speak, my Lord.” the man announced as Jon opened the door.

“Well. “ Jon simply as the Maester entered; he was only in leggings and Allyria, under the furs.

“A raven, my Lord...to Lady Allyria, from her Lord Husband.” Maester Flowers then handed the parchment to Jon, who quickly passed it over to his mistress.

Allyria’s face showed concern as she finished reading the letter. “I am to return south and act as Lady of Blackraven; my Lord Husband has been tasked by His Liege to sail East and escort His Grace back to Westeros...there are rumours the King died and some say Her Grace has been captured by the Dothraki. The Prince wants to see the truth of it and is sending a group of Knights on this mission.”

Jon’s heart raced. Daenerys.

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House Targaryen

Viserys quickly came to hate Lord Lannister and distrust Lord Varys:“ They are always of the same opinion...I never thought I would say this, but Lord Baratheon is far more right than wrong in his assessments and more helpful than your Lord Father.”

“Please, do not remind me of my blood relation to this man; you know full well I wish to forget it.” Cersei belly was huge and she chose to confine herself to bed for the best part of the days; she was used to this discomfort, as she was nearing the due date, in the last days of 298 A.C.

She only trusted Tyrion with the pregnancy, not allowing Marwyn´s replacement anywhere near her, in fear that he was employed by her Father or Varys; she was glad when Tyrion confirmed she could still enjoy her husband’s attentions every night- “it is good for your inner muscles” the Maester said-and the only source of disagreement for the couple was how to deal with her father.

Viserys wanted to name Lord Baratheon as Temporary Hand and send Lord Lannister home, but Cersei insisted they needed to keep her father at arm's length. “He is playing us... here, under our eyes, believing we are eating from the palm of his hand.”

They would speak in whispers; exchange notes that would be burnt as soon as they were read; take long strolls in the gardens...all to avoid being spied by the spy supposedly working for them. “Brother brought Varys back precisely because he is a foreigner; after the Westerlings, he felt any Westerosi could be in the secret employ of the former Liege. What do we really know of Varys? Who is this man?This is even worse.”

The stress was immense and relief was hard to find; Viserys feared he was getting mad. He had seen
his sister one night, near the bed he shared with Cersei, leaning in and trying to say something.

He woke up screaming.

But the dream happened again the next time the moon was full; Daenerys this time spoke to him in a soothing tone. “Brother...this is a glass candle dream...I am in Meereen, alive and well...Rhaegar will defend the city from Volantis and the Dothraki. Do not trust what Varys says...trust no one, but us...”

“Dany?“ Viserys asked in confusion; then he remembered. *Aegon destroyed the glass candle... this dream is not an hallucination, but Daenerys establishing one way contact.*

“Lord Lannister took over King's Landing...the Ironmen is raiding again...Arianne, her father...Aegon...they all perished in an explosion of the Sept. You must come back! I will send Lord Velaryon to defeat the Ironborn, but Lord Lannister demands Jaehaerys to be promised to Lady Marei. They need to see the dragons, Dany…”

But she was no longer there; Viserys was not sure if she had been when he answered her.

*Another moonturn must I wait...mayhaps I will be fighting a war next time she comes…*

Viserys could not trust anyone from the Westerlands or The Reach for that matter; Dorne had isolated itself after the attack on the Great Sept, Prince Oberyn as the Regent of Prince Trystane. He confirmed the betrothal with Lady Myrcella, but Cersei feared they would use her daughter as a hostage. Lord Stark had turned his spy into the wife of one of his new bannerman; Viserys was amused by his sagacity, but questioned the wisdom in seeking his help. Jon Stark was very far, anyway.

So Viserys turned to Lords Baratheon and Velaryon; he asked Stannis to quietly send some of his bannermen to the East to find the truth about the rumours and speak with the Royal Couple, urging them to return. Lord Velaryon was to organize this trip; Thoros of Myr could serve as translator and Lord Dondarrion was to lead the mission.

A sennight after their secret departure from Storm’s End, The Small Council reunited again. “Balon Greyjoy declared himself King; Seaguard is under Siege and so is Stony Shore; Aegon’s Septon had not been present at Arianne’s trial, for he was feeding the poor of Flea Bottom; he is now opposing the newly appointed High Septon, as he himself claimed to have been elected by the Most Devout. They are armed at Stony Sept, their new Capital, they say. “

*This is a nightmare...a nightmare.* “Very well then, if war they ask, war they will have...I task Lords Velaryon and Baratheon in going to the defense of The Riverlands and The North against the Ironborn…” Viserys recognized that the Iron Fleet was in a better position of doing more harm than the remainder of Aegon’s followers and, while he wanted nothing more than to send Lord Lannister to battle, Cersei’s words echoed in his mind. *The old Lion should stay in the trap he laid for me.*

A huge map of Westeros was laid by their table. *Stony Sept should be surrounded in three directions and stormed:* “I will deliver the Command of my troops to Ser Brynden Tully and task him in dealing with Stony Sept...Ser Jaime Lannister will be second in command and I trust House Tully will send reinforcements if needed be.”
Discovery

Chapter Summary

Daenerys ends her stay at Meereen, but not without loses;
Lord Tully sees an opportunity in the midst of war,
Maester Tyrion makes a discovery.

House Targaryen 299 A.C

Prince Regent Viserys had refused Lord Lannister’s suggestion of marching with the troops to Stony Sept, where Ser Brynden Tully was laying siege to the followers of the High Sparrow, for reasons beyond count, the most important being the small bundle he held in his arms.

Alysane Targaryen was born in the second week of the year 299 A.C; both Viserys and Cersei were in heaven. “The Princess has my eyes and your mouth...you done well, lioness. I am very happy.”

“How hopefully she will have you hair too, my love; she is as bald as an old man!” The babe was small, but healthy and strong, the pale lilac eyes being the most distinct Valyrian features she had. Myrcella could not get enough of holding her half sister, planting kisses on her rosy cheeks. Robert, unfortunately, could not come to King’s Landing with all the war raging in the Riverslands.

Cersei smiled; she could not believe how happy she was at that moment, but dared not hope it would last.

*How can this lasts with Father is making us his prisioners, and this silly war continues?*

The North had been attacked by the Ironborn, who were also active in the Riverlands. The reavers claimed King Rhaegar was dead; they saw this as an opportunity to reclaim the Kingdom of Isle and Rivers and were being partially successful in that, since The High Sparrow rebellion in the south meant that the riverlander forces were split in two fronts.

Lord Lannister offered as little help as possible; he would not lose soldiers fighting against a rebellion in the Riverlands, no matter how close Stony Sept was from the Westerlands. Since Viserys personally requested, Lord Lannister sent his son, Ser Jaime, but he was commanding the minimum amount of soldiers his Father dared sent without repercussions.

Cersei had a suspicion Lord Lannister was at least partially behind the Ironborn attack; Lannisport was far closer from the Iron Islands than Stony Shore, in the North, but despite its gold and the geographical proximity, it was left undisturbed.

Lords Velaryon and Baratheon destroyed many of their ships, but their troops managed to land and were advancing.

The war, which was supposed to take no more than two moons, was now in its fifth.

Things had changed in the meantime.
When Alyssane finally slept and Myrcella left to attend classes with her uncle Tyrion, Viserys lay by Cersei’s side, took a deep breath and made an announcement. “I must leave in two days time. They should be on her way...hopefully, the dragons will arrive and the sight alone should make the High Sparrow pray. He demands my presence to give us his final terms...Ser Brynden himself wrote that...”

“...he also recommended you to stay in King’s Landing.” Cersei reminded her husband; she feared this was another trap, but was also aware Viserys should be seen at least once before his troops, like the dragon he was, giving the soldiers hope to return to their homes alive and well before the last harvest of Autumn.

“Lord Baratheon is now marching south. He is escorting House Mallister’s heirs to Riverrun as Lord Velaryon continues with the war in the seas. The Ironborn took the northern part of the Riverlands...House Frey was supposedly overpowered by the Greyjoys; nobody believes it, of course. “ The Freys could raise four thousand swords and were a very rich house with a less than pristine reputation; even Lord Hoster Tully admitted a betrayal took place and would be out for blood. As for the taking of Stony Keep, it was obviously part of a large strategy. Nobody believed the Ironborn were interested in expanding in the North, especially with Winter coming in less than a year.

“They count on House Stark being content in retaking Stony Shore and returning to their Castles, leaving the northern borders of the Riverlands in their control.” Viserys planted a chaste kiss on Cersei’s forehead. “It is vital that the siege of Stony Sept is broken; our troops must be free to expell the Ironborn and no more resources wasted in this stupid war.”

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Prince Viserys had not have a good night of sleep since the Sept was destroyed and he was sure he would be forever haunted by the sight of Arianne, so frail and defeated, hair shaved, being shamed before an audience because his nephew wanted revenge.

Aegon was really mad...all he did was bringing House Martell to its knees, the House his own mother was a proud member.

Arianne, Quentyn and Doran, all dead because of Aegon. Poor Daemon Sand was missing; some claimed he had arrived at the Sept after Viserys left, perishing with his beloved, while others maintained he had managed to escape his imprisonment and was in hiding.

Viserys had loved the Martells once as he was a young man being fostered in Dorne. They were his adopted family in many ways. Regardless of how he felt about Cersei, Arianne had been his youth.

He had awfull nightmares: the green flames consumming their faces, Arianne screaming, their skin melting in a matter of seconds...

The Regent had lost weight and was constantly worrying about his wife’s pregnancy and his siblings. Daenerys had managed to contact Viserys once again through his dreams a moonturn before Alysane was born.

She whispered in his ears: “We will return home, Vis...in less than half a year’s time... Rhaegar is fighting at this moment; our position is far from stable, but we are winning the war. We will go home, Viserys...just wait a bit longer, my brother.”

There she was, asking Viserys the only thing he could not give her: time. He knew Daenerys was
not Rhaegar, who for over ten years had been raised as the sole and perfect Prince and still carried that single minded and infused confidence in the loyalty of most his subjects with him; Rhaegar understood interests would clash and greed was a weakness that led to many betrayals, but he simply believed he was loved by the Seven Kingdoms, that nobody would dare go against him.

No, Daenerys was a third child, someone who had to fight for her place; she never took the adoration of the crowds for granted and knew Viserys was being left behind to contend with problems Rhaegar just partially solved. Daenerys was aware their absence could be seen as them forgetting their responsibilities and that travelling was a risk.

However, it was a risk they simply had to take: their dragons had to be protected from the inner plotting of their most powerful bannermen and the world had to be reminded that slavery was working against the advancement of mankind.

All noble quests, Viserys agreed, but it was simply not the right time for them. Had the dragons been hatched a couple of years ago...things would have been very, very, different. easier, less messy.

When they crossed to the Riverlands and made camp two days from Stony Sept, a man in rags approached the old Ser Gerold Hightower saying he was Daemon Sand.

Viserys felt guilty; he had not tried hard enough to liberate Daemon, focusing on Arianne and the question of Cersei’s pregnancy. In a rare moment, Viserys left his guard down when he saw what they had done to Daemon. “I am very sorry, my friend.” he said as he hugged his former lover.

Then, he heard shouting; fire being sent on tents...before his eyes, Ser Gerold was stabbed in the back by two men with seven pointed starts carved in their foreheads.

Daemon started to cry: “No, Vis...I am the one who is sorry.”

The next time Viserys opened his eyes, he was alone, in a cell without windows...all he could hear was the Seven Pointed Star being read.

***

The Dothraki was a formidable opponent, but Rhaegar Targaryen was confident the superior tactics of the Westerosi Knights would defeat them. “When I return, things will change...we will leave and send our envoy to Braavos; they will be our allies in Essos. The dragons...”

...are not not yet ready, but they will be. “ Daenerys completed. The Dothraki were spotted by scouts two days from Meereen; the best course of action was to wait for them behind their walls. “Even if you manage to ride Viserion into battle, this is not a good idea. You should stay here, with me and your son.”

“You said yourself Viserys is basically a prisioner of Lord Lannister...the High Sparrow rebelled and the Riverlands is being split into two by the Ironborn...this attack will save us time.”

They had had this discussion many times over; Lord Beric Dondarrion arrived more dead than alive at Meereen. He was wearing an eye patch and his skin had an unhealthy colour. Daenerys thought he smelled of decay, but the man spoke, moved, breathed... and confirmed Westeros was on the breaking point.

Lord Beric was among the first to die from the Pale Mare; Volants was blocking them by the Sea, throwing corpses in the cities. Lord Beric’s friend, Thoros of Myr, delirious, screamed he should be
allowed near his friend; he would Beric back to life performing a rite called “ the last kiss”...

The healers put Thoros down with sweetsleep and he died no soon after.

Ser Justin Massey was now the one leading the Stormlander Knights who came to escort Daenerys and Rhaegar back to Westeros; The King, however, declared they would be helping leading their troops in the confrontation with the Dothraki after the Dragons had burned half the fleet sieging Meereen.

Rhaegal had been shot, but was recovering under Marwyn’s care: “ A good thing this happened here and not back home, Your Grace; the books I read in Dorne concluded that their eyes and the area at the base of their necks to be their weakest points, where the scales are either lacking or too soft, unable to protect them from scorpions piercing through. “

Rhaegar could not be dissuaded and he left, confident victory would be theirs.

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She did not even cry when his body was brought back to her seven days to the day he kissed her goodbye.

“Who ?” Daenerys asked Ser Barristan Selmy.

“A Kahl named Drogo...he commands the largest Khalasar there is. We were able to retreat and…”

Daenerys did not listen to anything.

Guided by revenge, she closed her eyes. Rhaego, Rhaegal and Viserion came flying.

She did not even heard when Ser Barristan said hers was the last thing Rhaegar muttered before dying; she did not even respond when Ser Barristan handed her Dark Sister, the Ancestral Sword Rhaegar had retrieved from the hand of no other than Brynden Rivers when he went north of the Wall.

Nothing mattered to Daenerys at that moment, nothing except protecting her family and the ones beneath her, the ones who counted on her.

The dragons felt they had lost one of them; Viserion cried in pain.

Rhaego understood what needed to be done; he offered his wing to Daenerys and she gently climbed over.

Khal Drogo was said to have in his command 100.000 screamers.

When Daenerys burnt Drogo and his bloodriders, she became their Khaleesi.

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The last month of their stay in Meereen left Daenerys very little time for tears, at least during the day.

At night, only Jaehaerys could bring her comfort. He would be turning three and would ask about his Father everyday.

"He is in a better place, my love...Father loved you very much."

One day, the young Prince stopped asking when his Father would return.
And it was only then that Daenerys broke down.

“Rhaegar, you fool...he will forget you!”

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House Stark

Lord Eddard Stark’s first reaction when notified that his Castle had fallen to the Ironborn, was one of relief. *Had I not lingered in Winterfell for so long and not sent Ashara and Elia to The Vale, they could have been in the hands of the Greyjoys at this point.*

There had been rumours about the ironborn attacking that year and it was serious enough to entice a reaction from Lord Jon Stark; they had prepared for it the best way they could, by fortifying their defenses, sending ships to scout ahead and informing Lords Dustin and Ryswell to be on high alert.

They marched fast; it took less than a fortnight to arrive and Lord Dustin briefed both his Liege and the Lord of the Castle on the situation he found: “The Castle fell two days ago; we came yesterday and most of the smallfolk had already been evacuated. Victarion Greyjoy was in command, but he left already; Theon greyjoy holds the Castle.”

*The youngest of Lord Greyjoy’s sons; untested in battle and probably wants to show himself as a competent leader. The North is not their priority. Again, they expect a siege and us, to leave once Winter comes.*

Jon Stark knew one thing: any man would think twice about storming his own Castle and that was exactly why they needed to do it.

“Two days he has been there; I worry about the members of our household; if he stays longer, he could be able to break them...or even worse. Our people are there...our grains for Winter, too. ” Jon reasoned it was easier to rebuild their walls and fortifications than to burn their dead. ” Theon must be eager for glory; he might do something stupid.”

“A stupid Greyjoy is a dangerous thing.” Lord Dustin said. “ We know very little of him as a man or leader...we do not know the risks of storming...or the risks of starving them.”

“The decision is yours, Father.” Jon finally granted; he might be his father´s Liege, but Stony Shore was not his; it was Lord Eddard´s.

The situation would be salvagable if they acted fast and swiftly; they knew the place better than anyone. Eddard agreed with his son and Liege: “We finish this before he tortures our folk and find our grains.”

It would take some days to build a Siege Tower so they opted to attack the main Gate with a battering ram, covered by a shelter to avoid anybody from burning in case oil would be dropped. While the Ironborn concentrated their defenses on that point, from inside the Castle was infiltrated through the newly renovated cisterns.

By the end of the day, Theon Greyjoy was a hostage.

Upon questioning, Jon Stark became convinced the attack was all but a distraction; they did not intend in keeping their Castle, but in luring The North into a siege while they bled the Riverlands.
“He means that Seaguard will fall or has fallen; we would be cut out of communications by raven from the South if the Greyjoys take the north of the Riverlands.” Jon concluded.

Northerners were isolacionsists by choice and temperament; theirs was a different society, with different Gods, weather, crops, people…

Many of Lord Stark’s bannermen were glad not to know anything about the South: “ Why would we care, my Lord?” asked Rickard Karstark at the Great Hall; all the Lords and Northern Clansmen either attended this meeting or sent representants.

Lord Manderly’s news from King’s Landing were troublesome…a revolt of the Faith in the South, while the Ironborn attacked The North.

The Reach fell silent; The Westerlands were doing surprisingly very little. The Vale was being ruled by the Lord Declarants in the name of Lord Robert Arryn- his mother was now Princess Regent in King’s Landing- and Dorne had no plans of getting involved. Only the Stormlands, the Riverlands and the Crownlands were active in the fight…many Lords were asking why their King had left in the first place: nobody saw the dragon Her Grace claimed her son had hatched and most of Westeros distrusted tales told by foreigner sailors from distant lands.

Jon could not be shaken by his conviction: it was as Her Grace said at Riverrun. He trusted his Lieges; he would not abandon them: “King Rhaegar has been a friend of The North; our harvests are now plentiful and the New Gift is prosperous. Many of the Mountain Clans will be wintering in Queenscrown. The reforms we have been making might have not been popular at the begining, but we are now all profiting from them. Lest not be said that northerners hide in their warm beds when reavers from the Iron Islands attack our neighbors; they came here once…they will sure come back again if they take the Riverlands. The Neck will not stop them. If the Riverlands ask for our help, we shall give them.”

Ser Gendry Stone had travelled the Riverlands when he was journeying North; he was discreetly tasked into crossing the Riverlands and provide Lord Jon Stark with accounts of what he saw. “ A couple of my men will join you; you must present yourselves as travellers looking for employment. When you arrive at Riverrun, and only there, will you reveal your allegiance; a ship will be waiting at Saltspans for you to return to White Harbour safely. If The Ironborn is sucessful in taking the lands between The Neck and the Twins, do not attempt sending us ravens from the South.”

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House Tully

Lord Stannis Baratheon was to meet the Prince Regent at Stony Sept to end the Siege and not stay at Riverrun for more than a couple of days; his mission there was accomplished as he had escorted Lady Lysa Mallister and her children to her Lord Father. Her husband was left behind to defend his lands and seas with Lord Velaryon, as it should be, but his heirs had to be saved from harm.

A messenger from Stony Sept came with startling news when Stannis Baratheon was about to depart: “ Prince Regent Viserys has been taken prisioner by the High Sparrow…they are keeping the information secret for the time being; Lord Lannister is to join Ser Brynden and take command of the Forces.”

Lord Hoster Tully was now a sick man; for over thirty years he had kept peace in the Riverlands, but now, when they needed him most, his health was failing. Still, he was determined he was to die
defending his lands and continued to have an eye for the game: “It was Lord Lannister’s idea to send the Prince in the first place; Brynden and I were against it. The Sparrows are trained in arms...one of their leaders is Ser Lancel Lannister, you see? They have Knights, noble children in their Army. They cannot expect to win this...but they want their voices to be heard, to split the Faith in two. Or to submit all of us.”

Lord Tully was concentrating his Forces in the North; he was to lead his men in crushing House Frey and asked why The Reach had not come to the aid of their neighbohr?“ We all know House Lannister keeps King’s Landing and they will not leave the Seat of Power or their borders not attended. The men they sent us are pitiful. Ser Jaime, my brother says, is very concerned and has asked for more men, but his father will not listen. House Tyrell has the numbers, the grains and yet...we have not seen any of it.”

“House Tyrell will pay for their lack of loyalty, my Lord, but now we must focus on cleaning the lands of these fanatics. “Stannis Baratheon regarded religion as nothing more than superstition; he paid lip service when it was needed but otherwise avoided Septs and everything that had to do with the Seven, or any other God for that matter. His late wife, Lady Ravella Swann, was very religious. He would only see her a couple of moon turns per year,so, when she passed, he was surprised to see he missed her greatly. She had been a dutiful wife, a good manager of Storm's End and gave him a heir and a spare, dying of a chill some moonturns after attending the Purple Wedding.

The succession for Storm's End was guaranteed, but not thanks to his younger brother, Renly. Lady Cassana, their mother, was now holding their Castle in his absence. The oldest boy, Robert, was four and ten and training at arms at Bronzegate, while the youngest, Steffon, stayed at Storm's End. It would be another year until Stannis was to send the boy to foster at Haystack Hall and he was fearful to be away for so long: his Lady Mother had spoiled Renly and he feared she would do the same with Steffon.

Lord Stannis observed Lady Catelyn with curiosity; she was now in the strange position of assisting her daughter, Lady Sansa, in managing the Keep she had grown up. They do look like sisters from the distance...all three of them with their auburn hair. The late Lord Stark had made overtures once to have Lady Sansa wed Robert; it never came to be as they were too young at the time, but now at riverrun, Stannis wondered...

“A man needs a wife as a Castle needs a Lady.” said Lord Tully behind Stannis. “My Catelyn is still young. Now that she is far from that cold wasteland, her health has improved; our Maester says she still has a good eight years of child bearing ahead of her. But you do not need heirs...mayhaps some heiresses to marry off? She just lost her son; she would be good to your youngest. Grandparents are made for spoiling, not raising.”

Lord Stannis Baratheon had been offered many possible second Ladies of Storm's End in the past year, but Lord Tully’s offer was blunt and honest, almost harsh in its straightforwardness.

He respected it; Stannis hated subtleries and social games.

They were both widows; their mourning periods had been observed and he was riding for war in some days. Formalities could be disregarded and the dowry was agreed upon during supper.

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“There is a Knight and a couple of men at the Gates, my Lady...he comes from The North.”
With the war at their doors, there was much work to be done at Riverrun and Catelyn was busy. She was thankful for it, as kept her mind away from her troubles. “If the Steward says the seal and papers are in order, I will receive him in my solar; prepare rooms and food for our visitors after we are done.”

Ser Gendry Stone handed Lady Catelyn a letter signed by Lord Jon Stark. She gasped in admiration. *What a day full of surprises!* She had just been informed she was to marry Lord Baratheon and be sent by ship to Storm's End from Saltpans and now Lord Stark offered the Riverlands his assistance when even the powerful Reach ignored their pleas.

Her Lord Father was sick of body, but not of mind. “Good that the wolf remembered we were family once! I will march on the Freys and Lord Stark is more than welcome to help in their destruction.”

Lord Stannis Baratheon could not be described as handsome; he was very serious, dutiful and preferred silence over words. He was, however, an imposing figure and a man of honour. Their marriage was consummated without passion, but also without the violence Catelyn was accustomed to with her previous husband and she dared hope for a better future.

Two days after the small ceremony, Catelyn was saying her goodbyes and preparing to leave Riverrun once again to become a Lady Paramount. Of his family, Lord Baratheon said little. “My Lady Mother will tell you all in time, my Lady; all i ask is that you care for my boys and mother.”

Her Lord Father was much more helpful when it came to tell Catelyn what to expect from House Baratheon. “Ser Gendry is Lord Baratheon late brother's bastard. Your husband spends more time in Kings Landing than in his own Keep and saw that Robert's bastard was taken care far from Storm's End, as Lady Cassana is too sweet tempered. You are to take care of his youngest son, correspond with the eldest, turn a blind eye to Ser Renly’s indiscretions and friendship with Ser Loras Tyrell and assist Lady Cassana. A couple of children of your own would be good, Cat, but the Seven knows we ought not to expect any miracle and you should not overtax yourself...”

Catelyn was then sent to Saltpans while Lord Baratheon went to Stony Sept.

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**House Tyrell**

Ser Arthur Dayne and Rhaenys were incensed by Lord Tyrell refusal in acknowledging the situation at the Riverlands: “I can understand your Father not wanting to help Lord Tully solve rebellions in his own lands; however, this conflict with Aegon’s followers is far from local. They are still recruiting in The Reach, Stony Sept is not that far after all and now they kidnapped my uncle!”

“What is the point of an alliance through blood when House Tyrell is refusing to do his part when House Targaryen needs?” asked Ser Arthur. “Make no mistake, Willas...when Rhaegar returns, your Father will face the consequences.”

Willas said nothing; he agreed with everything that had been said. This inaction had to do with House Lannister, he was sure; but the old Lion was smart enough to at least pretend he was helping, while holding King’s Landing hostage, whereas his father lacked foresight.

He brought their concerns to Lady Olenna: “It is the Lord Oaf’s doing, of course...he is not overly
fond of war. Well...since it is a Siege, I might be able to convince him to go and pretend he is fighting. Or at least send some of our men...we cannot pretend we did not receive their messages. It would look bad on us.”

Houses Calwell and Meadows and the knights swore to them were ordered by their Liege to go and assist their neighbor. Ser Willas feared it would be too little, too late and not wishing to give the impression that House Tyrell was made of cowards, decided to lead their troops himself, taking some Knights with him from Highgarden among them ser Arthur Dayne.

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**House Lannister**

Their walks to the Godswood became so frequent that some courtiers were asking in jest whether House Lannister was now following the Old Gods:

“You said we were to use him to clean after Aegon's mess...now he made my husband a prisoner, or don't you agree they knew exactly where to attack and when?”

Tyrion had to concede Cersei had a point: Prince Viserys kidnapping had the makings of an inside job: “ Our Lord Father is indeed endangering your husband's life by not negotiating with the fanatics...while it is true one should not speak with a madman as if he was sane, it would have granted us some time to explore other options. I believe this kidnapping is Varys doing...our Father prefers more ...permanent solutions.”

The real question that troubled Tyrion was why would Varys be behind this? A kidnapping was too risky of a move for someone to collect political gain. No, this was designed to bring chaos, to make the situation even more unstable...

But why?

For once, Lord Lannister had only lto ose if Viserys was to die in captivity: his temporary Handship would be seen as weak and he would endanger the only concrete link he had with the Royal Family. Princess Alysane was but a babe and a girl at that; Lord Lannister could not hope to become Regent for his grandchild when Princess Rhaenys was clearly ahead of succession.

Not to mention nobody knew about the main branch of the Royal Family, the focus of Lord Lannister ambitions.

“What do you think it will happen now that Father is going to Stony Sept? He is a man of violence; diplomacy means nothing to him. He will storm that damn place and they will kill my husband!”

Cersei was almost hysterical; Tyrion had promised her he would handle Lord Lannister after her child was born and prevent their Father from using the babe in his games.

“There are about three servants and a couple of knights I am currently treating from this disease...usually, it is not fatal, but things can always take a turn to the worst...” he paused. ” I suppose Varys and our Father are showing signs of the same disease?”

Cersei raised an eyebrow. “ You should offer them both the best of treatments, of course…”
Tyrion went to his father’s chambers at the Tower of the Hand that night; the room was silent but the door to the privy was half open; a lit candle inside.

“I will help myself with a goblet of Arbor, Father, while you finish…” Tyrion said as he discreetly looked the documents spread at Lord Lannister’s desk.

A message from the Island of Tarth caught his attention: “An Armada was seen a day away from our shores. The Golden Company has broken their contract with Myr.”

_House Blackfyre is extinct in the male line...in the male line...Lord Varys has disappeared in Essos after King Aerys died...he is from Lys...could it be? A Blackfyre from the female line is still alive and called the Golden Company?_

Varys was an eunuch, a man without past that knew too many secrets; he seemingly had no allegiance to any Westerosi House, but what if he was selling his services to a Blackfyre descendant?

_This explains Lord Arryn’s assassination...the Sept...even the Ironborn raiding again...and all those rumours about King Rhaegar. He surely is dead and soon, Viserys too..._

A Blackfyre invasion was not in his Lord Father’s plans...he would not abide to deal with a line coming from bastards on the Throne when he could have a red dragon. Lord Lannister was a purist; he even disdained Prince Viserys as a distant second because he wanted his line to mix with King Rhaegar, a man he admired personally.

_Should I tell Lord Father or Is he not aware already?_

Tyrion was doubtful if Lord Lannister could be of any assistance at this point. “Father?” he asked again.

No answer came from the privy. Tyrion walked towards the door; he knocked twice and finally stepped into the room.

“Guards...Guards!!” Tyrion screamed. “The Lord Hand has been murdered!”
Chapter Summary

House Frey and High Sparrow meet their ends;
The Golden Company arrives.
Ice and Fire meet.

Chapter Notes

Announcement: I added the Jonerys tag and updated the relationships and the TROLL came. His name is flayjunior20 and he uses other accounts to trash stories with this tag. I will leave the comments he and his clone left for you, who are following the story since the beggining and understand where I am going with this, can see it is not criticism, but pure hate. After Chapter 24, i will delete any comment of this guy and his clones.

My recommendation to any reader: if you dislike the story despite the tags and summary that are nothing if not clear, best not to read the story than to troll the author. Criticism is very welcomed, hate no.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

House Stark 299 A.C

Lord Jon Stark lead a host of only five thousand men from the North since his intention was simply to assist the Riverlands in cleaning their northern borders from the Ironborn. His people still needed the protection of their soldiers, both from the reavers and the White Walkers; he would not commit his uncle’s mistakes, leaving Winterfell vulnerable and the lands without proper leadership to seek glory. The number had been discussed with his Council and they all agreed was more than enough for what their Liege had in mind

Jon was eight and ten; he recognized the need of hearing his advisors, all his seniors, while also exercising his authority. Brandon had done good things for The North, everyone agreed, but his methods and ways were at the heart of his problem as a leader: he would alternate between leaving everything in Maester Flowers and Eddard Stark hands to making important and sudden decisions without their input and no much though into long term consequences.

He left The North in good hands: his father was rebuilding the defenses of Stony Shore ; Benjen and Robb held their Ancestral Home while Rickon and Lady Val stayed at Queenscrown preparing the New Gift for Winter.

Houses Stark and Tully were in agreement that House Frey served them no more; nobility worked through bonds of trust and mutual interests that connected a Liege to his Lords and those Lords to the smallfolk, their power and hold over lands only made stronger with the passage of time, the continuation of blood lines and the regular defense of their territory. House Frey had no place among
the noble houses, for they broke every vow they should have upheld, behaving like the toll collectors they were, seeking only their advantage when they should have been defending their people, the first and most important duty of a Noble.

Not even six centuries old, the present Lord Frey amassed power and riches through treachery and greed; he was, if not assisting the Ironborn, helping them by purposely blocking the northerners from passing through to defend the riverlands and, for the second time during Lord Hoster Tully’s tenure, they ignored the call of their Liege.

Nobody believed that Lord Walder Frey, who commanded four thousand swords, would have fallen to the Ironborn that easily. This fact in itself, although telling, was not proof enough.

So Lord Stark sough other means of confirmation that House Frey was not to be trusted.

After retaking Stony Keep and making Theon Greyjoy as hostage, the youngster son of Lord Balon started to boast their plans of reforming the Kingdom of Isle and Rivers since the dragons " were gone":

“ Seaguard will fall; from there, we will lay claim to the greenlands once again.”

The last Kings in the Riverlands were Ironborn invaders of House Hoare; they were not against followers of the Faith and spent more time in the greenlands and rivers they ruled than on the ships and seas they came from.

Regardless of this effort in integration, when Aegon Targaryen initiated his conquest House Tully saw the opportunity to end House Hoare’s rule and aligned themselves with the dragons.

It was not so far fetched that a stupid man like Balon Greyjoy would dare to reclaim those lands if he believed the dragons were indeed "gone".

But the Kingdom of Isle and Rivers only came to be because Westeros was, back then, divided into seven different realms; now that they had lived for almost three centuries under the same Ruler, either Balon Greyjoy was expecting the Seven Kingdoms to disintegrate or he had found important allies with shared interests for the time being. His plan and actions counted, if not with his success, with making enough damage to warrant a good bargain in the end.

and The Westerlands had not been attacked... is that because the Ironborn recognize the superiority of Lannisport...or because their attacks serve a purpose in Lord Lannister, who holds King’s Landing?

