The Raven's Plan

by The_Sithspawn

Summary

The Second War for the Dawn is over, the Others have won. All that is left is one insane plan.

Notes

Ok my hyperactive muse has struck again. Considering the number of open stories I have, I should NOT be starting another fic that isn't a one shot. I know most people were expecting an update for Erpman-or any of my other stories, but then this happened...
The Three Eyed Raven

It was night, the moon shone down on him as he watched the Children of the Forest prepare for the Ritual at the base of the last surviving Heart Tree. Melisandre stood behind them and observed quietly. A light snow fell on the already white landscape.

In the center of the Godswood of the Isle of Faces, was a massive and ancient Heart Tree. A hidden Heart Tree. It had stood tall since before the time of the First Men.

Bran was propped up on a large stone out of the way and away from the foot of the giant Heart Tree, watching the final preparations for the Ritual.

He turned to stare at those assembled now. The Last of the Great Houses of Westeros.

Sansa Stark stood covered in heavy furs, tall and proud, the grey direwolf stitched across her dress, unflinching, even in the face of death, she remained poised and ready as mother had taught her.

Jon stood next to her. Gone was the bastard of Winterfell, he had changed, gone was the grey direwolf of House Stark, the red, three headed dragon of House Targaryen was etched across his breastplate. Jon Targaryen stood there. The rightful King of the Seven Kingdoms.

Jon's Aunt stood with them. The Dragon Queen, Daenerys Targaryen, stood resplendent in fabrics and furs, colored in the traditional black and red of House Targaryen. The red dragon on her dress, almost seemed to move in the wind.

A little a ways away from them, two brothers stood speaking quietly. Jaime and Tyrion Lannister.

Jaime stood tall, thinner than before and not as haughty as he had been, but a measure of it remained.
He would not be Jaime Lannister if he was not a little bit haughty. He wore simple armour, adorned with the gold lion of House Lannister, *Oathkeeper* at his belt. His metal hand had been replaced with a much more functional dragonglass hook.

Next to him, Tyrion almost seemed to be a mockery of him, a smaller version of the red lion of House Lannister adorned his tunic, with simple furs on his back.

“This plan is insane.” Jon commented to no one in particular.

Bran shrugged, “We have no other choice.”

“We could all fight and die horribly,” deadpanned Jaime Lannister. “That's always an option.”

“My brother does have a point. Not a very good one, but it is a valid one,” added Tyrion idly.

“This is the better option,” Bran retorted.

“This is our *only* option.” cut in Daenerys Targaryen. “We have lost everything. We will go back. We will change everything. We will save everyone.”

Bran blinked at Daenerys, “Not everyone.”

“He's right. Not everyone.” Sansa agreed with him.

“I think I will deal personally with some of those people when this works,” Jaime added wolfishly.

“So we are agreed then. This plan will work,” Daenerys confirmed.

“Of course you Grace,” Tyrion agreed with a mock bow and easy smile.

“The Children will chant and bleed a little then you chant and bleed some,” Jaime jerked a thumb at
Bran, “Then he does his magic...and all me and Jon have to do is stall the army of the undead,” Jaime stated sarcastically. “Sounds simple enough.”

“It's very simple, we lead our army. Hold off the Night's King's horde of undead long enough for you to finish the spell.” Jon stated dourly.

An army Three thousand strong...a paltry number, but it was all that was left of the might of Westeros, the Golden Company, and Daenerys's Dothraki and Unsullied followers.

Three thousand against an untold number of wights and White Walkers.

What little mirth had filled them disappeared quickly after Jon's dour comment.

They were quiet, standing in silent contemplation till a scout came to them.

“Your Grace, they're coming.” he reported quickly to Jon.

Jon waved him away and turned to Jaime, “Time to do our part.”

Jaime nodded before turning to his brother, “This is not the end,” he said firmly to Tyrion.

“Of course not, Brother,” Tyrion said with his usual self sure smile.

Jaime bent down and grabbed his brother giving him a big hug. Jaime let him go and they nodded seriously at each other before Jaime turned and left quickly without another word.

Jon gave both Sansa and Daenerys hugs and chaste kisses before going to Bran. Or at least he tried to give a chaste kiss to Daenerys, it turned it something more.

Pushing that aside, Jon went to Bran and hugged him, “You do this...for all our sake's,” Jon whispered into his ear.
With that Jon strode away.

Bran waited for a moment till they were completely out of earshot, he turned to the watching Children, “We can really begin the spell now.”

The Children nodded and five of them formed a circle around the truck of the Heart Tree, daggers in hand.

Melisandre moved to stand behind them with Daenerys, Tyrion and Sansa side by side behind her. The last scions of three Great Houses also held daggers.

The Children stared chanting in their language. The only sound in Godswood was their words.

Bran could feel the magic being woven in the air as the chants intensified.

Barn eyed Tyrion as he stared mournfully at his dagger, “This is not how I wanted to die. I'm not old. I don't have a belly full of wine. And I don't have a girl's mouth—” he broke off as he looked around and realized who he was surrounded by.

Daenerys was giving him a look and Sansa did not look amused.

He looked at them guiltily then frowned, then finished his sentence, “-around my cock. I'm the Imp, I have certain standards of perversions I need to hold up. And I'm about to stab myself in the heart! I'm allowed to say these things!” he exclaimed, emphatically shaking his dagger in the air.

Daenerys and Sansa gave him dark looks before chuckling.

“I think we can forgive him his crudeness this time?” Daenerys said as an aside to Sansa.

Sansa gave him mock reproachful look, “Just this time.”

The Children's chanting grew louder and the magic stronger.
“It’s almost time.” Melisandre pronounced.

Tyrion swallowed, holding the dagger up, “I'll see you all on the other side.”

The chanting came to a sudden stop and as one the Children plunged their daggers into their own hearts.

Bran felt the magic peak as their bodies fell.

“NOW!” cried Melisandre.

The three human sacrifices played their part and their bodies joined the Childrens splayed out over the roots of the Heart Tree. The Blood of the First Men, Old Valyria and Children of Forest fed the Heart Tree.

The Heart Tree began to glow.

The magic crescendoed and engulfed Bran.

He let the magic take him and he began weaving the final part of the spell.

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Samwell Tarly

Sam gazed out at the frozen surface of the God's Eye. It had started to freeze two days ago and it was completely frozen over now. The wights had already started to shuffle across the ice.

“We're all set,” called a voice from behind Sam.
He turned and faced the old Knight, Ser Darvon Cressy, the old scarred and grizzled Master-of-arms of Horn Hill.

Sam looked at him and old memories resurfaced unbidden.

The old Knight had spent countless days trying to make him a warrior during his youth. The Knight had failed miserably back then.

The old Sam had stayed weak and fat, though not useless. Jon Snow had shown him that, but he could have done more back then.

*Been more.*

The new Sam knew the value of knowledge. But also that that value could be strengthened with strength of arms. The new Sam was sharp of mind, with hard muscles. The old flab was gone, replaced with hard muscle. Sluggishness, with quickness.

He'd learned much over the years, and all that it had cost him was his family. Gilly. Little Sam. Talla.

It had been so long since Gilly and little Sam had died, he'd started to forget their voices.

He'd failed them.

Dark thoughts swarmed and he felt anger at the old Sam.

The irony of it all was that his father, the redoubtable Lord Randal Tarly would have approved of the new Sam. Stubborn idiot that he had been.

Sam snorted in derision as he thought of his idiot father and how his stubbornness had dragged Dickon into the grave with him.

He and Dickon hadn't been on the best of terms but that didn't mean he'd wanted to see him dead.
Sam shook his head to clear it. Old memories would be a costly distraction now. He returned to the here and now.

His hand clenched around the hilt of *Heartsbane*.

He stared out at the approaching army of Wights.

“Tell the men, the moment we spot him, I need to know,” Sam commanded gruffly.

“Yes my lord,” Ser Darvon said before scurrying off to spread the command.

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“I see him, my Lord,” Ser Darvon said pointing.

Sam followed the finger and rage ignited in his soul as he locked eyes on the Night's King, “Gather the men, it's time! We're not dying quietly tonight.”

Ser Darvon started shouting orders and men rushed to obey him.

A man brought him his horse, and he swung astride smoothly. He looked back at the gathered men and his eyes met Ser Darvon's. The Knight nodded at him.

He stared around him, looking at all the men that were looking to his leadership now. Men *and* Women. All fighters ready to sell their lives to defeat the Others. From all corners of the Westeros and beyond.

Other than Ser Darvon, the only person he really knew was Gendry. Robert Baratheon's bastard son sat astride his horse next to him, warhammer at the ready. He was his father's son.

And a reassuring presence to him and the others with them.
With one smooth motion Sam unsheathed *Heartsbane* and pointed forward towards the Night's King. He turned to the assembled men. “He's come for us! I say NO! I say *his* time has come! *Who's with me?*”

The men screamed in approval.

Sam raised *Heartsbane* up high and gave a wordless roar.

He gave a final nod to Gendry, “*For Gilly.*” he said grimly.

Gendry nodded back just as grim, raising his warhammer, “*For Arya.*”

Sam pointed *Heartsbane* forward at the Night's King, “Change!” he roared, spurring his horse forward beginning the cavalry attack.

The shield wall parted and his armored force thundered through the gap towards their target.

The Wights came at them, uncaring as always, the front rows were crushed under the weight of the horses and the men. Sam's men didn't stop for anything. They continued onwards with only one purpose.

The weight of wights began to take its toll and horses started falling. Men and women began screaming their final defiance.

They edged nearer to the Night's King.

“We stop for nothing!” Sam screamed bolstering the men's courage.

Ser Darvon threw his dragonglass tipped spear and hit his mark.

A White Walker screeched and then shattered, the spear clattering to the ground.
The wights began to thin and Sam's force moved faster.

Another Walker crouched down touched the ground. Ice sprang forward towards the galloping men. The men scattered apart knowing what was coming next. Ice spikes broke through he ground impaling men and horses. The lucky ones were only thrown from their horses into the writhing mass of waiting wights.

Out of the corner of his eye he watched, a now horseless Gendry, as he twirled his warhammer, the sharpened shards of dragonglass attached to the head of the hammer glittered in the moonlight. Skulls shattered, chests were crushed, wight after wight charged him.

All were met by crushing blows, returning them to the dirt they had risen from.

A gap formed around Gendry and two White Walkers came at him, blades at the ready.

He deftly dodged their blows, dancing out of the way, blow after blow came at him till one the White Walkers overextended. With a savagery that spoke of Gendry's ancestry, he brought his warhammer up to shatter the Walker's jaw.

The Walker dropped to the ground with a gurgling scream, dragonglass shards stuck in its face and neck. The sound disappeared quickly as it died. It's form disbursing into a white mist.

The second Walker roared it's rage and renewed it's attack with vigor. Gendry continued to dodge till his luck ran out.

He was forced back and parried a blow with the unprotected shaft of his warhammer. The warhammer shattered, leaving him almost weaponless.

In an act of desperation, Gendry launched himself bodily at the Walker, pulling his dagger. His last reminder of Arya. Her Valyrian steel dagger.

With an roaring thrust, the Walker shattered, leaving Gendry sprawled on the ground.
He disappeared under a mass of scrambling wights.

So fell the Reborn Demon of the Trident.

All this Sam saw but didn't pay attention to, his men continued to fall around him, but he had a mission to fulfill.

His gaze was locked on the Night's King, and nothing else mattered to him.

Closer and closer he came, *Heartsbane* slashing up and down at anything that moved near him.

The Night's King turned his head and their eyes met.

The next moment Sam felt himself flying through the air. He didn't know what had happened but he braced himself and rolled with the impact and came up swinging his greatsword in arc around him, catching Wights and an unwary White Walker.

With relentless force he advanced on The Night's King.

The Wights parted before him and drew away from him.

The Night's King unsheathed his ice sword and stood at the ready, almost beckoning Sam forward.

With a roar a fury, Sam raised *Heartsbane* high and stuck at the enemy!

Valyrian steel met enchanted ice. The battle was begun.

Sam advanced with a series of blows fueled by his loss. The faces everyone he'd lost to the Others giving him strength beyond anything he'd thought he'd had. Gilly, Talla, his mother, Little Sam, and so many others...
He roared in the Night King's face.

The Night's King parried each blow, then he went on the attack.

*Heartsbane* was nearly wrenched from his hands with the first retaliatory blow.

Blow after blow rained down on him and his arms ached as he caught the Night King's immensely powerful blows. Each blow more powerful than any he had had thrown at him by other White Walkers.

Suddenly coldness spread through his gut. *Heartsbane* fell to the ground from his nerveless hands. Sam stared down and saw the Night King's sword stuck in his gut.

The Night's King slowly slid his icy blade out of Sam's gut.

His legs failed him and he fell to his knees. His hands went to his gut and became wet with blood.

He closed his eyes, ignoring the icy coldness spreading though him.

*I'll see you soon Gilly*...

He opened his eyes and stared balefully up at the Night's King uncaring eyes.

The Night King's sword came up and then swept down.

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**Jon Targaryen**

Further back from the first line of defenders, with a far-eye, Jon watched as Sam fell. He lowered it, unshed tears filling his eyes.
Goodbye Sam. Old Gods willing, I'll see you soon.

Too many.

Too many friends lost.

Too many allies gone.

Remember our bargain! Theon comes home, You give me back my brother! Jon remembered Yara Greyjoy's last demand before she'd gone off to her death.

Jon nodded, “I haven't forgotten.” he said to himself. She'd died a couple of weeks ago helping to make this last stand possible.

What's one more death between friends? Beric Dondarrion had said with an easy smile before he finally died.

I guess it is today for me...but you need to keep telling him not today! Arya's last defiant and cryptic words.

“I haven't forgotten any of you,” he repeated mournfully to himself.

Someone pushed him from behind snapping him out of his revere.

“You're thinking too much Snow,” Tormund Giantsbane mocked. “The enemy is here. I plan to kill two thousand of those fuckers before I die!” he hefted up two dragonglass axes, one in each hand, “That's why I've got two axes!” he finished with a toothy manic smile.

Jon snorted, “That's still not going get the Big Lady to like you. She likes her men pretty. And blonde.” he jerked his thumb in the direction that Jaime Lannister was leading his men. “When we get back...he was even prettier then.” Jon finished.
Tormund cast an angry look in the general direction of the distant Jaime then turned away with a snarl of disgust.

“What's eating him?” asked Eddison Tollett as he approached casting a thoughtful look at the Wildling.

“Well if it isn't the last Crow! Tormund Giantsbane said, his disgust turning into a wide smile.

Edd scowled darkly, “Don't remind me, bloody fucking terrific Lord Commander I turned out to be.”

Jon grinned at his friend, “I did tell you to try not to knock the Wall down while I was gone...”

Edd's scowl deepened, “Seven Hells! I'm going to go join the Others! At least there I won't have to deal with this bloody abuse!”