As Lord Stark, Jon could not allow the Ironborn near his borders after the attack on Stony Shore. House Frey was more a bridge; their lands bordered with The Neck and they had three Knightly Houses in the area to protect the passage to The North. With the information he received from Theon Greyjoy and still at Stony Shore, Jon wrote two letters; one to Riverrun and another to Lord Frey, urging the old weasel to prepare for the invasion, mentioning that The North might had to cross the bridge at some point if the threat proved to be strong since they were not only neighbors, but members of the same family: Lady Sansa Tully was born a Stark of Winterfell , Jon pointed out, and he would not refuse a call, if ever came to that.

The ravens were sent from Torhen’s Square; the Ironborn had killed almost all the birds at Sony Shore and, although Jon feared interception, the messages were not particularly revealing: it was more of a confirmation of the Ironmen intentions and an offer of assistance.

When Jon arrived at Winterfell, there were answers already: House Tully thanked for the
information, but at that moment, they were confident they could repel the enemy. But House Frey, on the other hand, elected to make demands of Lord Stark, if Lord Stark intended to cross to help them defend their own lands:

“Our dear Walda would have been Lady of the Dreadfort had her intended not revolted against your Lordship...due to our great respect for House Stark and seeing that you are offering to come in our aid, you will have your choice in the bride and a dowry to match a Great House.”

This was, in Jon’s opinion, a not so veiled attempt at blackmailing a Lord Paramount and, going against the interests of their Liege by preventing troops from passing undisturbed, Lord Walder Frey was betraying the Riverlands even before his Castle “fell” to the Ironborn.

Lord Tully’s reply arrived at White Harbour through Ser Gendry Stone: “We accept your offer, Lord Jon Stark; we shall attack House Frey from North and South, and kill all the Ironmen we may find in our way.”

The Ironborn stationed at Frey’s lands were plenty, but their numbers, as Jon suspected, were simply not enough to explain the invasion. They held the attack better than expected, but there is a limit to treachery and stupidity: Walder Frey believed his Liege would buy into his excuse of “being took by surprise” with the invasion, but Lord Tully was dying, no room in his heart to grant Lord Frey a third chance.

“If I cannot even trust you to hold your own lands, why do I even need you?” Lord Tully said in a dispassionate tone before sentencing Walder Frey to death for treason.

Hoster Tully, however, was not Tywin Lannister: having his own version of Castamere was not in his plans; all he wanted was to extinguish the Freys and avoid future disputes with his bannermen. His son, he said, was a good hearted man and Lord Tully had concluded it was an opportunity to clean the house before finally returning home to die.

He could not rest in peace if he was to leave this unfinished.

Lord Jon saw House Bolton falling and had experience to share with the Lord Paramount of the Trident: “If may I suggest, my Lord, the Twins should not be allowed to become such a powerful force in your lands again. We have divided the vast Bolton’s lands with the dual intention of rewarding our loyal men and avoiding a strong opponent from re-emerging and Knightly Houses I made are now directly sworn to House Stark. I suggest you grant the lands to two of your most capable men. The remaining male Frey’s of age to The Wall, as we discussed…”

There were too many sons, grandsons and great-grandsons to content with; the unmarried women and children could be sent to their relations with enough coin to have dowries or pay for their education as Knights or Maesters. House Frey ceasing to exist would not impact the region as a whole, but Walder Frey had married into powerful Houses of The Vale, The Crownlands and Stormlands. They were in the middle of a war and could not afford to send each different branch of this House to their maternal families at that time and expect the problem to be over; Lord Tully wanted to find a final solution for the succession and the most logical step was to marry the new Lords to daughters of Walder Frey.

“Roslin and Arwyn Frey are of age, pretty enough girls and daughters of the Old Weasel that I personally approve of; they could be given in marriage to the new Lords of the Twins. There are many Knights in the Riverlands named Frey or Rivers that were not slain...the ones that will go the Wall are dealt with, but I will leave stipulations on how to handle their future claims.

Olyvar Frey is the ward of House Rosby...Lord Rosby has no heirs and is fond of the boy. Houses
Blackwood, Swann, Crackhall and Farring will be offered the remaining women with their dowries, and youngsters with enough provisions to be either trained as Knights or sent to the Citadel as soon as war is over. We have been more than merciful with those traitors; they are lucky I must go south...

As Lord Jon Stark was preparing to return to his Lands, a raven arrived from Riverrun and he changed his plans.

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House Baratheon

Lady Catelyn was feasted upon her arrival at Storm's End; she found both Lady Cassana and Master Steffon to be extremely pleasant and amenable. “Your Lord Husband is not fond of social gatherings I am afraid, but even Stannis knows there are certain occasions that demand merriment!”

The next day, Lady Cassana started to train Catelyn in the management of Storm's End: it was an impressive Keep and its revenues matched those famously thick walls for what she could see.

Catelyn’s husband was a rich man, passionate about avoiding waste and anything he deemed superfluous: “My late son, Robert, would have been a much different Lord; I am afraid, not a good one. He was an excellent lad, very strong and handsome, a great Knight but not so keen on taking responsibilities. Six and ten and he already had a bastard…”

“Ser Gendry Stone; he is sworn to House Stark of Stony Shore. A valiant enough boy, I am told...knows his place well.” Lady Cassana’s eyes showed some emotion at the revelation and Catelyn feared she had said already too much about the subject.

“I was told so; Stannis never wanted the boy here and he went from The Vale to King's Landing...Lord Eddard Stark was more of a brother to Robert than Stannis...I wrote him to thank for making Gendry a Knight. Stannis sent Ser Justin Massey to train the boy in arms, but I know it was Lord Eddard who prompted it.”

Catelyn smiled at the mention of Eddard. *A friend...a dear friend of mine.* Now she was, once again, a Lady Paramount and this great responsibility gave Catelyn hope that her time in The North was finally behind her. *I must let go in my heart...I shall leave no place in my life for the memories of that brute; only the smiles of my boy should remain.*

Ser Courtney Penrose was the Castellan and showed his new Lady the books; she concluded there was little room for improvement and decided it was for the best to simply continue the work as it had been done thus far.

The priority was to meet the household members, get acquainted with some of the bannermen who made the trip to Storm's End to receive her and establish friendships with her new family. Catelyn visited the Sept with Lady Cassana and spent her free time with Lady Felwood and Lady Buckler from the nearest Keeps. She spoke with Maester Cressen about Steffon’s lessons and went with the boy to visit the nearby beach and watch the waves crashing.

Lady Cassana had been aware that Catelyn had lost a son, but waited a couple of days before finally breaching the subject: “My daughter, you must have many questions and now, I feel, it is a good time for us to talk. Lord Tully wrote that you take your Duty seriously and that Stannis agreed you
would be splendid as Lady of Storm's End and I must say, I completely agree. But you look at Steffon with both kindness and sadness. I must assume it is because of your little boy and I am very sorry...I too lost a son; it is something that never leave you. Stannis, of course, know this also, as he lost a daughter some years ago…”

Catelyn had been under the impression that Stannis had sired only two boys with the late Lady Ravella and was visibly surprised. “Thank you for your sweet words, dear Mother. It is impossible, it seems, to go through life without losing loved ones, but it does not make it less painful or easier. I must confess though that I did not know my Lord Husband had a daughter once…”

“Better not to speak with him about it; Shireen was his pride and joy. Baratheon men have the propensity of having more sons than daughters...from the moment we laid our eyes on Shireen, she had our love. She fell with greyscale when she was no more than three years old. Stannis enlisted GrandMaester Marwyn and Archmaester Ebrose to save her, as the disease does not kill as many children as adults, and she was responding well to the treatment, but she caught a chill and her little body could not resist…”

Catelyn went with Lady Cassana to place flowers in the girl's grave the next day and a couple of days after she noticed how life was starting to make sense once again,

She had finally arranged some time to write letters when news arrived that the Stormlands were being taken over by a boy calling himself Daemon, son of Serra Blackfyre, the now leader of the Golden Company: they had taken Tarth, Greenstone and Mistwood already.

“They cannot possibly hope to take Storm's End!” Lady Cassana exclaimed.

“A siege then...we have enough grains, I assure your Ladyship’s.”

They prepared for a siege, a siege that was never meant to happen.

In less than four days, Daemon Blackfyre was sleeping in the Lord’s chambers, while Lady Cassana, Steffon and Catelyn shared a room under the vigilance of two guards.

“They entered through the cavern; there is a passage there, but is protected by portcullis, bars and murder holes…” Lady Cassana whispered. “somebody knew exactly how to find the passage and deal with the defenses...we were betrayed.”

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**House Targaryen**

The Queen arrived with two thousand Unsullied guards, five hundred Dothraki bloodriders brave enough to cross the poisoned waters, Ser Barristan Selmy and Ser Jonothor Darry from the Kingsguard and three large dragons to liberate King’s Landing from House Lannister, just to find that the man partially responsible for the unrest in the Seven Kingdoms, Lord Tywin Lannister, had been murdered.

“My brother, Lord Jaime Lannister, called most of the troops Father brought here to the Riverlands, Your Grace.” Maester Tyron was relieved of his position as replacement for Grand Maester Marwyn, but seeing that House Lannister was under new rulership and that its new Lord was serious about liberating her brother from imprisonment, Daenerys allowed him to assist the Small Council. “Lord Lannister has no intention in forcing the Crown to fulfill the pact signed for the former Prince Aegon and the late Joanna through war; he waits your instructions on how to deal with the High
Sparrow followers and will swear fealty to you as Queen Regent to King Jaehaerys Targaryen, third of his name.”

Daenerys looked at Cersei; she had never spoken more than three words with her brother's wife. She wondered if Cersei knew she was also married to Viserys, in a sense. *It matters not; Viserys is paying with his freedom for his loyalty. And Cersei clearly is suffering for her husband. She knows the kind of man Viserys is and accepts him; this should be enough proof for me.*

“The safety of King Jaehaerys and his future Consort, Princess Alyssane, should be your main concern as I leave with my dragons to liberate my dear brother. The Small Council in its present form, Lady Brienne of Tarth and Princess Cersei are to hold King’s name in the name of House Targaryen until my return. “

Lord Varys had disappeared; Maester Tyrion shared his suspicions with the Small Council and Tarth had indeed fallen to the Golden Company a couple of days before Daenerys landed.

The Queen would have to content with two wars at the same time: “We know Varys associate in Pentos, Illyrio Mopatis. They are both together in this...I cannot possibly fly there to confront the man at this time I have the suspicion it would be for naught; the Magister is an intelligent man and is unlikely to be lingering in his Manse as we speak. Presently, all we can do is to set a price for Varys head for the murder of Lord Lannister.”

As her son was too small to ascend the Throne, Daenerys was forced to make the funeral of Rhaegar a spectacle and remind everybody that House Targaryen had returned. His body had been embalmed and kept in run for over three months. There was no Great Sept of Baelor anymore, so they used the Sept closest to the Red Keep for the ceremonies and prayers.

After seven days, Rhaegar's body was moved to the Dragonpit, where Viserion burnt the man who would be his rider.

The next morning, Daenerys said her goodbyes and left for Stony Sept.

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The High Sparrow had recruited followers among the poorest and the richest, but the chore of his Army was made of peasants and young knights.

Daenerys simply did not want to attack her own people, but there was little choice.

Ser Willas Tyrell explained he had cleaned his path from Aegon’s followers; the rebellion, although concentrated on Stony Sept, was widespread; he suggested the other Lords to do the same and Daenerys agreed. “Lord Lannister, it is my intention to release you from this siege as soon as I liberate my dear brother. Your lands are in need of your presence and our smallfolk should see us as their protectors, not abusers. It is important that you lead your troops home and, as Ser Willas said, deal with the local insurgents. Lord Baratheon is already on his way to the Stormlands; I will rally my Forces and I ask the strength of The Reach to deal with the Blackfyre invader in three days time.”

“Your Grace, how do you intend in breaking the Siege?” Ser Brynden asked. “The High Sparrow led Prince Viserys to believe they would be negotiating only to have him kidnapped; this is not a man to be trusted and yet, his hold on Stony Sept is very secure, as long as he has your brother. He knows we will not be risking to storm those walls in fear he will execute the Prince.”
The riverlander knight did not mention, but Daenerys was now openly called "Dragonqueen Whore", married to both her brothers in a ceremony honouring the false Gods of Old Valyria. There was no doubt in her mind that Viserys had been tortured; he was no warrior and never was been particularly strong of mind or body.

The best course of action was to get Viserys back at all costs and pretend they had never been married in the first place. The people that attended the ceremony were far from the High Sparrow’s grasp and the marriage was never intended to be more than a secret and private symbol of their commitment to House Targaryen.

Ser Barristan and Greyworm took Meereen by infiltrating the city; they had proposed to do the same to break Viserys free that night.

Stoney Sept was not a Castle nor a city; it was a walled town, but its wall would not withstand an attack of their now large and combined forces. That they held women and children and most of the smallfolk that were needed to tend the lands of the region gave the High Sparrow his first assurance that the soldiers would not storm their walls; when more soldiers came and it became clear they would attack, The High Sparrow sought Viserys as further guarantee of their inaction.

Queen Daenerys trusted those Lords who came to the rescue of her brother; but she trusted herself even more.

“Tomorrow, Ser Brynden...tomorrow you will see.”

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Infiltrate Stoney Sept was not so difficult when one was as experienced as Ser Barristan; Greyworm was told to keep his head down and not speak much. They were both dressed in the clothing of Aegon's followers. They had taken some men for questioning and Queen Daenerys, desperate enough for information, threatened their lives if they were not going to give them the location of Viserys cell.

“Your leader said my dragons did not exist; now you see he was lying while I have been telling the truth the whole time. Tell us everything we need to know and I will forgive you. Refuse and I shall grant you the Dragon's mercy.”

They spoke.

The High Sparrow’s piety was his undoing; most of the guards were attending a service that night, the last service before going to bed, while Ser Barristan and Greyworm cleared the path to the cell.

Viserys did not even listen when Ser Barristan opened the door; he was a shell of his former himself and tried to resist being freed, not recognizing the Knight. Ser Barristan had no time to lose and gagged the Prince.

Viserys was too weak to protest when they finally carried him outside.

Daenerys cried when she saw her brother; his nails were long, his face, scratched and his beautiful hair had been shaven.

He was as thin as Aegon had been during his younger years and had been wiped pretty savagely. “Brother...I came for you...I am here...Alysane and Cersei are waiting for your return. You are safe.”
She gave orders for nobody to interrupt their reunion; she fed Viserys soup and laid with him in the same bed, silently holding her brother until he fell asleep.

The Maester that examined Viserys said his body had not sustained any great injury; there were a couple of broken ribs and he would have to refrain from exercise, but it was his mind that worried Daenerys; she did not want to doubt her brother, however Viserys had never been particularly known for his tenacity.

The situation reminded Daenerys of her late mother’s advice: Targaryen men are frail; they break while the women endure.

She would have to be strong for them.

Viserys was present when the war Council met. Daenerys had personally washed him, trimmed his nails and dressed her brother, but he looked more like a ghost, sitting at her right side.

The Lords tried not to show their shock at seeing Viserys in that way; the meeting started without delay: “The High Sparrow sent us the head of Ser Daemon Sand as an answer to our offer, Your Grace.” Lord Lannister said; again, he did not mention the message attached to the head, about how they ought to have executed the Prince the same way since he not only laid with his married sister, but also with men.

“Burn them all.” Viserys murmured.

Daenerys turned to him; it was almost a whisper, but she had heard it perfectly.

Those were her people too...she was their Queen.

But her brother kept saying it, now in a faint, but audible voice. “Burn them all.”

This could be their Field of Fire; a final show of strength designed to put their enemies in their right places and end the bloodshed in one single move.

“Have our Heralds announce they have exactly two hours to send us their women and children…this ends today.”

At the end of the agreed time, Daenerys asked the soldier before her how many had left Stoney Shore:

“None, Your Grace.”

There was an oppressive silence in the tent. They do not think I will do it. “My Lords, you are all my witnesses. We should only follow those who deserve to be followed; women and children are going to die today and it is not our fault; they will die because many chose to follow this monster. Innocents will die because this monster is too proud to see he has been defeated. I ask you all to stand by me in this difficult time. It gives me no pleasure, but it is my Duty.”

Stoney Sept was burnt to the ground.

Daenerys was received as a hero in the camp; she had saved those soldiers, she reminded herself; they would be returning to their families very soon.

She had ended the war.

Her stomach turning, she thanked those brave men for their efforts and then she went to her tent and
Lord Jon Stark saw the flames in the distance as dragons were dancing in the skies.

He took a deep breath; Lord Tully said something, but he did not hear. They were close to the camp now.

When the message was sent to the Twins that Queen Daenerys had arrived with her dragons, that King Rhaegar would be cremated as per House Targaryen’s funeral rites and that King Jaehaerys was now his Liege, he was speechless.

*She is going to war.*

His first reaction was to think that war was no place for women; he then corrected himself: no place for pampered Ladies. *The She bears...the Spearwives...The Dragon Queens, they are cut from a different cloth.*

She was going to war and he would go with her.

“Her Grace will ride in a sennight; if we are fast enough we can arrive a couple of days later and join her.” Lord Tully explained his Kingsguard brother was sieging the place; adding their numbers was more of a political gesture than a military one at that stage; he had no doubts that the next step would be the Stormlands.” A contingent of the Knights of the Vale is moving south as we speak...it is the right step to lead the northerners to Stoney Sept, so it shows that we are all behind House Targaryen.”

When Jon finally arrived, he watched in awe as Daenerys, all clad in the colours of her House, dismounted her dragon.

She had changed and was more beautiful than ever.

But he too had changed, he reminded himself; his beard was now as full as his Father’s, his body, broader and his hair, longer than when he last saw the Queen.

“Her Grace wishes to receive you for a private audience, my Lord.” Ser Barristan then informed Jon they would be moving south the next day to fight the Golden Company and liberate Storm's End.

Jon knew that his former aunt, Lady Catelyn, was imprisoned in that holdfast; he could not fathom how they had managed to break those walls woven with protective spells, but the Golden Company was known for being the most efficient and prepared of the sellswords companies; they were not an enemy to be underestimated.

Jon had only time to wash his face and hands; he was wearing his new armour and his furs. He walked with apprehension. This would be the first time he was allowed to see Daenerys as a woman. Would he be able to hide his admiration under the respect she was due as his Liege? An impressive Queen she already was, but Daenerys was only two, three years older than he himself was, and Jon, at eight and ten, was among the youngest of Lords.
They were left alone in that tent. She looked at him with the same eyes, but in a different way.

A smile escaped his lips.

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Daenerys had loved Rhaegar first as a sister and then, when he had decided it was not enough, she loved him as a husband.

It had been over three moon turns since his death and she had bled twice already.

She was to inform Lord Jon she could not hope to deliver his promised Targaryen bride: Alysane was to be betrothed to Jaehaerys and she was the daughter of Viserys; even if he was to have more children of Princess Cersei, those would not be from the line of Rhaegar. And Rhaenys daughter was a Tyrell in name—by blood, she was a Dayne—and only the Head of Her House could dispose of the infant.

Jon—Lord Jon Snow—had been a friend for years now. He had saved her life once and provided her comfort when they journeyed together to King’s Landing. It was there that Daenerys started to see him as a man, and not as a boy. She loved Rhaegar and would never break his trust, but she had grown used to be looked upon with hidden lust by men. That night before she sailed to Dragonstone they crossed eyes for brief second, and Daenerys, for the first time since she had married, looked back at a man that was not her husband with lust.

She was the only available bride of House Targaryen to be offered if she wanted to honour the Pact of Ice and Fire.

Daenerys had been a pawn her whole life; so it was with Princesses. She was still young, fertile and she now craved things that only a husband could offer her. Yet, she was to be Queen Regent for the next ten years in the least; Viserys was to become the Prince of Summerhall, the heir for his nephew Jaehaerys until her son was to wed Alysane and have issue. Daenerys herself was also in line to The Iron Throne.

She could not possibly marry any man, or take lovers without consequences.

But she also did not want to marry for Duty alone and Lord Jon Stark—Jon—that night became her choice, both of heart and mind.

They spoke for hours, dancing around the subject. How cold was really Winterfell if it was built above hot springs...the terrible food of Meereen and her hatred for honeyed locusts...shared memories of the time they were both young and innocent and how the war had changed their views of the world...

Before she could even breach the subject, Jon placed his face so close to hers that she felt the warmth of his breathing. Daenerys could have politely rebuffed this move; Jon would then pretend it never happened and they would continue to speak.

She had to observe at least three more moonturns of mourning to even consider it...to even allow him the presumption of kissing her.

That night, Daenerys learned that, if a Dragon and a Wolf silently agree something was right, the world would have to accept or burn.
When they finally broke the kiss, she laughed.

Jon was confused: “What...I apologise, Your Grace...”

She pointed at his beard. “No need to apologise...I am just, not used to...all these hair.” She smiled, content with herself. “Please...call me Dany when we are in private. As for the pact...that the late King Rhaegar signed. Do you have any suggestions on how to...honour the agreement?”

“You will always be my Queen, even if I am to call you Dany.... or wife.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay guys...
this is the image I have of Jon Stark :
and this of Daenerys
as they meet. Just past the links on your browser; it is posted on my tumblr with credit given to the amazing artists.

Jonerys: as Daenerys POV leaves clear, if you are a person of Power, you cannot possibly make a personal decision without considering the political implications. That is what poor Robb Stark could not see it because he was so young and immature. So, Daenerys is Queen Regent; she cannot possibly marry a simple Knight or a man she does not trust entirely. She cannot take lovers in Kings Landing with all eyes on her. Thankfully for her, Jon is both her choice of heart and mind.
PART 3: when you least expect...

Chapter Summary

Daenerys is once again victorious, but many deaths and an unexpected player makes her victory seems hollow.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

House Stark 299 A.C

They would have to wait; Daenerys was expected to observe a full year of mourning, the Blackfyre rebellion needed to be crushed and the Seven Kingdoms would face the harshest winter to date.

Although Jon would rather spent that night leisurely kissing all parts of Daenerys body, they continued to speak; not only about the terms and conditions for the union between Houses Stark and Targaryen, but also about their personal lives.

She told him everything. Jon Stark was both shocked and disappointed; he had considered Rhaegar Targaryen to be a man of honour. Claiming Daenerys at such a young age, almost forcefully so, while still married to his first wife, it made Jon reconsider his opinion on the best King Westeros had had in a long time.

Daenerys noticed his discomfort over her past. She had forgiven Rhaegar long time ago, but had no intention of allowing his shadow to further complicate what was already complicated: “Jon, it cannot be undone. I came to love him as he was, a man who made mistakes. The Seven Kingdoms always saw Rhaegar as a perfect prince, but there is no such a thing. The dragon’s blood does things to the men of my family. It is not an excuse, rather an explanation to what and how had happened. I never saw Rhaegar or Viserys as nothing more than brothers...they, however, could not see me as only their sister.”

Daenerys tone was sad; there was hidden resentment and the burden of the present situation had undoubtedly pushed her to the limit. She dropped some tears as she spoke about the Red Witch and losing her daughter. The dragons were born out of blood and fire magic, she explained, and to protect them, Daenerys had agreed to enter into a political second marriage to her brother Viserys and this was what made Jon cringe.

“It was a symbolic gesture; the Three Heads of the Dragon. Nothing more, nothing less. Grand Maester Marwyn, Lady Brienne and our Castellan and Master at Arms at Dragonstone were the only ones in attendance. We will fly to Dragonstone and have an annulment ceremony. If it changes things…”

No, it did not change how he felt, Jon was quick to say; for this, she gifted him with another kiss.

But Jon had never trusted Viserys to begin with and now that he was half mad…” The Prince is not
the same man I heard. Mayhaps he would not agree ..."

Daenerys was yet to speak to Viserys about her plans; Cersei Arryn would be more than happy and she hoped this would influence her brother’s views on the matter: “Summerhall is not yet finished, but I will grant him the title as next in line after Jaehaerys when we announce the betrothal of our children. Then we must fly to Dragonstone and have the secret marriage annulled. I must arrive at Storm's End sure that House Targaryen is strong again and united around Jaehaerys; I can not allow Daemon Blackfyre to use any possible source of discontent to bring us down. Lord Varys was an informant of his and I am sure his spies had something to do with the Golden Company taking Storm's End.”

Many in the camp did not believe the news when it arrived, but Daenerys knew to be true. The Queen sent her messengers to summon the other Lords for a War’s Council; Viserys was given milk of the poppy to help with his pains and was sleeping in the tent next to his sister’s, therefore he would not be in attendance, much to Jon’s relief; the last thing he wanted was to be in the same room with his love’s husband.

Daenerys explained they had doubled the offered reward for Lord Varys head over the murder of Lord Tywin Lannister, but revealed the Spider’s association with House Blackfyre and the gravity of the new information was not lost on anyone.

Ser Brynden Tully had observed Varys first hand in King's Landing and offered his point of view: “The situation would not have been half as bad had Varys not been given the position; now I can see how he always fed us half trues and why the rumours regarding Her Grace were never dispersed. Storm's End surely fell because of Varys...I have now reasons to believe that Prince Viserys’s kidnapping was his doing. He was spreading chaos to pave the way for this Blackfyre invasion.”

Lord Jon Stark had constantly asked himself why the Ironborn chose to attack The North in the first place. He now wondered if Lord Varys had nothing to do with it; the murder of Lord Lannister could have been the disposing of a former ally turned undesirable.

He looked at Lord Jaime Lannister; sons are not their fathers, Jon reminded himself. The westerlander had called his troops from King's Landing as soon as his father died and stayed firmly by Her Grace’s side during the siege of Stoney Sept.

No, he would not know if his Lord Father had planned the Ironborn Invasion alongside Lord Varys.

Lord Stark decided to present the Council his suspicions: “The Ironborn seem to be under the impression they will claim the Riverlands...while there is no doubt in my mind that Lord Balon is an idiot, they could not possibly expect to hold the lands without allies. Mayhaps they work with the Blackfyres after all...Daemon might have promised them House Tully’s paramountship through Lord Varys. The Golden Company cannot hope to take the Seven Kingdoms with ten thousand men and elephants...they must count with the support of noble houses to their cause. Now that the Queen returned with the rightful ruler and dragons, whoever sides with Daemon Blackfyre has no excuses for this treachery.”

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**House Blackfyre**

Daemon had the sword, but lacked the conviction. He had been educated as a Prince since his birth, hidden in the Rhoyne with a household of servants and trusted supporters. Of his mother, Lady Serra
Blackfyre, he had only a couple of memories; his father, Magister Illyrio had been an intermittent presence in his life, as it was his uncle, Varys, who would have a better claim had not been for his status as eunuch.

The truth about the almost destruction of his House was one of an internal conflict: that two headed monster, Maelys, sold Varys and Serra after defeating their father, his cousin Daemon, over the command of the Golden Company.

The present Daemon Blackfyre resented the ways things had played out. Illyrio Mopatis came upon Varys in Pentos and they developed a friendship; after years of searching, they finally found Serra in a pillow house, another silver haired bed warmer of Lys claiming to be a princess. But her brother remembered her and they resumed being a family.

When they were established in Pentos they contacted the Golden Company about their inheritance. Commander Harry Strickland swore they had been looking for their lieges all those years; Daemon doubted it was true, or mayhaps, when they found both, one an eunuch and the other, a whore, they simply gave up the cause and turned their attentions to being what they had become: sellswords.

Only after Daemon was born, a strong and healthy baby boy, the Golden Company delivered their Ancestral Sword to his mother's hands and reaffirmed their intention: one day they would return to Westeros and help Daemon claim his inheritance.

Now that they finally proved they were able to further their line and counted with the loyalty of the Golden Company, Varys and Illyrio started to move the pieces on the board; Pentos was very close to King's Landing and soon word spread that the essosi eunuch was a Master Spy. Aerys Targaryen was not a good King, but he had surrounded himself with very capable people, skilled enough to make it appear the Seven Kingdoms were not under a mad man’s rule. Varys stay at King's Landing, however, was very short. Aerys, Lord Baratheon and his son and heir, Robert, were travelling the Free Cities in search of a Valyrian bride. They stayed way too long in Lys and, thankfully, Varys little birds made him aware that Lord Baratheon had stumbled across his secret when visiting the pillow house Serra Blackfyre had been rescued.

Varys acted fast; no correspondence from the King and his cousin was received; the whores kept them entertained while Varys announced he had been ordered to escort the King back to Westeros. The sinking of the Windproud was blamed on the weather and conditions of Shipwrecker’s bay, but in fact, it was all Varys Blackfyre’s doing. In the confusion that followed nobody suspected there were survivors of the sinking, members of the crew that took part in the “accident” and escaped on a boat; Aerys, Steffon and Robert Baratheon were locked on their cabins, drugged not to feel any pain as Varys was not a cruel man, he told himself time and again.

The original plan had been to fuel Aerys paranoia and continue to assist Rhaegar during his reign, enabling his stupid pursuit of Prophecies until the day came when he inevitably would bring his own House down in flames, like his ancestor, Aegon V, had done before.

Daemon Blackfyre had learned all this by accident, of course. Both Varys and Illyrio were training him as a perfect prince, and perfect princes don’t go about cutting tongues of children to turn them into spies or sinking ships.

Varys resigned from his position right after the “tragedy” and returned to Essos. For protection, Daemon was sent away from home when he was four. Varys and Illyrio continued to work for the restoration of House Blackfyre, keeping an eye on Westeros, hosting the Targaryens everytime they crossed the Narrow Sea and secretly plotting their destruction.
They learned to adapt; playing the waiting game had its benefits, as Daemon was still young and had much to learn. He rode with the Golden Company as soon as he came of age, never in real danger, but close enough to observe how wars were won. Meanwhile, Varys finally made his way into the Red Keep again; when Rhaegar and Daenerys went to Slaver’s Bay and left their weak brother, Viserys, to handle a religious insurgency and the greed of Lord Lannister, they all knew time had come.

Khal Drogo was a friend of Illyrio´s. Daenerys quest to end slavery was not of his interest, so he agreed to attack Meereen and personally kill Rhaegar Targaryen. He did accomplish the task in the end and, even tough Varys had also convinced the Ironborn to start a civil war by attacking two of the Seven Kingdoms in exchange for the lordship with the Riverlands, the mere fact that Daenerys Targaryen single handed commanded three dragons and crushed the Dothraki in open field made Daemon Blackfyre curse the day he was born and the plans his family hat set to him.

He was a dragon; he would not like to kill a dragon, especially one that was being used to free slaves.

Daemon spent time enough with the Golden Company to hear rumours; his father had been convinced by Lord Euron Greyjoy that a dragonbinder of Old Valyria could be purchased and give them command of at least one dragon; only one had been claimed and, if Daemon was able to claim the other one and kill the third...he would have a chance at forcing Daenerys to marry him.

But the education both his father and uncle had provided him taught Daemon to be rational. The History books told a strange tale, one that differed from the Golden Company´s version: only the first rebellion had been an almost victory; all others were failures. House Blackfyre was down to a single member- him - unmarried and without sons, while House Targaryen had an heir, a spare and a Princess. Not to mention three adult dragons and the leadership of a woman who proved herself to be a capable field commander, while him remained untested.

His mother had been a slave; he was a dragon himself. This fight he was being forced to fight was not the one he would have fought had him the choice.

And when he learned of what the Ironborn had done, Daemon Blackfyre suddenly saw he not only had the choice, but his voice would finally be heard.

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House Tully

The crabs inside his belly were eating him and the pain was excruciating.

There was so much to be done, and yet, so little time.

Lord Hoster Tully agreed he was in no conditions to lead his men into breaking the Siege at Storm’s End; Edmure would have to do it and his son, while a good enough man, was not a great warrior. Before he left for Riverrun, he met with his brother. Brynden was a Kingsguard and his loyalty was to the Crown, but blood is thicker than water; Brynden would make sure Edmure returned home unharmed and that their line would continue.

Lysa and her children were safe at Riverrun thanks to Lord Baratheon; now his oldest daughter was the one needing assistance and Lord Tully could only pray the men he was sending would be enough.
Before drifting into the haze induced by milk of the poppy, Lord Tully spoke with his son in private and for the last time: “You go and listen to your uncle. Our troops will obey you, but you should heed to Brynden’s advice. We are old and you are young; there is too much we have seen and you have not seen enough. Do not act foolish or seek glory. You will be a Lord by the time you return and your job is to stay alive, rule our lands and have a family with your wife.”

***

House Baratheon

Lady Catelyn had only seen the Blackfyre pretender once and she had to concede he looked like a Prince. Of course, he pales in comparison with the late King Rhaegar and will never sit on that Throne, but the boy is not unkind; our situation could be worse.

And the soldiers of the Golden Company were impressive. They took Storm’s End by deception, it is true, but they took it nevertheless and controlled half of the Stormlands for what Catelyn had heard.

Steffon was allowed to continue with his lessons when Daemon Blackfyre had no need of their Maester. Catelyn, Lady Cassana and others were given books and had permission to attend service at the Sept. They were heavily guarded, but not mistreated in any way and yet they were captives, prisoners of war with few rights. Nobody would tell them what was happening or answer their questions with the truth of their situation, which just made Catelyn more anxious.

She tried to comfort Steffon despite her own fears. She was a daughter of Riverrun, a Tully...they would not break her spirit. I survived Brandon Stark and years of abuse, I will survive this Siege. It is just a matter of time; soon, they will break the siege...we will not starve. We have enough grains for two years...

The days passed without any change; Catelyn still hoped for the best, but started to doubt herself sometimes. Lady Cassana tried to keep her chin up and Steffon was maybe too young to grasp the gravity of their situation, which was a blessing and, still, they knew very little of what was indeed happening.

The Blackfyre will sure be defeated; what will happen to us? Will they kiss us? take us away to Essos?

Catelyn was praying when they heard voices being raised; the soldiers guarding them did not move, but looked uncomfortable. High Valyrian. Catelyn had long learned the language...she could only make up some words; they were speaking of their allies...or former allies...

Daemon’s War Council...maybe an envoy from Essos?

A sennight later, it was all over.

***

House Greyjoy

Euron would leave his nephew die in the North now that he was made King. He saw that all of Balon’s sons died in the war and then, he himself disposed of his older brother. The niece, Asha, had tried to unite her claim to Victarion’s- stupid Aeron dared suggest a marriage between both of them,
if the rumours were to be believed- but, in the end, he made himself King.

Kings needed Queens and there was waiting for him.

With three dragons.

Lord Varys, the eunuch, had come to Pyke a sennight before the Kingsmoot was to take place. Euron listened to him speak about the terms of their agreement, of the gold the late Lord Tywin had gave them, the things Daemon Blackfyre would offer once he was on the Throne...

Euron heard the cockless man speak and agreed to everything : “ My late brother, Balon, was a firm believer in our ways. It took some convincing for him not to attack the Westerlands as he always felt we should pay the Iron Price...I was the one to explain him we should not bite more than we can chew; your deal was a good one and he only took it because of me. We speak more in the morrow, my friend.”

Euron had no intention of speaking to Lord Varys. The eunuch , however, was part of his plans.

Varys was to be the first gift Euron would offer to his intended.

*The most beautiful woman in the world...eyes like amethysts...*

Those sparse and rocky islands meant nothing to Euron. He wanted power, both political and magical. There was a woman , a dragon, who would provide him with both.

*When the kraken marries the dragon, let all the world beware.*

Magister Illyrio was a fat man. Euron despised fat men and let him starve for some days. The dragonhorn was his; the dragon would be his and the mother of dragons would be the mother of his children, not of that Blackfyre boy.

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**House Targaryen**

Cersei cursed her father many times when she finally laid eyes on Viserys. Her husband was in pain; only milk of the poppy could provide him a measure of solace. He would smile when playing with Alysane and sometimes, she could swear she saw the old Viserys emerge for some minutes, but  she knew deep down that her dragonprince was a changed man. A broken man.

Hard lines in his face and a feverish look in his eyes, this was the new Viserys Targaryen.

*It was all Lord Lannister’s doing...he was working with the Spider to bring Viserys down, to force Daenerys bethrote the Crown Prince to his precious Marei...you will burn in the Seven Hells, Tywin Lannister!*

Not even the presence of his dragon, Rhaegal, was enough to keep Viserys mind out of his misery. He would always drift to a semi catatonic state and retreat to his chambers. He would barely stay more than two hours in the company of other people, focusing on a task or conversation became almost impossible, him becoming unresponsive after some minutes, his head seemingly in the clouds.

Cersei tried to convince herself that her husband only needed time to readjust to the new situation; his
marriage to his sister had been annulled and they would be staying at Dragonstone for the duration of the war. Viserys only chance at recovery was on that island, Daenerys believed, and Cersei agreed with the assesment; far from the scrutiny of the courtiers and responsibilities of being a Prince, both women hoped the fresh air, his dragon and daughter, the attention of their loyal household and the sights of their childhood would bring the Viserys they both knew out of that shell of a man.

Maester Tyrion, however, broke this illusion as soon as Her Grace left for Storm's End; Cersei would never love this brother- or even the other- but she trusted his skills and knew he would not lie to her:” Your husband has become addicted; I had given him a fair share of poppy milk, but he went behind my back and requested more from the Maester at Dragonstone. “

Viserys had been treated with the powerful substance for his broken ribs, but the dosis had been increasing instead of decreasings as his wounds improved. The Prince would consume the milk and fall asleep, no doubt high on the poppy dreams. And even when he was awake, the milk incapacitated Viserys to the point of apathy.

Cersei went to the Maester at Dragonstone and asked him to refuse giving Viserys more from the milk; they would have to work out cutting his dependancy from it by slowly take the substance out of his body. The Prince did not protest when he was informed, which gave Cersei hope.

But the situation was even worse than she had expected: Viserys, as it turned out, had other means to get his fix behind their backs: “ Why is the Prince receiving in his Solar a sailor from Lys?” Cersei asked of the Castellan one day.

“I know the Prince ever since he was a small boy, my Lady. Queen Rhaella would forbid him to play with the stray cats, he would graciously accept the order, just to disappear and be found playing with the cats regradless.” The old man said in a somber tone. “ I am afraid he has not changed since.”

Cersei was livid. She loved her husband dearly and missed his touch. They had only been intimate a couple of times since his return and she feared that if she was to scream at him, throw away the disgusting drug and have his movements observed every second of that day until she was sure he had grown out of it, that Viserys would come to resent her.

She spent that morning with Alysane and her Ladies in waiting at Aegon´s garden, where they had a picnic, patiently waiting for her rage to subdue. She could not speak with Viserys in anger and yes, Cersei was angry at him.

When she returned to the Keep, she gave orders for a bath to be draw and say that Alysane took a nap.

Cersei had finished her bath and was being dressed when somebody knocked at the door; her heart raced, her mouth went dry and her hands were shaking...she just knew : “ It is the Prince, my Lady...”

As she closed his eyes forever, his cold skin under her fingers, a knot forming on her throat, Cersei noticed that Viserys had a smile on his face.

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There was an uncomfortable silence in the room. She did not speak; he made the first move: “ I am sorry for your loss, Your Grace.”

Daenerys nodded. She had spent a sennight at Dragonstone and another at King's Landing. She left
Jaehaerys, once again, at the Red Keep with Lady Brienne of Tarth, Ser Barristan Selmy and Ser Arthur Dayne. Before flying to Storm's End, she sat on the Iron Throne for a couple of days; there was much to be done and not enough time. With heavy heart, Daenerys flew. Jaehaerys was only three, but she knew he was safe. It was her brother, Viserys, she worried about.

Another sennight passed between war council meetings with Lords Baratheon, Lannister, Stark and Royce, Ser Edmure Tully, Brynden and Willas Tyrell. Prince Oberyn Martell was the last to arrive, but was quick to give his opinion on how to handle the Blackfyre pretender: with fire and blood.

Daenerys had other plans. War was only good for Knights and Lords. She had no intention of leaving the Golden Company return to Essos. Every rebellion saw the same outcome: they would be defeated, just to lick their wounds and try again on a later time.

The Queen had the solution to end this endless cycle of betrayal. The head she received of Lord Varys Blackfyre with an offer of marriage from Euron Greyjoy just confirmed that her instincts were true: she would prevail through diplomacy, not through sheer force. She was the one with the claim, the numbers and the dragons: Daemon had only a sword, a dead uncle and father, and half the Stormlands which he knew he could not hope to keep in the long run.

But the Lords, perhaps out of pride, resisted her proposed solution; between messages to Storm's End and meetings with her own men, the days passed. When they had finally agreed to her plan and Daemon Blackfyre showed himself open to negotiate his terms, news came that Viserys had died in his sleep.

"Thank you, my Lord; I also extend my heartfelt condolences for your loss." Daenerys had no love for Varys or Illyrio, but mentioning their deaths was also a reminder that Daemon could not count with the Ironborn or with the council and influence of his father and uncle.

"Your Grace, my uncle and my father both had very difficult lives. I would ask of you not to forget my uncle and mother were sold in slavery." Daemon explained how Varys manhood had been offered in sacrifice for the Red God because of his King's blood and how his mother had spent most of her girlhood as a whore in a brothel. "Whatever crimes they committed against you and your family, I assure you they had suffered enough, both in life in death. You do not need to seek retribution as I have no intention in continuing this war they started."

Daenerys believed every word that came from Daemon's mouth. He looked the part, she had to admit; Daenerys had told her Council that, even if they were to kill Daemon, she feared that in twenty years time, the survivors of the Golden Company would go to Volantis, find themselves a silver haired, violet eyed boy and claim him to be their King.

She considered her words carefully; she had the upper hand, but she did not wish to humiliate the young man: "My Lord, I believe we are both here to break away from the past. Our ancestors behaved poorly and both sides committed atrocities. We are more than kin; we are family. I want peace for my son, his sons and his son's sons. I hope you want the same for your House and the men under your command."

"What is your offer?"

"The original one. House Blackfyre was supposed to be a cadet branch of House Targaryen, joining in the tradition of House Velaryon of providing eventual Valyrian brides to the main branch. The Stockworth lands are available. The last remaining member of the House is a simple minded woman who is joining The Faith." Lady Tanda had died at the Red Keep, her eldest daughter too succumbed from a fever and her husband died fighting. Lollys Stokeworth was not capable of holding the lands and was delivered into the custody of the Faith soon after the deaths.
Daenerys had asked all the Lords to offer at least one available Lordship or Knightly House to the main members of the Golden Company. They needed to be scattered through the Seven Kingdoms; their lands should be enough to keep them and their Knights, but not to give them much Power. Daemon and Harry Strickland, the main Commanders, would be given Keeps in the Crownlands, swearing fealty directly to House Targaryen. House Hollard, a vassal of House Rykker ( House Darkling had died out) was also without a Lord, since Ser Dontos also died in the war and Daenerys was ready to have House Strickland hold those lands in her name.

Queen Daenerys insisted the Essosi soldiers and the elephants to be given the choice to return home with the ships and continue to be a sellsword company in Essos...there was no place for all ten thousand to be absorbed into their society. About a third of their members did not come from exiled westerosi nobility, and keeping their ships, elephants and the command of the famous company was enough of a boon already in her estimation.

The Vale offered the Baelish lands; the Reach had Standfast and Coldmoat, while the Riverlands still searched for a Lord to the Northern Twin Tower. Lord Jaime Lannister explained the lands of the Reynes and Tarbecks were too rich to be given away to former traitors; the solution was to only part with the portion of lands that had no mines, but farms and villages and Towers, which granted the exiles with two Knightly Houses. Lord Jaime would grant Tarbeck Hall and Castamere as reward for bravery once the War for the Dawn was won and Daenerys agreed it was the best solution.

Lord Baratheon requested not be forced to have invaders as bannermen and Daenerys accepted his decision with grace. Dorne and The North had no lands to give, but promised to arrange spots in their households instead.

Daemon agreed to to the general terms, but made some demands when it came to the subject of marriage: “Some of the men more deserving of the honour already have families within the Golden Company. Those unions must be recognized upon their ascension. Only a couple of us are unattached.”

“Your are still unmarried.” He nodded; Daemon was a good looking man and needed to be married as soon as possible. The Golden Company would be joining in the fight up North once Winter came, in about half a year. It was only time for them to be settled into their new homes and, hopefully, further their lines.

*And If some of them fail to do so, it will not be such a great loss…*

Daemon Blackfyre was no idiot; he knew this well and demanded his bride to be given to him in a moonturn, the same deadline to be observed for the other unmarried future Lord of his choosing.

Daenerys had anticipated it. Only Lords could negotiate marriages and she had invited some of the most loyal to her tent and informed them of the plan. From those, some had daughters of marriage age- Daenerys would only consider women older than six and ten- and were willing to overlook the tint of bastardy in the line of Daemon Blackfyre since their Queen would be addressing him as “cousin” from there on during Court sessions, a huge honour.

“Houses Selmy and Celtigar have daughters to give away. I will summon them to the Red Keep …” Daemon and his Officers would be swearing fealty, granted their titles and marrying their brides at the same time, she added, as Winter was coming and they had to prepare.
The desmobilization of the Golden Company essosi troops was fast; they were well trained, their discipline, legendary and many men had no interest in Westeros. Still, more than a half stayed and were supposed to be find employement under their former commanders lands. Daenerys gave them leave to do so and, if they were to dispose of household members to give way to their men, she insisted reparations to be paid. She also agreed they would be the last ones to join the fight in The North, a concession she had done out of necessity, since they simply had no idea when the White Walkers would strike or how long they would be fighting.

After all, more soldiers also meant more mouths to feed and possibly, more enemies to fight.

The day came and the ceremony was officiated by the new High Septon at the Great Hall of the Red Keep. Daemon Blackfyre knelt and offered his sword to King Jaehaerys; the Queen Mother gracefully accepted his fealty. “Cousin, you are to keep the Sword as a gesture of the unity between Houses Targaryen and Blackfyre. The past is no more.”

Then it came the marriages; Lord Daemon Blackfyre of Castle Stokeworth to Lady Rhaella Celtigar and Master Rolly Duckfield of Standfast to Lady Anna Bar-Emmon, as Lord Selmy would have his only daughter to the now cousin of the King, not to his sworn shield and Daemon prefered a bride of Valyrian blood.

There would be no bedding ceremony or feasting for several days, as they were in mourning, but the dinner served was sumptuous and the crowd applauded the newlyweds when they left to their chambers to consummate their unions.

Lord Jon Stark sat by Queen Daenerys side, their hands entwined under the table: “Congratulations on your victory, Your Grace. The Blackfyre Rebellion is over for good, Aegon’s followers were defeated and Lord Velaryon has sunken enough Ironborn ships to make their conquest of the Riverlands impossible.”

Daenerys feared the Ironborn were yet to make a return: “They have a King now...and he wants my hand.”

“Well” Jon said with a smile. “all we need to do is say no.”

For a fraction of second, everything was perfect.

And then, the painful cry of a dragon enslaved was overheard.

“Take the King to safety…” Daenerys screamed. She ran to the balcony, her guards after her.

In the skies, Rhaegal. Daenerys felt his pain, his tears and she started to cry for him...

...and for her.

The massive creature had no place to land, but Euron Greyjoy did not need him to. As the Ironborn got closer to his target, he simply whisked Daenerys with a hook on her dress and a fishing nest, as if she was a fish and not a dragon.
I incorporated the Varys is a Blackfyre and brother to Serra Blackfyre theory into the plot and it is Canon that 1) Lord Varys fueled the paranoia of Aerys Targaryen for reasons yet unkown, 2) he cuts the tongues of his little birds that are no more than children and 3) he is not beyond assassinate those near him if it fits his pupose, which is to bring Aegon ( here, Daemon) to the Throne.

So, Show Varys is all for the good of the people, but book Varys is all for his Perfect Prince.

The context of Daemon and how he is raised in different and he is older here than in Canon, so this explains why he reaches out for Peace when he can

Euron is...Euron. next chapter it will be explained how he used the Dragonbinder and how he killed Magister Illyrio.
Fire Demon

Chapter Summary

Daenerys and Euron Greyjoy arrive at Pyke; Ser Arthur and Lord Jon Stark prepare a rescue mission; Eddard Stark has problems with Robb.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Flight of Fear

He held her by the waist. “There: The Iron Islands." He said with contempt: "A poor gift for my bride, I am aware, but now that I have a dragon…”

Daenerys said nothing and stopped listening.

She thought about her predicament and how to save herself. They are too far to come and rescue me before Euron has his way. Her connection was to Rhaego and she sensed his presence, flying behind them as stealth as possible. This was not enough, of course: Rhaegal was also one of her children and a fight mid air would most probably kill them all, dragons and riders alike.

There were other risks, too: the control Euron was exercising on the dragon was flimsy at best; had his mother not been on his back, Rhaegal would have already killed the deranged man who was trying to forcefully bond with him.

As soon as we land, I will have Rhaego call for his brother and they will fly as far from Euron Greyjoy as possible. The horn is only a tool to train dragons, nothing more, nothing less.

Daenerys counted on Euron's ignorance of the real powers- and limitations- of the dragonbinder. When Old Valyria started to crumble, its sorcerers sought other ways to speed the process of binding dragons to their masters. Usually, it would take years from having dragon dreams to hatch dragons to finally be able to mount them; and them, to actually train dragons for battle...it was even more complicated. Daenerys and Rhaegar agreed they would not use violence while taming their dragons and she now reaped the benefits of this choice: in less than two years, she managed to be bound to Rhaego and him, in turn, was also bonded with his unclaimed brothers and acted as a leader of the pack.

In other words, Daenerys knew that, as soon as she got Rhaegal to leave with her dragon never to see Euron again, the spell would be broken.

For the sake of her own survival, Daenerys would have to stay quiet and play along. It was important that Euron thought he had the upper hand.

As she suspected, they landed on Pyke, where they were celebrated by the locals. Are the Ironborn
really that stupid? Rhaegal would have burnt them all if his mother was not among those people. I must look scared, I must make Euron believe I am hopeless. Daenerys suppressed a smile when she sensed both dragons meeting midair and flying back to protect Jaehaerys.

For what she read and by the renderings she saw in the books of Volantis, dragon binders were made of the horns of the most powerful dragons, decorated with glyphs that reacted when the horn was blown and they were of the size of a person.

They used slaves to blow the horns, for no man would survive long enough afterwards: the inner organs would be burnt by the fire magic and not even a draonglord could hope to endure it. The sound of the horn had a tranquilizer effect on the beasts and made them pliable to the wills of their masters for a time.

The idea behind it was simple: the horn would make the dragon accept commands from a rider and would be used as much as it took to make the dragon comfortable enough to accept the rider without any further aid in the future.

Old Valyria fell and most of the knowledge and lore regarding dragons was lost. Much of what remained were rumours and conflicted information. After years of research and experience, Marwyn and Rhaegar were able to separate the truth from the lies. Daenerys could not fathom the idea of Euron Greyjoy knowing more about dragons than the Targaryens. Some writers would claim there were horns strong enough to grant one with the right blood immediate possession of a dragon, while others were adamant no dragon would submit so easily.

A dragon is not a slave. Daenerys thought with hidden pride. She looked around, trying to determine whether Euron Greyjoy assumed Rhaegal was his or simply had used his one and only flight to get what he really wanted: her and, by the extension, the Iron Throne.

Even if Euron knows and does not care whether Rhaegal will return or not, I will defeat him somehow. The Lord of Pyke seemed to be intelligent, clearly many steps ahead his subjects. Their arrival was expected and the crowds cheered. Yes, this was his plan all along: their Lord- their King- arriving with his bride on dragonback.

Daenerys remembered her lessons on the different religions and customs of the Seven Kingdoms: marriage by abduction was practiced and recognized by only two groups- the Free Folk and the Ironmen, who would turn the women they took as spoils of war into salt wives.

Euron Greyjoy was not, by any means, breaking with the tradition of his people: “You made me your King, and now, I give you a Queen! The most beautiful woman in the world and three dragons as her dowry: why have the Riverlands if we can rule all the Seven Kingdoms I say!” Euron had his hands all over Daenerys as he addressed the crowd.

Although Daenerys wanted this spectacle to be over soon, she was afraid of what would happen when they were in the privacy of his Castle; Euron Greyjoy did not look like a man who would wait.

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House Dayne

Arthur had followed Her Grace´s orders and ran to protect King Jaehaerys; he did not see that the Queen went to the balcony, Jon a few steps after her, nor that Euron Greyjoy managed to abduct
Daenerys at the Red Keep, where she should have been safe from any harm.

The dornishman could only think how he had failed in his role as a Kingsguard, how Rhaegar- his best friend- had died in a far away land but had succeeded in the task of defending his family from their enemies just for his family to return to their home and be torn apart by a man who should have been loyal to their cause.

There was only one punishment for treason: death.

But how to kill Euron when he was in possession of Daenerys?

The man had earned himself quite a shield, Arthur had to admit.

Dragonstone had sent a raven telling of what had happened, but unfortunately, they all learned that dragons do fly faster than ravens and Euron used the surprise element of his bold attack to his advantage.

Now, instead of attempting to rescue Daenerys, they were discussing options: “Lord Velaryon and the bulk of the Redwyne Fleet were focused in defeating the Ironborn at the Sunset Sea, and, despite the great part of the Royal Fleet stationed at Dragonstone aor patrolling our waters, Euron Greyjoy managed to break our blockade; apparently, he kidnapped three vessels from Essos...“ The Hand of the King, Lord Baratheon, had been preparing to negotiate the terms of surrender with the Greyjoys when the unexpected happened. Now, he felt the only way to have the Queen back was to crush the reavers and destroy their fleet, threatening to starve them: “Princess Alysane is safe and has never been a target; the witnesses saw a man that matched the description of Magister Illyrio blowing a horn and then the green dragon left his lair and accepted Euron Greyjoy as rider. We need to learn about the exact state of the Redwyne Fleet. Lord Greyjoy was at Dragonstone, which means that Victarion is leading their Navy in the Sunset Sea. We were on the brink of crushing them... Euron Greyjoy should be forced to deliver us Her Grace once we defeat them once and for all.”

Jon had heard enough; Arthur could see the young man growing desperate and they, alone, seemed to understand Euron´s plans: “ Lord Greyjoy asked for the hand of Her Grace and was refused. While we discuss sinking their ships, Euron Greyjoy must be organizing a wedding...”

Arthur pitied his nephew at that moment. The points he was trying to make were all solid, but the members of the Small Council were simply not listening. Mayhaps due to Jon´s youth, or mayhaps because they already gave up on the Queen, fearing that history was repeating itself: Rhaenys Targaryen had also been taken by the enemy during wartime and never been rescued.

Ser Arthur asked to have the word; those men respected him and would listen to what he had to say. He hoped to add his voice to Jon´s, not because he was his nephew, but because Jon was right: “The Ironborn does not follow the Seven; even if Her Grace is forced to marry Euron Greyjoy, it would be a valid wedding in the eyes of their people. We are just losing time; we must send word to Lord Velaryon and work on a rescue strategy. Lord Greyjoy is calling himself King and Kings have enemies; he was elected in a kingsmoot, defeating Victarion Greyjoy and usurping Asha and Theon Greyjoy, the last children of Balon. If we promise Victarion lordship over the islands in exchange for the Queen, he might assist us and betray his brother.”

Lord Baratheon accepted the suggestion, with reservations: ” Victarion Greyjoy is a firm believer in the superiority of the Ironborn and would usually not go against his family, but it is right that we need to explore all our options. I will send word to Lord Velaryon and I task you and Lord Stark to organize a rescue party. Without a Master of Whispers, we are without spies at Pyke, but it is the only place, except for Seaguard, that the Ironborn still has control. We must tread carefully, as they now have a dragon and two riders.”
"Not anymore." Maester Marwyn interrupted Lord Baratheon after reading a message handed to him by one of his assistants: "The dragon returned, without Her Grace or Lord Greyjoy, who had used a dragonbinder horn. The effects, you see, are temporary."

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**House Stark**

Lord Eddard was glad to receive a raven from The Vale that morning: Ashara wrote they had arrived at the Gates of the moon, where House Arryn traditionally wintered. Apparently, Lord Robert was smitten with Elia and insisted in organizing a Tourney in her honour, something that put a smile on his face.

The boy, Ashara wrote, “was not yet very skilled in arms, but has the good looks of his Lady Mother and takes his role as Lord seriously; he will be a good husband when time comes.”

As he grabbed parchment and quill to write a reply, Ned contemplated how he would explain to Ashara the problems he was facing at Winterfell. Robb had grown strangely close to their hostage, Theon Greyjoy, to the point when even the most loyal servants started to gossip. Ned was seriously considering sending his son and heir away from Winterfell to avoid the rumours from reaching the ears of Jon, who was in the south fighting a war and counted on his family to hold The Noth for him. Not to mention, if other Lord would hear about what they were saying, Robb would encounter difficulties in finding a proper wife. Stony Shore was a small Keep that had been recently attacked and Robb would need the support of a rich wife to rebuild what Theon Greyjoy had destroyed.

Northerners were isolacionists by temperament and nature and the Ironborn were- are- bitter enemies. That a future Lord of a Keep recently attacked by reavers was openly showing affection towards one of the attackers was offensive to everything the North stood for.

Ashara would know what to do. Ned felt helpless without his wife when dealing with such matters. Even his own experiences as a young man were not of much help: he had been a couple of years younger than Robert Baratheon and took his lead when it came to all things, except for whoring and drinking, but even when Elbert Arryn would not join them in their outings, as far as Ned knew, nobody had mistaken their close relationship for something else.

No, Ned decided he would handle the situation before it would escalate any further; only then he would write Ashara without pretenses and tell her of their son. “Lord Poole, please tell Robb I need to speak with him.”

The Steward’s face went red: “Very well, my Lord...but...I am afraid we need to send some guards to Wintertown.”

Ned had hoped not be the case. Again in the brothel? With the hostage? The man who sacked our Castle?

Whatever...power Theon Greyjoy held over Robb, whatever it was the true nature of their friendship, Ned could not forgive his own son for confraternizing with the enemy without any hint of shame. Going to Wintertown again was flaunting their closeness for everybody to see and comment about.

One thing was to treat hostages and prisoners of war with dignity and another thing was to jeopardize a good reputation by forging friendships with those unworthy.

When Robb finally arrived, Ned had already gave Maester Flowers a letter to be sent to Last Hearth.
“Sit down, boy. Do you know why I asked you here?”

At least Robb did not play silly and answered his Father in earnest: “You are worried I spend too much time with Theon.”

Ned chose not to directly address the rumours - the last thing he wanted was to have a shouting match with Robb- and elected to simply tell his son of his decision: “You are leaving tomorrow, first light. House Umber will welcome you for a moonturn and I expect you to use this time to choose one of its women to be your Lady wife. You are to wed and bed a maiden of noble blood by the end of the year. If, perchance, you find that Lord Royce’s daughter is better suited for you, send a raven to Runestone and ask for her hand instead. Do you have something to say for yourself, Robb? Do you think am I being too harsh on you?”

“No, Father. You are right. I behaved...poorly.” Robb had been raised for Duty. Ned was pleasantly surprised that his younger son had not tried to argue or defend the friendship with the Lord Balon’s son and was about to praise Robb for his restraint when the young man, in a low voice, asked: “May I say goodbye to Theon?”

The answer was short and final: “No.”

Robb left the next morning.

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**House Greyjoy**

Daenerys knew little of the Ironborn customs, but sitting at the High Table with her “intended”, she surveilled the place in search of the other members of House Greyjoy.

“Where is your family, Your Grace?” Daenerys asked in a monotone.

Euron smiled seeing that she used the correct honorific in front of his household: “I was wondering if the cat had eaten your tongue.” He said playfully. “My Family is out...working for the glory of our House. Why do you ask, beloved?”

Without missing a beat, Daenerys replied: “I need Ladies in waiting and handmaidens. It is custom to be offered assistance by the female members of the House in the event of an union.”

“Then, what you are doing is asking of Asha, my only niece.” Euron stated with a degree of admiration; Daenerys obviously wanted to play this game with him. Very well. His left hand made its way to her tights. He smiled. She must be delicious. With a finger, he started to play with her folds, watching as the Queen pretended that nothing was happening. Such a proper Lady this one. He added another finger, invading her cunt; she stopped eating and froze there, giving him no reaction other than raise an eyebrow.

Asha, I could give her Asha. Euron’s niece had her supporters, yes, but was in no position to assist Daenerys in escaping. Asha had little access to any sort of weapons, was constantly being observed and, after days of being beaten, she was on the verge of breaking down.

If much, Daenerys seeing what he had done with his niece would be a lesson for his future wife.
The reaver leaned in and sensuously whispered in Daenerys ear: “If Asha is what you want, Asha you should have, my Queen.”

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A maid came to wash Asha and fit her in a gown. “You are to be Lady in waiting of the Queen, my Lady.” the shy woman said under the watch of Euron’s guards. “A great honour your uncle, King Euron, has bestowed upon you; the Queen herself suggested it.”

Only Euron’s cruelty and Victarion’s silly notions of loyalty were keeping Asha alive at that moment. She had refused to marry that old man, Lord Ironmaker, a joke that would serve to bury any political ambition Asha had for the Salt Throne once and for all. For this insubordination, she was paying with her blood. Victarion was away, leading Euron’s fleet in combat in a cat and mouse chase with Lord Velaryon, but expected to meet his niece, alive and in all pieces, upon his return to Pyke.

Asha had no doubt they would be dealt with, one by one, until the day that only Euron Greyjoy would stand as the last scion of their House. Theon would be left to die in the North, most probably, while Victarion was in the line of fire; nobody expected Aeron Greyjoy, half mad with salt water, to live for much longer and Asha, being a woman, could be disposed in many other ways.

For now, Euron had to play his part: a King must provide for his Family and ensure a smooth succession, and that is what Euron was doing as far as his supporters knew.

Queen Daenerys was given the chambers of Asha’s mother at Pyke. After losing almost all her sons, Lady Alannys Harlaw returned to her Ancestral House to live the remaining of her days in mourning. Asha missed her mother, but was not, by nature, a sentimental person. She had nothing against Daenerys, who had been kidnapped in what could only be described as a declaration of total war against the whole Westeros, but if Her Grace was expecting Asha to assist her in escaping, she would be disappointed.

“Please, my Lady, take a seat.” Daenerys looked composed enough, not even alarmed by Asha swollen face, black and blue marks visible. “My betrothed has not had time to explain me how a marriage is celebrated in the Iron Islands...I expect you to guide me through your customs.”

There was apparently no hidden agenda there, no attempt at passing a secret message before the guard’s eyes. Daenerys presented no excuse to have the guards leave the room and conducted what could only be considered as polite conversation: “My uncle expects the marriage to take place tomorrow; usually when the Sun sets, the bride and groom are joined by witnesses at the Beach, where they are married before the Drowned God and drink from the salt water. Afterwards, there is a feat and the bedding ceremony...just like any other wedding.”

“Thank you for the information, my Lady.” Daenerys said; Asha noticed she was shivering. “It is cold here...the whole Castle is cold. Tomorrow, before His Grace consummates our wedding, could you make sure our chambers to be properly lit and warm? The fireplace is too far from the bed and kindling is hard to come by, I was told...I assume you have braziers?”

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Euron Greyjoy would have a taste of his Queen before she was to become his wife; with luck, he
would put a baby in her belly already, a boy that would take the place of the soon to be late King Jaehaerys in the line of succession.

“What a lovely scene! My beloved niece and bride talking about our wedding night.” Balon had died to give way to Euron, but the truth was that the Seastone chair was of little significance. Euron wanted a bride with the bloodline of Valyria and dragons to conquer the world.

Their- *his* - would be an Empire.

Victarion was told to hold Lord Velaryon for a couple more days, time enough for consummating the wedding to Daenerys, regardless of how many men and ships he was to lose. Those lives were disposable and, by the end of the war, the Iron Islands would return to its original state: scattered, god forsaken rocks surrounded by cold waters, while Euron would sire a new Dynasty.

“Leave us, I wish to speak with my betrothed.” Euron announced with a smile. When they all left, the Ironborn gestured for Daenerys to take a seat next to him. “I am impressed by your countenance, Your Grace, but not fooled by it. Are you scared?”

“No, not scared; I am merely cold.” Daenerys said matter of factly. “I already asked Asha to have braziers in our chambers in preparation for tomorrow. You know I have no love for you; I know you will bed me regardless, hoping that, by the time my men arrive, they will be confronted with the consummated fact of our marriage and seeing that you rode a dragon, you expect to be faced with less resistance and, in time, be accepted. Resisting is futile.”

Euron would have prefered to have impressed Daenerys with his charms, had he been granted the chance, or even, he would find extreme joy in breaking her little by little with his brutality, until she would be unable to deny him anything; to have such a dispassionate and, literally, cold woman before him was not what he had anticipated.