Tormund and Jon chuckled.

A horn sounded and the mirth died.

The Others had breached the first line. Their strategy called for three lines of defense on the only path leading to the Heart Tree, traps thrown between the lines. They knew they couldn't win outright...but all they had to do was slow the Night's King's army of wights down.

Jon shared determined glances with Edd and Tormund, before casting a look to the moon and stars. Not much time had passed since the battle had begun. Their whole strategy was aimed at wasting time. Every second that passed was one more that Bran had to finish his spell.

A second horn sounded, the second line had been engaged.

Jaime Lannister was in the second line.

They were commanding the third line.
May the Old Gods and the New protect you.

Jon prayed silently for Jaime's success. Every second counted.

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He didn't know how much time had passed since the third line had been engaged, he was bloody and bruised. There was a sharp pain in his chest and his breathing was becoming an issue. He was on his knees, Longclaw clutched desperately in his hand.

By force of will alone, he rose again to his feet, blood was trickling down into his eyes. He wiped the blood from his eyes.

He struck out with Longclaw, he swung with all of his might left and right in a crazed manner. It didn't matter where he struck, only he was left standing...he was surrounded on all sides. He couldn't see any of his men left on their feet around him.

He was dizzy, the world was spinning but still he didn't stop slashing. Movement caught his eye and he forced himself to focus.

*The Night's King!*

Far in front of him, the Night's King stood still, a spear held at the ready in his right hand.

The Night's King threw his spear and Jon was too weak to dodge.

He went flying back, the power of the spear carrying him through the air.

He landed on his back barely able to breathe, coldness spreading all through his body.

As Jon's blood escaped his body and stained the ground, his last coherent thought was; *this has to*
The Three Eyed Raven

It was too much power! *Too much blood!*

The roots of the Heart Tree went too far, too deep...

*The entire island was the alter to the Old Gods!*

Every death on the island was fueling the spell. Every death adding more and more power to an already unstable and unpredictable spell. The blood of the Children of the Forest, the wolfsblood of the Ancient Kings of Winter, lionsblood of the Kings of the Rock, Blood of the Dragon...all would have been more than enough for the spell.

But now...too much blood was being absorbed by the roots of the ancient Heart Tree. The blood of three thousand men and women. The combined bloodlines of Westeros and Essos.

His consciousness continued to stretch out, reaching across time, trying to direct the power into the proper channels, preventing it from going to other channels.

An intricate web, now with too many fibers reaching back into the past. He shaped them, connecting some and severing others.

His mind strained, he could feel himself dying...he kept at it, he could not fail. Everything was at stake now.

He shaped everything, forming a new plan, and after an eternity his new web was complete.

The spell was finally finished.
His consciousness returned to his body.

He returned to the here and now.

He opened his eyes.

The burnt out husk of Melisandre's body burned at the center of the alter. The magic had consumed her. She'd sacrificed herself for him, she'd borne the brunt of so much power. He hadn't realized it, but to help him control the power, she'd let it consume her.

The bodies of the Children, Daenerys, Sansa and Tyrion lay were they'd died, untouched. Blood pooled over the roots of the Heart Tree, feeding it.

He turned his gaze to the glowing Heart Tree.

The Heart Tree did not glow now, it shone like the sun. Light expanding everywhere. He squinted his eyes and he could see red tears were now streaming down the carved face. There was an ominous groan and the light shone brighter for an instant before the tree exploded.

**BOOM!**

Splinters of Light expanded outwards and overwhelmed everything....
Robb Stark

He lurched from bed in a start. The pain was suddenly gone. He stared around in a panic, his eyes searching for Talisa's bloody corpse. Gone were the pandemonium of battle, he was surrounded by silence.

He came to a cold stop when he recognized the room he was in.

“What is this?” he whispered to himself as he stared about at his old room in Winterfell.

Whining answered him, followed by a small yip.

He looked to the noise and his eyes grew wide as he stared down and saw Grey Wind gazing up at him.

“That's not right...” he muttered to himself. Instead of a fully grown direwolf, a small adorable pup stared up at him.

The pup yipped at him again.

He knelt down and rubbed Grey Wind's head lovingly.

“This is madness....”

Touching his dear friend calmed him down.

Grey Wind looked up at Robb questioningly.
Moments passed and with a deep sigh, Robb said, “We’re home boy.”

He walked through the corridors of Winterfell in a daze, running his hands against the stones of the familiar walls not believing where he appeared to be.

It was deepest moment of night, no one stirred at this time as Robb walked the halls of Winterfell in a daze.

He walked slowly and quietly stopping often, as old memories came unbidden to haunt him.

It seemed a more innocent time, before all the battles, all the mistakes, before Talisa...

The refrain of the Rains of Castamere echoed in his ears and his hand rubbed his chest were the final blow had come.

_The Lannisters send their regards._ Roose Bolton's traitorous words echoed through his ears.

He shook it all away and strode forward once more, overcoming the dark memories with light memories of Winterfell.

He continued onwards, he reached the great hall, hesitantly he entered.

The great hall was as he’d left it, unmarred by wherever desecrations the Ironborn would have done while they held Winterfell.

Bittersweet memories swam before his mind's eye as he imagined seeing father holding court here when he was still alive.

The strong specter of his father filled the hall. So many times he’d been bored as he watched Eddard
Stark, the Lord of Winterfell, held court and dealt with his loyal bannermen.

If only he’d paid more attention. Robb cursed himself silently, *If I'd listened more would I still be alive?*

His musing were cut short as a figure appeared at the end of the hall.

The figure stepped into the light and Robb froze in disbelief.

Theon Greyjoy stood there with strangest look on his face that Robb had ever seen.

“*Robb?*” he uttered in disbelief.

Robb's feet carried him forward of their own volition.

“*Theon?*” venom consumed his voice as he spat out the name.

“This is one the hells isn't it?” Theon's voice carried a tone of defeat and desperation that matched the look that was growing on his face. “You're here to punish me aren't you?”

Rage over came Robb.

*Traitor! Bran! Rickon! My brothers!*

He tried to form words to throw at his traitorous friend but the rage was too much.

He launched himself at Theon with an animalistic howl worthy of a direwolf, grabbing a fistful of tunic and pulling back his fist.

Theon made no move to protect himself as Robb's fist met flesh. There was a sickening crack and blood spattered and he reached back.
Blood trickled down Theon's nose and guilt filled his eyes, “I'm sorry...”

Robb’s eyes flashed as blind rage consumed him.

Eddard Stark

He woke with a start.

His hand went instinctively to his neck and found it intact, and his head still attached.

“What is this is?” he demanded.

Gone were the steps of the Sept of Baelor, the crowds braying for his blood, and Joffrey's cruel faithless voice. He was back in his own bed in his rooms in Winterfell.

Confusion, the foremost on his mind he turned to Catelyn's side of the bed, but found it empty. The covers were cast aside. He laid a hand on her side and felt the residual warmth. It didn't seem to be a dream.

You wouldn't feel heat in dream? Would you? But where is Cat?

It felt like it was the middle of the night. What could she be possibly doing at this time of night?

He rose from his bed, casting all thoughts of Cat aside, the surreality of the moment overwhelming him.

By the Old Gods and the New! How am I back in Winterfell?
He took a couple of steps before he realised that something was wrong. It took him a second to realise that he wasn't limping. His leg felt as good as new, as if that Redcloak hadn't stabbed him while he was distracted.

He shook that away and mentally reviewed his most recent situation.

Catelyn's hostage taking, the bloody Kingslayer, betrayal on all asides, Baelish, the Goldcloaks. All his loyal men slaughtered, the Lannisters seizing power with the abomination, Joffrey as their figurehead.

It was almost too much for him.

“I should never have left Winterfell,” he muttered mournfully to himself.

His anger swelled to him as a stray thought struck him.

The damned abomination had had Ice used to execute him! With Sansa standing right there!

Rage gripped his heart as he imagined what depredations would have been visited on his daughter after he'd died.

Gods, Arya!

He'd seen her hiding in the crowd, what happened to her? How had she gotten away from the Lannisters?

Old Gods Damn Joffrey! And all the fucking Lannisters!

But that didn't explain how he could be back in his sleeping quarters in Winterfell. He stared about himself in confusion, “Is this the next life?” he called out, “Brandon? Father? Mother? .....Lyanna?” If this was the next life, shouldn't they be here with him?

No one answered him, and Ned just stood there, for the first time in a long time, he was unsure of
what to do.

He sat done on the edge of his bed and started to brood. Dark thoughts plaguing him, marred by the confusion of his current situation.

Ned didn't know how long he sat there musing, but suddenly he realised that he could hear shouting coming from outside.

A great ruckus indeed.

He was grateful for the distraction from his impossible situation.

The shouting was intensifying, getting louder and louder by the minute.

He strained his ears and tried to pick out the voices.

Jory's commanding bellow stood out. He frowned as he made out Maester Luwin's voice. Jon and Robb's voices joined the amalgam of voices. Ned started as he heard urgency and anger in their tones.

With an alacrity, he grabbed his robe and ran out to find out what was happening.

Ned entered the Great Hall and came upon a scene of utter madness and chaos.

Servants and Guardsmen were gathered, in various degrees of dress, shouting and speaking together.

They were surrounding someone, many of them seemed to be shouting encouragements while others were trying to calm those around them.
Ned hastily pushed his way to the center, wondering what lunacy was going on at this hour of the night. As he moved closer those around him started to give way as they recognized him.

He reached the center; Jon and Jory Cassel were holding onto Robb with all their strength trying to keep him away from Theon, who had fallen on the ground, blood streaming down his face. Maester Luwin was next to him trying to stanch the bleeding. Arya had wrapped herself around one of Robb's legs and was holding tight trying to weigh him down while Sansa was standing in front of Robb, screaming at him to calm down and stay away from Theon.

Four of the direwolf pups were chaotically dancing around yipping and pulling the legs of various people, whether helping or hindering was anyone's guess.

"WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?!" Ned roared in his most commanding tone.

Everyone froze, the commanding tone of the Lord of Winterfell something they were used to obeying, cutting through whatever was going on here.

His children turned to him with surprise and disbelief on their faces.

"Father..." Robb uttered in stunned disbelief. The fight went out of him and he stood there staring at Ned with equal parts trepidation, happiness and...shame. But still Jon and Jory didn't relax their grip on him.

_Shame? Why is he looking ashamed?_

Sansa broke the silence that had descended on the great hall.

"It worked." She shared a triumphant look with Jon of all people and smiled a tearful smile, "It worked."

"Aye," Jon said returning the smile. He cocked an eyebrow and cast a look at Theon and Robb then to everyone around them. "Maybe a little too well."

Sansa shrugged, "It worked, we have a chance."
Ned eyed them both, the emotional wall that had always kept them apart seemed to be just...gone. Their simple and easygoing exchange, though cryptic words, spoke of a closer relationship between them than he’d seen before.

He gazed at his children and saw various expressions. Sansa had a happy knowing look in her tearful eyes. Jon's expression was mixed, both happy and resigned, though resigned to what he didn't know. Robb was still looking ashamed, while Arya was looked utterly blank.

He opened his mouth to demand an explanation, but the breath was knocked out of him as Arya launched herself at him and latched around his waist with a strength he didn't know she possessed.

“Father!” she crowed happily.

For a moment he enjoyed the sensation, he tussled her hair then lifted her up, holding her tight. He held his littlest daughter, reveling in the sensation, the closeness, he thought he would never have again.

They pulled away from each other and Arya looked him with silent tears streaming down her face, “I don't care how this happened, I'm glad you're not dead anymore.”

The happy sensation in his gut turned to ice as Arya's comment returned the surreality of this night to him.

A commotion started beyond the crowd and even as he turned to investigate, a disheveled and half dressed Ser Rodrik Cassel stalked forward to stand by where Maester Luwin was ministering aid to Theon. There was a wild look in his eyes. At first Ned wondered at his intent but all doubt of what he was going to do was cast from his mind with Ser Rodrik's next action.

Horrified, Ned watched as Ser Rodrik drew and raised his sword, as to strike the fallen and bleeding Theon.

“You fucking Squid cunt!” roared Ser Rodrik, his face red with fury.

Before he could strike, a big bulk grabbed him and Ser Rodrik was jerked off his feet, the sword
wretched from his hands and sent flying far away.

Rodrik squirmed as he was held up in the air by his attacker. He looked at his attacker and swore in surprise, “Hodor? Put me down!”

Hodor actually give him unamused look.

“No.”

Rodrik’s jaw fell open in surprise and he gaped at Hodor.

“....You will not kill Theon today, Ser Rodrik. We have more important people to kill. Much more is at stake then you know,” Hodor continued.

The muttering in the hall ground to a halt as everyone stared at the halfwit that normally was only capable of saying Hodor.

Ned stared dumbly at Hodor, gathering his thoughts, he put Arya down and took a hesitant step forward, “Willas? You can speak again?”

Hodor stared at him emotionlessly and then shook his head.

“It's not Hodor. It's Bran. He's warging into Hodor.” Stated Arya calmly, “Meera told me about this. It's not the first time he's done this.”

Ned turned to face Arya, the full import of that sentence took several moments to be fully realised by Ned’s already strained mind.

“What?!” he screamed as his scalp tried to crawl off his skull at this revelation.

“It is me father. And we cannot kill Theon. We all have parts to play, even him,” explained Hodor/Bran calmly as if there was nothing wrong with hearing coherent words coming from Hodor’s mouth.
The world has gone mad... Ned thought in stupefaction.

“Willas?” a trembling old voice called.

Hodor/Bran turned to face the speaker.

Old Nan stood there, her whole body trembling, at the edge of the crowd.

“Old Nan,” he said warmly.

Old Nan stood there for a full second staring up at Hodor with big wide disbelieving, yet hopeful eyes before she collapsed bonelessly to the ground.

Maester Luwin displayed a speed that belied his age as he left Theon's side and came running to the crumpled form of Old Nan.

Luwin's hand went to her neck and after a moment, he breathed a sigh of relief, “She lives.” He cast a pointed glance at Hodor/Bran, “But she has received a severe upset.” he reported gravely.

Ned cast a look around at his family and the others gathered there, before turning back to look at Hodor/Bran, “There is much that needs to be explained.”

“It would be best to speak privately father,” suggested Sansa coolly. “More than you can imagine must be said,” she added cryptically.

Ned cast a speculative look as Sansa, but his next words were cut off as Catelyn's panicked scream came from the entrance of the great hall.

“MAESTER LUWIN!” she cried.

Ned turned to look towards her, the crowd parted before her and he gasped as she scrambled into the
great hall carrying a limp Bran in her arms.

**Catelyn Stark**

Her eyes opened and she found herself staring up at a very familiar ceiling.

The ceiling looked just like the one in Winterfell, above her side of the bed.

She just lay there numb with confusion.