He would have to change tactics: “Here...we shall drink together. I mean to open your eyes, Your Grace...to the marvels that lie ahead our impending union.” Euron produced a flask of blue liquid from his sleeves.

Two flutes, one for him and another, for Daenerys.

“Shade of the evening, the wine of the warlocks of Qarth.” Daenerys said uninterested. “You travelled far, Your Grace; so did I.”

Euron emptied his flute at once and soon, Daenerys followed, taking one sip. “The first taste is terrible, I must admit...an acquired taste.” The playful tone was gone; Euron now looked at her with burning eyes and, in a menacing tone, gave her a simple, but clear order: “Drink it.”

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His hands were heavy, calloused, cold.

Cold were also his lips, his skin and cock; her warm mouth was forced to swallow his length at once, him holding her head as she gasped for air, finally relaxing as she closed her eyes and imagined another man in his place.

Fearing retaliation, she sucked him the best way she could; he was soon panting stroking her head and praising her.
This was not about sex or pleasure, but about power and dominance. Even though she knew he was close, he saw fit to fight against his own body and halt the service, despite her acceptance of the act. He was the one creating and changing the rules: now he wanted something else. “Enough, my bride of fire...soon you will drink from me, I promise, but now I have need of your cunt. Show it for me; present yourself.”

She had heard a tale of a maiden that, wishing not to be raped by the man who bought her, would promise her Master to tell him a story, and every night he would listen her musical voice speaking until he would fall asleep. The story would have them falling in love in the end, she supposed.

She, however, knew better than to believe such fantasies: in real life, the Master would eventually wake up and take the maiden in the morning anyway.

Life was not a song and Euron Greyjoy had to be obeyed, for the time being.

Images kept appearing in her head. A handsome man in a red armour, muttering her name with his last breath as he died; a blue flower growing from a chink in a wall of ice; a great beast breathing shadows from a tower...

She climbed over the bed, and with her ass up, facing the now blue lipped man, she showed herself to him, There was no modesty, but also no lust; she had simply followed a command.

The sensation was curious, the thick liquid now being poured on her most intimate parts, his cold tongue licking it, the wine and his saliva soaking her cunt, preparing it for the unwanted intrusion that would follow...

When it happened, his member cut through her like a sword of ice, splitting her in two, Daenerys mind was elsewhere; she was flying and burning...burning them... burning him , and the image was so pleasant and calming that lead her to peak while the man was madly thrusting his cock in and out of her.

Euron, feeling her walls massaging his cock, pumping him for all he got, finally let go and, grunting, spent inside of her.

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House Targaryen

Daenerys thanked the Old Gods and the New when she woke up the next day alone. The maid soon came and offered to bring her a tray of food.

“No...I am not very hungry at the moment, thank you; just bring me some bread and tea…”

Moontea, if you really want to help.

She stayed in her chambers for most of the day, in almost complete silence. Lady Asha only spoke when spoken to. They both looked tired and miserable, trying too hard not to show anything that remotely resembled weakness.

Tears, they both saved for later.
Euron Greyjoy came to personally escort his bride to the nearby beach; Pyke was a very ugly place and Daenerys had no intention to ever set foot there again. *It will not be for long.*

She followed the instructions Asha gave her; little was asked of her, except to be present and take Euron’s hands when the Priest said so. They drank the salt water and Daenerys could only wish it had been moontea. *Later, it will not take so long now.*

Euron Greyjoy was a good looking man playing the part of charmed husband, holding Daenerys as the Ironborn Nobles came to pay their respects, wishing them “strong sons and fertile daughters.”

Daenerys sat at the Hight Table once again, looking regal in a red and black silk dress. “The colours of your House; I will spoil you, my Queen...together, we will conquer the world.”

She had no interest in his schemes, in him, or in what he considered to be ”spoil ing her.”

The only thing she wanted from this marriage was for Euron to die.

“Bedding! Bedding!” the drunken pirates started to scream and soon, King Euron graciously offered Queen Daenerys his hand and they descended the dais; as soon as their feet touched the ground, the women went for Euron and started to tear his clothes with wild abandon.

While nobody could call the Ironborn “mild mannered” the men who came to lead Daenerys to her chambers were much less enthusiastic in their dealings with her. *Their King must have told them not to go rough on me...not to damage his trophy.* She arrived in her chambers naked as she was supposed to, but there were no scratches and she had not been fondled or abused in any way.

Euron was eager. He grabbed Daenerys by her waist, pushing her to his body, kissing her lips and biting her nipples as they walked to the bed. “Mine...you are now mine, Daenerys Stormborn.”

“I need something strong…” She said as she made to the small table. Under his eyes, she drank a goblet and poured herself another one. “Come.”

Daenerys obeyed and went in a hurry; clumsily, she dropped some of the strong wine in the sheets. “Ooops.”

Euron seemed pleased. “Scared?”

“No...just cold…” Daenerys gestured for Euron to lay in bed while she pretended to clean some of the wine with a cloth she found at the nightstand.

With Euron in bed, she gave him a smile. *Good.* “Come.” he said again.

*Now...before he rapes me again.* Without a single word, Daenerys touched the brazier near the bed with her bare hands and, in a single movement, dropped it.

Euron was a strong and agile man; the bed was burning, but he would have managed to escape had Daenerys not dropped the second brazier on him.

The Fire Demon walked towards her, lit in flames and screaming in agony. Daenerys had the advantage; she had barred the door, his guards desperately trying to open it, smoke and flames spreading everywhere.

When they finally managed to unbar the door, Euron had stopped fighting and was on the ground. In the confusion, Lady Asha was able to understand what had happened and, quickly, took Daenerys by the hands .She knew they had only a minute to escape and Daenerys was still naked from the
Asha pushed them into an alcove, and handed Daenerys her dress; underneath, she was wearing a shirt.

Asha took Daenerys through some passages and soon, they were at the beach: “We need to sail at once...North...our ships must be at Lannisport now…”

“No, we are staying...Lady Asha Greyjoy. “

Daenerys pointed at the skies where her three dragons were approaching: “The punishment for treason is death. Your uncle died screaming and, if I so command, your Ancestral Home will stand as a second Harrenhal. Right now, I need moon tea and a new and faithful Lady of the Iron Islands. Do we have a deal?”

Asha nodded.

Chapter End Notes

I was sick, everybody was sick...terrible! But I managed another chapter.

If you have time (or you miss our Brandon Stark), take a look at my Au- Au crazy fic: https://archiveofourown.org/works/13882725
Strong Women

Chapter Summary

Daenerys makes a new Lady of the Iron Islands and returns to the Red Keep and the Game of Thrones.

In the North, Ned and Ashara reunite.

Chapter Notes

Almost a month away. SORRY. I cannot update twice a week anymore, but every Sunday is doable.

I wish to thank you all for your support and comments.

My plan is for this fic to have 3 more chapters and an epilogue. This chapter is not as action packed as others, but I needed to move plot and to address the aftermath of Daenerys time at Pyke.

we end on the positive note: sex clifhanger! (which means, for yll you Jonerys enthusiasts that next chapter we will have Daenerys and Jon sex scene)

Pyke, 299 A.C

Queen Daenerys had half a mind to burn every Ironborn ship she could set her eyes on and condemn the Iron Islands to decades of misery. Their inhabitants would live with the consequences of their own stupidity and their Lords would drown in a sea of utter and complete defeat and nobody could blame Daenerys for being harsh, for all knew their lot would mistake mercy for weakness.

Their suffering, however, would not bring anything positive to the Seven Kingdoms. It woud definately not erase what Euron Greyjoy had done to the Queen.

*The Ironborn are already defeated; they are already miserable and their pain will not take mine away.*

Euron Greyjoy would not be allowed to live through the torment he inflicted on her, Daenerys decided. She would condemn the Crown’s Eye and his brief Reign of Terror to become a footnote in the History of the Seven Kingdoms.

In the great scheme of things, Euro Greyjoy was nothing.

Lady Asha swore fealty to the Queen Regent the same day most of the ships at Pyke were burnt. Daenerys left them with the vessels fit for fishing. Starving the Ironborn would literally serve her nothing.
Instead of a goblet of Arbor Gold, to celebrate the surrender of the Ironborn and her victory, Daenerys shared a cup of moontea with the only daughter of Balon Greyjoy.

Asha also did not wante the burden carrying Euron´s child.

“What happens now?” the new Lady of the Iron Islands asked as Daenerys prepared to leave Pyke once and for all.

“We will destroy your best ships, kill most of your command, make sure we have enough hostages to dispose off if you dare raise against us once again and leave you with just enough for your people to survive Winter. Barely.”

Personally, Daenerys had nothing against Asha. Quite the contrary: they were both victims of Euron Greyjoy.

However, she could not afford to see the new Lady of the Iron Islands as a friend, for she was not: the Ironborn had choose to follow a madman. It was not the first time Asha´s people had gone the stupid way and it would probably not be the last.

The Ironborn would be allowed to survive, to move on, but they deserved the punishment: “Your younger brother, Theon Greyjoy, will remain in our custody. I trust you will be strong enough to lead your people and crush any opposition you may find: I am not going to send you any help. For what I heard of your brother, you have nothing to fear from him.”

“My uncle…” Asha hesitated. There are things that must be left unsaid. “…was a monster.”

“That he was.”

Asha nodded.

“I am no monster. Theon is just...a stupid, vain, young man. He is no threat. We will make do with the little we have and not bother you any longer. I thank you for the...trust you have in me, your Highness. Good fortune in the wars to come.”

Without a word, Daenerys mounted on Rhaego and quickly dissapeared among the clouds in the sky, being closely followed by Rhaegal and Viserion.

Asha started to work immediately.

“The war is over.”

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Casterly Rock

“Welcome, my Queen. Casterly Rock is yours.”

Lord Jaime Lannister was as startled as anyone when the Queen Regent arrived that afternoon, seemingly in control of her emotions and, most importantly, in command of three large dragons.
The soldier in Jaime wanted to ask Her Grace exactly how she managed to evade her captors, to defeat them all by herself.

Of course, she had dragons, yes, but even Rhaenys Targaryen, a much more skilled and experienced dragonrider, had been defeated atop of one.

Jaime knew better than to have his curiosity cross the boundaries of good taste: nobody would come unscarred after being imprisoned by the Ironborn; Euron Greyjoy was famous for his unorthodox methods and his ship was called Silence for a reason.

Instead, Jaime focused on the practical and mundane aspects of receiving a Queen. He was his warden of the West, not her friend: any attempt to offer the Queen Mother with something remotely close to emotional support would only make things more complicated.

Jaime also took care in not having his wife, Lady Margeary, cover Daenerys with empty courtesies and dishonest inquiries. “We already sent a raven to King’s Landing and to Storm's End, Your Grace, where the rescue force to liberate you is currently docked.

“Well, it seems I managed to rescue myself without their assistance, my Lord. “ She said dryly. “ I won’t stay long; all I need is to rest a couple of hours, a warm bath, a meal and some new clothes ...and a Maester to see to my...physical state. I must return, to my son...I cannot…”

“I understand: the only thing that will ease your mind at this point is going home. His Grace, King Jaehaerys, is in good health, my Queen.” Jaime offered Daenerys a sad smile and bowed. “If you excuse me, I will leave now, My Queen, and see to my Duties. I am glad it is all over.”

“Thank you for your kind words, my Lord. But surely you know it is never going to be over.”

Jaime opened his mouth to say something, but no reply came out; he lowered his eyes and left the room.

***

Storm’s End

“We have done all that we could, Jon. If someone should be held responsible is the Kingsguard. We failed in our Duty to the Queen. It is a good thing that she is … a capable general in her own right. She should be arriving at the Red Keep by the morning, the raven said.“

Ser Arthur was worried.

He could not return to Highgarden, to his lover and daughter. His vows, the ones he forgot when he laid with Rhaenys the first time, had to come first. The Kingsguard were in shambles. Ser Gerold Hightower had been killed when Aegon’s followers took Prince Viserys; Ser Oswell Whent was old and sick and Prince Lewyn Martell died at the Great Sept explosion. Maester Tyrion was treating his pains with sweetsleep and the Knight had already said his goodbyes by the time the fever came. It would be only a matter of time now.

Ser Brynden Tully was in his fifties, but still in good shape. Ser Barristan Selmy had just turned sixty, as strong as ever, and was now their Lord Commander. Only Ser Jonothor Darry and Ser Arthur himself were at the height of their physical and mental capabilities.

They were at their weakest, their failures had to be addressed and three new members needed to be
chosen and trained in the next months because the Royal Family was in dire need of protection.

“At least Father says that all is well in The North. My brother is to choose a northern bride and return to Stony Shore before the year ends. I already named Father my Castellan and he is aware I will be staying in the South for the time being.” Jon had sensed something had happened between his father and brother to force Robb in search for a wife so suddenly. “Her Grace... need me.”

Arthur’s brows furrowed. The Daenerys that returned from the East was not the same girl he had once known. *Foolish is the man who thinks he is needed by a woman.* Dornishman knew this too well: Queens could be as harsh and as strong as Kings. Jon should not make the mistake of taking Daenerys for a maiden in constant need of rescue.

“I advise you strongly against telling Her Grace what you just told me, Jon. She is still your Liege and not yet your bride. Be available, but allow her to take the lead. We can only imagine what happened at Pyke. Never, for a minute, mistake her gender for weakness.“

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Red Keep

Daenerys had asked Lords Lannister and Royce to provide her with three names, Knights of pristine reputation and value for the honour of being appointed as a Kingsguard. Ser Oswell Whent had peacefully died in his sleep before the Queen arrived from Casterly Rock; one of his last wishes was to be buried near Harrenhal, the seat of House Whent, and the silent sisters were currently preparing his body for this last trip.

The Queen took to sleep in the nursery, near her son, the only place she felt safe. She named Lady Brienne of Tarth as her sworn shield and Ser Arthur Dayne as Jaehaerys. Partially out of sympathy for the lovers, but mostly for political reasons, Daenerys named Ser Willas Tyrell as the new Master of Coin. Lords Baratheon, Velaryon and Connington remained in the Small Council and were joined by Prince Oberyn Martell as the new Master of Whisperers. Daenerys reasoned that, with Rhaenys returning to the Capital to stay with her lover, everybody would be reminded that Dorne was linked to House Targaryen.

Prince Trystane Martell was five and ten, betrothed to Lady Myrcella Arryn, step daughter of the late Prince Viserys Targaryen. The new generations would care very little about Elia, about Aegon and his followers, about Rhaegar and his second marriage. By having Prince Oberyn- who had seen the White Walkers first hand- in her Small Council and not back at Dorne as Regent for Trystane, Daenerys was keeping everyone of importance close to her.

Even closer to her, however, were those she trusted.

Daenerys asked Lord Stark to join her for a private conversation at her solar as soon as he returned from Storm's End.

Jon had missed Daenerys. He had almost gone insane with worry after her kidnapping. As soon as they were left alone, he broke protocol and went to hug her.

She recoiled.

Daenerys was as surprised by her reaction as Jon:
“I...apologise.”

“Please, don’t. You obviously need more time... Your Grace. I should have known better.”

“No...not like this...and you must call me Dany when we are in private. Jon, nothing changed between us; in fact, I called you here to speak about us, about our plans.”

Jon reached out for her hand and this time, she allowed him the gesture. This made him feel...hopeful. He had to be patient. He could do that:

“As you wish, Dany. “ He would have added I will stay here as long as you need me, but remembered Arthur’s words. So, he spoke about the good things, how well the North was recovering from the attacks.

“You will be pleased to know that the situation in the North is stable. The Wall is in capable hands and so is Winterfell. My brother is my heir and is currently seeking a wife. The Northern Lords can wait for their Liege to marry, as long as you deem necessary.”

“Good. I, however, wish to make our betrothal announcement as soon as possible. We must only agree on a date for the wedding and on terms. I am still Queen Mother, but with my dragons...we should work on a schedule for my visits to The North. Do you have any suggestions?”

Grand Maester Marwyn had spoke with Jon before; he told the Lord of Winterfell that his prospective bride had been “treated” from the “injuries” sustained during her captivity and that the medicines ministrated after her “liberation” had been effective.

The meaning was obvious.

“Nothing would make me happier, Dany, than we to be together. I must leave the details of date and places with you...the bride’s prerogative. As for our schedule... my Lord Father is in good health and I named him my Castellan. My uncle takes care of the New Gift and The Wall. My brother will hold Stony Shore. Once the war is over, at least in the first years of our marriage, I would like to spend half my time in the South, with you and our children. Once I am in The North, you could spend a week out of five in Winterfell. It would be important that you came during the Harvest Feast. My Lords should see their Lieges in the flesh. Once His Grace is of age...I would like us to stay North for most of the year.”

Daenerys then asked if Jon had been approached by Marwyn. “Good. I have no wish of speaking in detail about Pyke. Mayhaps one day I will be strong enough to speak to you...”

“You are strong, Daenerys Stormborn. You are a survivor and a Queen. You owe me no explanations. I do not wish to bring you even more pain to speak about those who wronged you. They are dead, and we are alive. Whenever you decide you want to speak...I will listen. Until then, we will continue to live. And they will continue to stay dead.”

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Winterfell

Lady Ashara had not been fooled by her Lord Husband’s last letters and returned to Winterfell sooner than anticipated. After she made sure that Elia was well taken care of, she could no longer stay in The Vale in good conscience.
Besides, Elia was three and ten and would be the next Lady of the Eyrie in a couple of years. Her future was there, not in the North anymore. Elia was being trained by Lady Waynwood for her new responsibilities, learning about the people and the places of the Vale.

Ashara staying longer would only serve to distract Elia from her lessons, not to mention that Elia was no longer a child, but a young woman, who had reached that age when nobody wants to be seen being pampered by parents.

As she suspected, Ashara found that Ned was keeping things from her.

“Have you received my last letter?” He asked.

“Lady Waynwood had the good heart to send a raven to White Harbour because I had already left to the Fingers by the time you send me the letter. Tell me what made you take such step as to send Robb away.”

_Damn dornish woman intuition._ The boy was getting too close to our hostage, Ash, the same man who took our home. Had he been from another family...I might have allowed the _friendship_ to continue. But Robb is my heir and Stony Shore needs a Lord, someone whose loyalty and duty to his people are beyond question. “


“We were treating Theon as a prisoner, but being highborn, we offered him many courtesies. He was being well treated, but his status as prisoner was obvious to anyone. I went to attend Lord Cerwyn’s heir wedding to Lady Wylla Manderly. Benjen and Rickon were there and I assumed I could trust Robb with Winterfell, so I decided to join in the hunt and I spent some additional days in the company of my brother. When we returned, Theon had been moved to a guest room. I did not want to override Robb’s decision, as he was training for lordship now, but I had the guards report to me on them.”

“What about the servants? Did you hear something when you came back, Ned- tell me the truth, You know I cannot help if you do not say what really happened.” _and I have my ways of finding out anyway._

“Nothing salacious, Ash, but enough to make people wonder.” Robb had spent his formative years in the Vale. Lord Royce was always ready to compliment the boy on his martial prowess, but never said much about his personal dealings. Ned now asked himself if there was some reason behind it.

“What do they say about Robb in the Vale? I fell we overlooked his education somehow...we focused too much on Jon, mayhaps.”

“Like most of other families, Ned. We have done what we could. We offered Robb a great education for a second born son. He grew up knowing he would not inherit and I think this might explain his careless behaviour now, for it is typical of younger sons to behave in such way. With Jon ascending as Lord of Winterfell, Robb became the heir and our expectations changed. Nobody should be blamed.”

Bed silently agreed. Ashara always made him see the other side of things. They were so different in many ways, and this was _good_, as he had discovered later on. Had he married a more traditional kind of woman, Ned was sure he would have become too blind by his own duties to see the humanity in his children.
“Aye, you are right...we raised Robb as a second son, which he was, but mayhaps it had been a mistake to send him so far away. What kind of future Lord makes friends with a reaver whose family has been the bane of his lands for centuries?”

“I agree with you, Ned. Robb is still young...he will see reason. As for what I heard …” Ashara had inquired about her middle son during her visit to The Vale. Nobles loved to gossip, but Maesters and servants could be trusted to know even more than they let out. So when she visited Runestone, Ashara was sure to visit the kitchens and speak with the help. “ He bedded at least one noblewoman. Lady Corbray, for what I have been told.”

Ned seemed somewhat relieved.

Ashara, however, did not mention the rumour she heard about Robb spending too much time with another member of House Corbray- Ser Lyn to be precise-who was known to prefer the company of younger men to of women.

A boy growing up and exploring was natural. Ashara was not worried, nor she felt guilty about Robb. Nobles were expected to leave their homes and many reached their sexual maturity far from their families. Training for knighthood offered many opportunities for young boys and men to engage in mutually pleasurable agreements.

Ashara, being liberal in mind and in spirit, would not care about whom Robb bedded.

But she knew Ned would. Her northern husband had strong ideas about how their offspring ought to behave. Now that they were raised to the main branch of House Stark, even Ashara had to concede that her husband was within his rights to put an end to Robb’s folly.

She suggested writing Jon, mayhaps their son could be convinced that the valuable Greyjoy hostage should be moved far from The North and away from Robb.

With time, Ashara knew, people would forget about the rumours; their son would grow used to the life of a married man and settle in the role of a northern lord, someone supposed to fight off Ironborn and not mingle among them.

The Castellan of Winterfell, however, had received other orders: “ The Queen Mother wishes House Greyjoy to be naturally extinguished in the male line. Victarion Greyjoy and the priest, Aeron, were captured and executed. Lady Asha succeeded and Her Grace determined that Theon Greyjoy had to make a choice: either take the black or remain as our prisoner, possibly for as long as he lived. The wretched boy chose to remain as our prisoner, Ash. In this case, Her Grace wrote us, he is to be placed in the forefront of the coming war. Theon Greyjoy is to die, unwed and childless. ”

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Dragonstone

Now that Maester Tyrion was working assisting Grand Maester Marwyn in his many Duties since the old man spent most of his days tending, studying and compiling knowledge on dragons, the youngest of the Lannister siblings was privy to many sensitive information.

He was finally in the great game and he loved every second of it.

The Queen bid Tyrion to join his sister at Dragonstone and deliver Princess Cersei with a message:
“Your good sister, Her Grace Daenerys, wishes you to return to the Capital. Princess Alysanne should be by King Jaehaerys side and be educated with her future husband.”

“I am in mourning, Tyrion...the Red Keep is not a good place for grieving widows.” Viserys was gone and Cersei felt lost. She had considered returning to the Vale- from all places- and the only political move she had made since her husband’s death was to finally send Myrcella to Dorne. Cersei would be attending her daughter’s wedding to Prince Trystane in three moonturns and reasoned she could stay on Dragonstone and sail from there.

“If I recall correctly, you mourned your first husband at the Red Keep. “ Tyrion added without missing a beat.

True. Not to mention, I went to Highgarden wearing black and returned to King’s Landing as Viserys mistress “ Well, it is different now that I lost someone I really loved, Tyrion. I do not want people to see me like this.”

Tyrion took a deep breath; other than a few kilos Cersei had not yet lost and her obvious great enthusiasm for wine and tendency to being self indulgent, his sister still looked beautiful:

Daenerys, as it happened, had plans for Cersei :“ Her Grace is also observing a mourning period, sweet sister. It has been said that soon, she will announce her betrothal. It seems she finds six moon turns enough of mourning when there us work to be done and alliances to be made. If you are not with child, Her Grace wishes you to take your place as a member of the Royal Family, and to support House Targaryen, as she herself is doing. “

Oh, how Cersei hated to be reminded of Duty when all she wanted was to drink her pain away.

But yes, she could not allow herself to be seen as weak. If Daenerys, that small girl with the big Crown, was strong enough to rule after losing a husband and being forced to marry a madman, Cersei too had to return to center stage and remind everyone she was the mother of the future Queen, the light of the west and the beloved widow of the wise and greatly missed Prince Viserys. She needed friends; Dragonstone, as good place as it was, could not offer Cersei with such friends.

“We sail in the morrow.”

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The New Court

As the Iron Throne was a monstrosity and would be impossible for the four years old Jaehaerys to be sitting there by himself, Queen Mother Daenerys served as her son’s cushion, and the long limbed silver haired boy sat on her lap and watched as the members of his court paid him homage.

Today, His Grace would be welcoming the return of his beloved sister, Princess Rhaenys Targaryen, her children and husband and he would formally be introduced to his betrothed, Princess Alysanne, a babe in the arms of her mother, Princess Cersei- who was not actually a Princess by birth, Jaehaerys was informed, but was treated as such by courtesy- therefore he needed to wear his Crown and sit on his Throne.

Lord Aemond Tyrell, who was of age with Jaehaerys, entered with his mother, Rhaenys, who was dressed in the colours of her House by birth. She was carrying Lady Dyanna Tyrell, also dressed in black and red, while Ser Willas held Lord Alester, clad in green and yellow as his older brother.
Jahaerys was confused: “Are they twins? Why they do not look the alike?” The King whispered to his mother.

Daenerys explained that not all twins were identical and left at that.

Then it was time for Princess Alysane to be presented to the King and his Court. Cersei’s breasts were threatening to come out and the silver haired girl clearly wanted to be fed, her tiny hands scratching the cleavage as her mother fought to keep her composure and dignity intacts.

“Welcome, my dear Aunt Cersei. “ The King said as loud as he could. Cersei continued to stood before him. (his mother whispered something in his ear). The boy finally addressed his aunt once again and acknowledged the babe: “ You brought me my... betelot , Alysane. I am very happy, aunt.”

“We are overjoyed to be in your presence, Your Grace.” Cersei answered sweetly.

Daenerys breathed in relief- all went well.

She ended the tedious, but necessary, ceremony and took Jaehaerys herself to the nursery.

Jon came to say good night to the King and take his mother to the great hall, where a feast was about to begin.

“Mother said you are to marry her. Ser Arthur told me I could ask you a bride price. Could I have Ghost?”

I will kill my uncle. “Your Grace, we can initiate negotiations on the bride price if you insist. For now, as sign of my goodwill, I will leave Ghost to watch over your sleep. Is this amenable?”

The small boy agreed ( for now) and Jon went straight to the door and berated his uncle for planting such ideas in the King’s head.

***

Cersei was not supposed to dance, an activity she loved, and spent most of the night renewing old acquaintances and smiling to new faces.

She rolled her eyes; watching others having fun was simply terrible.

Seeing the sad widow drowning her sorrows in inferior ( in his estimation) wine made Prince Oberyn approach Cersei and remind her where her loyalties should be: “ The Princess is drinking Arbor Gold, how disappointing.”

Cersei decided insolence would be a good starting point, sipped more from her goblet, and answered the notorious Viper pf Dome: “My daughter, the future Consort of your Liege, surely will not forget to send her poor mother copious amounts of your best vintage. Then, my Prince, I will gladly serve Dornish Red for all my guests, when I resume my social activities. Until then, I drink what is being served. Your must be very tired of all that dancing to pay attention to such trivialities...”

“Frankly, not as tired as bored .” Oberyn replied in amusement. “Your dress is very...becoming, if I may say.”

The hours waiting for the formal presentation made Cersei’s bosom fill with milk; what had been a
perfectly fine cleavage became... a much commented vision: “I suppose the dress is indeed quite fetching... if you happen to like cows, of course...”

Oberyn laughed at the observation. Keeping his head on the present subject, he offered a piece of advice: “As an experienced father and as a former acolyte at the Citadel, I would say that mayhaps it is time to wean the Princess. If my memory serves me well, your daughter has seen four moon turns. She will pass through a growth spurt soon enough and the soreness and discomfort of your breasts will only increase. Now that you are to take your place at Court, mayhaps you should seek a wet nurse and reduce your offer gradually for the next month, until you return to your original size.”

Cersei was expecting some sexual innuendo from Prince Oberyn of all people, not honest and sound advice on breastfeeding.

Oberyn took his leave and Cersei was left to wonder what had just happened.

Friends. She needed friends. Would Oberyn be one?

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From the short list provided by the Westerlands and The Vale, Daenrys selected Ser Lyn Corbray and Ser Damion Marbrand, both second sons and knights of renown in their respective Realms.

From The Reach, Daenrys selected another Hightower, Ser Humfrey, the youngest of Old Hightower’s sons. She did not wish to have Ser Loras Tyrell in her retinue, for he was more of a Tourney kind of Knight, and House Tyrell would use the appointment to ask even more of the Crown.

Out of the three newly made Kingsguard, Ser Lyn Corbray was, by far, the most skilled with the sword.

He also had a wild reputation (had she not made it clear she wanted only virtuous knights?), rivaling Prince Oberyn Martell when it came to his lustful pursuits. His preferences, however, were far more specific and limited: he only bedded young men and had quite an appreciation for soldiers.

After much debate, Daenrys caved in and offered Ser Lyn the position simply because he carried Lady Forlorn, the Valyrian Steel sword of House Corbray. She knew they would need as much of that metal as possible in their front lines.

Daenrys made the valeman aware that he was not to take liberties with the courtiers; if he wished to break his vows, he would have to do so discreetly and join his new brothers in their visits to the brothels of King’s Landing.

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On the third day of the sixth month since King Rhaegar Targaryen’s death, Queen Mother Daenrys and her Warden of the North, Lord Jon Stark of Winterfell announced their betrothal.

That night, they shared a bed for the first time.
To The North

Chapter Summary

In the South, Daenerys and Jon have their first night; Cersei attends the marriage of her daughter to Prince Trystane and Lady Olenna tries her best to convince Willas to join the game.

In the North, Daenerys and Jon come even closer.

Chapter Notes

hey guys, sorry for the stupid discussion in the comments section last chapter. Just a quick note about Daenerys and Euron:
Rape as plot device is something I would never do. You can recognize when this is happening when rape is just used to prompt a reaction from male characters. Not the case here.

Euron kidnapping Daenerys was taken from what possibly happened to Mary, Queen os Scots. The importance of what happened to Daenerys in the story was to show her making a very hard decision: Justice or Vengeance?

When she burnt Stoney Sept, was to end a Siege and her conflict was that she was attacking her own people. When she decided not to burn all the ships, she was punishing the Iron island for choosing and following a madman into a silly war and leaving them with just enough to survive. She was tempted to give in to her rage and destroy the Iron islands for allowing her to be raped, but she decided for Justice instead of vengeance.

House Targaryen 299 A.C

Daenerys could have not asked for a better partner than Jon.

Given their circumstances and what had, unfortunately, happened to her at Pyke, sex was the last thing she had on her mind right after her return. Daenerys was a queen, a mother and a general planning for war.

In the first weeks, she had nightmares. Marwyn said it was to be expected and told the Queen to continue with her life as she had before. Anything she felt not comfortable with or anxious about, she would be in no obligation to handle it personally and they would accommodate her schedule according to her needs.

Daenerys was glad to have enough advisors and people she trusted in her household; they had her best interests at heart and were understanding she could not possibly do it all, at least not at that point.
But her life included Jon and their proximity and relationship had to be addressed. As the days passed and she recovered, Daenerys felt more like herself. She realized, with happiness, she still wanted to touch Jon, to feel her skin against his, to sleep by his side...

Jaehaerys was four and had to become even more independent from her. Deep down, Daenerys knew she was the one clinging to the boy for comfort, probably fearing the beginning of real physical intimacy with Jon in the aftermath of her ordeal.

Daenerys was glad to see that Euron Greyjoy’s presence in her mind was being quickly replaced by her many responsibilities and small joys, that the Ironborn, as she wanted would indeed become nothing but an unpleasant episode in her busy life.

If anything, her kidnapping served to bring her family closer, Daenerys reflected. She could now count once again with Rhaenys true friendship. Their kids played together like they had once. Cersei would never be a friend- the twice widowed woman was too self centered for that - but was, like Viserys had told his sister more than once, fiercely loyal to their cause and a good mother too, as far as Daenerys could see.

After they announced their betrothal, Daenerys could no longer resist her impulses.

***

He was lean and muscular. She loved to caress the dark, soft hair that covered part of his chest, calling it “fur”.

Jon allowed Daenerys free reign in exploring his body and she more than obliged. Her small, beautiful hands tracing imaginary patterns on his skin, her mouth leaving a trail of small kisses and love bites, marking him as hers.

Jon could not wait until they would be back North, at Winterfell. He wanted to take Daenerys under the furs and make love to her, no need to hide from the prying eyes of the courtiers. Arthur had to help Jon sneak in her chambers. She opened the secret door, looking at Jon with lust and love.

He closed the door himself and pulled Daenerys to him, claiming her lips first and her neck, second.