*The Rains of Castamere.*

She had been in the Twins, surrounded by the bodies of Robb’s loyal Northmen and women. Talisa and her unborn child, lifeless and dead, in a puddle of their own blood.

Walder Frey cackling from high table.

She remembered her heart breaking as Robb collapsed lifelessly to the floor...

She'd slit that innocent girl's throat with a cry of despair.

Numbness had consumed her, she hadn't even felt the knife that had slit her throat from behind....

Snoring cut into her revere and she turned towards the sound.

She froze and her breath caught, as her eyes locked on her beloved Ned's scrunched up face, he was snoring next to her, just as he had, before leaving Winterfell. Peaceful and alive. And snoring.

*This is a dream...*
Slowly, she reached out a hand and tenderly stroked the side of Ned's face. She willed whatever
dream this was, not to end.

Her trembling hand lingered on Ned's cheek, feeling his warmth. Her breath hitched and she fought
off tears. She came closer to him and gingerly placed a gentle kiss on his lips.

Ned didn't disappear, he murmured in his sleep but didn't awaken.

*Maybe it was all a just a nightmare...Maybe this is Real,* a part of Cat's mind prayed with fervor.

*The children! Her children!* Another part of her mind suddenly screamed.

Heedless of her sleeping husband, she rose quickly from bed, casting the covers aside and feeling the
cool air chilling her. She stood, grabbed heavy furs and wrapped them around her shift as she all but
fled from the room and her peacefully sleeping husband, going in search of her lost children.

She reached Rickon's room first. She could hear loud noises coming from inside. She could hear
other noises now coming from the great hall, but she cast those aside, she had to check on her
children!

Tentatively, she opened the door.

Her little boy was jumping manically on his bed playing with his direwolf, a massive smile plastered
all over his face.

She let out a breath she hadn't realised she had been holding and stepped inside. She stood there
watching him play without a care in the world, feeling a warmness filling her heart.

Rickon finally noticed her, he stopped jumping suddenly and came to a stop standing on his bed and
staring at her.
“Mother!” he screamed. He jumped from his bed, a long leap towards her and threw himself at her.

She went to her knees and swept him up into her arms, all thoughts of her impossible nightmare fleeing from her mind, as she held her youngest tightly to her breast. She knelt and held onto him as tight as she could, afraid that he would evaporate and leave her alone once more.

Eventually, She pulled back from him, smiling happily as she stroked her son's face, looking at him, just staring at him and remembering everything about him.

“You're back.” Rickon stated happily.

The smile slipped from her lips, “Back? Back from where?” she asked in trepidation.

Rickon gave her a look, almost questioning her intelligence, “From the South. Father went first, with the King. Then you. Then Robb. None of you ever came back.”

Cat shook, “No...that was just a dream.”

Rickon rolled his eyes in annoyance, “No it wasn't. You all went south, you all died there.”

Cat shook her head emphatically, “No. No...that was just a nightmare. We're here in Winterfell.” A terrible, terrible nightmare...

“It wasn't a nightmare mother, it all happened,” Rickon stated evenly, with a shake of his head.

Her whole body trembled, it had to have been a nightmare.

“Everyone left and then Theon came...”

“And he killed you.” finished Cat angrily, “The Seven damned Greyjoy killed you!”
“Theon didn't kill us,” Rickon answered with a frown.

Catelyn felt her heart skip a beat in surprise, “What?”

“Osha saved us. Me and Bran, and Shaggy and Summer. And Hodor. We escaped.”

Cat couldn't breathe, she pulled her son back into her embrace and wept.

They'd lived! Bran and Rickon had lived! Joy overwhelmed her. Her boys had lived! It was a while before she could focus on anything else.

She let her son out of her embrace and asked her voice full of emotion, “You escaped, then what happened?”

“We ran, away from Winterfell, hiding from everyone,” he paused, “Then Jojen and Meera Reed found us. Jojen talked a lot. He convinced Bran that he needed to go beyond the Wall. So they went and me and Osha and Shaggy went on hiding.”

Cat went white as a sheet, the blood roaring in her ears. Her crippled son beyond the Wall?! Reed? Howland Reed's children? Madness! Utter madness!

Rickon continued on talking not noticing his mother's distraction, she missed some of his words, “...then they gave us to the Boltons.”

That sharpened Cat's attention, “The Boltons?! What did they do to you?”

Rickon looked down unhappy, “It was Ramsay. He killed me.”

Cat's mind was screaming at the injustice of it all, but she kept a hold on herself.

“Ramsay said Jon and Sansa were coming for me, I saw Jon before...the end. He had an army with him. He even had a giant with him!” said excitedly. He paused thoughtfully, “Maybe if I hadn't run in a straight line Jon could have saved me?”
The Bastard? Her mind practically spat the word, With an army? A Giant? And Sansa? She was in the North? How did she escape from the Lannisters?

“How is all this possible?”

“It was Magic of course.” Rickon said with another roll of his eyes. “Do you think Jon and Sansa are here as well? Or Osha?” Rickon whistled at his direwolf, “Come on Shaggy. Let's go find Them!”

Rickon ran out of his room, with his direwolf hot on his heels, leaving a very bewildered and scared Cat behind.

The commotion was louder now, coming from the great hall, but still she ignored it.

She moved onwards to Bran's room next, trepidation in her heart after her encounter with Rickon. She wondered what madness she would find there.

She prayed silently to the Father for protection and the Crone for guidance on this insane night. Everything was impossible and yet it all felt so real.

She came to Bran's door and with a deep breath opened it and went in.

The room was quiet with only one flicking candle lit, giving Cat only a little light to check on her son.

She edged inside, making out the sleeping form of her son wrapped in his furs.

A deep sigh escaped her body and she felt herself relax, he here, he's safe. He's NOT beyond the Wall.
She stood at the side of his bed, as her eyes continued to adjust to the flickering light.

She frowned, there was something wrong with his eyes...

She screamed a blood curdling scream.

Bran's eyes were open, gone were his brown eyes, instead unnatural white orbs stared out...and he lay on his back stiller than when he had fallen from the tower.

She started to shake him, trying to wake him.

She continued to scream as she shook Bran's inert body. She kept screamed his name, calling to him, trying to awaken him from whatever unnatural sleep held a hold over him.

*Not again, not again....*

The door to Bran's room slammed open and Old Nan came running in, despite her age.

“*My Lady?*” she questioned worriedly.

“*Get Luwin! Get the Maester!*” she screamed in a panic at the old woman before turning back to continue trying to wake Bran from whatever fit he was going through.

Cat didn't see Old Nan leave, she just continued to fail at awakening her comatose son. Her panic and fear rising with every passing moment.

She waited and waited but Old Nan didn't return.

She gathered Bran into her arms and ran from the room in search of Luwin.
She was screaming for the Maester with each step she took. She ran to the great hall, hoping that whatever was happening there Luwin would also be there.

She entered the great hall.

“MAESTER LUWIN!” she screamed, she'd lost count of the number of times she'd called for the venerable old Maester.

There was crowd there, they parted in a hurry for the frantic Lady Stark and she found the Maester at the center of the all the commotion.

Luwin was kneeling beside Old Nan, who was collapsed on the ground. Nearby Theon was also on the ground blood covering his face. She saw Robb being restrained by Jory and the Bastard. There was blood on Robb's fists. Sansa stood defiant between Robb and Theon. Ned stood with Arya by his side. And strangest of all, Ser Rodrik was stood almost held aloft by the lackwit Hodor.

All this she noticed and dismissed as she rushed to Luwin, kneeling by his side and thrusting Bran out.

“He won't wake! You have to help him,” Cat demanded in a panic.

Instead of helping, Luwin just cast a glance at Hodor, and raised a questioning eyebrow.

“It's alright mother, there's nothing wrong with me,” Hodor said.

Cat's jaw hit the floor as she stared up at the lackwit. Her mouth moved but only mumbles came out. There were too many surprises tonight. Too many.

Rickon came out of nowhere and came to his mother's side, placing a reassuring arm around her.

“It's ok mother. It's Bran not Hodor,” explained Rickon quickly, “He's just warging.” He looked up at Hodor, “I didn't know you could warg into people.”
Hodor/Bran looked down at Rickon and shrugged, “Just Hodor.”

Cat felt the floor falling out from under her feet. Her blood was roaring in her ears and she couldn’t see clearly. If she wasn’t already kneeling she’d have fallen to the floor.

Was this what having a fit felt like?

“My Lady?” Luwin called out, she could feel his hands taking Bran’s limp body from her as she started to sway.

Eddard came to her side and placed an arm around her waist, supporting her.

She clung to him, “It's impossible Ned. What madness is this? It's a dream isn't it?” she whispered to her returned from the dead husband.

“I don't know Cat, but this is all too real,” Ned spoke quietly but firmly, “But I don't think this is dream. I don't know how this happened, but we will find out.”

“I did this father, it was our only chance.” Hodor/Bran cut in.

Cat's head jerked up to look at Hodor/Bran in astonishment, a quick glance around saw nearly everyone else was just as surprised.

Except Sansa and the Bastard. They had knowing looks on their faces.

“It was Bran. And he's right it was our only chance.” spoke the Bastard forcefully. “Lord Stark. There is too much to say and little time to speak. There are traitors to be dealt with and preparations that must be begun,” there was note of command in his voice, that Cat had never heard before.

She bristled at the tone but Sansa cut her off.
“Jon is right,” she said firmly, casting what looked like a reprimanding look at Cat. “Father, we should talk in your solar.”

Cat blinked at her daughter in surprise. The forceful and commanding tone was also uncharacteristic of her.

“Ser Rodrik, I will release you, but you will not harm Theon,” commanded Hodor/Bran.

Ser Rodrik just stared balefully at Hodor/Bran.

“Ser Rodrik. I will have you word that no harm will come to Theon Greyjoy,” Commanded Ned gravely.

Ser Rodrik gnashed his teeth angrily together before answering, “Aye Milord, you have my word.”

Slowly Hodor/Bran released his hold on the old knight.

Then, as Cat watched Hodor's eyes flashed into white orbs, just like Bran's, for a moment before returning to normal. The lackwit stared about him in confusion before saying, “Hodor. Hodor?”

Cat's breath got caught in her throat, at the same time, Bran rose up from where Luwin had been holding him. His eyes were the normal brown once again. He stood there as if nothing was wrong. His face was blank and unemotional as he stared about.

“It's okay Hodor everything is alright,” Bran reassured the lackwit, “Go help Luwin,” he pointed to Theon. Bran then turned to Ser Rodrik, “Ser Rodrik, I need you to take your men and wake everyone, I have to know how many were affected, how many remember,” he commanded in a lifeless tone that matched his empty face.

Rodrik cast a glance to Ned, who gave him a curt nod.

“Aye, Lord Brandon, as you command,” rumbled Ser Rodrik unhappily.
The old Knight began shouting orders at those assembled, arranging teams to do Bran's bidding, leaving the Starks nearly alone.

People began to leave the great hall and Ned turned to Jory, who was still holding on to Robb, “Jory help Luwin, and make sure no more harm comes to Theon,” commanded Ned gravely.

Ned turned to his children, “Let's go talk.” he said gravely.
Chapter 3 The Talk

**Eddard Stark**

There were too many questions, too many possibilities running through his mind, but foremost among them Eddard was beginning to realise that this was no dream. Despite the insanity of it all, he appeared to have been brought back from the dead.

He closed the door to his solar as the last of his family filled in. The door closing seemed to act as a dam breaking.

He'd only managed to make it a couple of steps towards his desk before Sansa rushed at him wrapping her arms around him.

“Father...I've missed you,” she said tearfully as she held onto him.

Before he could say anything, Cat joined them in the embrace, wrapping her arms around them both, her breathing was haggard and she didn't say anything, just held on tightly to them both. He felt small hands going around his waist and looked to see Rickon standing there. He ruffled Rickon's hair.

They stayed like that for a moment, before Sansa pulled away, she blinked away the tears in her eyes and...

Ned blinked as the Sansa he knew seemed to disappear, in her place stood a poised and composed lady. She nodded once and then stepped aside.

Rickon just beamed at him and grabbed Cat's hand pulling her away to a chair.

Ned then found himself face to face with Robb.
Robb stood there, Theon's drying blood still on his hands, “Father...” he had such a defeated look on his face.

Ned didn't care about the blood or Robb’s irrational attack on Theon, he stepped forward and embraced his son. He held his boy close and thanked the Old Gods for bringing them back together.

“I failed you father, I'm sorry,” Robb lamented, his voice filled with such shame, his arms squeezing tight.

Ned just held his son for a moment, “It's alright. It seems we have a second chance now.”

They broke apart, and Robb had a timid smile on his face.

Ned patted his shoulder and walked past.

This time Jon was standing in his way.

Jon smiled a sad smile, but he didn't move to embrace him, he just stood there with that strange resigned smile before finally nodding at him and taking a seat.

Finally, Ned managed to get though all the heartfelt greetings. He went behind his desk and sat down. He relished the feel of his old chair, he'd done so much work while sitting here, ruled over the North as his father had...before the Mad King. Before the Rebellion. The weight of history sat heavily on his shoulders. He ran his hands over his desk before jerking himself out of his revere and casting a look at his assembled and reunited family.

Cat was sitting to his left, with Rickon sitting idly by her legs, leaning back against a chair leg. Sansa sat next to them, as perfectly poised as a Lady of a Great House. Arya stood still by her sister, a smile on her face but her eyes seemed to be watching everyone all at once without actually moving. Robb came next, slouching into his chair, with a sad smile, the defeated look was lessened but still there. Jon sat next to Robb, the same resigned look still on his face, his eyes unreadable as he looked at Ned.

In the final chair, sat Brandon. He was just sitting there as if waiting for them all to finish, his face still as blank as before. He was completely devoid of any emotion.
The hairs on the back of Ned’s neck stood at attention.

*Warg,* his mind echoed, but he remembered the old stories, legends of Stark Kings, Kings of Winter that were also wargs. It didn't matter he was still his son!

Silence deepened between them all. Glances were shared and still no one spoke.

Bran finally broke the silence, “Father we must prepare. The Oth-”

Jon cut him off mid-sentence, “We shouldn't start there.” he gave Bran a reprimanding look, “let's start slow. We should just clear up a few things first..”

“Jon's right, we should begin at the start first.” Sansa cut in, “Bran's right father, we have to prepare. But you have to know the precarious position we are in now.” She shared a knowing glance with Jon.

Ned raised an eyebrow and gave them both calculating looks. Again Sansa and Jon were working together, and almost completing each others sentences. He expected this from Jon and Arya but never Jon and Sansa, Cat had seen to the creation of the distance that was once between them.

“Aye father,” Robb nodded gravely, “Our position in the North is not as secure as you believe, especially if more people remember as we do.”

Ned shot his son a sharp look. “Explain.”

“The Boltons are not to be trusted,” Robb started.

“Not only the Boltons, the whole of the Seven Kingdoms stands on the precipice of civil war,” Jon added, “And the truth is that it was led there by the ambitions of one man.”

“Aye! Tywin Lannister. He wants to control the seven kingdoms himself!” Robb added hotly, perking up and leaning forward in his chair casting aside his melancholy.
Jon stopped and turned to stare at Robb.

“No. It was Petyr Baelish.”

Cat colored at this.

“He betrayed father in King’s Landing,” Sansa added.


“He started everything. The War of Five Kings came about because of his schemes,” Jon continued.

*Five Kings?* Ned thought sharply, *What five kings? Stannis and Joffrey would probably have been two of the five, but who are the other three?!

“...he had Lysa Arryn poison Jon Arryn. It wasn't the Lannisters, it was Lysa Arryn who murdered him.” Jon finished.

Ned’s world turned upside down with those words. *It was Lysa? How Why?*

“Lies!” Cat screamed, “My sister would never murder her own husband!” she jumped from her seat rounding on Jon, quivering with rage. “Bastard! How dare you? You accuse of my sister of such a sin! You, a lowly Bastard?”

“Mother...” started Robb trying to calm Cat, he reached out a calming hand but she pushed it away and stood in front of Jon.

“How dare you spew such horrid lies! You worthless Bastard!” Cat shrieked at Jon.

Sansa got up and dragged her mother back from Jon, “Enough mother! You will not speak to him like this again!” she commanded with a firmness and fierceness Ned didn’t know she possessed. She
placed herself between Cat and Jon.

“Have you lost your senses!” Cat retorted angrily at her eldest daughter. “He's a Bastard! You can't trust his words! A Bastard's words are not to be trusted!”

Ned had heard enough. He slammed his hand down on his desk, “That is enough Cat! You will be silent!” He roared in anger, rising from his seat. “I rejoice that we are all reunited...but that does not mean you have the right to speak to Jon in this way! You debase yourself with your words! We will have words later! About this and your other misdeeds!”

Cat's head turned towards Ned in surprise, “Words? Misdeeds, my Lord?”

Ned frowned at Cat, he waved a hand at her cutting off her further words, “It is a private discussion. We will speak, later.” he stressed.

Jon had been watching the interplay, silently glaring at Cat, unlike before he was not in the least bit cowed by her. He stood up and Ned groaned internally, Jon had finally reached his limit with Cat's poisonous attitude and evil words with him.

Jon stood up and scowled at her, “I'm not a bastard.”

An icy chill froze Ned's stiffening spine. No...he couldn't know, could he?

Cat reddened at this and anger shone from her eyes. She cast an enraged look at Ned, her ire rising anew as all watched.

“How could you, Ned?” she screeched red in the face.

“I am not the son of Eddard Stark,” Jon announced.

Cat's mouth closed with a click and her new tirade stopped before it had began.

“This isn't true father, is it? It can't be!” Robb exclaimed jumping up from his chair, surprise etched
on his face.

Ned simply stared at Jon, the truth was finally coming out and he didn't know how to feel about this now.

Jon turned to Robb, “I'm sorry Robb...we're not brothers.” he paused and placed a reassuring hand on Robb’s shoulder. He cast an unreadable look at Ned, “I am Stark by blood. I always have been, that has, and that will *always* be true.” he paused taking in a deep breath and letting out an even deeper sigh.

Ned opened up his mouth to speak but Jon held up his hand forestalling his words, “It's ok...I understand why you did it. We can speak later about this. There are more important issues we must deal with first,” he said with a sad smile.

Jon turned to face Cat, the smile disappearing from his face, “I am the son of Lyanna Stark. My father was Rhaegar Targaryen. My parents were in love, and he didn't rape her. Robert's Rebellion was built on a *lie*. I am Jon of House Targaryen and I am the *rightful* King of the Seven Kingdoms!”

Cat was white as a sheet now and stood almost trembling in front of Jon. Ned collapsed into his chair. The words had been said, the lie shattered and now they would all have to live with it all.

Cat didn't utter a word as Sansa led her back to her seat, she meekly sat and stared with wide and fearful eyes at Jon.

At the same time, Robb was looking like someone had clubbed him over the head with a mace. Sansa took the time to gently push him back into his seat, before taking her own.

Once more silence ruled over Ned's solar for many moments.

“Good job taking it slow.” Arya teased with a snort of amusement breaking the silence.

Jon and Sansa snorted in response.

“I have a good idea to strengthen our position, and it's a simple plan. A very simple plan. We find all
our enemies and kill them all,” Arya suggested evenly. “I even have a list we can start with.” she
added with no hesitation and a serene smile.

A coldness settled on Ned, and he gave her a disturbed look. She’d suggested that with an evenness
of voice and lightness that belied the sheer bloodthirstiness of the remark.

“No pies!” Jon and Sansa said in the same breath.

Arya smirked and shrugged, “No promises,” she retorted smugly.

Pies? Ned thought, seeing the disturbed expressions on Jon and Sansa's faces did not put him at ease.

Foreboding rode through Ned’s mind, despite it all he forged forward, “It seems that a great many
things happened after my death.”

“More than a person should be able to endure, but...most of us did,” Sansa said gravely.

Ned felt more coldness spreading in him, “Then perhaps you should tell me what happened after
I...died.”

Jon nodded and gestured to Sansa, who began speaking in earnest.

She spoke of many things, all that happened in King's Landing. The rising up of the various

She spoke eloquently and concisely but he sensed that some things were glossed over or not said.
She spoke of what Joffrey had done to her of how the Seven Kingdoms had splintered. Of how
Stannis, of all people, had killed Renly with blood magic, done by a Red Priestess of R'hllor. Robb
declaring himself King in the North. Theon eventual betrayal and what he'd actually done and what
he'd pretended to do.

Ned cast a look at Robb, suddenly his senseless attack was not so senseless. Rather it was much
deserved, as had been Ser Rodrik’s attempted attack.
She described what she knew of the battles that came next, how Stannis was repulsed from King's Landing. Of how Robb had smashed Tywin Lannister's armies at every turn, of the mistakes he and Cat made as the campaign continued till their eventual betrayal at the Twins and their deaths. Of the Red Wedding. Of Roose Bolton and the Frey's breakage of guest rights.

Robb and Cat volunteered some relevant words as Sansa's tale unfolded, all the while wearing alternating expressions of pride, regret and shame.

After that peace seemed to have settled for a time on the Seven Kingdoms. Though the intrigue and lies continued, with death following in the wake of it all. Joffrey's poisoning and Tyrion Lannister's Trial by Combat. The death of Prince Oberyn and the upheaval that caused in Dorne. Sansa's escape with Baelish's help to the Vale were she should have been safe if not for Lysa's madness.

Ned had watched as Cat's mood had plummeted to a bleak nadir as Sansa had described all that happened with Lysa, ending with her death at Baelish's cunning and deceitful hand. And hearing Sansa speak of being sold to the Bolton's only made things worse.

Her eventual escape to find refuge with Jon at the Wall had Cat looking everywhere except at Jon.

Sansa finished with the so called Battle of the Bastards and Rickon's death. The joining of the Wildlings and the Loyal Houses of the North and their killing of the Boltons and retaking of Winterfell with the aide of the Vale Knights.

Not since he'd held Lyanna as she'd died did Ned feel such an urge to cry. Which of the Gods had they blasphemed against to have to endure such horror?

He knew there were some things they weren't saying, how did the Wildlings get past the Wall? Why would they join with the North against the Boltons?

He'd thought the story over but it wasn't Jon took over and explained that while they'd secured the North, Cersei Lannister had secured her hold on the rest of the Kingdoms, with her burning of the Great Sept in Wildfire.

And then just to add another layer of madness to it all Jon talked of Daenerys Targaryen and her Dragons. Actual fire breathing dragons. Three of them. And her army of Unsullied and Dothraki Screamers. She came back to Westeros as Aegon the Conqueror had, with Blood and Fire to take
back her birthright.

Jon paused here before continuing, “More happened after we took back Winterfell and Daenerys took Dragonstone.” He paused and took a deep breath. Ned felt his heart beat faster as he felt some sort of descending blow, “We-Bran cast the spell to try to undo everything, but it was not because of the civil war that ravaged the continent, nor was it because Daenerys crossed the Narrow Sea with Dragons.”

Ned frowned in consternation, what possible reason could be more pressing than that?

“The army of the undead marches on the Wall. The Others come. The Long Night has returned once more. Will return,” Bran proclaimed cutting in with that same maddening toneless voice.

All that Ned had felt before paled in comparison to now. He felt like tearing his hair out at the roots in madness and rage while his spine had apparently been replaced with a giant slab of ice.

“The Others?” he repeated dumbly. This couldn't be happening, not with everything they'd already revealed to him.

“And the undead,” Bran added. “We must be united and strong or they will destroy everything again.”

Ned ran his hands though his hair in a harried way, and looked at his family. Jon, Arya and Sansa all had grim expressions but didn't look surprised. Cat who had seemed to be recovering from the shock of Jon's heritage, her sister's madness and trials Sansa had been through had once more been shocked into a stillness that was very much not characteristic of her. While Robb had the same incredulous and harried look he himself was probably carrying on his face. Rickon on the other hand was just watching everything with a focused look on his face.

Bran was still speaking and Ned made an effort to focus, “Sacrifices were needed. Blood of the recently dead fueled the spell, by feeding the Heart Tree on the Isle of Faces.”

“Wait a minute. Sacrifices?! Blood of the Dead?” Jon looked to Sansa in disbelief before looking back to Bran. “Sansa was a part of the Spell! You convinced your sister to kill herself?!” Jon ran his hand roughly through his hair, “Dany! Tyrion! They killed themselves?!”
Bran stared back at Jon his face blank and empty. “Yes.”

The hairs on the back of Ned’s neck stood straight up, completely at attention at Bran's simple and very troubling answer.

Jon turned away from Bran rubbing his forehead as if in pain.

*Who was this boy with Brandon's face that spoke so lifelessly? Where was his energetic and happy son?*

He looked to Cat and he could see her on the verge of despair.

Jon turned to Sansa, “You went along with this?” he demanded of her in a horrified tone.

Sansa held her head high, “There was no other option.”

Jon started rubbing his temples, “With all the risks, you agreed? Without telling me?”

Sansa gestured at Ned and the rest of the family, “We're all here, back in Winterfell. It was the right choice.”

Jon just glared at her for moment before letting out a deep sigh, “You just like always being right, don’t you?”

Sansa just smirked at Jon in response.

Ned ignored their byplay and gave Bran a hard stare. His young son stared back unblinking, not in the least put off by Ned's patented paternal displeasure.

“Brandon Stark!” he managed to say with displeasure.
Bran blinked but didn't react to the reprimand or shy away from the disapproving tone.

“Yes?” he replied remorselessly.

Ned kept looking him in the eye trying to understand and pierce this new boy that sat before him. The staring came to naught as Bran didn't even seem to blink as he returned the stare.

“What happened to you?” Ned eventually asked, very much afraid of the answer.

Bran didn't even miss a beat answering, “I became the Three eyed Raven.”

Ned frowned, “What does that mean? How did you do that?”

“I see everything now. The Past. The Present. Visions of the future. The Three eyed Raven showed me,” Bran replied.

It took Ned a second to realise what Bran's words meant, “A mentor. Who is he?”

“Yes. A mentor. He was known as Brynden Rivers, a former Lord Commander of the Night's Watch.” Bran answered.

It a second for Ned to recognize the name.

Wait...Brynden Rivers? Bloodraven?! The son of Aegon the Fourth? Aegon the Unworthy? That Brynden Rivers? He's long dead!” Ned exclaimed flabbergasted at the impossibility of the answer.

“He's alive and well, beyond the Wall,” responded Bran simply.

A thousand eyes and one, the century old rhyme echoed in Ned's head as he recalled all that he had heard of Lord Bloodraven. A Kinslayer and said to be a foul sorcerer. One of the Great bastards of Aegon the Unworthy and former Hand of the King for several of the Targaryen Kings of old.
“Brandon...what has happened to you?” Ned finally managed to ask.

“I'm the Three eyed Raven now, I'm not Brandon anymore, not really. I remember being Brandon Stark, but I'm not him anymore.”

Ned stared at Bran...no, at the Three eyed Raven. He cast a glance around him.

Arya, Jon and Sansa shared the same pained expression on their faces as Bran finished his pronouncement but there was no surprise there. Cat was no longer the verge of despair, she looked to be lying in a pit of it. Robb was giving him a horrified lock, while Rickon was looking only a little upset.

Ned sat back in his chair a sense of defeat almost overwhelming him, “What foulness have we committed to be so damned?” he finally lamented.

“We haven't been damned, we have a second chance now.” Jon retorted.

“We can do everything right this time,” Sansa added.

“No one will tear us apart this time,” Arya chimed in.

Ned thought for a moment before replying, “Then tell me what is next?”

“The spell went astray, it was fed too much blood. Too many people remember here. We cannot decide our first course of action till I see who else has remembered and what is happening elsewhere in the world. I need to go to the Godswood. I have work to do. I need to see who's returned. When Ser Rodrik has finished his task, send him to me there.”

With that Bran stood and left the solar without another word.
She watched Bran leave the solar.

Her trembling wouldn't stop.

She hadn't gotten her family back, her sweet boy, Bran, seemed to be completely gone....

And the bastard wasn't a bastard. He wasn't even her children's half brother. He was a cousin. He was Lyanna's son. He was a Dragon. The rightful Dragon King!

_Madness!_

Ned was back but he was angry at her. Sansa was angry at her. Her sweet daughter filled with southern songs of Knights and Princesses was gone and in her place sat a Lady of a Great House. Poise and strength radiated from her. Arya was almost as unnaturally silent as Bran, but what emotion was there seemed filled with a bloodthirstiness. Rickon was less different but the complete sentences and directness of his words did not belong coming out the mouth of such a small child.

And Robb...

He'd started out looking defeated but he looked devastated now.

With all of her willpower she refused to think of Lysa now, or what she had done.

_Family, Duty, Honor...._

Lysa had held true to none of these things.

And the true horror....The Long Night. The Others...And actual Dragons.

Inside, a part of Cat broke, and she wept...
Ch4 Madness and Loathing in King's Landing

Chapter 4 Madness and Loathing in King's Landing

Joffrey Baratheon

He screamed to his feet, a screaming was echoing through his ears. It took him a second to recognize that he was the one that was screaming. He stopped and started gulping down air.

The strain and burning in his throat was gone, he sucked in air greedily, in a daze.

The door to his room burst open, the Hound stepped in, with a hand on his sword looking around for a threat, but all he saw was Joffrey standing in his night clothes gasping for breath.

“Your Grace?” the Hound asked in strange voice.