She had imagined they would tear each others clothes in feverish anticipation. They both wanted this all too much not to lose control.

Love, however, is sweet, patient, caring.

They took their time rekindling their passion with kisses and whispers.

Daenerys bodice, velvet and lace, was conquered without much difficulty and her peaks of flesh and taut skin sprung free from the constraints of clothing and shame. Jon’s calloused fingers cupped, massaged, knead her breasts as he kissed her plump lips, tongues dancing inside in a wet, sensuous kiss.

Without much delay, they were both naked. Jon swoop Daenerys off the floor and gently placed her on the large bed. The room was lit by the fire burning in the hearth and Jon could see the vivid violet of her eyes glistening with desire, her cheeks flushed from her arousal and her lips, beaten from the kissing.

Jon stopped for a beat, his eyes admiring Daenerys desnude body for the first time. "You are all I want, all I need."
She reached for his cock, curious. He was large and thick, the skin a couple of tone darker than the rest of Jon. The swollen veins throbbed, his flesh engorged and a couple of drops of a translucid, viscous fluid leaked from the tip of Jon’s hard member.

Daenerys’ mouth watered; she wanted to taste Jon, to claim his cock and have him come undone with the pleasure her mouth could give him.

Instead of servicing Jon, Daenerys invested some time in carefully inspecting his scars, the markings of his many battles, scattered mostly through his arms and torso. She wanted to learn his body, to trace every and each inch of him. She went from one to the next with suave moves, thoroughly mapping Jon. After some minutes of such lovely examination, Daenerys stopped to caress a small, round shaped spot of darker skin near his right shoulder; it was from the day Jon took an poisoned arrow to save Daenerys life.

They locked eyes. Daenerys took a deep breath and moved her small body from his side to his top, straddling him. She leaned in for a kiss, rubbing herself on Jon’s firm erection. The delicious friction helped smear and imprint on him some of her intimate slick, their natural scents mixing to form a single perfume of sexual need and want.

A rather loud moan escaped her lips as they kissed once again; Jon took it as meaning they could go forward and complete the act. With his right hand securely holding her tiny waist, he lifted Daenerys a few centimeters up as he assumed a sitting position, his left hand keeping his erect cock in place while she slowly descended, gleefully impaling herself in him.

“Dany!” he rasped, a knot forming on his throat as she rocked her hips back and forth.

Her tight channel claimed all of him, her walls clenching around his shaft as they moved in tandem, achieving a steady and satisfying rhythm for their carnal dance.

Jon latched on Daenerys right nipple, a rosebud on a white mound. He sucked it intensely, his right hand playfully twisting her other nipple as not to play favorites. Such pleasant stimulation made Daenerys increase her pace, her hips swinging more forcefully than before.

Seeing that she liked to have her breasts assaulted, Jon switched to the other nipple, sharply nipping the tip before switching to succion. His hands now guided Daenerys up and down, the wet sounds of their coupling loud enough to be heard between the moans and muffled noises of their pleasure.

The knowledge that Daenerys was nearing her peak brought Jon close to his. Her quim felt delicious around him. He stopped his attack on her chest and watched in awe as the Queen rode him hard and fast.

Daenerys cried out as Jon emptied himself in her. She collapsed on him and he, on the bed, where they remained for the rest of the night.

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Good thing that Myrcella was clearly smitten with the boy and had taken a liking to all what Dorne had to offer, from spicy food to games of cyvasse, for Cersei would not have wished her daughter to be as unhappy and dissatisfied with her new home as she was when she wed Ser Elbert Arryn.

She reflected on the destinies of women and what they could expect hen joining a new family. It took Cersei years of struggle and a great amount of self discipline- not to mention the fact that she had nowhere to go- to finally get used to the dullness of the Eyrie and a dispassionate husband and
accept her duty to House Arryn.

Her sweet Robin was almost four and ten. He came to Dorne with his bethorted, Lady Elia Stark, who was indeed a true beauty. *They will have very good looking children...Myrcella too, as Trystane is quite handsome.*

Cersei had opposed his son’s bride at first because their bethrotal was born out of sentimentality. She truly believed Robert was better off marrying one of his future bannermen’s daughters, but the Gods had smiled upon House Arryn when that odious man, Brandon Stark, died: Elia was now the only available lady of the main branch of House Stark and her brother, betrothed to the Queen Mother herself.

Cersei and her family were in a very good position politically, due to a combination of her efforts in avoiding any connection with House Lannister, her marriage to Viserys and his pans for their future.

Now that her eldest children were busy with their lives and responsibilities, Cersei could stop working for the glory of House Arryn and focus on Alysanne.

The bedding ceremony was underway; with the attentions turned to the bride and groom, it was the perfect moment to have meaningful and secret conversations. After their initial meeting at king’s Landing, Cersei and Oberyn had not crossed paths. This was the right time to have a conversation and Cersei was determined to have answers.

Oberyn pretended distraction, the tip of his pointer finger leisurely circling the goblet of wine. “Of course our hard work in preparing for Winter and the War that comes with is necessary, my dear Lady. We simply do not known when and how the white walkers will strike, but strike they will.”

Cersei could not believe it: “Grumpkins and snarks...children's stories. The late King Rhaegar wished to favour The North and take them out of their wild ways...he surely exaggerate the threat to force southern lords into re-establishing the Night's Watch…”

This idea was widespread. The common folk of the south, more likely to believe such stories, sought solace in the teachings of the Faith: they would be guarded from the northern demons. As for the nobles, their Maesters would advise to simply send their unwanted to The Wall and pay lip service to King Rhaegar’s pleas for support.

Lord Randyll Tarly, for instance, refused the King’s offer to have their Ancestral Sword Heartsbane re-forged into two longswords for the upcoming war. Instead, to appease the King, he sent fifty men to The Wall, gold and two years supply of wine for Castle Black, a very generous donation indeed, but *not* what the King had asked of him.

Oberyn’s eyes pierced through Cersei’s; with conviction, he spoke: “Rhaegar Targaryen was many things; mad was not one of them. The enemy is real, Cersei...do not doubt that.”

Cersei had never discussed the existence of Ice demons and wights with Viserys. They were too busy playing the game. She frankly did not know what to make of it: “Should I trust you have House Targaryen’s best interests at heart? If what you say is true, Westeros need dragons to win this fight...are you capable of leaving the past behind and not seek vengeance? Some people think my good sister was wrong in namingyou for Master of Whispers...”
Oberyn made himself comfortable in his seat; smiling, he covered Cersei’s hands with his own. “My Mother, the Ruling Princess Dorea of Dorne, was a mentor of your mother, Lady Joanna Lannister. It was their wish that our Houses be joined. Elia would have been Lady of the Rock and you, a Princess of Dorne had your Lord Father listened to his Lady wife. He gambled for the Iron Throne, and lost. Instead of a Lioness, Rhaegar married a Martell...you know how the story goes. My dear sister almost died trying to give her husband a son, and this son lived long enough to almost kill us all. You ask me if I want vengeance...for what, I ask you? No, Cersei...what I really want was for my nephew, Aegon, to have never been born.”

*Aegon Targaryen*, Cersei thought bitterly, *your soul is now burning in the seven hells.*

“Aegon was mad. Everybody knew it. Dorne and the Westerlands surely knew it…”

“You ask yourself if the Queen Mother can trust me. *We are family,* Cersei. Elia and Aegon died, but Rhaenys is here. Rhaegar changed the law and recognized her claim on the Iron Throne. I tried to convince Elia to forget about Aegon...by the laws of Dorne, Rhaenys should have been Rhaegar’s heir. What is good to Dorne, however, is not acceptable to the Seven Kingdoms. Jaehaerys is King and Dorne stands behind House Targaryen, as it is our only hope to survive the Long Night. Had the situation been different...I would fight until my last breath to have Rhaenys as Queen. Survival is what guide us now, not politicking...”

Cersei examined Oberyn more closely as he stood and went to speak with his paramour, Ellaria Sand; he had been Queen Elia’s closest advisor, her right hand, her greatest supporter. If somebody knew the extent of Aegon’s madness, it was Oberyn Martell. Yet, he was a second son, without holdings and riches. A servant of House Martell, first and foremost. She could see him trying to convince his sister to give up on Aegon...what he said rang true.

For now, Cersei could trust Oberyn’s loyalty lied with House Targaryen.

But how long would House Martell could be trusted?

*I must keep Oberyn close...one move from House Tyrell and Rhaenys would have the largest Army of the Seven Kingdoms and enough grain to feed them at her disposal.*

Ice Demons, Giants, Grumpkins and the threat of the Long Night would not stop the Lords from playing their games once the fight was over, Cersei thought with herself.

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**House Stark**

Jon remained in the Capital and worked with the Small Council during the Queen’s brief absence to attend the wedding of Lady Myrcella Arryn and Prince Trystane Martell.

Daenerys did not want, but she needed to go: showing favour towards House Martell was paramount for their war efforts. Princess Rhaenys would also be in attendance to her cousin’s wedding and remind everyone the two houses were linked by blood.

If the situation in the North would become too dangerous, Dorne, so far south, stood to receive many refugees, so it was important to be in their good graces.
King Jaehaerys also joined his mother, flying on dragonback for the first time and Jon could only imagine His Grace excitement.

_Hopefully, the flight will put his mind off from having Ghost as his personal pet._

Working alongside the Hand of the King, Lord Baratheon, was easy. The man was immune to flattery, had no ear for gossip and cared only for his duty. Stannis Baratheon had an iron will and, all things considered, was perhaps too inflexible to hold such position, but he worked night and day for the good of the Realm and was loyal to a fault.

Of his family, Lord Baratheon said very little, even during the few social gatherings he attended, his conversations always tended to rotate towards his job and immediate concerns.

Despite seeing Stannis Baratheon every day and spending many hours with the stormlander, Jon only came to know that his former aunt by marriage, Lady Catelyn, was with child through his cousin, Lady Sansa Tully.

“ I hear congratulations are in order; my cousin writes that Lady Catelyn has already passed the tumultuous phase of pregnancy and is very happy to be expecting. ”

Stannis Baratheon gave Jon a quick nod. “ My Lady wife is in good health, the Maester writes me, and my Lady Mother is also very happy. I hope to be present at the birth, of course.”

And that was all the small talk Lord Baratheon was capable of enduring.

After the civil war was finally over, Jon’s life in the south settled in a routine of attending meetings and writing letters. Ravens between Winterfell and King’s Landing were almost daily since the Warden of the North extended his stay in the Capital. Even with his father as Castellan, Jon had to be made aware of important issues and guide Lord Eddard Stark in making some decisions.

The last raven to arrive from the North carried a message from Jon’s Lady Mother, Ashara, informing that Robb was to marry Lady Lyarra Umber at Winterfell. The couple would then return to Stony Shore and Robb would act as its Lord in the absence of their Father.

The wording was clear and left no doubts: Eddard Stark was to remain at Winterfell, even after Jon returned. They were to discuss who would be leading their troops and the strategy to fight the Walkers once the Warden of The North arrived, but, for what his mother wrote, their Father wanted Robb to stay as far as possible from the main areas of conflict.

The year was drawing to close; two moonturns, and Winter would finally come. As soon as Daenerys was back at King’s Landing, Jon had to prepare to leave for White Harbour.

A passage of his mother’s letter caught his attention and he sensed he should return sooner better than latter:

“....your Lord Father wishes to move the prisoner, Theon Greyjoy, to Queenscrown or to Castle Black before Robb is to come with his bride; he fears rumours would reach the Umber girl's ears and wants to avoid any unpleasant situation. Besides, the Greyjoy staying idle at Winterfell helps no one; even if he has no wish, at the moment, to join the Black Brothers, we do not see any problem in him helping the war effort...”
Jon had spent part of his training for knighthood in Highgarden, where he had been propositioned by a couple of knights and caught at least two in the act. Ser Arthur said it was more than normal. Men would rarely discuss such dalliances, but their existence was common knowledge: poor knights, for instance, would spend long stretches of time far from home and young men were naturally curious about their bodies. Some would even see such agreements as rites of passage, Arthur told Jon...

While he would not be disappointed in Robb if he was to have such tendencies, Jon was shocked at his supposed choice of partner. One thing was to take a tumble with Ser Lyn Corbray- the man would smile with the corner of his lips everytime Jon mentioned his brother- but another was having a friendship with Greyjoy, the man who attacked their home and killed part of their household.

Jon was aware and approved his Lord Father´s original plan of relinquishing his claim on Stony Shore in favour of Robb once he was married. Eddard Stark would still serve the North, working alongside his son at Winterfell, but wished more freedom to finally travel with his Lady wife once all their children were grown. That both Jon´s parents now reconsidered their decision and were willing to sacrifice their happiness to fulfill their duty spoke volumes.

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Daenerys insisted Robb upcoming nuptials were a great opportunity for her to visit Winterfell and meet with the Northern Lords : “You could send your man with Ghost right away, either to White Harbour or through the King´s Road. We could fly on Rhaego. My stay would be short, but I would like very much to see our future home with my own eyes.”

Jon liked the idea. Daenerys indeed had yet to see The North for herself.

“I never thought I would ride a dragon…” Jon murmured under Daenerys kisses.

“What do you think you have been doing if not riding a dragon all those nights, dear Lord Stark?”

Point taken, Jon sent Winterfell another raven, informing of the Queen Mother upcoming arrival and asking his Father to give Daenerys the warmest chambers and to assign him with an adjoining room.

Lord Stark had no intention in discontinuing his nightly visit´s to his dragon´s lair.

Jon expected too much of Daenerys first trip to North...that he was disappointed by his bannermen´s reactions made him angry. He knew enough of his men to notice the cold reception they gave Daenerys under the usual emptycourtesies.

Jon was furious and spoke bitterly with his Father when they met later that night at the Lord´s solar: “The Others take them...she will be their Lady and she is their Queen. Are they angered I am not marrying one of their daughters?”

According to Ned, the underwhelming reception was due to a mixture of factors: “Jon, some think six months of mourning is not enough. Others still take issue with the Tourney at Harrenhal, where the late King Rhaegar crowned your aunt Lyanna Queen of Love and Beauty...“

“This was almost two decades ago and His Grace only wanted to honour House Stark, nothing more, nothing less.”

Ned gave Jon a knowing look. Harrenhal... “ Do not mention this ever again, but Rhaegar and my sister at some point believed themselves to be in love. The rumours subdued after Lya married
Willam Dustin and they indeed came to love each other Jon, but the gossip had merit and The North remembers.”

Jon gave no reply, too stunned to say anything.

Ned shrugged: “They dislike southerners as a rule. You, riding that beast instead of arriving on horseback, with Ghost by your side, made them weary. Give them time, Jon... they will get used to it. Lady Catelyn and even my Ashara received cold shoulders at the beginning. I advise you to behave as you have not noticed it; the Queen will only stay for a couple of days and your Lady Mother is busy pampering her. I doubt she will complain to you and I do not see our Lord's saying something out of line to her. If you do something now, you might only make matters worse.”

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Robb was on his best behaviour. Theon had been officially moved to Queenscrown, but his destiny would be The Wall. Jon knew of Daenerys plans for the Greyjoy young man and he doubted she would mind not meeting with the Ironborn during her stay at Winterfell. In fact, she had only once asked about the prisoner and, upon answered he was being well treated, she left at that.

Lady Lyarra Umber was a year younger than Robb and as tall as her new husband. After their first round, Daenerys still naked under the furs, she mentioned the newlyweds made for a good looking couple.

Jon wanted to believe so: “She is an Umber, strong and sweet, a good Lady for Stony Shore. I pray my brother makes her a good husband.”

His tone betrayed a sense of uneasiness much to Daenerys surprise: “Why would Robb not be a good husband? I thought Stark men were all...very dependable.”

It was time for Jon to educate his bride to the realities of House Stark:”You heard about my late uncle, Lord Brandon Stark... He had too much of the wolf's blood, as my grandfather said…”

“Wolf's blood?”

“Aye...our temper, our ways. My father was raised in The Vale and is more temperate as a result. My uncle Benjen is a typical Stark. Brave, connected to our lands and traditions. The reason my uncle favored me so much was because he thought I was the embodiment of the Stark qualities. My grandfather believed we had to work with the South and prosper economically but there were some Lords who would have prefered to have their smallfolk dying of starvation during winter than asking for the assistance of the South...prideful people, you see?”

Daenerys nodded.

“ We do things differently here. My parents marriage was a success, but my uncle’s...was a disaster. Brandon Stark wanted a very different kind of woman as his mate and, had Lady Catelyn be northerner, he would have been content, as she would understand him better. Traditionally, House Stark raised their bastards in the same household as the legitimate sons and some bastards even grew to become important members of our family. Brandon wanted to have as many as he could, but Lady Catelyn would not accept it. As he grew unhappy with their marriage, Brandon became... a kind of monster.”

“You fear your brother will be bad suited to Lady Lyarra and act like your uncle?”

Jon could not see Robb being overly cruel to anyone...but he was impulsive enough to make bad decisions and jeopardize his place as a future Lord:
“I spoke to him...Father spoke to him. We gave him advice. He says he listens, but is already asking me to lead men at The Wall. He says he is a soldier and that is our Father's duty to be at Stony Shore, that he is young and needs experience in combat. I would not fault him for wanting to fight, but I just fear he wants out of his responsibilities as a married man.”

***

Maester Flowers assessed that Lady Lyarra Umber’s maidenhead was intact and that the young woman was in good health, ready to start bearing sons and daughters to House Stark. The result of his examinations pleased Lords Umber and Stark; the groom, Robb, offered no visible reaction other than smiling uncomfortably as Greatjon Umber enthusiastically tapped his back.

Until time came and Queen Mother Daenerys took her place as Lady of Winterfell, the honour fell to Lady Ashara. Much like he had done before with the previous Lady of the Keep, Maester Flowers considered the dornishwoman an ally: decades advising the scions of House Stark made the reachman conclude their tempers and passions were not deterrent to a work well done.

“My Lady, if I may have a word with you in private…”

They moved to Lady Ashara’s solar, richly decorated with enough tapestries and mementos of her home in the south, an effort of Her Ladyship to be more comfortable once Winter came. Winterfell was considered by the northerners warm enough, but Ashara was always a bit cold:

Ashara tried to be as practical as she could: “I already spoke with Robb about the need of preparing Lady Lyarra before she is to be deflowered. This is not a love match- at least for now- but I cannot abide to have a girl in pain if it can be avoided. Robb is a good man...he listened and I believe my words were not in vain. Would you agree I have done my part, Maester?”

She had confronted Robb; he had, as expected, denied any physical intimacy with Theon. Ashara did not press. What good would come of it? Lyarra was young and clearly infatuated with Robb. Not all noble women would be as lucky as Ashara, marrying for love. She hoped Robb would at least try to be a good husband, but she could only do much.

“You have been nothing if not accommodating and understanding of the delicate situation. House Umber is among the most powerful and loyal bannermen of House Stark and Greatjon dotes on his eldest daughter. He expects Robb to treat her with respect and care, not in the way Lady Catelyn had been treated by the late Lord Brandon…”

Ashara shook her head at the memory of her good brother. A charming man when he wanted to be. Robb, too, had this same quality. “Robb is cut from a better cloth than Brandon Stark. Even if love does not find its way in their marital bed, my husband made it clear to him that Stony Shore will only be his if he takes his responsibilities seriously and perform in accordance to our expectations. I saw that his uncle Benjen also spoke to him, about being a good husband and the importance of having a friendship with his Lady wife, even if he longs to be with another. More, we cannot do…”

The morning after the bedding ceremony, as expected, Maester Flowers went to visit Lady Lyarra for a physical examination. He saw that Robb kissed her forehead before leaving and the girl gave him a shy smile. Her maidenhead had been broken; her body was not bruised, nor battered.

“Are you sore or in pain, my Lady? If his Lordship was not able to ease the discomfort of your first coupling, I have salbes I can prescribe you…”
“No, Maester Flowers...my Lord Husband was very careful...I only need a warm bath and I shall be fine.”

Maester Flowers breathed in relief.

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House Tyrell

Lady Olenna disliked her son’s lack of success in bringing glory to House Tyrell and came to believe that her grandson’s surprising happiness with his personal life worked against the interests of their House.

They married their Margaery to House Lannister for a purpose: to have a half Tyrell Queen on the Iron Throne. Their efforts, however, came to nothing when the Old Lion died and Cersei Arryn birthed a baby girl.

But they still had Rhaenys Targaryen.

And the late King Rhaegar, seeking not to completely alienate Dorne or perhaps eager to have his own Daenerys in line of succession, confirmed his first born among those with rights on the Throne.

In short: to avoid problems in his rule, Rhaegar might have left a door opened for House Tyrell to achieve their long held ambition.

Until Jaehaerys married and produced offspring, Rhaenys was her younger brother’s heir.

Mace, however, would not do anything: Daenerys returned with three dragons at her disposal and as a tested and undefeated war general. Olenna’s son was scared of the silver haired girl.

The Queen surrounded herself with loyal and competent men like Lords Baratheon and Velaryon; she convinced former enemies, like Oberyn Martell, to join her cause and even later on embarked on a marriage alliance with The North, a very advantageous match since House Stark was connected through marriage to both Houses Tully and Arryn.

The Queen Mother was so successful in her moves that had retained Ser Arthur Dayne in the Capital, lured Rhaenys to the side of her lover and sweetened the deal by offering Willas a seat in the Small Council.

Lady Olenna felt House Tyrell was selling itself short and said so to Willas before he departed to the Capital: “You should be working to have Aemond ascend to the Iron Throne, silly boy. Your sister has a daughter...you should at least be aiming to betrothe one to another at this moment. It would be a start…”

“For what, more war? “ Willas hissed. “ Aemond is to be Lord of Highgarden, not King of Westeros. The Queen Mother is making a good job at unifying the Seven Kingdoms after a ridiculous civil war and I accepted the offer to go to King's Landing, both because I am not needed at The Reach, and also to make sure that my children take their places at Court. “

Olena smiled; her grandson indeed had hopes for his son to inherit the Throne; he was simply not well disposed to scheme to make sure his dreams came true:
“You are smart, Willas. Nobody said anything about a war…”

Willas colour drained from his face. “I will make sure you are not to be anywhere near King Jaehaerys in the future, nana. Goodbye.”

Lady Olenna sighted; lions had claws; vipers, venom...and flowers...flowers had thorns.
The Cold

Chapter Summary

The war begins.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the late update. Next Sunday I hope to post as regularly.

The war for the Dawn starts now. Note that I have no intention of writing battle scenes or discuss strategy fully. I am working my headcanons and my assumptions on how to better fight an Army of the Undead. According to season 7 foreshadowing and some yet to be confirmed leaks for season 8, my strategy is FAR BETTER than Jon and Dany’s-lol.

Since here they have been preparing for over fifteen years for this fight, I can only count as reasonable to expect them to not incur in the same mistakes Jon and Dany will most likely face being taken almost by surprise.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

300 A.C

From the mists of cold air, giants and children, men and women, bears and spiders, all with frozen blue eyes, walked.

Suddenly, they halted; Bran is surrounded.

Only for a second, he is scared.

When his eyes open, he is in the darkness of the cave he now calls home.

“Now it is time for you to become me.” Bran hears

And so he does.

***

In the third week of the year 300 A.C, a large flock of ravens crosses The Wall. All the northern keeps, even the floating Castle of Greywater Watch, are visited by talking birds, bringing terrible news.

Maester Flowers was, by nature and profession, not given to superstitions. Ever the man of science,
he considered capturing the first speaking raven he had ever seen and send to the Citadel for studies.

The bird, however, disappears before his eyes.

What is truly remarkable is not that the raven speaks; some birds were capable of learning and repeating a couple of words, Flowers knew.

No, those ravens are special because they even answer questions after delivering a very precise and clear message:

*The White Walkers march. Their movements are now shrouded from my eyes. Yet, I saw before and I see it now. The Wall will be breached. South they will go.*

***

“Move as many children, women and elder who are in the castles to White Harbour and from there Lord Manderly is to send ships south. Dragonstone can receive up to five thousand of our own. Cape Wrath and Plankytown are options for later. The smallfolk that cannot make the trip south are to be taken by their Lords in their Keeps and protected. Whatever happens, The Wall must contain the enemy for at least a fortnight.”

Decades of preparation for such war and Jon feared it would not be near enough. They would not win with numbers. Actually, numbers could work against them. Jon instructed the Lords to build trenches around their Keeps with chevaux de frises- walls of projecting wooden spikes- bearing dragonglass tips for protection against hordes of wights.

The dead had to be burnt. Body to body contact should be avoided at all costs; therefore archers became more valued than cavalry for once. Jon insisted the Dothraki would be of no use to fight in the North. They could not withstand the cold and their powerful horses could become unstoppable wights. Daenerys was forced to conclude that the Warden of the North was right and disbanded her personal Army. They were needed in Essos anyway, to assist Braavos in enforcing Her Grace’s anti slavery agenda, but many of the Unsullied remained, mostly stationed on Dragonstone and King's Landing and their first task was to protect the King.

Daenerys was flying North every five days to take her seat at the war council. The dragons were to be used to burn the dead and to attack the wights, which meant that the northern forces had to be kept apart or, at least, visually distinctive from the white walkers hordes, lest she would burn her own army.

At this point of the war, Daenerys was simply offering aerial support to the evacuation effort. Normally, she would be scouting and reporting the enemy’s movements, but it would be extremely risky to fly north of the wall as it was and Jon vetoed.

They laid in bed, she playing with his hair, now longer than she had ever seen: “I must return South in the morrow...with the war, my intention is to move Jaehaerys and Alyssane to Dragonstone.”

Such step confused Jon. King's Landing was too far south to be considered a target for the White Walkers, so why would Daenerys move the Court? :“What made you decide taking such action? Do you think the King’s life is at risk if he remains in the Capital?”

“It might come as a surprise to you, but the lord's are still playing their games...and until my son produces an heir, our position is not fully stable.” There were other reasons too…” I told you about the birth of the dragons...I have the sight, Jon. I saw the white walkers once or twice in my dreams.
In one of my visions, they were *south*.”

Fear crossed Jon’s face. He had all the trust in her visions. The White Walkers south meant that the North would fall. He would fail to protect his people. Thousands would die.

It was not difficult for Daenerys to understand the struggle behind Jon’s eyes: “We are doing everything we can. You are doing everything in your power. The North will continue...we are evacuating as we speak...”

“...something we insisted and my Lords argued against. No matter how many ships sail from White Harbour, most of our population will remain... I am leading them to their deaths.”

“No, you are not.” Men seemed to thought mainly in terms of battles, of losses in the field and of being defeated. In this case, the most important thing was to *survive*. Jon would not be fighting for a Crown, but to save his people. “You are more than a general leading soldiers; you are also a Lord protecting the smallfolk and ensuring they survive Winter. You are already doing this by moving as many as you can south. War is hell. We fight not for glory, but for survival.”

Jon silently agreed. Sansa and Elia Stark were living south of the Neck. Robb’s wife, Lyarra, should be sailing south from Stony Shore with many other families and they would be spending the remaining of the war in The Reach.

House Stark would continue, even if he died, Jon reasoned.

“You are right, of course, but it does not make any more difficult. This war we are about to face might take a whole generation. The Long Night they called it once. Even if we survive, we will never be same. The things we will see...our dead turning against us...the cold...hunger. Glory is the last thing in my head right now.”

Daenerys understood. They shared a long kiss and slept peacefully in each other's arms. It was the first time they shared a bed not as lovers, but as friends, a sign that their intimacy was as strong as the passion that pulled them together.

The next morning, Daenerys left to King’s Landing.

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**House Targaryen**

Daenerys spent the great part of the day in meetings with the Small Council and dined with her son before retiring for her chambers. Cersei was already waiting for her good sister there, anxiety written in her face.

“Sister, we have much to discuss, please have a seat.” Cersei’s hands automatically reached for the wine, but she halted the movement halfway, noticing the look of disapproval on Daenerys face. “I am moving the Court to Dragonstone.” the queen said plainly. “Lords Baratheon, Velaryon and Connington will stay at the Red Keep and see to the basic management of the Realm... Our children will not be safe in the capital while I fly North.”

Cersei had heard rumours about such decision, but she was interested in knowing Daenerys reasons: “Has the Master of Whispers uncovered another plot against the Royal Family? Why the need to
move to Dragonstone?”

“In case you had failed to notice, there is always a plot against the Royal Family.” True. Cersei had never had an important conversation with Daenerys before and it annoyed her that Viserys little sister was so shrewd. Thankfully, we are on the same side.

“The Blackfyre Rebellions are over...the Faith Militant, defeated. The Old Lion and the Sun’s daughter are dead and forgotten and you crushed the Greyjoys.” Suddenly, recognition dawned on Cersei’s face. Ah, the other dragons. “Ser Willas and Princess Rhaenys are joining us on Dragonstone then?”

“Yes, Rhaenys has been invited.” This time, it was Daenerys that poured them both goblets of wine-diluted in water- and offered one to Cersei. “Ser Willas and Ser Arthur insist in going North. The same with my Sworn Shield, Lady Brienne. I am also sending the new additions to the Kingsguard to the frontlines while keeping the more experienced ones with Jaehaerys. Rhaegar spent decades preparing for this war. I am confident we will win. However...I am afraid the threat of the Long Night will do little to stop the ambitious and misguided from aiming at the Iron Throne.”

While Daenerys was certain they would save Westeros, the costs and consequences of a prolonged war during winter could be disastrous, especially when most of the Great Lords loyal to House Targaryen were placing their lives in danger. “Nevermind we just came out of a civil war... for many of our Knights and Lords, it is their most sacred duty to lead their men in the battlefield. Your brother, my warden of the West, is riding as we speak. Lord Tully is also marching, leaving Lady Sansa heavy with child at Riverrun. And he is the last of his line, Cersei. What happens if I die...if Lord Lannister dies...if Willas dies, if the North is too weak to recover and come to our aid? The Vale is small and relatively poor; the Riverlands is still regrouping after being attacked and we all know that Dorne can go one way or the other...”

Cersei could see the situation was a potential political disaster for her and Daenerys personally. Willas and Jaime were loyal to Jaehaerys: they fought side by side with the Queen and placed their families ahead of their ambitions. If they died, Lady Margaery and Lady Olenna would be left as de facto rulers of the two most important Kingdoms, with the largest armies and enough grains and gold to take over the Throne as most of the other regions still struggled.

And, thanks to Elia Martell, House Tyrell now had a claim:

“Lord Mace is with his daughter at Casterly Rock, supposedly to help her rule the Westerlands in the absence of her husband. While we were busy at King's Landing, they moved the pieces on the board. Ser Daven Lannister married a Redwyne...Alysanne Bulwer, a cousin of the Tyrells, is to marry Martyn Lannister... and there are rumours of a possible betrothal between Aemond and Marei Lannister. Ser Willas confirmed both his Lord Father and Grandmother were in favour of the match.”

“You could simply not authorize the union...” Cersei mentioned casually. Great Houses needed to previously inform the Queen of any agreed matches. “But since Jaehaerys is marrying his cousin, it would make House Targaryen look distrustful of them. House Tyrell surely would push for more favors and appointments as reparation...”

Cersei then suggested sending Tyrion to Casterly Rock, although she herself doubted his loyalties: “Tyrion, you see, is a Lannister through and through. He personally delivered Marei and is very attached to Jaime and his family. He has, however, a very large mouth and his letters were always filled with interesting pieces of information; he could be useful.”

Daenerys supposed it could not hurt, had someone at Casterly Rock and not depend so heavily on
Oberyn and his Vipers: “Rhaenys dislikes the game and is happy living with her knight at Highgarden. But she is my son’s heir. Without Willas, Lord Mace Tyrell has parental rights over Aemond. It is of utmost importance that neither Rhaenys nor Aemond return to Highgarden, but stay on Dragonstone for the duration of the conflict.”

Daenerys bitterly concluded that Cersei was the only person she could fully trust within the Royal Family at that moment, for their interests were one and the same.

Before ending the conversation, Daenerys spoke about her will: “Rhaegar had been confident he would survive the Dothraki. I am confident yes, but will not make the same mistake. When he confirmed the succession after Aegon was excluded, he wished to include Rhaenys and myself, as the previous Councils had excluded the female lines. We have Elia Martell to thank for House Tyrell being next in line after Jaehaerys. It also means, of course, that I have a claim, which they do not seem to remember.”

Lord Baratheon was to remain as Hand of the King and guide Jaehaerys, Daenerys said. The stormlands wished to lead his men, but Daenerys objected it, pointing out he had already fought a war and was needed in the Capital, so they sent Stannis younger brother instead. Cersei and Lord Stark would have seats in the Small Council and oversee Jaehaerys and Alysane’s education until they were married in case the worst would happen.