Joffrey tried to gather his thoughts quickly trying to understand what was happening, “The damned Imp! He poisoned me!” he screeched angrily, “I'll have him torn limb from limb!”

The Hound gave him an unreadable look, before he turned and closed the door, finally turning back to Joffrey, “You remember then, do you?” his tone had a very strange lilt to it.

Joffrey sneered angrily at the Hound's stupidity, “Of course I remember! How can I forget...” he trailed off suddenly remembering something else. Something from the Battle of Blackwater Bay.

Fuck the Kingsguard! Fuck the City! Fuck the King!

The Hound advanced on him menacingly, “I'm very fucking happy that you remember,” he grabbed Joffrey, effortlessly lifting him up off the ground.

“Release me! I am the KING!” Joffrey screamed in a panic.
“Fuck the King,” the Hound retorted simply. His scar stretched into a cruel and satisfied smile, “This is for the Little Bird.”

Joffrey began screaming as his whole world turned into pain.

Jaime Lannister

His eyes opened. He stared around a for a moment trying to get his bearings.

“It worked. Seven Hells...it worked,” Jaime said with a sigh of relief. He clenched both of his hands, the feel of the silk covers in his right hand, relishing the feeling for a moment.

He pushed the feeling aside and sat up quickly, twisting around to get his bearing and figure out where he was now.

He froze as he suddenly recognized who's chambers he was in. With a deathly slowness he turned to his side.

She was there...

Sleeping peacefully, her long hair flowing again, and entwined in her covers, his twin slept with a small contented smile on her face.

The ghostly image of the last time he'd seen her flashed in front of his eyes; Eyes wide and going red, face red then purple contorted in a rictus of madness and despair as he'd squeezed the life out of her.

He blinked the image away, breathing heavily as his eyes once more focused on the Cersei that was sleeping next to him now. He cast his eyes away and scanned the room trying to get his bearings.

The remains of a meal sat on a table, their clothes were scattered across the room. Everything was so
familiar, this scene was so familiar. It took him a second to recognize this night. This had been one of their last nights together before the Fat Man had taken them North to make Ned Stark the Hand of the King.

“Fuck...” he whispered under his breath. “He's already dead.”

Jon Arryn was already dead, the plan had them coming back before Lysa poisoned him. Obviously something had happened after he'd died.

*Well there goes the plan,* he thought in annoyance. *What to do? What to do?*

Jaime just sat there thinking hard. He frowned, he knew he was out of his depth, thinking had always been Tyrion's area of expertise. He knew he had to act...but without making things worse. Time stretched on as he stewed in his thoughts.

Next to him, Cersei stirred in her sleep, moaned and then turned over, the covers falling away from her back, exposing her soft skin. She looked so beautiful and peaceful.

*Kill her,* the realistic part of him screamed mentally.

Jaime clenched his jaw, thinking of the perversions she would visit on the realm in her madness. Aerys, she was not. Maegor she was not.

She was worse...

He got out of the bed and circled to her side, going down on his knees to look her in the face. To look his twin in the face, the other half of his soul.

She looked so innocent now. Not like the creature she had become after the children's deaths...no. No, that wasn't true. It all just a facade.

*Melara Hetherspoon.*
Bran had shown him the truth. Cersei had always been a monster. She'd just been leading him around by his own cock since the beginning.

He reached out his hands, intending to strangle her a second time. His hands were shaking as they inched closer to her neck. He tried to stop the shaking but he couldn't. His hands stopped so close to her face he could feel her breath on them.

His breathing was haggard now, as he stared at her unconscious face.

I can't do it...not again.

Once was hard enough...he couldn't do it a second time.

He turned away and dressed quickly, fleeing the room. Leaving Cersei sleeping, undisturbed and alive.

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What to do? What to do? Echoed through Jaime's head as he stalked the halls of the Red Keep. The whole plan had been put on its head. They were supposed to come back before Jon Arryn died. Events would have been more controllable in those circumstances.

Unfortunately, walking around had confirmed for him just when he was. Redcloaks, Baratheon men and a few men in Tyrell finery. He could see them spread around the Keep...but no Arryn guards.

Lysa had already fled the Red Keep and so had Stannis. Everything was so precarious now, and it would only get even worse.

The servants also seemed to be moving around in a more harried manner than he remembered. One moved to the corridor ahead of Jaime. The servant recognized Jaime, blanched and then turned and ran off in the other direction.

What the fuck? What is going on now?
“I've been looking for you, Ser Jaime.” a familiar voice called out.

Jaime turned and found himself face to face with Ser Bronn of the Blackwater.

“Bronn, good to see you,” Jaime nodded in greeting. A familiar face would be helpful now.

Bronn had an unreadable expression on his face, “Is it?”

Jaime frowned, of course it...wait, “How did you get into the Red Keep?” he asked eagerly, a sense of dread building in gut, “Did you use one of the secret passages?”

Bronn shrugged, “I was going to. Then the gate guards recognized me as Ser Bronn of the Blackwater and let me in.”

Jaime's jaw dropped in surprise.

Bronn raised an eyebrow at him, “Based on your reaction, I'm guessing this wasn't a part of the plan to make a couple of nobodies remember?”

Jaime shook his head still trying to come to grips with this unexpected revelation, “No. That wasn't a part of the plan.” He was reeling and a small part of him didn't want to believe Bronn.

Movement caught his eye and turned to see two Redcloaks at the end of the corridor.

“You two! Come here!” cried out Jaime at two Redcloaks that were passing by.

Startled the men came quickly to Jaime's side.

“Do you remember?” he demanded of them.
The first one gave him a confused look, “Remember what, Ser Jaime?”

Jaime mentally dismissed that one and turned to the second one.

The second man had a very disturbed look on his face, he started to tremble a little as he spoke.

“I was with you on the way back from Highgarden...I remember...it was a second Field of Fire,” the Redcloak admitted fearfully, “But it was just a dream...wasn't it?” His companion shot him a bewildered look but remained silent.

*Seven hells! Fuck!* 

“So what happened? What changed?” asked Bronn.

The Redcloaks were forgotten as he turned to Bronn, “No idea, everything was going according to plan before I died.” Jaime admitted. Too many possibilities were jumping through his mind, and he had no idea how to react to all of this, whatever the extent of this was? Who else remembered? He blanched, did Cersei remember? That would be bad...very bad.

The sound of heavy footsteps and the jingling of heavy armour, came towards them. Jaime welcomed the distraction and turned to face the sound.

The Hound was coming down the corridor now, his eyes darting left and right in suspicion and with his hand gripping the hilt of his sword. The Hound looked like he was ready for a fight.

The Hound looked at the small group and eyed them with suspicion and derision as he slowly approached. As he neared, Jaime say that there was blood splayed across his armour.

Jaime's hand slipped down to grasp his sword.

“Clegane?”

The Hound didn't answer immediately, he cast a dubious look at Bronn and a dismissive sneer at the
Jaime remembered how Clegane had died, fighting on the Silence, side by side with Brienne and Arya, ending the perversions of Euron Greyjoy...too many people died that day, a dark despondent part of his psyche mourned. But here was the Hound, back, and not limping anymore. At his most powerful.

“What the fuck?” the Hound finally asked.

Jaime snorted, taking reassurance from the same foul mouthed manner that the Hound always used.

“Good to see you remember Clegane,” Jaime retorted with a smug smile.

“Aye I remember! I remember that damned Ironborn cunt and his fucking mutes!” Clegane said manically. He paused and looked unsure for a moment. “Euron fucking Greyjoy got a lucky hit in.”

Jaime nodded, “I wasn't there but that's what I heard. He killed you before he was gutted,” he took a deep a breath, “You weren't the only loss that day,” he finished gravely.

The Hound's scowl intensified and he clenched his teeth in anger.

“Glad to see you remember and are as foul as usual,” added Bronn lightly.

Clegane rolled his eyes, “I wasn't the only one that remembered, the little shit remembered everything.”

Jaime froze. Joffrey...suddenly he knew where the blood on Clegane's armour came from.

He'd been avoiding thinking about his firstborn. Joffrey had been spoiled completely by Cersei. His actions as King had marked him as perverted as the Mad King. The cruelties that marked the beginning of his reign had been too reminiscent of Aerys, and they would have only gotten worse with time...but Olenna Tyrell had made sure that worse never happened.
But now, he was alive and back. And...a problem.

A sadness settled on Jaime as he realised that he couldn't save him.

A plan began to form in his mind. The original plan had been for Tyrion to manipulate things in the Westerlands after convincing Uncle Kevan to join him. The two of them together could have manipulated father to a better position for them all.

_Tyrion_...he would know what to do.

He turned quickly, to the two Redcloaks that had been standing at attention the whole time.

“You! Find Captain Vylarr, have him gather the men, _quietly_, we're riding to Casterly Rock _now_,” he turned to the second man, “You get to the stables get all the horses ready!”

The Redcloaks ran off to obey him and he turned to Clegane, “Get Tommen, meet us at the stables,” he turned Bronn, “Raid the treasury, gold always helps with sudden trips. Avoid any Baratheon men.”

Clegane nodded and headed off in a brisk pace, but Bronn hesitated.

“And when we get to Casterly Rock...maybe I can get my castle?” Bronn asked pointedly.

“Talk to Tyrion, he's in charge now,” Jaime retorted.

Jaime rushed off leaving a thoughtful Bronn behind, as he ran to get his armour and then do his part of the new plan.

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He entered the antechamber of Myrcella's room and gave a few words to the princess's faithful Septa that was tasked with watching over the sleeping princess. A Westerlands woman that was loyal to House Lannister. With a few quick and urgent words, he had her up and in a frenzy preparing
He left the woman behind as he entered Myrcella's sleeping chamber. He saw her sleeping peacefully there, entwined in her covers, and a part of him tried very hard not to think of the last time that he'd seen. He banished the image of her bloodied form laying lifeless in his arms on the boat leaving Dorne.

He shook off his haze and stepped quickly to her side, sitting down on the bed. He paused for a moment and stroked her hair as his emotions swirled and danced in his gut.

“Myrcella,” he whispered eventually, gently shaking her awake.

Myrcella's eyes flew open and she blinked furiously before focusing on Jaime's face. She relaxed as she recognized him and gave him a small smile.

“Father.”

A part of him ached and he shook his head, “No, it's Uncle Jamie. You have to wake up now.”

Myrcella blinked in surprise and twisted around in surprise looking around her.

“It's alright sweetheart, but you have to get up now.” Jaime uttered trying to calmly cajole her to full awareness.

The girl sat up warily, a strange look in eyes. “Father,” she repeated.

Jamie shook his head and smiled at her, “You need to wake up, I'm not Robert.”

“No. Father.” she said stressing the word and giving him a semi amused smile.

Something clicked in Jaime's head and he went white in shock as his heart skipped a couple of beats. “You...remember?” the words came out as barely a whisper.
Myrcella nodded, “Dorne. We were on a ship going home to mother.” she paused and gave him a dazzling smile, “We were talking, then I hugged you...I was so happy,” she stopped and frowned before continuing, “And then...then I felt so lightheaded.” She twisted her head around to gaze around her room and looked at her child hands. “Is this a dream?” she asked in a lost voice.

The guilt wracked Jaime's chest, “You...you died. Ellaria poisoned you.”

Myrcella shot him a sharp look.

“My...you didn't matter. You're alive now, we're all alive now, but we have to go now. We have to escape.” Jaime said forestalling any questions, picking her up and bearing his returned daughter out the room before she could say anything else.

He wanted to savor the moment and enjoy it, Myrcella had been given back to him and things would be better for her...provided they could defeat the Night's King.

That didn't matter now, first they had to get out of the Red Keep and get to Casterly Rock.

Clegane, Bronn, Joffrey, some of the Redcloaks...and now Myrcella. They all remembered.

*Who else remembers?*

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**Robert Baratheon**

Robert groaned and turned over in bed, and with a startled yell, he found himself face first on the hard and cold floor. He groaned again and twisted himself around to sit up. He rubbed his face, feeling his, now, tender nose.

The pain was almost nonexistent nothing like his belly. His head was clearer than it had been for a while now, since Grand Maester Pycelle had last given him milk of the poppy. Instinctively a hand
went to his belly. He froze as he felt no pain there, he searched for the wounds the boar's tusks had gouged there, he found nothing.

Robert blinked, “What a fucking strange dream...done in by boar?” he snorted in derision, “Seven Hells. What a way for the Demon of the Trident to die. Too fucking slow to spear a damn boar. Gods...” He shook his head willing the strange dream away.

The door to his chambers opened and in strode one of his Kingsguard, sword at the ready.

“Young Grace, is everything alright?” asked Ser Mandon Moore, looking around the room, searching for a threat.

“Well it took you long enough! Don't just stand there like a fucking halfwit, help me up!” Robert crowed angrily.

Ser Mandon Moore stood there with what was for him a very uncharacteristically thoughtful look on his face. Slowly he put his sword away and moved towards Robert. He reached out an arm and helped Robert up off the floor.

Once on his feet, Robert walked towards the table next to his bed. He pulled out a chair and sat heavily. He grabbed a wine jug and raised it up to his lips, gulping heavily from it. With a satisfied sigh he put it back and gave a thunderous burp.

Robert turned back to Ser Mandon, who continued to stare at him with a confused look, on his normally blank face. Mandon Moore had never been one of the smarter of his Kingsguard, much too odd and unlikable, tactless to an extreme in his words, but the man was a terror with a sword. Not as good as Jaime Lannister or Barristan the Bold, but close enough. He was man of little sense, except on the battlefield.

“What?” Robert scowled grumpily as Ser Mandon remained pensive.

Time stretched out, before Ser Mandon finally asked, “Didn't you die? Didn't the boar kill you?”

Robert went white. It was a dream. It didn't happen!
“What in the name of the Seven are you prattling about?” asked Robert shaken by the possibilities. He remembered the boar. How slow he was to lower his spear and take its charge. And the pain...

“You died and Prince Joffrey became King.”

Robert blinked rapidly, “I named Ned as Regent.” he said quietly, some memories sharpening in his mind's eye. The memory of his deathbed and the pain caressed his psyche.

“Yes your Grace.” Ser Mandon nodded.

Robert slouched in his chair, if I died how am I here now? “Am I dead now?”

Ser Mandon didn't answer immediately, instead he started to rub the back of his head with a peculiar expression on his face.

“We may both be dead....I remember there was a battle,” Ser Mandon began, “The city was under attack.”

Robert looked up sharply, “What?”

“Lord Stannis was rebelling against King Joffrey. His men were attacking the walls.”

Robert gaped for a moment before finding words, “Stannis...my brother Stannis? My brother that has a constant hard on for fulfilling his duty was rebelling against his own nephew?”

“Yes, your Grace.”

Robert sat back reeling as if Ser Mandon had struck him in the face.

Ser Mandon didn't wait for Robert to recover and continued talking, “Lord Tyrion was the acting Hand, he led us into battle, sallying forth and killing Lord Stannis’s men attacking the Mud Gate.”
This second blow was just as surprising as the first.

Robert looked up sharply and couldn't believe his ears, “Tyrion...Tyrion Lannister...the Imp...acting Hand? And leading the men into battle? And he actually did battle?” How...why in the Seven Hells did Ned name a Lannister as Hand of the King? And the Imp, of all Lannisters?

“Yes your Grace, I saw him take a man's leg off, before splitting his skull open with his axe,” Ser Mandon confirmed.

“Fuck me. I didn't know the Imp had it in him,” Robert said in disbelief, respect filling his tone. He turned back to Mandon, “Well? What happened next?”

Again, Ser Mandon had a thoughtful look on his face, “I fulfilled the Dowager Queen's commands.” he answered cryptically.

“Which was?” Robert prompted in exasperation.

“The Queen wanted me to ensure that the Hand did not return from the battlefield.” Ser Mandon said without blinking.

A coldness spread through Robert, as he looked at Ser Mandon aghast, “Fuck me! Her own brother?! I know that she's always despised him, but Kinslaying?” he took a deep breath, “You killed him?”

“I sliced open his face, but I then I felt a pain and then...then I was here, outside your chambers your Grace,” Ser Mandon stated in confusion.

Robert stared for a moment before grabbing the jug of wine and taking another hearty gulp from it.

“How in the Seven Hell's did Ned let all of this happen?” questioned Robert in bewilderment. Did the whole of the Seven Kingdoms go mad after my death?

“King Joffrey had Lord Eddard executed,” explained Ser Mandon.
The feelings of confusion he'd been having disappeared. Those feelings from before, paled in comparison to his rising rage, “The little shit did what?!” Robert roared seeing red.

“King Joffrey executed Lord Eddard.” repeated Ser Mandon without hesitation.

Wood splintered in Robert's hands as the arms of his chair surrendered to his enraged strength. He rose from his seat and picked it up throwing it across the room in a fit of fury.

Ser Mandon stepped to the side, dodging the chair, but not saying anything.

Robert stood there, his breathing heavy and fury building in him.

*Ours is the Fury.*

Now more than ever he felt his House's words ringing true. Joffrey, his little shit of a son had executed the man he loved most! The Brother he chose over all others...over his own flesh and blood! All those carefree days in the Eyrie, Jon and all the lessons he'd tried to knock into his own stubborn head while Ned would stand there and mock him with his silence after each mistake. The rebellion, and all the blood they'd shed together for justice. Justice for Lord Rickard, Brandon... *Lyanna*...all of it undone by *Joffrey*!

He'd always known that the little shit had been wrong in the head, but this was too much!

Maybe Stannis really had been thinking about duty when he rebelled?

Yes, Stannis would have joined with Renly, they'd have rallied the other Kingdoms against Joffrey and the Westerlands. Tywin Lannister would have supported his grandson no matter what, but two Lords of Winterfell being murdered in succession in King's Landing would not be accepted by the other Lord Paramounts.

Robert turned to Ser Mandon, “So Stannis attacked King's Landing while Renly rallied the kingdoms against the Old Lion?!”
Ser Mandon frowned before shaking his head, “Lord Renly with the Tyrells named himself King...at least for a while. He died, they said he was killed by one of his own Kingsguard, a Stormlander, Brienne of Tarth…”

Robert felt dizzy, he reached a hand out and steadied himself on the table.

“...The North and the Riverlands named Robb Stark, the new King in the North and he was fighting Lord Tywin. The Young Wolf was destroying Lord Tywin's armies at every battle. The King in the North wasn't losing.”

The dizziness was gone replaced with disbelief as Robert stared opened mouthed at Ser Mandon and the insane words that were spewing forth from his mouth.

Robert staggered away from the table and sat heavily down on the edge of his bed. Renly, dead? The North and Riverlands in open rebellion...no not rebellion they were seceding from the Seven Kingdoms! And Robb Stark...he remembered the boy from Winterfell. He looked more like his mother than Ned. He'd seemed earnest and well mannered but still a green boy. Nothing had really stood out about him. And that boy was beating the Old Lion?

_The Seven Kingdoms really did go mad after I died!_

He sat there deep in thought, Ser Mandon's revelations twisting and turning in his mind till a distant sound penetrated his haze.

The sound was familiar, it was distant but familiar. There was an urgency attached to his familiarity. It was coming from outside. Grateful for the distraction, he stood up and went out onto his balcony, throwing open the doors and following the noise out. King’s Landing was spread out in front of him, the same as always unchanged by whatever state he really was in, whether dead or alive...and it still stank of shit!

It took him a second to recognize the sound. He blanched as the sound finally registered with his already tumultuous mind...the bells of the Great Sept were ringing.

_Seven Hells! What other calamity is happening now?_

**Renly Baratheon**
Thrashing woke Renly.

He lurched up, clutching at his chest. Eyes wide and searching for the shadow creature with Stannis’s face that had stabbed him.

He quickly froze as he recognized the sight of his private quarters in the Red Keep. He stared about him in a daze till the thrashing that initially awoke him distracted him as it continued next him. He turned to look and froze again in surprise.

Next to him, lay Loras, asleep and thrashing about, his face contorted in pain, dreaming about something...something...unpleasant it appeared.

He stretched out as if in a dream and started to shake Loras awake.

“Loras...wake up...everything's alright,” he called out reassuringly, trying to wake Loras from whatever nightmare was gripping him.

Loras jerked at his touch and almost seemed to leap from the bed, he fell heavily onto the ground but didn't stay there. He leapt up shaking himself and jumping from foot to foot, moving away from their bed.

“Gods! The pain! There was so much pain!” Loras gasped with an anguished expression on his face, “She burned us! She burned us all!” Loras cried as he shook.

“She who?” asked Renly encouragingly, as he came off the bed and approached the agitated Loras.

“It was Cersei,” Loras's tone oozed such venom as he spoke the name, “She burned us...Father! Margaery! Me...even Ser Kevan!” Loras spat angrily, “The entire sept! The Great Sept! She burned us in green flames!”

Renly paled, green flames? There was only one substance that burned green...Wildfire.
He shook his head.

*Cersei burned the Sept of Baelor with Wildfire?!* He thought in astonished shock.

He shook himself again and went to the trembling agitated Loras and wrapped his arms around his lover, enjoying the closeness, “It’s alright. Whatever happened, you’re alright now. I’m here with you. We’re together again...and whatever comes we’ll face it together.” he whispered into Loras’s ear.

He felt the trembling stop and then Loras's arms were clutching at him desperately.

“I missed you Renly,” Loras eventually whispered hoarsely.

Renly didn't reply, he just tightened his grip on Loras. They stood there for who knows how long, each one taking strength in the others presence.

Eventually, they separated and Renly gazed at Loras beautiful face. He stroked the face once, before kissing him deeply. They separated again.

A sound interrupted what ever else would have happened.

Renly frowned, *what was that?*

The sound came again and he watched as Loras flinched and whimpered at the sound.

He recognized the sound now. The Bells of the Great Sept were ringing. Whatever was happening, it was not a dream! Why would the bells be ringing in his dream, there was no purpose to it!

Renly's mind scrambled as he tried to come to terms whatever strange situation he and Loras suddenly found themselves in.

If this wasn't all a dream...
They hadn't been together here since Robert had died. Was it possible that somehow time had pasted backwards? Whatever magic had wrought this...he could take advantage of it.

Renly was Master of Laws and Lord Paramount of the Stormlands, he would use all of his power! He would bring the Lannisters to justice before the war could begin anew!

With purpose he let go of Loras, grabbed a cloak, wrapping it around him and covering himself, running to his door. He flung it open and began screaming for his guards.

The men outside hurried to him. They were all Baratheon men with a single man in Tyrell livery. They stood there, tense at his initial tone but ready for his words.

“We've been betrayed by the Lannisters! Gather all the loyal men. Kill all the Redcloaks. Bring me Cersei and Ser Jaime. Joffrey. Myrcella. Tommen. Bring me the children!” Renly angrily commanded his guards. “Spread the word!”

The men sprang away to obey him as Renly went back inside to don his armour.

Myrcella Baratheon

She didn't understand what was happening.

She didn't know why father was rushing though the Red Keep. She could hear the distant bells of the Great Sept and other noises now. The clanging of metal on metal, like she'd hear in the training yard and at tourneys.

Her septa and two Redcloaks were following behind them as Father carried her, holding her close, she should have relished the feeling, he'd never really done that when she'd been small the first time, Mother had always kept him distant...but it wasn't fun now.
Father and the Redcloaks held their swords at the ready, looking for enemies.

She recognized what was happening. There was fighting going on somewhere in the Red Keep. They’d seen some bodies as they moved. Guards and some servants.

An idle part of her wished she was back at the Water Gardens with Trystane. Those happy moments they’d stolen together, the soft kisses and everything else...

The happy memories crumpled to dust as father’s words came back to her. She’d died and Trystane had been alone. What happened after she died? Did he mourn her?

“Ser Jaime!” she heard a voice call out, cutting off her idle musings.

Her view changed as father turned to face the man calling him.

“Ser Jaime! What is happening?” asked Lord Petyr Baelish as he steadily approached. The Master of Coin was an oily man that she’d never liked.

_Did he remember as well?_ She wondered.

She turned to look at father’s face and saw a strange look on his face. In the next second, her feet found the floor and father was striding past her towards Baelish.

Father didn’t answer him and Baelish didn't manage to say anything more before father buried his sword to the hilt in his stomach.

A gasp of fright escaped Myrcella's mouth, but she quickly stifled it.

She watched as surprise then horror blossomed on Baelish's face as blood suddenly began to dribble out of his mouth, he coughed, splattering blood all over father's golden armour. His mouth moved but no sound came out. With jerk, father pulled out his sword. Baelish collapsed to the ground and lay there gurgling.
“Just to be safe,” father said cryptically. He raised up his sword and then brought it down on Baelish’s neck.

The gurgling stopped as the head came free from the body, blood pooling around the body and splashing father’s armoured boots.

Myrcella stared in astonishment at her father standing there with bloodied sword and a satisfied smile.

Father wiped the blood from his sword and then stepped back to her, gathering her up again before continuing forwards.

Myrcella stared at the satisfied smile on father’s face and then looked back at Baelish’s cooling corpse in bewilderment as they continued in their trek forwards.

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Father slowed as they neared an intersecting wide corridor. His eyes were wide and he was alert to any danger. There were fallen bodies ahead, Redcloaks and Baratheon men.

Standing amongst the bodies, bloodied sword in hand, stood Barristan the Bold. His white armour splashed with dark blood.

Relief flooded through her. Good old Ser Barristan would help them with all this madness. He turned to face them and as he recognized them, his face hardened.

“Ser Jaime.” he said raising his sword, his face and voice blank.

“Ser Barristan.” acknowledged father in the same blank tone.

Father put her down and pushed her behind her, sword pointed at Ser Barristan and she realised with a horrified gasp that maybe he wasn’t a friend anymore.
People spoke of father's unmatched skill with a longsword. People also spoke of Barristan's unmatched record in battle. Over the years she'd heard people wonder who was the better warrior.

Her horror intensified as she realised that she was probably about to find out.

“You remember,” father said, it wasn't a question.

“I remember all the horror your perverted son unleashed on the Seven Kingdoms.” he answered in derision.

Father's sword lowered and he seemed to relax, “Good. The Queen sends her regards, she says, no more songs, this time you stay by her side.”

Uncertainty flickered in Barristan's eyes and his sword wavered, “What?”

“House Lannister serves House Targaryen once more.” Jaime proclaimed to Ser Barristan, his tone smug.

She heard gasps of surprise coming from her septa and the Redcloaks with them. She ignored them.

What?! Father should be the very last man in the world to claim loyalty to the Dragons!

Ser Barristan seemed to hesitate at this, before a very skeptical look appeared on his face, “Kingslayer...You serve Daenerys Stormborn?”

“No, I serve the other Dragon,” Jaime stressed the word dramatically.

“What other Dragon? There are no others, wait...Viserys?” Barristan said with annoyance, “He's still alive isn't he? But he's no better than his father!”

“I serve Jon Targaryen, Lyanna Stark's son.”
Barristan reeled with that retort, his mouth dropping open in surprise.

Jaime continued, “You would know him better as the Bastard of Winterfell. Lord Stark has been hiding him as such since the Rebellion.” He gave Barristan another of his smug smiles.

Out of the shadows suddenly appeared Varys, as quiet as always, “He is not lying Ser Barristan. All of us here are loyal to House Targaryen.”

Barristan's sword wavered even more as he looked between them all, surprise etched on his face. A moment passed and then he lowered his sword, “I am Queensguard to Daenerys Targaryen. Ser Jaime....It seems we are not destined to cross swords tonight.”

Daenerys Targaryen? She thought in surprise. Barristan the Bold, the loyal and honorable, serving the Mad King's daughter?

“Good, then let's go, I have men preparing horses. We need to leave,” Jaime take a hold of her again and strode forward, resuming his anxious stride forward, towards escape.

Myrcella was barely paying attention now, Jon Targaryen? As in Jon Snow? A prince? The rightful King? She remembered the boy from their trip to Winterfell. He'd been so polite and had looked so pretty, she'd wished that he'd been Lord Stark's heir. Then maybe father- no King Robert, could have betrothed them instead of Sansa and Joffrey. She'd liked Sansa, she didn't deserve to be married to Joffrey.

Events continued to play out as Myrcella became lost in her thoughts.

“Stop...this way, there's a passage down here that will take us unseen to the Stables.” Varys stated, taking the lead. “You should all hurry. I would very much like to survive this time, if only to spite that damned red priestess.” Varys commented off hand, as he led them to the hidden path.

Father reversed his steps and followed Varys, she gave Varys a deep scrutinizing look. The Spider had always been kind to her, his smiles had always seemed genuine when they spoke, but still...
She shuddered.

She mentally reviewed his strange words. After a short while a deep part of her agreed with him, *I don't know what red priestess he's talking about but I'd like to survive as well*... 

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**Barristan Selmy**

He didn't know who drew first, all he knew was that the Red Keep had turned into a battlefield. Redcloaks fought Baratheon men. Baratheon men fought Baratheon men. Redcloaks fought Tyrell men. The smattering of guardsmen from various Stormlands and Crownlands houses fought against everyone and themselves.

It was utter chaos.

And the bells of the Great Sept continued to ring nonstop...

And now...

All he knew was that somehow, he was side by side with Jaime Lannister and the Spider. And if it hadn't been for the Spider, he'd have finally found out who was the better swordsman, him or Ser Jaime.

*Gods! How in the name of the Seven did Jaime **Lannister** end up loyal to House Targaryen? And he said House Lannister was loyal, not just him! What happened after I died in Meereen? Did Grey Worm survive?*

He cut off his musings as they reached the end of the tunnel and Varys opened the secret hatch there, before turned back to them.