Cersei understood and was in agreement. Her thoughts turned to Viserys: she was no dragon, but she silently swore to bring fire and blood to Houses Tyrell and Lannister if they ever dared raise against her Alysane and Jaehaerys.

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Winterfell, being in the heart of the North and the main seat of power, was the center of operations and hosted many lords who came to join in the fight against The Others.

Lady Ashara and Maester Flowers worked harder than anyone else, supervising the rations, moving the excedent knights to Wintertown and providing enough food and fire to keep them well fed and warm in the height of their harshest winter.

The hardest thing, however, was to assign rooms in the main Castle for all the lords and their retinues and keep the knights occupied enough not to create their own distractions:

“This is a nightmare, Jon. We clearly do not need all those people…” Ashara said in desperation. The situation was so dire in her opinion that she hoped for an attack sooner rather than later. Knights were famously prone to in-fighting when idle and they tended to attract all sorts of strange and unwanted people, from bandits to camp followers.

This meeting, of course, was private, far away from the southron lords eyes. Benjen Stark was already hosting many of the Mountain Clans at Queenscrown, so he suggested to move many of the knights to Karlhold and Last Hearth: “Most of their smallfolk- if we are to believe Lords Karstark and Umber- were sent to White Harbour, so they have enough space to receive the troops. Not to mention that their Keeps are very near to the Wall…if there is need for reinforcements, they could easily be called.”

Jon agreed with the proposed solution. The next day, he met with the Warden of the West, Jaime Lannister, the commander of the Knights of the Vale, Lord Royce, Ser Willas Tyrell, Ser Arthur Dayne and Ser Renly Baratheon to discuss the new strategy: “Lord Tully is to remain stationed at and help protect the Rills and the Dornish Forces will hold Moat Cailin. We need to send men to the Umber and Karstark lands, as they are closest to the areas more likely to be attacked when the wall is
breached…”

“When The Wall is breached?” asked Lord Royce with surprise. “If they are so ill prepared to withstand an attack, should we not send the bulk of our men to defend it?”

“The Wall is not only a massive structural barrier, but a magical one. Maester Aemon Targaryen and Grand Maester Marwyn both believe the Undead Army have not attacked in all those centuries because they were waiting for the right time to dim the magic in The Wall. For what I saw myself, I agree with the assessment: they either found a way to weaken the magic or they were destined to march during the longest and harshest winter. At any rate, Lord Royce, in this conditions, even if we send one hundred thousand men to the Wall, it would only be a matter of time for the wights to overpower us. Therefore, we need to prepare all of the northern keeps before such time comes, because it will come.”

***

House Lannister

Jaime Lannister had just finished to speak with his lieutenants about their upcoming march when he saw Sandor Clegane sparring with a knight almost as tall as himself. He was surprised to see that no other than Lady Brienne of Tarth, the Queen's sworn shield, was the one responsible for the Hound’s defeat.

“You are Lord Selwyn Tarth’s daughter. He is a good man.” Jaime said after being introduced to Brienne.

“Yes, he is, my Lord.”

“And you are his only daughter and heir. As good a fighter as you are, my Lady, the prospect of dying in the cold snows of the North should be less appealing than ruling the Emerald Island…”

Brienne was used at being told her place was not on the battlefield. Lord Lannister was telling her more or less the same; yet he acknowledged her skill as a warrior and seemed not annoyed at the sight of a woman yielding a sword, but almost in awe of her.

Still, he was not her friend and overstepped her boundaries: “Father is still young and could remarry if he so wishes. I came to fight and not to die as you predict, my Lord.”

“Apologies, my Lady...I was merely attempting to have an honest conversation and not sticking my nose on Tarth’s succession. We are going to war...casualties are to be expected.”

Brienne realized that she was so used at being treated with either contempt or condescension hat her first reaction when approached by someone about her martial prowess was always defensive: “I also should apologise, my Lord. You are indeed right; we might as well die in this war. My sincere and, mayhaps, naive hope is that we will survive. The late King Rhaegar and Queen Daenerys prepared us well, I like to think.”

Jaime quickly came to admire Brienne, who had more honour in one finger than Renly Baratheon, the man leading the Stormlands contingent, had in his whole body. When they finally moved, Jaime requested that Brienne and the other knights from Tarth and Cape Wrath to join his numbers and go to Last Hearth; Ser Willas was acting as the warden of the South and traditionally, both the Dornish and the Stormlands would serve under him, but this meant that Karlhold would receive twice the number of troops that the Umber lands would get, which was absurd, since the Karstark holdings
were south.

***

Sandor Clegane observed the rapport between Jaime and Brienne with growing concern. He knew the value of the Maid of Tarth and trusted her implicitly; Jaime, however, was the one he worried about:

“Tell me, Lord Lannister...are you that tired of your perfect little Tyrell wife that you find amusing to play with Lady Brienne? Calling her a wench...sharing meals...sparring at any given opportunity…”

Everybody at Casterly Rock with one eye could see that Jaime was exasperated by Margaery. She was simply too good to be true. Only a couple of years older than Jaime’s eldest son, Tyrek, and used to engage in a constant pursuit of beauty and pleasure, the pretty brunette was the exact opposite of the qualities Jaime admired in a woman.

Her courtesies were too polished; her smile, too trained and her words, always right, but seldom ringing true.

It did not help that Tyrek and Tommen were clearly in Margaery’s thrall. At first, Jaime had been happy to see that his sons accepted their step mother, only to realize how the Tyrell girl was working hard to solidify her power and influence over Casterly Rock even in the event of Jaime’s death.

The minute Jaime left for The North, Lord Mace Tyrell suddenly announced he was to visit his only daughter. the Fat Flower always came with second and third intentions. The last two visits resulted in a Redwyne- Lannister marriage and a very appealing bethrotal contract to the third son of Ser Kevan Lannister, a boy who would never grow up to inherit anything. Now, thanks to Mace Tyrell and Margaery, Martyn Lannister would become Lord Bulwer in four years time.

The flowers were drowning the lion and suffocating his cubs with their sweet parfum.

“I am too old and tired to lie to you, Clegane: other than our couplings and Marei, Margeary is of no interest to me.” as for Brienne, Jaime added: “ she is a friend, someone I care and admire.”

“Bugger that, Jaime!” Clegane spat. “I heard you when you told her her eyes were beautiful. Brienne went as red as a beetroot, of course...and you stammered like a green boy!”

Jaime was shocked, not that he was being confronted by Clegane, but that his friend knew him all too well. When had been the last time Jaime was really interested in a woman? He could not remember it, really...after Cersei left and he entered his adolescence, Jaime had been intimate with one of his cousins. He would have married her gladly and be happy with his choice, had not been for Tywin Lannister.

Jaime himself could not identify his feelings for Brienne, for he had never felt this way before. If what Sandor was telling him was true, Jaime was indeed in love with a good, sweet and pure young woman who had the misfortune of being born with a plain face and an awkwardly huge body.

Now that he had much to think about, Jaime had no interest in discussing his private life with Ser Sandor: “I owe you no explanations, Clegane. Go away…”

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House Stark
Jon arrives at Castle Black early in a cold morning and is greeted by the Lord Commander, who pats him on the back and walks with him to his solar.

The moment the door opens, Jon’s jaw drops.

There, sitting by the fire, is Robb.

“Lord Commander Mormont, I do not mean to be rude, but I am afraid I need to exchange a couple of words with my brother.” Jon is furious. “who was not supposed to be here.” he adds, the wolf’s blood boiling in his veins.

Jeor Mormont’s expression dulled. “Very well, Lord Stark...I give you some minutes of privacy.”

As soon as the older man leaves, Jon gets Robb by his throat and lifts him: “WHAT. ARE. YOU. DOING HERE?”

Robb cannot answer, his face contorting in agony. Jon is forced to release his brother before he goes too far and becomes a kinslayer and when the younger Stark falls on the ground, he is coughing and gasping for air.

“ANSWER ME!” Jon demands.

“There was a raven sent to Stony Shore---coff, coff---Lord Commander needed reinforcements---coff, coff---Theon added a message on his own, saying they were short of commanders...”

Jon cannot believe what he is hearing. “Your Liege told you to hold Stony Shore and you disobey because Theon fucking Greyjoy tells you so? What about your wife, Lady Lyarra...is she alone in the Keep? Do you mean to tell me that a girl of six and ten is supposed to defend our lands, a port that has been recently under attack?”

At this point, Robb had regained some of his strength. He stands up. As tall as Jon, Robb is leaner and his features, more refined. Jon looks at his brother with blood in his eyes but is obvious that Robb has no intention of backing down: “Arya is of the same age and uncle Dustin left her in charge of Barrow Hall...Lyarra has our Castellan to assist her managing our defenses and the Maester to see for the baby...”

Jon does not believe what he had just heard. He covers his face with his hands and takes a deep breath. By the Old Gods and the New, Robb is beyond saving. ” Why must you even write letters to the Greyjoy get? He attacked us, Robb...”

“...he never meant to. Theon did not kill our men. It was his uncle. He was just there as a Castellan. They left him to die there, Jon. It was not his fault. Lyarra is a good woman; she understands we need to stop the White Walkers at The Wall if we are to survive. I told her to sail to the Reach if we are defeated.”

“Robb, you are a piece of shit. All the Northern Lords agreed to send their wives and small children and as much of the small folk south NOW. Not when the Wall falls, but NOW. Do you think just because you are my brother that you will not face the consequences of your disobedience? “

Jon sits at the table, grabs a piece of parchment, quill and starts to write: “Uncle Benjen will be staying at Queenscrown...I will tell him to keep Rickon at Winterfell to act as its Lord while I stay here and acting as a Warden. Father, who should be staying at Winterfell, will go as fast as he can to Stony Shore; your wife will be sailing to Oldtown as soon as she receives my raven and the Castellan will wait for Father to arrive.”
Robb observes Jon writing the letters in silence for a couple of minutes. Unable to contain himself, he finally asks: “What will be my punishment, brother?”

“You are demoted to foot soldier and I am moving you to Eastwatch-by-the-Sea because I cannot abide to look you in the eye, Robb. Before you ask, Theon is going with you.” Jon has the suspicion the Greyjoy is not truly Robb’s friend, but it is using him. Eastwatch, being a port, Jon reasoned, might be the place for Robb to see that, given the right opportunity, Theon will leave him behind.

Jon hopes he will.

***

It did not take Jon long to see the attacks for what they were: a distraction.

Castle Black does not fall. For three days and nights, they kill as many wights they can with dragonglass arrows. They also have a pyromancer dealing with mixing and storing wildfire, but this option Jon decided to only use as last resort.

Daenerys also burns as many as she can atop of Rhaego. The other two dragons were yet to join the fight. The reasoning behind Daenerys decision is sound: “They tend to follow Rhaego’s lead, but a dragon without a rider is a risk we cannot take under such adverse circumstances. Dragons do not do well in the cold. We should focus in defeating as many white walkers as we can; the weather should get better as a result, since they are the ones bringing most of the cold. Then I will summon Rhaegal and Viserion and we can handle the remaining wights more efficiently.”

The battle follows the same pattern for all the other Castles along the Wall, except for one: Eastwatch.

Giants, Mammoths, Ice Spiders and wights destroy much of the fortification.

As the Undead Army makes headway, the cold intensifies.

On the third day, the sea water freezes and they cross.

“Why are they retreating?” Daenerys asks Jon at night. “Three days and they are gone, defeated?”

Jon shakes his head. “No, something happened. No more ravens from Eastwatch...and they are not moving further North, but west.”

The next day, Daenerys flies West. She tries. The conditions are so bad and visibility, so low, that she returns less than a couple of hours later.

“I could not go any further, Jon, otherwise I would lose my nose. You are right and I believe Eastwatch not only fell, but they are moving from there, bypassing our forces. “

“Fly to Last Hearth then...they must be informed and prepare for a Siege.”

This time, Daenerys is luckier and she makes it to the Keep. She does not linger though and flies to Winterfell, where she is to send word to the other Keeps and King’s Landing of their first defeat.

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The few survivors of Eastwach make it to Greenguard in two days time and Jon goes there to hear their account of what happened and prepare for the next phase of the war.
He does not see Robb among them. When he asks, Lord Karstark says only that Robb “perished among many others.”

Later that same night, a reachman called Satin approaches Jon with a lurid tale: “Your brother fought valiantly, my Lord. He saved many lives. Theon was our best archer, but it was clear we would fall. We were given orders to hold as much as we could and cover for many of our men retreating. It was too cold, but we had enough dragonglass and we even used wildfire to give us more time. They do not sleep or have need for food, but we do. We would take two hours breaks between our shifts, to rest our eyes before rejoining the fight, my Lord. They used to take their rests together. "Deep down, Jon knew. But it was almost too much to hear Satin saying it. "Some men saw them, my Lord.”

Oh.

Robb’s death was fast, Satin said, but Theon was treated as spoils of war and tortured horribly.

“Lord Karstark said Robb was a disgrace to the North...he and some of the old Bolton men carried Robb and Theon to the dungeons. Some of the men here will tell you if you ask them far from Lord Karstark’s sight. He paid me no mind, I think because I am not noble born. I watched when they burnt his body, my Lord. At least your brother will not turn, if it serves you of consolation.”

It would not.

“Theon died too, but later. I did not see him, only heard what happened. I suspect they did not even burn him...Lord Commander Pyke has no knowledge of what had transpired, as he was busy with the battle. It was all Lord Karstark and some other northerners, during their own breaks.”

Theon Greyjoy’s destiny held no interest to Jon Stark; he took Satin’s statement and made the man repeat the statement to Lord Pyke and the Maester at Greenguard and then sent the reachmen to Castle Black, to avoid retaliation.

Usually, as Lord Stark, Jon would need more evidence and witnesses to condemn a Lord for murder, but war is no time for formalities.

The execution, as the crime, was carried in secret and the bodies, quickly burnt.

Rickard Karstark and his brothers were known for being hard, unforgiving men, but Harrion Karstark, his son and heir, was much more amenable. Jon would not punish the son for the father’s crimes.

He could not, however, lie and say that Lord Rickard died and fought honourably. His note to the family, informing of Lord Karstark’s demise, was brief, formal and distant.

The letter Jon wrote his mother, however, was filled with regret, guilt and anger.
Again with the expanding and incorporating Canon into the story and offering a new
dramatic angle.

Robb was a great soldier, but a poor politician. He was open hearted and incapable of
seeing Theon’s struggles. He really trusted and loved Theon as a brother, most
possibly, but there is a lingering suspicion of an homoerotic factor at play. See, Robb
fucks Jeyne (Talysa in the show), because he is GRIEVING and he feels BETRAYED
by Theon. He was just informed his brothers were killed by someone he trusted and
loved. At any rate, his reaction is the same of a spurned lover- he basically jumps to bed
with the next available person. He married her because of Catelyn Stark’s upbringing. It
is clear he does not love Jeyne, but cares for her.

This poor personal decision makes the other northern lords doubt Robb (really, the guy
was fucking 14 you assholes!) and he starts going downhill, not listening to his family
advice etc...

which is more or less exactly what I portray here, but with my dramatic twist.

Funny thing: I really like a thread where the Op is claiming that Theon is NOT bi or gay
and he himself gives contextual evidence of Theon being what we now call "in the
closet" on his second answer:

For those who want to read it, it is here:

Chapter Summary

Last Hearth, Karlhold, Winterfell...many are falling and many are already looking ahead.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait. The chapter has not enough dialogues for my liking and the smut is very subdued. This is what happens when you are in the middle of the war for the dawn, I guess...

Last Hearth, Third Month of 300 A.C

As the cold winds burnt our skin and the earth beneath us reverberated, we knew they had come.

We were prepared, I reminded the soldiers under my command as we took our places and waited for their attack.

The problem was, we have been prepared for war but this...

...this was a nightmare.

The undead had literally nothing to lose by fighting, being they were neither dead or alive...they had no allegiance to their families, no personal ambition other than walk, run or kill. Their generals did not care whether they succeeded or not...they would keep trying, wave after wave, day after day.

Last Hearth would fall, as Eastwatch fell, I imagined. So, I did what Commander Pyke have done and tried to organize a retreat. The northerners would die, they said, and not leave: their wives and children had been evacuated and it was clear the enemy would not give up. All we could do under the circumstances was to keep fighting for as long as we could, to kill as many as we managed and make them lose time with us so that Karlhold could better arm themselves.

They had surrounded the Castle and even an escape through the tunnels would be impossible.

What surprised me most in our defeat was how utterly dispassionate they handled their victory. Whereas a human army would round up important prisoners, torture soldiers for information and maybe even humiliate and execute those labelled as traitors, the White Walkers, when satisfied with the destruction they inflicted upon us and how they were able to increase their numbers with those we were not able to burn on time, simply left.

In the end, twenty five brave soldiers survived the battle of Last Hearth.

My wounds were extensive and there was nothing to be done; I was dying, content that most of the
men still standing were from the Westerlands and extremely grateful that the Stormlander I cared about would live to fight another day.

"Do not cry." I told her softly. "I could not have not asked for more." her beautiful blue eyes drowned in sadness as she held me “dying in the arms of the woman I...”

Jaime never finished.

***

Many terrible things happen during wars, things nobody care to discuss. Painful memories of death and gore, betrayals of trust, cowardice...the list goes on. And also amidst all the confusion and violence, true bonds of friendship are forged between soldiers and those are among the strongest and truest of friends one could possibly have.

When such a friend dies, there is no honest consolation, no words to be said other than the obvious ones, just the sense that you have to honour them with the rest of your life and make sure their sacrifice had not been in vain.

For this reason, Sandor Clegane did not even dare to comfort Brienne of Tarth as she held Jaime Lannister´s body. The Walkers were gone; they were alive and now it was time to survive.

Still, Sandor needed to say the something; he needed to admit it, to say it out loud that that Jaime was indeed to make it feel real. “We need to burn him, Brienne...we owe him this, not to have him turn...”

Silently, she nodded, tears pouring out of her eyes. “At least...” she said ´, the voice still trembling with emotion “we are alive to tell the tale.”

She stood and looked around the small room in the tallest tower of the Castle the survivors had gathered. The cold mists had dissipated enough and they were able to see they were truly alone and the walkers, gone to their next target.

The possibility of Jaime being raised from the dead, however, was to cruel to contemplate and they had to act: “I supposed you are our commander now, Ser Clegane.” Most of the survivors were westerlanders after all. Only five from the Stormlanders stood and a couple of northerners. It was only fair that Sandor would lead them now, Brienne reasoned.

“Aye.” He said lamely and started giving orders to take Jaime´s body downstairs and organize a pyre with some of the dragonglass still available.

As they watched the late Lord Lannister´s body burn, Brienne kept wondering. “He did not have time to say what he wanted to say...what do you think he meant?”

Sandor saw no reason to tell one of those white lies; Jaime was gone and the truth would not harm him anymore. “I knew Jaime for most of my life, Brienne... he was weak in many ways, flawed and selfish. He made so many mistakes with his life, by trying and failing to be a good son. But the only thing that made him whole, the only thing he really cared about was being a soldier, to protect his people. He never wanted to be a Lord. Had Jaime been more of a father than a son, his Joanna would ve alive. Her death, something I thought would have killed him, was what had saved Jaime from himself. He died here, in the snow, trying to save Westeros from those bloody Ice Demons. He died fighting. He died in the arms of the only woman he admired...the only woman he honestly loved.”

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Casterly Rock

No raven would be able to survive the taxative flight under the extreme northern winter conditions. It was even said that the Queen’s dragons were mostly being kept in the ground during the hostilities, mostly burning the dead, all due to the increment weather which also affected the fire breathing beasts.

News from the battlefield became scarce and rumours starte to spread. For the Houses in the south, a visit from the Queen on dragonback meant only one thing: that their troops had perished in the war against the Ice Demons and possibly, that their Lord had fallen.

About twenty days since the fall of Eastwach, Daenerys Targaryen went for a second time in less than a year to Casterly Rock.

Maester Tyrion watched as Lady Margaery cried when her Grace shared the news that Lord Jaime Lannister had died at Last Hearth, his troops all but obliterated by the White Walkers.

Maester Tyrion watched as Lady Margaery, all dressed in black, continued to work alongside Ser Kevan Lannister in advising the newly made Lord Lannister, Tyrek, a young man of seven and ten, still unwed and not betrothed. Tyron did not know whether to admire Margaery, juggling many responsibilities while also raising her daughter, or suspect her motives for continuing as if nothing had changed.

How the lions came to depend so heavily on a single rose? Casterly Rock had literally dozens of trained cousings and aunts who could perform the tasks of Lady of the Rock, but Margaery ruled supreme and her status never once questioned.

Lady Margaery worked hard to please the right Lannisters. Kevan’s wife, Dorna Swift, had travelled to the Reach with their youngest son, soon to become a Bulwer and connected by blood with House Tyrell, a very advantageous match for a second son of a second son. Daven Lannister was another that owed his “happiness” to Lady Margaery’s rich relations in the Reach, wed to a Redwyne heiress and there were talks of others “mutually beneficial matches” being negotiated between the two richest houses, all under the table of course, since they were observing a six month mourning.

Tyrion knew Margaery was a willing tool to be used by her very ambitious family and that the girl had insinuated herself in the good graces of most members of House Lannister, but the fact remained that Casterly Rock had a new Lord and usually in such situations, the still young and fertile widow of the previous Lord would be then returned to her original House and a new match set for her.

As the weeks passed and Lady Margaery remained acting as Lady of the Keep, Tyrion broached the subject to Kevan: “Jaime left enough provisions for Lady Marei and Lady Margaery in his will and I assume my niece will be raised at Casterly Rock since she is a Lannister, but the question of Lady Margaery’s future remains. Tell me, uncle, what has Lord Mace Tyrell in stores for our pretty rose?”

It was no secret that Tyrion's father had all but sold Cersei to House Arryn, even granting the Lord of the Eyrie free reign to dispose of his sister as he saw fit in the event of her husband’s death. This was, of course, very uncommon and showed exactly what Tywin’s thoughts on Cersei’s value were.

Lord Mace, however, being very fond of his only daughter, had demanded a substantial widow’s pension from House Lannister, extravagant enough to cover for Margaery’s expensive tastes for her lifetime or until he, as Head of the House, would provide her with a new husband.
Kevan Lannister was a capable man. Tyrion thought unjust aunt Genna’s assessment that Kevan had never had a thought that Tywin did not have first, but now he could see that indeed, in the absence of their truly cunning father, their shy uncle was suddenly showing his claws: “Lady Margaery is to remain as Lady of Casterly Rock and marry Tyrek, who is only but two years younger and in need of a wife.”

As Castamere showed, House Lannister was rich, but this was not to mean they would go about life without collecting their debts or demanding their profits: by keeping Margaery where she was, Casterly Rock was also keeping some of its gold.

There were many advantages for continuing with the Lannister-Tyrell alliance in Kevan’s eyes: for once, they would retain a woman of proven fertility, already trained in managing their gargantuan Keep and used to a myriad of cousins, uncles and aunts by marriage and bastards, all living under the same roof and by the grace of their vaults of gold.

Jaime had died after spending three moonturns away from the Rock and as its Maester, Tyrion was responsible for assessing the women under House Lannister’s responsibility monthly. Ser Kevan was aware that Margaery was not pregnant with Jaime’s child when he began negotiating with Lord Mace Tyrell.

But his uncle, Tyrion knew, would never overstep; if the engagement was going through, it was because Lord Tyrek Lannister had approved of.

Tyrion knew of Kevan’s reasons for wanting Margaery at the Rock and a couple of days later, he witnessed first hand the reasons for Lord Tyrek Lannister to accept his late father’s wife as his own, for Tyrek was already enjoying his husband’s rights, vigorously mounting the Tyrell woman.

That they did not even care to bar the door was what really surprised Tyrion. *Margaery is usually smarter than this...she must be trying for an heir already. securing her position.*

Margaery and Tyrek wed a moonturn after the end of their mourning period.

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**Winterfell**

Jon realized that his heartfelt letter had never reached his mother once Daenerys finally brought him to Winterfell. The terrible weather conditions made it impossible for their ravens to fly all through the North and Lady Ashara had gone south, being on the last ship that sailed, Jon was informed. *Thanks the Old Gods and the New for that.*

With his Father at Stony Shore, Uncle Benjen at Queenscrown and Rickon at Castle Cerwyn, Jon turned to Daenerys for comfort in the aftermath of Eastwatch. He needed to talk, to listen, to make sense of what happened...to be whole again.

He took Daenerys with newfound hunger. There had always been a sort of intensity in most of their couplings, but this time it was like he truly burnt for her touch, as if being inside her chure, feeling the heat of her center, was the only thing that mattered, at least for a time.

After they finished, still panting from the effort, he rolled by her side, his eyes fixed on the ceiling. Daenerys, feeling the tension, initiated the conversation: “You do not need to be strong, at least not
“I fought two wars before this one and I witnessed many soldiers succumbing to this sort of...madness. Mayhaps I was a fool to expect my men to be better than this...or to assume the fact our enemy is a magical one would be enough to eliminate this need for blaming others for our failures. Desperation either brings the best or the worst in us. Our urges... not many camp followers around ...” Jon trailed.

“You mean to tell me there was an increase of rapes among soldiers?” Daenerys inquired shyly, the subject still too uncomfortable for her to speak openly, but important enough not to be ignored.

Jon shut his eyes and made a face, trying to collect his thoughts, to organize them in a way Daenerys would understand.” Eastwatch was a nightmare, no doubt about that, but some northerners made sure to make it a particular sort of hell. Some Lords never really bought into the whole idea of allowing the Free Folk to settle...some might have had sympathies towards the Boltons. I didn't mean to, but I placed Robb in the line of danger by sending him to Eastwatch...with the ironborn...his friend.”

“I heard some rumours during my visits. Was Robb really like Viserys? I had dismissed the gossip entirely.”

Viserys was openly comfortable with his sexual exploits for what Jon had heard of the late prince; Robb was nothing if conflicted. “No, not the same. More complicated, I´d wager. He never meant it to complete the act...as many squires do, Robb had engaged in some consensual games with other Knights, but never...laid with a man. He told me so. The morning I sent him to Eastwatch, he admitted it to me that he indeed had feelings for Theon... that they had shared some prostitutes, touched each other....but nothing more. They might have thought the end was near and they wanted to…” Jon was unable to complete.

Daenerys held Jon while he cried; they stayed like this for some minutes, until they heard a knock on the door.

***

Jon had no time to recompose himself; Maester Flowers was by the door.

He gestured for the reachman to come inside, not noticing the Maester was carrying a raven with him. “Apologies, my Lord, but I believe this war will be lost if you do not listen to what this bird has to say.”

Jon was stunned. He was of course aware that Brandon had sent ravens before and believed in his cousin’s powers of divination. That Maester Flowers, a rational maester, follower of the New Gods and doubter of northern superstitions was advising him to heed by a bird's advice was unexpected.

Maester Flowers explained: “Nothing is more sacred to me than knowledge and I believe in rational, scientific explanations. However, our situation is extraordinary and I spent years enough in the North to know that the magic here is of a different, more dangerous type than the ones we study at the Citadel. I do not have a valyrian steel chain as Grandmaester Marwyn, but he urged me to open my mind to what is beyond the eyes. Now it is either try the impossible, or die...Even though my first instinct is always follow my Order, I cannot, in good conscience, advise your Lordship to ignore the
“Maester Flowers, your decision is much more reasonable and rational than the Citadel’s drivel; you do well in ignoring them and continue serving House Stark.” Daenerys secretly planned to punish the Order of the Maesters for their inactivity once the war was over. When Rhaegar was alive and Grandmaester Marwyn, a young and more vibrant man, the Maesters were just too happy to pretend to help in the war effort. Even now, with The North fighting and losing a war that could kill their entire population, the “grey sheep” continued to do the bare minimum and only when the Crown compelled them to.

They sat to speak about what truly mattered: destroying the white walkers. They suspected that, the first time around, some sort of truce was achieved. Inactivity for thousands of years meant only that walkers had been waiting for the right opportunity to attack, not that they had been truly defeated; if it had been so, they would never have made a come back.

Jon and Daenerys would not settle for another truce; they wanted the Ice Demons gone and, according to Brandon, in order to do so they would have to travel to the heart of winter “...the place of their creation, the source of their magic.”

It seemed logical, a good and fail proof war strategy. By liquidating the enemy’s supplies so to speak, half the job of winning was done. That the White Walkers depended on their Ice Magic to not only raise the dead but to create new walkers made the task even more crucial.

“We must prepare then...leave as soon as possible.” Daenerys announced with excitement. She wanted to go home, to be with her son…the faster she was to destroy the heart of winter, the closer she would get to Dragonstone.

“I am sorry to say, Your Grace, but Master Brandon made it absolutely clear that we must wait for him say so and that it would take months before the conditions were favorable…”

Jon listened in silence. Thousands would have to die...the white walkers would have to be allowed to go as south as they could, to believe they were winning so that both Daenerys and himself could go beyond the wall without their notice or interference and safely destroy their sacrificial altar and burn their frozen weirwood.

The War for the Dawn would be a distraction for the White Walkers, as the Battle at the Wall had been a distraction for the Armies of Men.

***

Barrow Hall

Arya Dustin would send her wolf, Nymeria, to scout their lands and pray no walkers would be seen. She was now the only surviving member of her family, the last of her line. Her cousin and Liege, Lord Jon Stark, had all but begged Arya to go south and join the northern women and children at Dragonstone. “Your Father died at Castle Black and you are a Lady in your own right now; you owe him to survive and continue keep the family name alive.”

“With all due respect, Jon, you could not have be more wrong. I will gladly die protecting my lands...Father already sent most of our folks south, but not me, and this was for no accident: we took a vow, to fight and die or to win and live. No middle ground. What would House Dustin be good for
if I was to survive in exile, either in Dorne or Essos, leaving the North to be a wasteland and our people, wights? Our name would mean nothing, only defeat.”

As they prepared for a prolonged war, Jon and Daenerys decided to fly south and visit the Castles most likely to be attacked. Barrow Hall was on their way; Arya was in danger and Jon’s heart was breaking as he realized his little cousin was no more, that Arya Dustin was a warrior and had already made her choice.

She was almost eight and ten and all but alone save for her Stark cousins. Lord Edmure Tully was to help Arya hold the Castle and although he was married to Sansa and, as such was considered to be “pack”, the northern lady second in command was the young knight she fancied, Ser Gendry Stone.

Jon had already asked Daenerys to marry him once they returned to Winterfell. If he wanted to die, he reasoned, he would die having the woman he loved as his wife. Mayhaps trying to dissuade Arya from staying at Barrow Hall...or mayhaps because he wished his cousin to be happy if she was to die, Jon asked Daenerys to legitimate Gendry; a natural son of a great lord's heir, a Knight without lands or gold, but brave and of known parentage would be a suitable enough consort for an old House that had a Lady as heiress, especially in times of war, when the social etiquette was more relaxed.

Daenerys agreed; her signature in a paper would mean that Arya could marry the man she loved and Lord Baratheon would have no reasons to protest, since Gendry would be giving up any claim he might have and had agreed to take on the Dustin name.

The wedding ceremony was brief. They were rationing the food, but everybody agreed it would do good for their soldiers morale to drink diluted wine and be offered an extra portion of soup in order to celebrate the occasion. Jon delivered the bride and danced with Arya that night: “ I pray that we will all survive the war and wish all the happiness for you and Ser Gendry. I can only hope that your Father would have approved of the match…”

“He would.” Arya said with a smile. “ Thank you, Jon...now I have a love and not only duty to comfort me during the long night.”

***

Riverrun

Lady Sansa Tully was relieved when the Queen confirmed that her husband was alive and well, still stationed at Barrow Hall. For what she remembered, the Castle's defenses were solid and she trusted Edmure would not try to play the hero and stick to the role of Commander rather than foot soldier. Her cousin, Robb, would have been alive and well had he stayed at Stony Shore, as his Liege had commanded. She cried when she received the news and could only trust Edmure would continue to obey the Queen and simply help Arya to hold Barrow Hall.

Sansa was no longer a silly girl; when Daenerys said she had ordered Ser Brynden Tully to come to Riverrun and he was expected to arrive soon enough to attend to his new great-nephew’s birth, Sansa knew it meant the war in the North was not going well: “Do you have reasons to believe they will cross the Neck, Your Grace?”

“They are not attacking to simply conquer us. Their moves so far suggest their objective is going
somewhere and we believe this place to be the Isle of Faces, where the last of the Children are supposed to live.” If that was true, Riverrun was not technically on their way, but close enough to be in the position of sending reinforcements and Sansa could not expect to lead the troops in this case.