“This is it, the exit to the stables,” he gestured them forward, “You'll be able to get out that way”.
Jaime frowned at Varys, “What about you?”

“I still have business in the capital,” Varys said without explaining.

“If it's with Baelish, I've already killed him.” Jaime retorted.

Varys raised an eyebrow at him, “So that was you? Hmm...I still have other business that must be dealt with...and I have my own means to escape.” he finished cryptically.

Jaime gave him a look before shaking his head and striding forward. Varys walked quickly, disappearing into a side passage.

Barristan remained silent and followed Jaime forward, without a word, despite his misgivings about this whole endeavor.

Moments passed, the Bells of the Great Sept were louder now, and they finally reached the Stables. A goodly number of Redcloaks were there. The Hound stood to one side with sullen looking Tommen and a septa. A black leather clad sellsword stood shouting orders at the Redcloaks.

Barristan wondered, who was this sellsword?

As they approached Tommen was the first one to notice them. He smiled sadly at Myrcella but didn't do anything else. She smiled back in response but seemed confused by Tommen's sullenness.

Barristan cast a look around and frowned, noticing who was missing where was Cersei? And Joffrey?

The Hound noticed him and then cast a look Jaime and jerked his head at Barristan. In response Jaime just waved it off and stepped up to the sellsword.

“Bronn.”

“Glad you could finally join us, I was just thinking of leaving you behind,” the sellsword...Bronn
quipped insolently.

Barristan raised an eyebrow at this, he turned to Jaime, expecting to hear a scathing retort at the sellsword's brashness and impertinence from the proud Lannister...but none came much to his surprise.

“If I was you I probably would have,” retorted Jaime, with an easy smile. “Everything ready?”

The ease with which they spoke especially surprised him. Who was this Bronn character?

Barristan twirled around drawing his sword, facing the speaker, he saw a red faced Loras Tyrell. The Knight of the Flowers was rushing at them with a small group of Baratheon and Tyrell men at his back.

Barristan met the charge and cut the first man down with ease. One of the Tyrell men came at him with a greatsword. He parried the first blow and then twisted, locking their guards together. Their eyes locked and the Tyrell man's face blanched as he recognized who he was crossing swords with, panic actually started to cross his face as Barristan forced the greatsword's edge away. The man tried to disengage but Barristan was quicker, the longer blade a hindrance to the man, and with a stunning blow he finished the Tyrell man off.

He suddenly found himself back to back with Jaime Lannister and together they cut a bloody tide through the attackers. More and more of the attackers fell in quick succession. The skirmish was very much in their favour.
With a roar of rage, Loras Tyrell rushed at them, lightening fast strikes coming at them, each was parried with contemptible ease either by himself or Jaime.

*Is the boy mad?* Thought Barristan as Loras continued to press his attack instead of seeking to try to escape. *What are you trying to prove?*

Regardless, Barristan fought on.

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**Jaime Lannister**

Loras Tyrell came at him, sword raised with a roar of anger.

A small part of him was incredulous at the Tyrell boy's stupidity, as the Tyrell boy attacked him and Ser Barristan. At the same time.

The Knight of the Flowers was an excellent jouster and an able swordsman with good skill but still...he was proving to be a complete and utter lackwit.

Most of Loras's men lay dead or dying, and now he was *charging* him and Ser Barristan.

Their swords met and clashed violently in a deadly dance that Loras used to try and press them back. Back and forth he struck at Jaime and Ser Barristan. They both met his strokes, defeating every attack he made.

*What is he doing?*

The sound of a great many running feet reached his ears.

*He's delaying us!*
Beyond them he saw distant, the colours of House Baratheon. Men being led by Renly Baratheon himself. He saw a familiar flash of gold amongst them and then Jaime saw Cersei among them. She was being dragged along with them, none too gently.

A pang of guilt stabbed him in the heart that he attempted to stifle, they had to leave now!

It was time to end this, with mere glance at Ser Barristan and a small nod, Jaime struck hard at Loras, driving him back. In response Loras struck back, with a quick cut at him. Ser Barristan parried the blade, sending the blade in the other direction, and Jaime went in for the kill.

Blood spurted as Jaime's blade sliced open Loras Tyrell's throat.

Renly Baratheon

"LORAS!" Renly screamed in anguish.

Loras's sword clattered to the ground as his hands went to his opened throat. The Heir of Highgarden clutched at his throat, trying to stem the tide of blood unleashed by Ser Jaime's sword. Time seemed to stop for Renly as Loras fell to his knees, and as a tower collapsing fell forward onto his face. He twitched once before stilling, his blood pooling around him.

His men were still too far away to reach them and the Kingslayer knew it. The Kingslayer swiftly mounted his waiting horse, taking Myrcella from the waiting arms of her septa and putting her in front of him, preparing to ride away and escape the Red Keep.

Renly had to act now before Loras's killer escaped. He grabbed Cersei from her guards and dragged her forward by her golden hair. He quickly unsheathed and placed his dagger at her throat.

Cersei screamed and struggled against him. She spat obscenities and threats at him of what Robert would do to him. Of what Tywin Lannister would do. He ignored it all.

“Stop Kingslayer! Stop! Or I will kill your sister!” Renly screamed in an enraged passion.
All of the Lannister men seemed to freeze for a moment, staring at Ser Jaime and wondering what he would do now.

Myrcella was staring at him with tears in her eyes, “Mother!” she screamed in anguish.

While Tommen seemed unusually subdued.

From atop his horse, Jaime gazed forlornly at Cersei for a moment before his face darkened and he said bitterly, “Slit her throat and rid us all of her madness.”

Cersei’s screaming and struggling stopped and she seemed to fall into a stupor.

Renly froze and stared at the Kingslayer in shock and disbelief, “What?” He couldn't have heard those words correctly.

The Kingslayer didn't wait for Renly to respond further, he spurred his horse forward and charged out of the gates and into the streets of King's Landing. The rest of the surviving Redcloaks thundered forward in his wake.
Chapter 5 More Awakenings

Samwell Tarly

His eyes opened.

The coldness was gone.

He blinked for a moment taking stock of his new reality. The battlefield and the hateful gaze of the Night's King were gone. Instead, he lay in a soft bed, feeling warm all over, under heavy covers. He rose slowly, his eyes recognizing his old room in Horn Hill.

He moved out of bed, casting the covers aside and walked around his room. He came to mirror and stared at his reflection.

“It worked...” He sighed, “I'm fat again.” He stared down at his ample gut. His cheeks were large and round again. All his hard work to shed his old self were back. Weak and cowardly Sam was back.

He shook himself, no I'm still me, he clenched a fist and stared at it, and I was never weak. I just didn't know how to advantage of my weight.

Gilly's alive...he took strength from this thought as he quickly dressed and prepared for his day. I can save her and little Sam. Talla. Mother. Even Dickon...

With renewed energy he finished dressing and walked out of his room, head held high and proud.

“Lord Tarly...”
His musings, as he walked around Horn Hill mapping out what he was going to do in the coming
days came to an end, and Sam turned to the voice. He came face to face with Ser Darvon, the
Master-at-arms of Horn Hill. Flashes of that final charge at the Night's King with Ser Darvon at his
side came to mind. He cast them away, that Ser Darvon was gone now.

He gave him a sharp curious look, “My father isn't here, Ser Darvon.” he stated evenly.

“Did you kill him?” the man asked with a strange look on his face.

He gave him a sharper look, “Kill who?”

Dread filled the old Knight's voice when he answered, “The Night's King.”

Surprise blossomed on Sam's face. “No. I failed...again.” Sam shook himself, “You remember? You
shouldn't remember.” It seemed his trusted knight wasn't as gone as he thought.

“Aye, I remember everything,” he paused pursing his lips, “I'm not the only one.” he added quietly.

That isn't good...Sam thought suddenly very concerned. The plan had been...delicate. Sam's mind
started filling with concerns as he tried to imagine all the possibilities of this. What happened after I
died?

Ser Darvon stepped closer and whispered, “Enough remember who is the better Lord...say the word
and you will be Lord Tarly once more...” he started gravely. “Many of them know and remember
what truly is at stake now...what is coming...”

Sam ran through his thoughts, thinking. He didn't consider it long before nodding once, “Consider the
word given.” he answered just as gravely. Whatever had changed he needed to take the initiative, he
needed to be in control of this situation. His father couldn't send him to the Wall this time.

Ser Darvon smiled wolfishly, “Aye. Then I will go and make it so.”
Sam nodded again and began mentally steeling himself for his coming usurpation.

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Time passed quickly as Ser Darvon's preparations proceeded. Sam returned to his room and avoided his family as the possibilities of what went wrong with the spell passed through his mind. The implications of so many people remembering did not bode well for the original plan. Especially Daenerys, she would be in a very, very delicate situation in Essos, caught between her brother, the Dothraki and the Slave Masters.

Eventually, word came to Sam and he went to find his father.

It was time to face his face. The implacable Lord Randyll Tarly.

Ser Darvon led him and his men through the halls of Horn Hill. They marched to the training grounds where Dickon was hacking relentlessly at a training dummy as Lord Randyll Tarly watched hawkishly.

As they approached Randyll turned towards him, he appeared to be uncharacteristically jumpy today, his eyes seemed to dart back and forth. Almost manically. Ser Darvon took the men and spread out around them.

A sudden stray thought came to Sam and he blurted out his suspicion, “You remember.” It was a shocked statement and not a question.

Randyll tensed and sneered at Sam, “Remember what boy?” there was the barest of quivers in his voice.

Sam returned his father's hard stare with his own, “The Dragon Queen.”

The blood drained from Randyll's face and Dickon froze in his hacking at the practice dummy, turning towards them, just as white as Randyll.

They stared at each other, and no one spoke for an eternity.
“Sam!” He heard Talla's voice scream. He turned, breaking from the stand off, with just enough time to catch his little sister as she threw herself at him. She wrapped her arms around his neck and held on for dear life.

“Talla,” he whispered, forgetting his father and returning the hug. He lifted her off her feet, he twirled her around once then set her back down on her feet.

They hug ended and they came apart. A smile spread across his face as he looked at Talla now, gone was the woman he'd seen die and back was the little girl he remembered from before he left for the Wall.

She looked at him and then laughed, “Sam, we're alive again...and you're fat again.” She reached out to squeeze his chubby cheeks.

He waved her hands away and snorted at the remark, “Rub it in.” he replied mock acidly.

She laughed again and then turned to father. The smile faded from her face as she saw the angry look on his face.

Randyll stared between the two of them, his disquiet undiminished, “What is going on?” he paused, “It was just a nightmare.” he added almost to himself.

“Talla! Talla, where did you go?” came mother's voice calling for his sister, cut off any answer he would have given his father.

Lady Melessa bustled into the training yard confusion and annoyance on her face, “Tall, why did you run off?” she asked in mystification.

“Mother,” Sam said with a smile as he engulfed his mother in a big hug.

Melessa hugged him back and then broke the hug, she gave him an even more confused smile before casting a concerned glance at his father. “Is everything alright?”
“She doesn’t remember,” Talla quickly added.

Melessa frowned at Talla before looking back at Sam, “Remember what, my dear?”

*She doesn’t remember?* Sam thought in confusion, *Why not mother, when father remembers? And Dickon, and Talla and Ser Darvon and the other guards?*

Sam frowned, turning to Talla, “But you remember?”

Talla nodded earnestly, “Dickon!” she cried out, seeing her other brother. She leapt at him as she had with Sam, gripping her other brother happily.

Dickon looked a little overwhelmed before returning Talla’s enthusiastic affections.

Sam turned back to Randyll, who almost seemed to be becoming even more manic than before, “It happened. It really happened. You stood with Cersei Lannister and Daenerys Targaryen reenacted the Field of Fire with you and Dickon taking the place of the Gardner Kings.”

Randyll shook, “It was a nightmare.” he denied.

“No...I remember father.” added a now pale Dickon.

“How is this possible?” demanded Randyll.

Sam shrugged, “Magic. You can thank Brandon Stark.”

Randyll’s shock disappeared and was replaced with scorn, “Now I know you are lying boy, the Ironborn killed that Stark.”

“No they didn't, he survived,” Sam cast a pointed look around him, “He outlived *all* of us.”
“What are you all talking about?” demanded Melessa, looking in consternation between her husband and eldest son.

Randyll cast a glance at Ser Darvon and the men now surrounding them, suddenly registering them and their demeanor. “What is happening? Ser Darvon, why are these men here?”

“I am obeying Lord Tarly's orders,” Ser Darvon

Randyll's eyes narrowed, “I gave no orders.”

Sam braced himself, “I did. As of today, you are no longer Lord Tarly.” he stared defiantly as he finished. There's no going back now.

Mother looked at him in fearful dismay.

Randyll turned back to Sam, his face flushed red with rage. “You dare boy!” He stepped menacingly towards Sam, “You weak little boy!” he raged, spittle flying from mouth, staring daggers at his fat son.

Sam returned the stare without flinching, after staring down the Night's King as he was cut down, Randyll Tarly's stare no longer held any power. His mother edged her way between them, she'd always tried to keep the peace between them.

Sam paid her little attention as he retorted, “You threatened me. You promised to kill me if I didn’t take the Black.” Sam paused defiantly, “But I will not be cowed by you this time.”

Randyll sneered angrily at him.

Smack!

The sound of the biddable Lady Melessa Tarly's hand striking Randyll Tarly's face echoed in the training ground.
Randyll gaped at his wife in disbelief. His normally quiet and obedient wife who had just struck him.

“You threatened our son? Our Son! You threatened to kill him!” she trembled with rage, her eyes shining with such anger and scorn that Sam hadn't known she was capable of. “He is our son whether you like it or not!” she screeched at Randyll. To Sam's eyes, the severe expression on her face now, made her look very much like Selyse Baratheon. He'd always wondered how his mother and Selyse could possibly be cousins, but the Florent in mother was shining through now.

Dickon and Talla shared Sam's shocked expression at their mother's unexpected action.

“He is not worthy of my name!” Randyll retorted back rubbing his cheek, more in surprise than pain.

Smack!

Randyll clutched his other cheek.

“Sam is a kind and intelligent soul! That you cannot see him for who he is and not what you want is your failing!” she spat back at him.

Sam stared at his mother as he suddenly realised, she never knew? She never knew about father's threats?

Dickon looked ashamed now, he'd been quiet but spoke up now, “If...if I'd know this, I wouldn't have stood with you at the end.”

Randall turned to stare at Dickon in shock. His expression turned to disbelief at Dickon's next words.

“We turned against the Tyrells and I understand why we did it. We broke out oaths to them...but...Kinslaying is something else. It is the greatest of sins.” Dickon shook his head gravely. He turned to Sam, “We were never close, and I...was not kind to you, but you are still my brother,” Dickon went down to his knees. “I swear to serve you now. As faithfully as a brother should.”