Daenerys flew to Dragonstone to spend time with her son and attend to business, but would be returning North in a fortnight, promising her former lady in waiting that she would try to stop over at Riverrun for her dragon to rest and mayhaps even carry a letter for Edmure.

Sansa’s last days of pregnancy were spent in the company of Summer, her now beloved direwolf, and working at the Keep. Ser Brynden Tully arrived a sennight after the Queen had left and took over the leadership of the soldiers that stayed behind.

As Daenerys had predicted, Axel Tully was born a couple of days after his great uncle arrived and she indeed returned to Riverrun and held the auburn haired baby before flying North, where the war was at its gruesome.

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Karlhold

The gallant Knights of the Reach were not cut for a war in the cold snows of the North and nor was their Commander. Adaptive enough to eat barley bread without complaining and attentive to strategy to determine that what Lord Jon Stark had advised was indeed the right approach, Ser Willas was overpowered by an enemy that spent the last thousands of years in training.

Lord Harrion Karstark and much of his archers survived the battle; two thirds of the reachmen, however, perished. Ironically, command of the remaining forces fell to a dornishman, Ser Arthur Dayne, the Sword of the Morning, who considered for a second leaving his post and going in pursuit of the enemy to kill them all before he remembered they were technically already dead.

There was no other choice than burning the dead in a common pyre, as to save the dragonglass; Lord Harrion, understandably, feared a possible second attack. Ser Arthur felt it was unlikely, due to what they learnt had happened at Eastwatch, but had to defer to Lord Karstark, even though he wished Willas would be cremated in a separate ceremony and his ashes, taken to Highgarden.

When it was clear that the White Walkers had moved on, that they had taken what they wanted from Karlhold and would go to their next target, Arthur Dayne sat alone in his chambers, thanking whatever Gods there was that he was alive still and praying he would live long enough to see his daughter and kiss his princess again.

***

Winterfell

Something told Daenerys not to make a stop at the Twins, but to go straight for Barrow Hall, stay long enough to rest and then, continue to Winterfell.
As she expected, there were no news from Jon. *Eastwatch, Last Hearth, Karlhold, Wolfsfort...Winterfell.* The only reason behind the precise and quick attack on Karlhold was to add to their numbers. Strong enough, the white walkers could go straight to Winterfell and either just send a weak force to Hornwood as to prevent reinforcements to be sent, or ignore the Castle altogether. Ramsgate and White Harbour in the east; Deepwood Motte and Stony Shore in the west were the Keeps less likely to be attacked if the white walkers were indeed planning on taking the King’s Road south to the Riverlands.

From above, Daenerys saw an army slowly moving south of Castle Cerwyn; she could not engage them, not with only one dragon, particularly without an army of her own nearby to protect Rhaego from harm. *And we need to make them believe we are losing.* This was the worst of all...knowing that all those lifes would be lost as part of a strategy. There was no other way, Daenerys told herself over and over again. They had already saved many northerners by reatreacting...and by delaying their advances, while still leading them to trust their success and not look behind, but go forward, Daenerys hoped to honour the sacrifice of the soldiers.

She arrived in the middle of the battle, the flames high enough to provide visibility for Rhaego to burn the mid section of the white walkers army before he finally landed in the courtyard of Winterfell.

It took another half a day and losses nearing half their forces for the white walkers to be finally repelled. It was far from a victory and everybody knew. It could have been worse if Daenerys had not arrived with her dragon when she had arrived, Winterfell would have been outran, like it happened at Last Hearth.

Jon had fooled them, by hiding a great contigenet of his men in the crypts together with the women and children as their attention was concentrated on the dragon; the crypts being magically protected against necromancy and the Ice Demons, believing that they had managed to enlist the bulk of Jon´s forces, left to continue their journey south.

“How many have you seen marching while we were being attacked?” Jon asked as Maester Flowers tended his wounds.

“Over fifty thousand. I could fly to Hornwood to see if they were also attacked. Since they breached the wall at Eastwatch and Queenscrown has been left undisturbed, they are clearly concentrating in our east coast.”

“No, better to fly to Castle Cerwyn and visit the survivors. Moat Cailin is prepared and surely they will understand that our lack of communication means they are next. Too risky to fly to Hornwood as it stands...mayhaps in a few days...” Daenerys nodded; she understood that Jon was worried about his cousin, Rickon, who would have been expected to stay at either Winterfell or Queenscrown, but had gone to Castle Cerwyn as the old Lord had died and the new Lord, his uncle, fell ill.

Thankfully, Rickon had survived and managed to save many of the Cerwyn smallfolk. Lady Barbrey Cerwyn, the mistress of the late Lord Stark, and Lord Cley Cerwyn, both had died. Lady Wylla Cerwyn, the widow of Cley, had sailed south in the first ships, as her grandfather, Lord Manderly, had insisted. Acting as de facto Lord Cerwyn, being the last living blood relative of the House, Rickon Stark decided to stay behind and not return to Winterfell, as the survivors needed leadership at that time.

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That the wedding of Queen Daenerys Targaryen to Lord Jon Stark, Warden of the North, at Winterfell, in the middle of the long night, was nothing short of a miracle: the moment Daenerys appeared in the godswood, all dressed in the colours of her House and wearing the Targaryen bridal cloak, the other two dragons, Viserion and Rhaegal, who had been staying in the south so far, surprised everybody by joining their brother, Rhaego, midwair.

Together, the three dragons performed an incredibly beautiful aerial dance, the full moon providing enough illumination for the guests to watch the show and admire its wild beauty.

The feasting was a subdued, as it was expected. There was dance, some speeches were made, and the soup served was thicker than usual, the bread, fresher.

They had waited a long time for this. Jon did not care for a big wedding, and he suspected that neither did Daenerys. They were eager to retreat to their chambers and to finally lay as husband and wife.

Once again, their joining of bodies provided each other with love and warmth, much needed in times of a cruel and unforgiving cold, the fire that would defeat the ice.

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**Dragonstone- Eleventh month of the year 300 A.C**

Daenerys arrived in time to put Jaehaerys in bed. Her boy was growing up and it pained her to be missing so much of his life, but he seemed to take it in stride, insistently asking when his “wolf” would be delivered, now that Daenerys was married to his “friend”, Jon.

*He does not give up easily. I will give him that.* Daenerys must have explained at least four times that Ghost was not a toy but a direwolf, and that the animal was helping in the war effort, much like the dragons.

Jaehaerys said he "knew it already" just to wait five more minutes before asking again.

She finally managed to kiss her son goodnight and went to have a closed door meeting with Cersei. As usual, there was so much to discuss. First, however, Cersei delighted Daenerys with anecdotes of Jaehaerys and Alyssane, and how the boy had mentioned that his betrothed should only be playing with girls her age when some of the young boys at the Keep showed some interest in having the almost two years old princess join in their games.

Daenerys smiled, as the tale was supposed to bring her some joy, but she took the opportunity to briefly discuss her wishes for Jaehaerys upbringing: “Being protective of Alyssane is a good thing; being jealous, is not. I love my son and I know he is a good boy, however I wish him not to be raised thinking because he is a man and a king that women is be treated as his property. Alyssane is to receive as good education as he is in order to become his most trusted adviser, his *equal*, not his plaything. I trust you will see that Viserys daughter grows up to be a great Queen, as I intend to raise my son to be the best King Westeros has seen. We have not agreed on their names by accident after all…”

It was only then that Daenerys finally won over Cersei. Their interests aligned, yes, but the Queen Mother showed real affection towards Alyssane and a wisdom Cersei wished she had. She tended to spoil her children; that they turned out to be good and capable, she had to give half the credit to the
Arryns...not that Cersei would openly admit it, of course.

Besides, nobody could deny that the Targaryens had certain tendencies. That Daenerys, despite obviously loving her only son, was concerned about enough to actively seek not to overindulge the boy king was admirable.

Children and their diatribites aside, the game was still being played: “As expected, Tyrion is firmly in House Lannister’s grasp. His letters show that he supports the decision of keeping the Tyrell brat as Lady of the Rock. He is not enthusiastic about it, but agrees with the reasons. While he, as a Maester, is sworn to be neutral and is not personally pleased with his late brother’s widow seducing his nephew, Tyrion defends the match. Tyrek is infatuated with the whore and it does saves them a lot of gold, not to pay her a pension. But we know better than to believe that saving their hoarded gold and giving in to a young man’s lust are their only reasons... “

They went over the ramifications and concluded there was nothing they could do at the moment. The new Lord of the Rock wrote a long and apologetic letter to the Queen Mother, explaining he had not wished to “bother” her during the war with the subject of his wedding, and reminding Daenerys that, as King Rhaegar himself had approved the alliance through marriage between Houses Tyrell and Lannister before, he assumed there would be no problems in simply continuing as it was.

Tyrek obviously knew or, most probably, was told that his assumptions were wrong, but played his card well; Daenerys indeed had no time to protest.

There were, however, other ways she could punish them. “I will demand Lord Mace to personally rally and lead his troops. We are moving and stationing men at the Trident as we speak. If we are lucky, Lord Tyrell dies a valiant death and his mother, broken hearted, finally succumbs to old age. From that family, I only ever trusted Willas and Rhaenys...”

Keeping Rhaenys content and on Dragonstone was a priority. Karlhold had fallen and Ser Arthur Dayne was ordered by the Queen to leave the remaining reachmen in North under the command of a Tyrell cousin, go to White Harbour and from there, sail to Dragonstone, taking his place both as Kingsguard and as Rhaenys lover.

Cersei asked about the war, how far south they were expecting the walkers to go and where exactly where they now.

“The Trident is their destination; we are now sure. they are slow, but they move without interruption. At this point, we are not to engage them in open field, so they are allowed to move from castle to castle. Our troops North are regrouping, but we cannot have them going in their pursuit for there is a possibility they had divided their forces and we are afraid they left some still beyond the wall.”

Cersei was nit well vresed in military strategy, but Daenerys had been clear enough: “This means you do not expect to halt their advance in the foreseeable future and that there is a great possibility they will cross The Neck by the new years?”

Daenerys nodded: “Yes.” she said, then added. “We are counting on they passing through Moat Cailin. We want them to come south and to die south.”
Chapter Summary

Ice and Fire.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long wait.
This Chapter’s all explanations and action.
I have a hard time with action and well...I wanted to make it worthy it.
I hope I did.

Winterfell, fourth month of the year 301 A.C

Everything had been a calculated risk, their losses carefully considered and anticipated. It was the worst thing in Jon’s opinion, sending soldiers to the frontlines expecting them to die, for the sake of their strategy.

Yet, it needed to be done: their future victory lied in the pretense of losing the war. If they managed to make the White Walkers believe they were winning, they would march south without ever looking back.

Sixth Month

Moat Cailin had been the longest and bloodiest battle. The Undead Army defeated the combined northern, dornish and riverlander forces and continued to march south. As expected.

Their numbers had somewhat dwindled, as Daenerys continued to use her dragons to burn their dead, but they did manage to raise so many and add to their numbers that the even though they had lost thousands, it was not near enough to make any difference and save more of their soldiers lives in the process.

Seventh Month
A raven managed to arrive at Winterfell early in the morning.

Lord Jon Stark read the message in the privacy of his chambers. The Long Night was still upon them, but even in the harshest of winters, for a brief morning hour, there was enough light for him to make sense of what was written without the aid of a candle.

He took a deep breath, holding the small piece of parchment Maester Flowers had delivered him; the magical raven had vanished and the old Reachman knew better than to interrupt his Lord and the Queen after all those months of acquaintance.

Although they needed to be mindful of their resources, the message was important enough, and Flowers opted to waste parchment instead of displeasing his masters by demanding a meeting when the Queen was in clear need of her rest.

Jon read the message three times.

*It is time.*

His eyes fell to the large bed in the middle of the room and to the lovely figure beneath the furs; Daenerys was in deep sleep, a small smile illuminating her features. Jon took that as meaning that his wife was having pleasant dreams, a rare occurrence in those terrible days, which made him even less confident that waking her up was a good idea.

Jon chuckled; Daenerys was *not* a morning person.

Seeing his wife like this, so relaxed and happy, gave Jon hope.

Maester Flowers had come not even five minutes ago, knocked on the door and delivered Jon the message they had been waiting for all those months.

Still, Jon did not want to wake her up.

*No, not yet.*

Jon marvelled: Daenerys was as beautiful in repose as she was atop her dragon, riding for battle. *Or riding me.* Images of the past night, him watching her landing near the Godswood, they having dinner at the Great Hall and then, retiring to their chambers and making love twice before drifting into slumber, passed through his head.

Daenerys had spent the last ten days visiting the Court at Dragonstone, where not only northerners, but also riverlanders were now taking refuge from the war. Among them was Jon’s cousin, Sansa Tully, Lady of Riverrun, and her son, Lord Axel Tully, a suckling baby. Daenerys had personally overseen part of the evacuation and, although Dragonstone was nearing full capacity, she felt it was the safest place to receive a Lady Paramount who was not only a friend, but family.

Jon was yet to meet Axel, young and innocent, unaware a war was being fought at that moment in his homeland. His brief life, like so many other children, noble or not, already deeply affected by the White Walkers. *He is probably an orphan.* Jon thought bitterly; it had been almost two moon turns since they heard about Edmure Tully.

Last they heard about Sansa’s husband, he had managed to survive the attack at Moat Cailin and led his men to defend the Twins.

But that Castle *also* fell to the Walkers and, in the confusion that followed another defeat, nobody knew for sure who was dead or alive. As they were just recovering from the civil war in the previous
year, the battles in the Riverlands were more chaotic and bloody than the ones fought in the North; even their milder climate was now as cold and unforgiving as the northern winter, which made communication all but impossible.

He was more than aware that any night could be their last at this point. They were not losing the war, but not actually winning it.

*We need to go. We need to stop this.*

Daenerys could have her pleasant dreams *later.*

“Dany.” Jon whispered in her ear as he covered the exposed neck with thousand kisses. “Dany, wake up…”

“Mmmm...no... *make me !” she said like a petulant child.

Jon would love nothing more than to punish his wife’s insolence, but his duty had to come first. *Damm White Walkers! :*

“Bran has sent word; we need to fly North.”

Daenerys immediately opened her eyes.

***

There was a calmness, a stillness in the air that made Daenerys fearful.

Not only the cold- milder than expected- but a sense of doom invaded her thoughts as they flew.

Rhaegal remained at Dragonstone, physically protecting the boy King Jaehaerys from any threat that might come his way. Daenerys was not a fool; she knew that even though Westeros was supposedly unified fighting a common war, House Targaryen still had to contend with jealousy and ambition, a terrible legacy of previous mistakes.

It was the last thing she needed, to worry about her son, but when does a mother not worry?

*I pray this will be over soon enough for me to give Jon sons and daughters, for us to be a family.* Daenerys had witnessed too much destruction and suffering for a lifetime; she wished nothing but peace, to her and Westeros, and that was precisely why she was risking her life, once again, hoping the outcome would be favorable, wanting nothing more than to survive to see another day.

Her heart, however, weighted in her chest.

Jon did not say anything, probably also lost in his own thoughts. However worries he surely had, Jons ensued his wife’s inner turmoil and placed his chest against her back even tighter, burying his face in her hair, a way of comforting her without words.

Daenerys closed her eyes for a second, inhaling the pure air and slowly exhaling it for a couple of times. *Better now.* Viserion was flying ahead of them, the most reckless of her dragons, and his behaviour, especially now, only made her even more anxious about what was to come. *He should have stayed behind.*

But Viserion did come. *He also needed the exercise,* she told herself.

*And we need a back up as we will meet with resistance.*
The visibility was low, but Daenerys had learned to fly safely in such poor conditions and her dragons were had gotten more used to the cold winds of the North now that they spent so much time there.

An image was forming before her eyes, a sight she had expected to see for all those past months: ahead of them, an arrow shaped mountain stood proudly.

“We arrived.”

***

The frozen, dead weirwood sat in the middle of a stone formation.

Jon dismounted with dread:

“Stay here!” he told Daenerys, who nodded back at him.

The place was deserted, which was a surprise. Bran had mentioned that he saw a Guard of Seven White Walkers protecting the Altar when he sent his ravens to investigate.

Seven. Do they have a King, too? Daenerys thought how this had all the tidings of a trap. With two dragons, they were not particularly stealth in their arrival and had prepared an aerial attack to deal with these White Walkers left behind, just to find out the place supposedly abandoned.

They had stopped at Castle Black in the previous night and asked for six men to join the mission. Daenerys’s dragon was big enough to ferry them and Viserion would be in support.

She watched the Black Brothers dismounting and encircling Jon; other than her husband, only Samwell Tarly carried a Valyrian Steel Sword. And this because Lord Tarly and his heir died in battle and Samwell inherited Heartsbane. Daenerys would never forgive the late Lord Randyl Tarly for not allowing them to reforge Heartsbane.

At least, after Willas and Garland died in succession fighting the Walkers - and Lord Tyrell refusing to leave The Reach, claiming he had to stay behind and "defend it", Lord "first in battle" Tarly finally made North, where he perished at Moat Cailin. That he took six and ten years old Dickon Tarly with him seemed a recipe for disaster in Daenerys opinion, but perhaps because he had married the boy when he was no older than three and ten and his equally young wife was expecting, Lord Tarly assumed the succession for Horn Hill was secure.

Fool. Nobody is safe when fighting Ice Demons.

Daenerys flew to Moat Cailin, collected the sword from a Knight sworn to House Tarly, and delivered Heartsbane to poor old Samwell Tarly, who barely managed to lift the zweihander, but guided by a sense of family obligation, insisted to join such dangerous mission…

She observed as they walked towards the middle of the spiral of rocks, arranged curved lines going from the center of the circle to its extremities in a crescent order of size.

In its middle sat a black, oily stone table. The Altar. The craftsmanship seemed eerily misplaced in such a raw, elemental place, like the table had fallen from the skies, ready and perfect, never being moved ever since.

Mayhaps this temple was built around the table… 
Daenerys had been at Oldtown and seen the base of the Hightower and with disgust she reminded herself that yes, she had also been to the Iron Islands and seen the Seastone Chair...

*It is the same stone, the same awfull, disgusting , oily black stone.*

Grand Maester Marwyn spent time in Ashai and confirmed that the whole place was built on black stones. He also believed the Hightowers, great supporters of the Faith and the Order of Maesters, were more than aware of the existence of the Church of Starry Wisdom, founded by the Bloodstone Emperor of Old, who brought the Great Empire of the Dawn to its knees, and who worshipped a black oily stone that fell from the sky, suposedly the source of his nepharious power and magic.

Daenerys concluded this place- the Heart of Winter- was double cursed: by the Children of the Forest, who created the Walkers, and by the blood stone, which obviously channel eviled powers of an unknown nature...

She then looked up to see her dragon and found Viserion flying from the montain and back. Daenerys took to finally observe her surroundings: the Arrow shaped mountain was not the single one, but the tallest of a range.

There were hills and visible caves entrances around the area that could be used as hidde places.

Had they noticed the danger?

*They are too far to hear me now.*

***

“They must be hiding in the caves.” Jory Cassel said.

Jon agreed; he had noticed the caves once he realized the Walkers were not by the Altar. Brandon had specifically told them there would be seven- such a number was not an accident- and Grand Maester Marwyn, along with the crazy Hightower Lady that now sat by his side and “ advised” him, had convinced Jon that seven warriors were to fly North and help him in this mission.

As Jon was not well versed in the faith of his mother, he had assumed the Seven Guards Brandon had spoken about were just a coincidence. *Not according to Marwyn and Mad Mallora Hightower.* When Daenerys mentioned that her dragon was able to carry seven more on his back, Jon simply shrugged and went about to find six nights watchmen to join.

He had learned long time ago not to discuss such matters of faith and magic. Jon never sought to understand such mysteries as the late King Rhaegar did; being of the North, he simply accepted magic existed, in different degrees and forms.

It made things easier: if the Three Eyed Raven saw something, Lord Jon Stark believed it; if Grand Maester Marwyn offred another of this theoris, Lord Jon Stark listened…

Why torturing himself trying to rationalize the Long Night when even Maester Flowers had decided it was best to ignore the teachings of the Citadel and fight magic with magic?

Jon turned to answer Cassel: “Aye, they must be waiting for us, so we better worry and find this weapon very soon.”

Jon moved a few steps closer to the altar and pointed to the table. “I will look under it; moving it might make a noise and attract them.”
“They know we are here. Dragons are not silent creatures…” Samwell Tarly offered. “It should be a sword what you are looking for. The texts in Essos call it Lightbringer. If not under this Altar, then we should look at the weirwood.”

Jon noticed a thick layer of snow and ice underneath the black stone table. “Go with a couple of Black Brothers, Samwell and search the tree. The less time we spent here, the better. “

Jon´s heart skipped a beat and his body tensed as the *white cold* hit him from down his feet and travelled through legs, torso and neck, penetrating his head as a dagger would. 

***

Daenerys watched as the white Walkers emerged from underneath, their white, frozen hands coming out of the snow and effortlessly propelling their bodies, diving out of the invisible tunnel system that surely went under their Temple and landing on their feet.

***

If there was a moment when Jon regretted observing his duties as Lord of Winterfell all too well was now: Ice was a ceremonial sword, unfit for battle like situations. *And this is definitely a battle like situation.* Regardless of the size, Valyrian Steel is not a heavy; Jon managed to slay the Walkers who attacked him, even though he was still not used to such long sword. He had engaged with Walkers before with Ice, but he had always chosen the moment and time to confront them, a luxury he did not have now.

Freed of the chivalric vows and only too eager to get the hell out of there, Jon had no qualms about dispatching another Ice Demon off by stabbing him on the back. The scream of pain, a growl of angst, was the only sign of humanity in those beings before they exploded into a thousand pieces of ice, melting in the thin air as if they had never really existed.

Jon continued to swing Ice and pursue the enemy, his vision completely blocked to anything else other than the walkers. It was only when two men clad in the outfit of the Night's Watch attacked him with their bare hands that Jon realized the gravity of the situation.

*We have to defeat them fast, lest we will never leave.*

Jon finally looked around: Samwell Tarly, against all odds, was not only alive, but the fallen walker by his feet meant he had at least defeated one. That he looked more than frightened- sick, really- was not Jon’s primary concern, so he pressed on and went to help Jory, again taking the walker by surprise with a stealth attack, burying Ice to the hit inside the inhuman body of the frozen demon.

***

Daenerys breathed in relief as she saw three human figures in the end.

The end, however, was nowhere near.
Jon, Jory and Samwell regrouped. Despite being alive, the fat Reachman was so shaken that could barely be of any assistance, so Jon was really addressing Jory when he spoke: “We need to keep our eyes open; there must be at least one more White Walker. I myself counted six.”

Jory’s forehead furrowed: “Better search for this artefact and fly back to the Wall. If there is a seventh walker, soon he will reveal himself. Those things have no self preservation instincts and he is too far from his Army to try and run to them.”

“My wife and her dragon are waiting for us. They are in a vulnerable position as we speak: if there are more walkers out there, they could attempt to take down our means of transportation and strand us here.”

The Walkers were adaptive and prone to use claimed weapons as their own. They came to Winterfell with scorpions- probably found at Last Hearth or Karlhold- and attempted to take down the dragons. The bolts were not big enough to make any real damage and Daenerys had trained her beasts to evade such attacks. Nevertheless, some scorpions did come close enough, with a couple actually hitting Rhaegal, one of the reasons why he stayed behind this time around, to give him time to recover.

Jory searched the weirwood; the carved face resembled the walkers features, ghostlike eyes and a thin line for mouth, a far cry from the expressiveness the northerner was used to see in the heart trees of his homeland.

Against his better judgment, Jory stuck his arm inside the opening, feeling the insides of the tree, a mushy, wet, unpleasant texture that reminded him of human flesh.

Disgusted, as soon as he figured there was no weapon hidden inside, Jory retrieved his arm from the dead tree. Samwell Tarly looked at him with wide eyes. Normally, Jory would have told off the obese man - the frontline was no place for delicate souls- but the southerner started to stammer:

“Blooming…blood…”

And only then, Jory saw it, his arm covered in blood. warm and alive.

The sword was made of ice, the pommel, a hardened type of dragonglass, not the brittle material Jon was accostumed with. Magic is woven into it.

With the tip of his fingers, Jon gently and briefly touched the ice, trying to assert if the metal like quality evident to the eyes held true to the touch; surprisingly, the surface emitted heat instead of cold.

No moment to lose, Jon walked towards the tree and, as he neared the sacred place of his enemies, the cruel sound of thousands horns was heard.

One time.

Two times.

Three times.
Jon plunged the sword into the mouth of the carved face. The sword changed: where was once Ice, was now blue fire. The weirwood, alive now, started bleeding.

“We need to go. NOW!” someone screamed.

Sword in hand, Jon ran with the others to where Daenerys was waiting.

***

Daenerys heartbeat was beating an accelerated rate as the scene unfolded: Jon carried a sword; he stopped by the three.

A single Ice Demon emerged from a cave with a horn; he blew it three times, the sound so awful and odious that made the dragons howled in pain. Daenerys calming presence atop of Rhaegal protected the beast.

But what about Viserion?

Jon stabbed the tree; the white and frozen wood suddenly turned into a healthy shade of brown. The canopy was now green and red, filled with life. The dead tree was alive for mayhaps two seconds and then, it disintegrated into a cloud of dust that threatened to engulf Jon and the others as they ran towards her.

From behind the Mountain, seven Giants in thrall of the walkers, were running.

They carried enormous weapons made of ice

Her eyes went to the skies, searching for Viserion.

Daenerys saw as the dragon fought to regain the strength and continue to fly. He was in agony.

Fly away, Viserion...fly for safety.

After the third blow, came a dead silence. Jon, Jory and Tarly managed to make it safety to where she stood.

As they prepared to leave the place, Daenerys looked back.

At the top of her lungs, she screamed: “VISERION!”

Then, time stood still.

She could not breath. Her voice disappeared. She could not feel her blood pumping through her veins or notice when a dragonglass arrow hit her shoulder. Daenerys could not even remember Jon shaking her and telling her to command Rhaego to go.

They were back in the skies, she alternating between reliving the scene of Viserion´s death, his fight against the Giants that took him, and the darkness of deep sleep.

***

Maester Aemon had died, so it fell to Samwell Tarly to treat Her Grace´s wounds, and he did so to
the detriment of his own health, for he also had been hit when the White Walker left started shooting at them.

“Although the arrow did not damage any arteries or vital organs, it was imbued with magic and is keeping Her Grace in a coma.” The Reachman explained. They had already cauterized the wound with the blue fire of Lightbringer mid flight and Samwel was sure this act of desperation had actually saved Daenerys life; had they waited to arrive at Castle Black to operate her, whatever kind of substance that was coated in the arrow could have poisoned her.

“No word comes out from Castle Black that the Queen is in this state.” Jon held the hand of his wife as she slept and spoke with the newly made Maester and the Lord Commander; nobody was to be informed, not even His Grace, that they lost a dragon and that his mother was unresponsive.”

*She will wake up...I know she will.*

***

*Daenerys was before a house with a red door; she could hear laughter and smell lemons.*

*A silver haired girl, came from inside.*

*“Rhaella?”*

*The little girl just smiled and ran away; Daenerys entered the house and followed her. She had never been in this house before, but was not afraid. Somehow, it felt home, like the old tree house at Dragonstone, where she would have tea with her dolls everyday at five before her nanny would come and take her to the Castle.*

*Daenerys hated castles; she had always wanted a place like this. It was spacious, but not sumptuous. A comfortable, cozy house for a happy, beautiful family.*

*She finally arrived at the garden. There was a beautifully set table. Daenerys walked barefoot, the grass caressing her feet. A soft breeze, the smell of sea, golden rays of sun warming her skin...*

*Her mother had the silver haired girl on her lap.*

*The two Rhaellas looked so peaceful, so content in being together, that made Daenerys brifely consider staying...*

*“ Dany !” the Queen Mother said. “ Sit with us for a minute, but only a minute: you are not staying for long!”*

*“She knew her mother was right; she did not belong there. Not yet, at least: “Mother, I've missed you so!” Daenerys smiled at the little girl. “ Rhaella, I am so happy to finally meet you!”*

*Her daughter hugged her and said that she too, was happy. “ But you must come back for Jae...he has nobody but you, while I have nana, papa and Uncle Vis!”*

*A voice Daenerys had not heard in years came from behind her : “Sister, I am sorry I had to leave you and my family the way I did.” Viserys said with his usual charming smile. “ When you come back, please tell Cersei to finally listen to me and find herself a lover! She is raising our Alysane very well, but the lioness cannot live through her cubs! She is still...young and beautiful . She should be enjoy ing her many assets, don’t you think?”*
“Oh, Vis...we knew you were sick. Nobody blames you, dear brother.”

“Then, please, stop blaming yourself for Viserion. My dragon has merely returned to its master.” Daenerys was relieved; she knew that without their source of power, the walkers would not be able to raise Viserion as their mount. But to have confirmation that he had joined her family in this other world renewed her strength and sense of purpose.

"Before I go back, I would like to…”

Viserys understood immediately. “...speak with Rhaegar.” He shrugged. “Yes, I know...he is waiting for you at his study. Always with his nose in parchments and scriptures...”

Daenerys found Rhaegar playing his harp, by the window. “I prefer to watch them having fun than joining in myself...Viserys thinks I am jealous because now he has a dragon; I am not. Rhaegal will be Jaehaerys when he is ready. He never truly belonged to me…”

“A Dragon is not a slave.” Daenerys muttered.

“You married the Stark boy.” Rhaegar said without a hint of resentment. “Good. “ he smiled. “You would have never loved me had I not forced you to. I am sorry for that...for hurting you. Forgive me;it needed to be done...the prophecy, you see…”

He stopped himself; Daenerys looked sick. “Nevermind what I thought I needed to do...you have always been stronger than any of us and that is why you cannot linger here. Time works different in this world. You just arrived but a moonturn has passed since you fell asleep. “

“All is forgiven, Rhaegar. Trully. I could never not love you. and you gave me Jaehaerys . I always tell him about how brave and intelligent his father was...I assure you , Rhaegar that our son will grow up to be the man you always knew he would be. ” She then paused to offer Rhaegar a sad smile. “Talk to me...say what you need to say before I leave, brother.”

“Viserion’s sacrifice was not in vain; Jon Stark is indeed wielding Lightbringer as we speak. The sword has Ice and Fire balanced and will restore balance in your world. The Walkers, however, did not spend ten thousand years planning this war without a back up plan. The horn you heard…”

“The Horn of Winter.” Daenerys supplied.

“Yes...now that they lost their necromancing powers without the tree, they are using the horn to wake the dead Giants from the earth. I always thought it was a metaphor for earthquakes, but it is not. Giants inhabited Westeros before and they buried their dead like we did.”

A whole moontoon passed and they left the Heart of Winter without defeating the last member of the Guard. A single Walker could passed undetected by the Wall, while the Night's watch fought the Undead Giants.

“How do we finally defeat them? We assume it will be at the Isle of Faces…”

“The Walkers are creatures of Ice created by the Children. Their fight is to either prevail or to be put to rest. They did not ask to be made and their revenge is understandable, I suppose. They lost the power of raising our dead, but they still bring the cold with them. With the Horn now, they can prolong the fight until they reach the God's Eye. They can still freeze the lake- it will take some days, I think- and make their way to the Isle, where the last Children live.

You and Jon Stark need to go there and bury Lightbringer in the most sacred of weirwoods. Both the Walkers and the Children will perish; their spirits will join others greenseers inside the trees and
Spring will come again.”

***

**Ninth Month**

“Dany…Dany…”

Warm hands on her cold skin; Daenerys opened her eyes to see Jon’s face.

“Jon!” She smiled.” I am sorry that I kept you waiting…”

Jon took a deep breath, relief written in his handsome features. “The important thing is that you are here again. You need to regain your strength…”

“I know--- the war.” she sighted.

“No, our future. “ he said after kissing her forehead. “ The Giants are fearsome as wights, but they are avoiding confrontation. There was another battle at Moat Cailin. As you imagined, we left the Giants pass; otherwise the Wall would have fallen... we fought enough to kill many of them and not lose many of us. I ordered a general retreat to the Castles and for our armies not to engage if could be avoidable. They are to wait for us to lead them in a final attack. Our forces are moving to Harrenhal as we speak, since it is the closest castle to the God’s Eye.”

“Yes...Harrenhal.” Daenerys voice was weak, but determined. Jon helped her eat the broth and bread crumbles and told his wife the things she wanted to know:

“ His Grace is safe at Dragonstone; we still have two dragons and soon, soon, we will be able to see the Sun again.”

***

**Tenth Month**

Queen Daenerys and Lord Jon Stark arrived at Harrenhal late at night and promptly met with their Generals, who briefed them in the situation: they were living in what could only be described as an unofficial truce, the still big Army of the Undead re-grouping at the other side of the huge lake as the Westerosi Army did the same at Harrenhal.

The next day, Daenerys flew to Dragonstone as Jon continued to prepare their final attack. It had been three months since she last saw Jaehaerys and , in the event of her death, she wanted to have this final memory of her beloved son...

Before returning to the war front, Daenerys had another closed door meeting with her good sister.

She told Cersei of Viserys words.

The Lannister woman was in tears. “ Are you certain it was not a dream...that Viserys is really in a better place?”

“How can we know for sure? It was... real to me. “ Daenerys thought about her experience many times ever since she woke up. She agreed the vision was almost too good to be true, an ideal place of
rest and wonder for those she loved.

The fact that she saw no signs of Aegon, Elia or her Father spoke volumes to her. *My own private paradise would not have any of them.*

But there was one detail that gave Daenerys hope that, in fact, she had been there, with Rhaegar, Viserys, her mother and daughter.

“ I spoke with Rhaegar; he gave me information on *how* to defeat the White Walkers. If it comes to pass like he said it would, then we will have confirmation that I actually visited them in the afterlife... then we will know they wait for us!”

***

**Last week of the Eleventh Month of the year 301 A.C**

They were crossing the frozen lake by foot.

The Westerosi Forces attacked the Undead Army several times in the course of the previous week. Their losses were heavy. It was difficult to fight against the Giants and Daenerys, having already lost a dragon, decided to only fly with Rhaego again when time came for her and Jon to reach the Isle of Faces.

The reasons behind the choice of not using the dragon were explained to the Generals as soon as Her Grace returned from Dragonstone: “There is no need anymore to burn the dead as soon as they fall; we know exactly where they are now, so scouting with dragons brings us no great benefit. On the contrary: it would make them vulnerable to a Giant’s attack; coupled with the magical horn, the effects are devastating. “

As Rhaegar had told her, the Undead Army, now unable to recruit so to speak but having thousands of years of preparation, adapted to the new state of things and used the Giants as their cavalry, with the remaining human wights trained in archery. They were not very good at, the zombie archers, but ikept the war going before they managed to freeze that great mass of water.

Gaining time was important, since the walkers would never reach the Isle by boat: the magic of the children protected the last remnants of their civilization and only those they deemed worthy were granted passage through the troubled waters and thick mist.

***

“It should be there.” Jon said to Daenerys as they observed a single, large clearance in the sea of trees that covered the Isle.

As soon as they landed, with the dragon going to nest near a beautiful waterfall, it became clear that this temple was not unlike the one they had visited in the Heart of Winter: there was an Arrow shaped mountain somewhere, a rocks arranged in a spiral formation and an altar of sorts, not made of black stone but of hardened dragonglas.

The Heart Tree, however, was visibly alive and well, completely illuminated with lamps made of
leaves. The fire inside was the same blue that Lightbringer generated when ignited by its magic.

And Then, From the trees, the children appeared.

Jon had always imagined the children to be, well, childlike, but those before them looked like warriors.

Small and lithe, green skinned and yellow eyed, tested soldiers of past wars.

The tallest of those magical creatures, wearing a beautiful headdress made of leaves and berries, addressed Jon and Daenerys with a steady voice. “The Champions of Ice and Fire...Our Bringers of Death!”

The other children answered in unison. “We shall rest!”

The trees also spoke: “Through Death, thos who sing the song of the earth will join their brothers and sisters, their mothers and fathers, their daughters and sons.”

“We will become One.”

***

Jon and Daenerys were then led by their Priest - or Priestess? - to the Heart Tree.

The Child gestured to the sword and explained the ritual:

”The Fire is hers; she is to take the sword, cut her hand with its fire and offer it to the tree.

The Ice is his; he is to take the sword, cut his hand with its ice and offer it to the tree.

Together, you return the sword to the Mother Tree.

Once it is done, you will and not look back.

Our fates are not for your eyes;

Looking back, it will turn Fire into Ice and Ice, into Fire.

No men will ever see us again; this is how it should be.

We will become One.”

***

As soon as they landed at Harrenhal, Queen Mother Daenerys ordered the troops to go home.

When asked why, she simply stated: “The war is over. Spring will come in the first day of the new year.”

***
302 A.C Dragonstone

Like the day before and, hopefully, the day after, Lord Jon Stark woke up to find his wife, Queen Mother Daenerys Targaryen, in his arms.

But this day was not like any other.

Definitely not like the day before, the last day of the year 301 A.C

Where it had been dark and cold, it was now sunny and warm.

We lived to see Spring again.
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

The Maesters and their stories.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Red Keep, 312 A.C

Maesters are supposed to be neutral, to serve a Castle, not a House. We take vows to do so and while words have power, I doubted I could keep said Vows the moment I spoke them.

Whoever thinks The Citadel has survived for thousands of years because it does not play political games, is not only naive, but also idiotic.

In all honesty, most Maesters are idiots, grey sheep trained by The Citadel to do their bidding under the pretense of servitude. Certainly because of our reputation as nothing more than tamed pets, Lord Tywin Lannister requested our Order to send a Maester that believed in “curious things”, his intention being to keep King Aerys, rumored to be quite mad, busy with arcane pursuits to give him any trouble.

The year was 271 A.C and I had just arrived from extensive travels the year before; that I spent so long far away from The Order worked to my advantage, as they clearly did not know me well enough to accurately judge my character and leanings. There were rumours that I frequented brothels and kept company with hedge wizards at Oldtown, but in my line of research this was certainly to be expected.

Lord Tywin Lannister and The Citadel considered their jobs done and allowed me the courtesy of their indifference for most part. Aerys Targaryen suffered from a combination of illnesses and maladies, some undoubtedly rooted in the inbreeding of the Valyrians and exacerbated by the pressures of his position. It was only a matter of finding what made the man happy and indulging his illusions in a constructive way. His body quickly recovered and, while his mind would never be the what it was, the concoctions I developed indeed tempered his notoriously unpredictable behaviour and his outburts became less infrequent.

Some more observant courtiers noticed how light headed His Grace behaved since we started the treatment, or how the smile plastered on his face sometimes was clearly out of place, but nobody dared speak their minds: Lord Tywin Lannister was satisfied with the state of things, the King was happy and the Queen had even provided him with a long waited spare.

As the years passed, I found Lord Lannister to be an useful ally. I made his life under Aerys Targaryen more than bearable by providing His Grace with the remedies he grew dependable upon, by not interfering with Lord Lannister’s business and refusing to overtly influence any decisions The Hand of the King considered to be of great importance.
Lord Lannister came to trust my supposed neutrality and my obvious skills as healer and advisor so much that he allowed his younger son, the dwarf named Tyrion, the dubious honour of entrance to The Citadel. I told him the idea was a great one: the Order was the best place to welcome the unwanted but talented offspring of Lords and even mentioned how Tyrion could, one day succeed me in becoming Grandmaster, a prospect that Lord Lannister found ever so appealing, since he worked to have a Lannister Queen sitting on the Iron Throne and half lions to inherit the Kingdom.

I provided The Citadel with worthless reports, or ignored their messages altogether; I gave Lord Lannister glimpses of what could be, but did nothing to stop Aerys Targaryen from hating his former friend, but merely convinced His Grace to be civil to His Lordship.

Narrow mindness and political ambitions were lowly, simple occupations for those who lacked a better understanding of the world and its inner workings. Therefore, I had no patience for dealing with the grey sheep more than I was obrigated to, and saw no point in wasting my time in assisting Lord Tywin Lannister in his quest for glory.

True Knowledge was what drove me. House Targaryen, the only living dragonlords of Old Valyria, had a love for knowledge that rivaled mine. They granted me full access and endless resources to continue with my researches. In exchange, I treated their bodies, listened to their problems and provided them with solutions.

Over thirty years ago, I came to King's Landing and spent half this time helping King Rhaegar and Queen Daenerys in their efforts to save Westeros. His Grace had hoped the Order would offer invaluable assistance. They, of course, did nothing of the sort.

Maesters were the ones who killed the dragons a century ago and ,in their stupidity, they believed Westeros would survive regardless of which measures would be taken. So, it was only logical for them, to sit and do nothing.

In their complacence and from the comfort of their Tower,some Maesters even denied the Long Night had ever happened the first time around, a position many Lords were just to happy to embrace.

Although I have always held The Order in mild contempt, their passivity in the face of utter calamity, while expected, still disgusted me; whatever loyalties they expected me to have towards The Citadel were forgotten . I despised cowardice and was more than prepared to fight; I had once killed a man with my bare hands in self defense and to witness my supposed “brothers” committing intelectual suicide was more than I could bare.

So, I turned my back on The Citadel and swore fealty to House Targaryen the day the dragons were born.

King Jaehaerys was both crowned and married in 309 A.C. His Mother, Queen Daenerys, moved North to be with her northern family and Queen Alysanne’s mother, Cersei Arryn, also retired and moved to Dorne in the next year.

I remained at the Red Keep; retirement had never crossed my mind. But the years started to catch up with me.

When The Crown Prince Rhaegar was born, I had lived with, advised, assisted and worked alongside five generations of House Targaryen.

And when Lannisters and Tyrells dared to raise their arms against the rightful King, I could not stay idle.
Maesters are supposed to be neutral, to serve a Castle, not a House. We take vows to do so and yes, when I said those words, I believed in them.

I was five and ten when I became a novice at The Citadel. Born a bastard to a noble house in the Reach, I was provided with education and options. As I lacked the talent and strength to become a knight, had no intention of marrying or fathering children and was quick to learn my numbers and letters, my greatest aspiration was to become a scholar and healer. Decision made, my fees were paid by House Redding, and our ties were immediately severed, much to the pleasure of Lady Redding I suppose.

Archmaester Marwyn left The Citadel before I felt sufficiently learned to earn a Valyrian Steel link, which would have served me greatly in the years to come, but alas, it was not meant to be. At that time, my mind was not as open as Marwyn’s; it took me years of living in the mystical North to contemplate the idea that magic was in fact, a prevalent force of nature, and when my long held beliefs were finally shaken, I was not longer a young man.

It took me about six years to forge my chain and to take my vows. I was surprised when they sent me to Winterfell, the seat of House Stark, and sensed there was a meaning behind this choice.

The selection is supposed to take into consideration the type of knowledge sought by a Lord, the experience a Maester has and to guarantee that neutrality would not be an issue, usually by having an assigned Maester not work near his birthplace.

Regardless of birth loyalties, we are sworn to a Keep, not to a Family. They explained in very simple terms: it was for our own safety. Politics are a rather messy business and, if a Maester was to be loyal to a House instead of its Seat, once a new Family was granted said Castle, or took it by violent means, our lives would most likely be forfeit as a result.

There was, however a secondary reason for our supposed neutrality: The Citadel had plans and Maesters were incredible assets.

I never believed the Order was behind any great conspiracy. The Citadel was not a single entity with defined goals and ambitions, but an amalgamation of groups, with subtle but clear divisions.

However, the Maesters indeed had common interests, and they mostly concerned with keeping the status quo and expanding their base of power while holding on the their safe position and neutral party ideal.

That was why I was being sent North. I had a good temperament and talent, they said, to advise Lord Stark properly; my mind was not filled with superstitious, but I was perfectly able to engage in such debates if need arise due to my curious nature.

In their opinion, I would be instrumental in bringing the North into the fold:

“Northerners live in isolation and this isolation just add to the differences that separate us. They are poor, but not as poor as they make us believe. Many northern Keeps spend years to request a Maester; there are some less than educated Lords who believed their healers and their ways are as
good as ours. To make matters worse, they prefer sending their children to The Wall rather than to The Citadel, which is simply absurd. Your mission is to help House Stark prosper, and the only way they can prosper is to take them out of their isolation, establishing true alliances in the south and showing them the benefits of education. In time, we hope other nobles will follow their lead…”

I expected more difficulties to put this plan into action, but Lord Rickard Stark was eager to have The North modernized— to a certain extent. I convinced him to give his heir a southron bride and, while Catelyn Tully proved not well suited for Brandon, her dowry in grains would feed many northerners coming Winter. There were also negotiations of a betrothal contract between his only daughter, Lyanna, and the Baratheon heir, but it never came to fruition; eventually, Lord Baratheon opted to search within the Stormlands and Lyanna was sent to Barrowton.

When Brandon Stark succeeded his Father, rational reasoning would not do. I had to change tactics. Where Lord Rickard could be swayed over the welfare of his people, this was only a secondary concern for Brandon.

My role changed; suddenly I was not only an advisor, but also Brandon Stark’s minder, keeping his many indiscretions and scandals far from public knowledge.

When The Crown contacted Winterfell, speaking about a plan to modernize The North, I assumed it was Grand Maester Marwyn’s influence, that he was also acting according to the guidelines of The Citadel.

But I was wrong: Marwyn had a very low opinion of our grey brothers. Not only that, but during my years long correspondence with Marwyn, his utter belief that Houses Targaryen and Stark would be instrumental to save Westeros from the Long Night was evident. As time passed, I also changed some of my views, gradually steering away from the crutches of The Citadel and accepting my life in the North.

At some point, I became more than a servant to Winterfell.

The North is harsh, cold, mysterious; their Gods are cruel and their people, strong. Their passions had to be fierce enough to survive the snows of their Winter. Lord Brandon Stark hated his wife as much as Lord Eddard loved his and that indomitable nature was passed to the next generation, the same generation I had hoped to make less northern.

My advice for Lord Rickard Stark, to have Catelyn Tully as Lady of Winterfell, was a good one. Lord Tully had raised his daughter for Duty, and dutiful she was, until the end. That Brandon Stark was a man who saw Duty as an annoying task, I had not known. The woman suffered, and I watched. She is now happy as Lady Baratheon, mother to the only daughter of Lord Baratheon, a girl named Careen, whom His Lordship dotes upon I am informed. Her other daughter, the Lady Sansa of Riverrun, surviving child of the late Lord Brandon Stark, writes me every moonturn with tales of her children, all auburn haired, blue eyed, proud Tully she says.

But in my eyes, Sansa Tully will always be Sansa Stark.

I lived to see the boy I brought up to be a southron Lord Stark running away from home, going beyond the Wall and becoming the last greenseer. Marwyn told me about the Raven, the sight and skinchanging.

Fool that I was, I only believed when I saw with my own eyes the birds killing Lord Stark, his son commanding the animals, Brandon dressed in their skin as the ravens drove his father to his death.

I lived to see giants, white walkers, wights; to see dragons flying once again and dying in the cold
wastelands of the place I came to call home; I lived long enough to see the son become a father and then, a grandfather and long enough to come to care and love those I was hired to serve.

and much to my surprise and happiness, I found out that I was too, cared and loved in return.

Ten years after the War for the Dawn was won at the Trident, The Reach and The Westerlands repaid the sacrifices The North made with treason. As King Jaehaerys reached his adulthood on his fourteenth name day, his mother, Queen Daenerys finally took her place as Lady Stark, bringing to Winterfell its heir, Lord Eron Stark and daughter Rhaella. She was also pregnant with a third heir to Lord Jon, a boy they would name Daeron, and, understandably, Her Grace wanted to rest from warring and be with her family.

But peace evaded us once again.

They said many things to justify their treason; that Jaehaerys was not the son of King Rhaegar, but that Lord Jon Stark had placed a bastard in the Queen’s belly; they went as far as suggest that the direwolf pup his stepfather had finally presented His Grace on his tenth nameday was proof that the Dragon was, in fact, a wolf.

They also said that Lord Aemond Tyrell was the true heir, being that his mother, Princess Rhaenys was the only legitimate child of the late King and that the betrothal between Houses Targaryen and Lannister had been broken unlawfully twice, forgetting that Prince Viserys had wed a Lannister and sired a half Lannister daughter himself.

Controlling two thirds of Westeros economy and population and having access to good grain and more gold than they deserve, had blinded the Lannisters and the Tyrells and rendered them reckless.

They were blind because, from The North to Dorne, nobody accepted their excuses.

And reckless, because even among themselves, there were many who also did not believe in them and refused to fight.

and The North remembered.

The two surviving sons of Lord Rickard stayed behind: Lord Eddard Stark, at Stony Shore with his wife, Lady Ashara, where they were raising Robb’s heir, a boy named Brandon.

Lord Benjen sat as the Stark at Winterfell; his wife, Lady Val, held Queenscrown in his and their son, Bael, name.

Benjen’s eldest son, Rickon, who had inherited Castle Cerwyn during the war for the Dawn, was among the generals that went south. Anya Norrey remained at the Cerwyn lands with their two daughters and baby boy.

Despite having a thirst for adventure, Lady Arya Dustin took her responsibilities seriously and also remained at Barrow Hall with her children and people. Ser Gendry, once again, followed his Liege south, for what many believed would be a prolonged conflict.

But they were wrong.

The war was won before the year was at a close.

The Lannisters and Tyrells did not have Lord Jon Stark as a general. The Hero of the Dawn was not only respected, but loved by his subordinates. No matter how many sellswords they could hire in Essos, or how great was the nautical advantage they believed to have by controlling the Redwyne
Fleet, their soldiers did not believe their cause and Westeros knew their dragons and they were named Targaryen, not Tyrell.

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Casterly Rock, 320 A.C

Maesters are supposed to be neutral, to serve a Castle, not a House. We take vows to do so and yet, when I said the words, I never truly meant it.

At the beginning I might have even entertained the thought of finding a path far from The Rock away from my Lord Father’s influence, but it was an illusion.

I have always been Tyrion Lannister and a lion, albeit a small one, had claws...

Maesters are supposed to be sent away from their places of birth to avoid “conflict of interests” and “native loyalties”.

Lord Tywin Lannister had other plans; he had sent me to the Citadel with the express purpose of having me serve no other House than my own. By the Old Gods and the New, Father expected me to become Grandmaster one day and to serve a Lannister Queen until the day I died.

I could not complain, really; had the rules been observed, I might have been sent to the Iron Islands!

Father made the Citadel an offer they could not refuse; a price was agreed upon and The Order send me on my way to Casterly Rock without a second thought.

Lord Tywin Lannister was a man of no half measures.

Sometimes I wondered how History would have been different had Lady Joanna not died, had I not been born, or at least, had I not been born as a deformed, twisted dwarf.

Would Lord Tywin Lannister have been a different man?

A better father?

No.

There is a hierarchy in the world. We, sons of nobility, are painfully aware of this fact.

We are not human beings, but living pieces on the table, to be moved according the the interests of our Masters. It is the price for our privilege, equal parts blessing and burden.

Although we knew our place and never refused to play our roles, to have Lord Tywin Lannister as a father was brutal.

All three of us tried to measure up to him, in our different ways and, in the end, we failed him as miserably as he had failed us.

Jaime, the heir, the favorite son, did what he was told. He used his weakness as shield and not even when Father died, he took his place as the Lion of The Rock.
No, Jaime could have never really taken Lord Tywin Lannister’s place in our world: my brother was not a politician, not a bully and definitely not the ruthless bastard our father had been.

Jaime was a soldier. He died in the North fighting Ice Demons and, if our common friend, Sandor Clegane is to be believed, Jaime died a happy man, finally free from the constraints of being a Lannister. After the war, Clegane did not return to the Westerlands; he married Lady Brienne of Tarth, retired to the Emerald Island and never set foot at Clegane Keep again.

Mayhaps fearing for my life and poor choices, Clegane offered me a place in his household as unofficial castellan of his lands until his second son was old enough to manage it himself.

Loyal as he was, Cleagene tried to get me far from Casterly Rock and the disaster that awaited us.

I should have accepted his offer...

Cersei, the daughter, was set aside. Sold off to the highest bidder and treated with nothing but unkindness, she renounced her family and homeland and adapted to the new prison Father had assigned her.

Cersei was a survivor. Without much guidance or affection, she made herself Lady, Mother and Princess. She escaped the terrible fate of those of the line of Tywin Lannister by giving forgetting about House Lannister, possibly the wisest decision of her life. Her son Robert Arryn, Lord of the Eyrie, made Cersei a grandmother five times over, unable to resist the charms of his beautiful Elia Stark; her firstborn, Myrcella, is a Princess of Dorne, mother to a Prince and two Princesses.

And it is through her, Cersei, the forgotten, the despised, the unloved, that Lord Tywin's descendants have the right to sit on the Iron Throne; her daughter Alyssane, is the mother of the Prince of Dragonstone, Rhaegar Targaryen, the Prince of Summerhall, Aemon Targaryen and Princess Visenya.

Had Lord Tywin Lannister not been greedy, Alyssane would have been his legacy. But no, Marei Lannister had to be brought into this world to fulfill the Old Lion’s dreams and the Fat Flower’s delusions.

Poor Marei.

Tyrek was an inexperienced, love sick young man when he succeeded his Father in presiding not only the High Table at Casterly Rock, but also the bed of Lady Margaery Tyrell.

I educated the boy myself and can attest that Tyrek was smart and capable in his own way.

But he suffered from not being Tywin Lannister.

In other words, Tyrek, son of Jaime, was destined to fail.

His half sister was given to Lord Aemond Tyrell in marriage; The Crown was displeased with the union, the threat too clear to be ignored. The alliance between The Reach and The Westerlands already in its second generation was a slap in the face. King Jaehaerys only approved the match in the hopes that would stop there; he himself was married to a cousin, as we pointed out and nobody could argue against that.

Rumours of bastardy should be carefully cultivated for political purposes; one mistake, and heads would roll. We started speaking about things that were obvious and general knowledge, lacing those with great dosis of innuendo and malice:
Jaehaerys, who looked every bit the Targaryen, had a direwolf as a pet;

Jaehaerys, who showered Lord Jon Stark with great affection, had the eyes of his mother, not his supposed father;

Jaehaerys, who was said to have a dragon, had never been seen riding one…

Before long, people started calling Jaehaerys the “Wolf of the Red Keep” in hushed tones.

The former Master of Whispers, Lord Westerling, and several servants came forward; we demanded a Great Council to be called after much deliberation. Aemon Tyrell had to be convinced he was the legitimate heir and this took time. He had been partially raised with Jaehaerys, but neither were close to each other and old rivalries resurfacing only benefited our cause.

Even though his mother was a Princess of the Iron Throne, Aemond’s name was Tyrell; as such, his martial education was responsibility of Lord Mace Tyrell and not even princess Rhaenys could deny him his rights as Head of the House. Highgarden was to be her son’s; he was to be raised in the Reach, among his future vassals.

Rhaenys Targaryen had her son squire for the heir of Old Oak and remained at the Red Keep with her lover, Ser Arthur Dayne. She was not in a good position to create problems for Lord Tyrell, being that her daughter, Dyanna Tyrell, was obviously fathered by Dayne.

The stage was set; we raised in rebellion and started a war. Dragons could be defeated; I had notes and notes on how Dorne had managed to bring Meraxes down, courtesy of the time I spent as assistant to Grand Maester Marwyn.

We prepared scorpions big enough to pierce through the dragon's eyes; our troops were well armed, fed, and trained; only a handful of sworn houses had dared not follow Casterly Rock with their full force.

Say what you will of Tywin Lannister, but he worked to have a firm grasp on the Westerlands.

As for Mace Tyrell…the only good thing I can say about the fool was that he died of a cold before the first battle was fought. Command of the troops fell to Ser Loras Tyrell, a knight more adept at Tourneys than the battlefield.

That half their vassals refused their call should have been a sign. House Tyrell owed its status to House Targaryen, who elevated them from mere Stewards to Lord Paramounts and The Reach never forgot that.

Princess Rhaenys, knowing House Tyrell better than anyone, sent an open letter to all Westeros, where she denounced her good father for “unnatural ambitions”, asked forgiveness for his son who was “young and naive to believe in unfounded rumours” and declared she was not a prisoner or hostage, but a faithful servant of the Seven Kingdoms, working for the “only brother she had ever known.”

The moment King Jaehaerys rode his dragon, Rhaegal, the Green Dread, into battle was the moment we lost the war and everybody who was there knew it. His mother did not come; she stayed behind, sitting on the Iron Throne for the last time, heavily pregnant with another wolf while my niece, Alysane, held Dragonstone.

Lord Jon Stark brought south many of the veterans from the War for the Dawn; Lord Edmure Tully commanded the Riverlanders with only one arm, as the other he had lost during the Retreat of the Twins; Old Prince Oberyn Martell would not pass an opportunity to kill Reachmen; Lord Robert
Arryn led the Knights of the Vale and crushed his cousin Tyrek in open field, despite we having the numbers on our side and Lords Baratheon and Velaryon sunk enough Redwyne ships as to make a blockade impossible.

Tyrek died in the battlefield and his only son, Jaime, would have been sent to the Faith when he turned ten had he not died aged eight of a pox. Lady Margaery was promptly sent to the Silent Sisters in the aftermath of the defeat and her daughters by Tyrek, Lelia and Lilian, were delivered to the custody of their cousin, Princess Myrcella of Dorne, in order to be “properly educated”.

Their dowries, of course, were larger than of the average dornish heiress. Cersei married them off to Dornish Knights of no great consequence - both of whom I am sure were among my sister’s discarded lovers- and in the last letter she sent me, Cersei boasted about the fact that the only direct descendants of Lord Tywin Lannister by his beloved son, Jaime were dark skinned babies with green eyes, adding that they would grow up to be loud and lustful dornishmen and women.

As no adult Lannister was considered “fit” enough in the eyes of King Jaehaerys to inherit the Rock- he exiled many Knights and their Families to the new settlements being established Beyond The Wall- I now serve Lord Jason Lannister, youngest son of Ser Lucion Lannister, who was the grandson of Father’s uncle, Jason. He was seven at the time. To reward King Jaehaerys loyal subjects, Jason was betrothed to Lord Velaryon’s granddaughter, Lady Laena.

To this day, eight years after our Rebellion failed, we are paying reparations to the Crown. It serves me of consolation to know that our gold is partially funding the last project of Grand Maester Marwyn, a brilliant plan really, of establishing High Education Centers in all the Seven Kingdoms- even the Iron Islands!- ending The Citadel monopoly on Education without dissolving the Order entirely.

Lord Tywin Lannister’s legacy was ironically, the end of his line (and of his brothers) as rulers of Casterly Rock.

Aemond Tyrell was pardoned after his capture due to Princess Rhaenys plea. He renounced all claims on the Iron Throne, asked for forgiveness and recognized Jaehaerys as the true King, kissing his feet at the Great Hall of the Red Keep.

Lord Aemond went to inherit Highgarden, but House Tyrell became just one of many vassals of House Tarly, with just enough lands and holdings to pay for the upkeep of the Castle. Their political power and fortune was no more; Aemond took an ugly Florent girl as second wife, another punishment inflicted by his cousin.

One lordship and two knightly Houses were created in the former Tyrell lands and given as reward for loyal service to second son’s of the Houses of The Reach that did not follow the Tyrells.

Lord Samwell Tarly had apparently been a healer at the Night’s Watch; when the war was won and the Watch changed its purpose, he was freed from his Vows and succeeded his Father as Lord of Horn Hill. His Grace arranged for the new Lord Paramount to marry the daughter of Lord Celtigar, Lady Rhaena, as the wildling the reachman had brought with him from The North could not possibly manage such great responsibility.

Marei and Tommen joined The Faith; Marei because she was forced to- her marriage to Aemond was annulled- and she died in the same Motherhouse Lady Margaery had been living. Much like Joanna, Marei was sickly. Her marriage to Aemond remained unconsummated due to her young age and King Jaehaerys was advised to break the alliance between Houses Lannister and Tyrell once and for all.
Tommen, on the other hand, went to the Quiet Isle willingly. He writes me often enough and it brings me a measure of contentment to know that at least one of Jaime’s children was not touched by the war and the horrors of being a Lannister of Casterly Rock.

Plagued not only with a deformed body, but with a sick one, it is a miracle that I, Maester Tyrion, reached the age of seven and forty, outliving both my perfectly healthy and sublimely beautiful siblings.

The Gods, both Old and New, are indeed cruel.

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*From the Historical Dictionary of Westeros:*

**Grandmaester Marwyn (240 A.C-312 A.C)**

Born to a rich dornish merchant, Marwyn forged his Chain after only five years of study. He then travelled the world, visiting Temples, Cities and Libraries, searching for lost books, forgotten texts and ancient treasures. He returned to Westeros sometime late in the year 269 A.C, published his “Book of Lost Books” and ascended to the post of Archmaester in 270 A.C, before accepting the position of Grandmaester in 271 A.C

(...)

Marwyn died in the year 312 A.C at Tumbleton. He had joined King’s Jaehaerys as he marched to Highgarden and was hit by a poisoned arrow during the Battle of Tumbleton. He was cremated by dragonfire per King Jaehaerys wishes.

**Maester Flowers (255 A.C-315 A.C)**

The bastard son of Lord Leo Redding of Redding Hall, Flowers was sent to Winterfell a year after he forged his chain, in 277 A.C. His efforts in bringing progress to the then isolated and retrograde North were first viewed with suspicion, but Flowers eventually proved himself a valuable and dependable source of counsel and advise to three successive Lords Stark.

After losing his hand during the war against House Bolton, Flower’s health started to decline. In his late years, confined to a wheelchair, he remained at Winterfell as an informal member of the household, ignoring his Order’s offer of retirement at Oldtown Hospice. He wrote “The Defeat of House Bolton” and died in his sleep in the year 315 A.C. surrounded by Starks.

He was entombed at the Winterfell Crypts.
Maester Tyrion Lannister (273 A.C. - 320 A.C)

Maester Tyrion Lannister was the second son of Lord Tywin Lannister and Lady Joanna Lannister. A dwarf, his disability prevented him from being trained at arms and to compensate, he was provided with a superb education in letters and arts. His father attempted, unsuccessfully, to negotiate betrothal arrangements in his name. He was eventually sent to The Citadel and, after forging his chain, went to serve at Casterly Rock as per Lord Tywin Lannister’s orders.

He joined the Small Council during the Regency of Prince Viserys Targaryen, his good brother, but returned to Casterly Rock after The Faith Uprising.

Although he was rumoured to have been one of the masterminds of the Lannister-Tyrell Rebellion, his position as a Maester of the Citadel prevented him from being punished too harshly. As King Jaehaerys removed the lines of Tywin Lannister and of his brothers from westerlander succession, Maester Tyrion was allowed to remain at Casterly Rock and served Lord Jason Lannister, a distant relation, until he died of brain aneurysm in the year 320 A.C.

Chapter End Notes

For those who do not know, I have a Degree in History and I used my average knowledge of European Middle and Modern Ages to colour this fic and made it more realistic.

My sense of drama might have made some believe that I was being too far fetched in my writing, but I believe this to be an illusion.

Many readers, more romantic ones I suppose, were a bit disappointed with the relationships here portrayed, especially Daenerys and Jon. But as I explained over and over again, I went for what I felt was more realistic and that is not always satisfying.

On the top of my head we had King Aerys dying in a shipwreck like William Aetheling (and Lord Baratheon in Canon.); Prince Aegon going insane and berserk at being displaced as Heir mirroring Peppin the Hunchback, son of Charlemagne; Queen Daenerys being kidnapped and raped (in order to be forced into a marriage) like what was rumoured to have happened with Queen Mary of Scots...

The whole "illegitimacy" claims on Jaehaerys drove part of the War of the Roses and in canon, the Blackfyre rebellions; the expedience of defeating fathers-brothers and either marrying their daughters-sisters of dispatching them to Convents, as well brothers marrying the brides of deceased brothers, marriages between first cousins, uncles and nieces, annulling marriages due to infertility or other concerns etc is well documented, both in ASOIAF Canon as European History.

The greatest liberty I took was having Margaery marry Tyrek after Jaime was dead; the Catholic Church would have made a big fuss about such union, especially because Margaery had a daughter by Jaime...
I am also happy with my treatment of women and sad I did not tackle racism as I should have. There is, of course, a small node to westerosi-europen racism to brown skinned people in the end, but I did not had time to develop Dothraki into the story, nor used the Martells for this purpose.

As previously discussed, rape is a plot device when the reaction to the fact is focused on the MEN point of view. Here, it was about daenerys, her reaction, her struggle and her surviving it, unfortunately, twice. And no, she did not deserve that, but I think NOBODY deserves it.

So, I say goodbye to this story Sorry it took so long to update and thank you for sticking until the end!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!