Melessa was staring at them now, her angry replaced with confusion and fear at Dickon's words.
Sam was surprised by his brother's words, he nodded seriously at his brother, “I accept your fealty. Now get up, we have a lot work to do.” he turned back to face his father. He sneered at him but didn't say anything to him.

“Your orders, Lord Tarly?” asked Ser Darvon, staring defiantly at Randyll.

Sam continued to stare at his defeated father for a long moment before answering, “Ser Darvon, take my father to his rooms and keep him there. Make sure he is comfortable. He will be there for quite sometime...”

Eddison Tollett

Edd held a grubby cloth to the wound on his forehead as he watched Grenn and the others throw Ser Alliser Thorne and his other conspirators into the ice cells of Castle Black.

It was good to see Grenn again. And Pyp. And so many other lost friends.

It was even better to see Alliser Thorne, bruised and bleeding, behind the bars of a cell.

A commotion came from behind him and Edd turned to see what was happening.

The old bear, 998th Lord Commander of the Night's Watch, Jeor Mormont, came bearing down on them, bloodied sword in hand and some bruising on his face. His eyes flickered between Edd and his men before passing over Alliser Thorne.

“What the fuck are you doing, Tollett?” he demanded gravely.

“She’s dealing with traitors,” he responded quickly. He was happy to see Jeor again. Thank the Gods! Now I don't have to be Lord Commander any more, a part of him thought happily.
Jeor's eyes narrowed and he glared at Alliser angrily before, “More traitors?” he demanded through clenched teeth. “What did you do?” he asked turning to Thorne.

“I did right by my Oath!” spat Thorne.

“You fucking betrayed Jon!” screamed back Edd.

“That fucking bastard betrayed us all!” snarled Alliser in anger. “He let those damned Wildlings though the Wall!”

“He was your Lord Commander and you stabbed him!” Edd sneered back. “That was doing right by your Oath?”

“Enough!” Jeor roared silencing them. He was looking between them anger in his face. He turned to Edd, “Jon Snow was Lord Commander?”

“Aye.”

“And he let the Wildlings thorough the Wall? Why?” he asked urgently.

“Better alive and with us then Wights.” Edd paused, “We were already outnumbered.”

Jeor slowly put away his sword and stared again between the two of them, his eyes were unreadable. He turned to Thorne.

“You stabbed Jon Snow?”

“Aye I did! And a fat lot of good it did me! Lord fucking Snow still executed me!” Thorne spat in disgust.

Anger and disgust appeared on Jeor's face as he turned back to Edd, “We need to talk, my solar.
Edd nodded, “Of course Lord Commander, we have a lot to talk about and prepare for,” He paused and then turned back to Thorne, he smiled savagely, “But first, today is going to be the most fucking painful day of you life!”

Throne snarled, “Bring it on Tollett, you're a weak cunt! I can take anything you do to me!”

Jeor frowned gravely, “Tollett, this isn't the time for this.”

Edd's smile widened, “Oh I'm not going to lay a hand on him. I'm just going to tell him a secret.”

Jeor frowned in confusion as Thorne's eyes narrowed, an extra grumpy sneer in place.

Edd took a deep breath drawing the moment out, savoring every second of what was coming, “Jon Snow is not a bastard. He's not the bastard son of Eddard Stark. His mother was Lyanna Stark, who was married to his father and his father was Rhaegar fucking Targaryen! Your oh so precious prince!”

The words didn't have an immediate impact. Seconds passed and Alliser seemed confused for a moment. When the full meaning of the words finally sank in...everyone could see the reaction.

Alliser turned white as a ghost and then red...he passed through an array of colours as the defiance in him completely fled. He staggered back from the bars and just stood there, his mouth gaping open, trying to come to grips with this revelation.

“You fucking stabbed your own King.” Edd added twisting the metaphorical blade in Alliser's gut and putting into very simple words the former Targaryen loyalist's true actions. The feeling Edd now had was even better than bedding a willing woman!

And he relished every moment of it!
Stannis Baratheon

He stood in front of the painted table, leaning heavily on it.

*Do your duty,* he'd said to Brienne of Tarth. There had been a quick pain, then darkness. Then he'd awoken here of all places. Dragonstone. He despised Dragonstone. Was this to be his prison? His own personal hell for killing Renly and Shireen?

The doors of the room burst open and in stamped Ser Davos. Stannis turned to face him, there was dangerous glint in Davos's eye as he came to stand directly in front of Stannis.

“Do you remember?” Davos asked darkly.

*My loyal Onion knight...*he thought idly, *Davos is here...Maybe this isn't hell?* Stannis stared at him for a moment, before answering.

“Yes.”

Pain blossomed and he felt his head knocked back as Davos's fist met his face. He felt his cheekbone gave way under the blow. He reeled back against the painted table. He steadied himself against it and turned back to face the red faced and furious Davos.

“How could you?!” roared Davos with more anger than Stannis had ever heard from the man. “She was your daughter! She good and kind! And you fucking *burned* her!”

“A sacrifice was needed,” The words sounded hollow and empty even as he said them.

Davos grabbed him and punched him again in response to the words, before starting to shake him, screaming about what was right and what wasn't. Of the duty of a Father. Of madness and Stannis's Targaryen grandmother. Stannis only half listened, feeling the oddly detached from it all.

Still detached, he watched as Master Cressen appeared. Cressen blanched in surprise at the scene,
before he started calling urgently for the guards. The guards appeared and dragged Davos off of him. One of the guards punched Davos in the stomach and the old smuggler bent in half at the blow.

“Stop! Release him!” Stannis ordered.

The guards froze in surprise and looked at him.

Stannis grunted and ground his teeth, “I said release him!”

The guards obeyed and stepped away as Maester Cressen placed himself between Stannis and the enraged Davos.

Too many dark thoughts coursed though his mind. He came to a quick decision, “Take Shireen and go. Take what gold and men you need. Keep her safe.” Stannis ordered quietly.

Cressen did a double take between them at the words, “Shireen?! My Lord?”

Davos ignored Cressen and scowled as he marched from the room. He stopped at the door and turned back to Stannis, “Gods willing, you will never see her again!”

Maester Cressen stared after the disappearing Ser Davos in complete bafflement, “My Lord, what has happened?”

Stannis turned his attention to the old Maester and frowned, “You don't remember?”

Cressen frowned at him in confusion, “Remember what?”

Stannis grunted remembering Cressen's death, the poison he'd drunk to try to kill Melisandre. He thought of all the years Cressen had served him and House Baratheon faithfully. Faithful even at the end. If he had listened more would things have been different? He cast a glance at the empty doorway. Faithful Ser Davos was gone and he'd take Shireen. It was too late to a better path. But she would be safe from him now.
He turned away ignoring Cressen's question and leaned again, heavily on the painted table.

He stayed like that for a good while, just seemingly frozen in time. He didn't move or react as Cressen continued to question him. Finally, he noticed on the table someone had left a jug of wine and two goblets.

He reacted for it, but didn't take a cup, he took the jug and raised it to his mouth, drinking deeply. The wine burned as it went down his throat. As he swallowed, a numbness spread though him and his body seemed to relax.

Wine worked for Robert...maybe it'll work for me?

“You!” Stannis pointed at a waiting guard, “Bring me more wine!”

The guard gave him a bewildered look and scurried away in bewilderment.

Maester Cressen stared at him in shocked disbelief, but he ignored the old man again.

Stannis raised the jug to his lips and drank deep of the remaining wine.

The numbness spread.

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Selyse Baratheon

This is impossible...I was dead!

She walked through the halls of Dragonstone, fearing for her sanity. She remembered the North, the coldness there, Lady Melisandre's need for a worthy sacrifice. Shireen's screams...and the final painful release of the ropes around her neck.
She shuddered at the memories, and tried to cast it away.

And now she was back in Dragonstone. Dragonstone as it had been before Robert had died and Stannis had sworn himself to the Lord of Light. Baratheon banners hung without the flames motif of the Red God. Had it all been a dream? Some horrific nightmare? She continued moving through the halls. Her feet were moving on their own and before she realised it, she was outside Shireen's rooms.

In a daze, she entered her daughter's room. Inside, Shireen was there, alive and unburnt, younger than she had been, standing in the middle of her room, surrounded by her books and the oddities that she collected.

“Shireen?” Selyse called gently.

Shireen turned and saw her. She froze staring at her mother.

Selyse felt so certain it had all been a dream right up until the moment Shireen started screaming.

Selyse's breath caught in her throat.

Shireen's face contorted into fear and anger. She screamed at her, “Stay away!” and began throwing whatever was near her at Selyse. Books, goblets, anything that came under her hands.

Selyse raised her arms up to protect herself as horror ate away at what was left of her soul. Shireen continued to scream and throw things.

“Princess!” Ser Davos's voice came from behind her.

Selyse felt hands on her as Ser Davos shoved her out the way and sent her sprawling to the floor.

“Ser Davos!” Shireen cried out in relief.

“We're leaving!” Davos said reaching Shireen and gathering her up into his arms.
Selyse watched frozen from the floor as Davos sneered at her as he left with Shireen in his arms. She continued to watch, looking into the hate filled eyes of her daughter as Ser Davos carried her away.

She lay there for a long time, alone in Shireen’s now empty room and she realised, it wasn't a dream or nightmare. She'd let Shireen burn. It had happened.

She wept as what was left of her soul shattered...
The pain was suddenly gone.

He sat up with a grimace, but the pain remained gone. Kevan blinked several times trying to clear his eyes, the green light had blinded him. He felt so much pain for a flicker before it was gone. The press of the people around him, his guards trying to push through the crowds the shouts and screams of panic and then pain as the hells were unleashed in the Sept of Baelor.

He remembered the final look of disbelief on the cursed High Sparrow face. He'd taken some solace from that look of despair as the flames came for them all.

He shuddered, that final moment had been so quick for a moment he though he'd actually seen the High Sparrow's bones.

He blinked his eyes, finally clearing them. He found himself surrounded by darkness. Shades and shadows now clouded his eyes. He blinked repeatedly trying to adjust to the sudden darkness

Finally, his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he stared around him trying to get his bearings.

He blinked. Then blinked again.

He quickly rubbed his eyes trying to clear them.

Finally, he realised that he was were he thought he was.

He was in his own rooms in Casterly Rock, sitting up in his own familiar bed. He stared around perplexed. Everything was exactly as he had left it. So many familiar objects, the rich and expensive
decorations in Lannister red and the golden lion stitched into the resplendent fabrics.

*So I am dead*, he thought with a deep sigh. *Cersei...damn you girl, you knew I would be there! Why did you do it? What possessed you!* He cursed silently.

He fumed angrily and let him fall back onto his pillows in defeat. He nearly jumped out of skin as an unexpected moan and movement came from beside him. He twirled around to look....

“*Dorna?*” he uttered breathlessly.

She moaned again and turned over in her sleep.

*Oh my sweet Dorna...*gently he reached out and caressed her peaceful face.

Thoughts of his death and Cersei’s betrayal fled from him.

*Is this my reward for a life of faithful service? A return to the quiet life with my beloved Dorna? An eternity of serenity and peace in our home?*

Gently, he turned on his side and leaned forward to plant a kiss on her forehead.

Dorna stirred as he leaned back, her eyes opening and she stared up at his looming face with sleepy eyes.

“How did I wake you, my dear?” she asked sleepily. “Was I tossing too much?”

A feeling of such happiness filled him as he stared into her eyes, “No dear...I just...had a dream.”

In response, she patted his shoulder tenderly, “Go back to sleep Kevan, you have a long day tomorrow,” she replied sleepily.
He gave her another happy smile before kissing her deeply. She giggled saucily, sounding much more awake now, “Now, Kevan? It's very late...and you have a very busy day tomorrow.”

Instead of answering, he started kissing her again, his lips lingering on hers, and going down the side of her neck while his hands roved down her body, clutching at her soft yielding flesh. Her body began to respond to him, her breath coming faster and she was moaning into his ear now.

He cast his nightmarish death aside, far from his mind. Cersei and her madness wasn't here. The High Sparrow and his grubby hands and dirty feet weren't here. The power hungry Tyrells weren't here.

Just Dorna.

His dear and willing wife.

And right now, that was all that mattered to him.

He let go and lost himself in the throes of their shared passion.

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Tyrion Lannister

Sneaking back into Casterly Rock in the dead of the night brought back memories. Waking up in that Lannisport whorehouse, brought back even more. Awakening in that ample bosomed blonde's embrace had been fun. He used to enjoy his time with her there, oh so long ago.

He smiled to himself, such fond memories. He sighed. I'm going to make it to eighty this time! He vowed silently to himself as he continued waddling forward. His thoughts turned to the plan, Too late to talk to Uncle Kevin now, I'll have to do that first thing in the morning...

Tyrion ran into something unyielding. He reeled back but managed to stay on his feet. He stared up at the unyielding object he had ran into. It took him a couple of seconds to recognize the bulk of Ser Daven Lannister. Why was Cousin Daven dressed in armour at this hour? Daven had a strange
expression on his face and was staring at him intensely.

“Ah, Cousin. I didn't see you there,” Tyrion said lightly, fidgeting under Daven's unusually intense stare.

Daven Lannister continued to stare at Tyrion for a moment, before beginning gravely, “I don't have a beard any more and I just left father in his rooms. My sisters...they were there as well. I just left after calming Cerenna down...I remember the Winter coming. So did she,” He paused and gave Tyrion a very mournful look, “I remember what is coming and that we lost. Father, mother and Myrielle don't remember.”

Tyrion stared for a minute, “uh......” He quickly went through what Daven had just told him. “Oh...fuck me...”

Daven snorted and smiled, “I'd rather not...do you remember? Do you know what's going on?”

Tyrion blinked then grabbed Daven's hand dragging him into a poorly lit corner of the corridor.

“How do you remember?” Tyrion questioned warily as he peered around for hiding listeners.

“You're asking me?” Daven sputtered in surprise, “How do you remember?”

Tyrion frowned, casting another suspicious look around, “It was Brandon Stark, he cast a spell...but only me and Uncle Kevan were supposed to remember, at least here anyway.” he explained in shock.

“Good job then...I remember. Cerenna remembers. Some of the guards remember. Some of the servants. And that's just the few I've discovered since I awoke up back here,” Daven explained in annoyance.

Tyrion had been listening and had grown paler and paler with each of Daven's words.

One thought echoed foremost through his mind, What the fuck happened?! The sacrifices went ahead as planned, his hand subconsciously went to where he had stabbed himself, so what
happened? Why do so many people remember?

“Uh...yes...well,” Tyrion started.

Daven smirked at him, “Good to see you're as silver tongued as ever.”

Tyrion gave Daven an irritated look and cleared his throat, his mind trying to think of the implications of everything and what to do, “Yes well, we need to deal with this problem quickly, things will not go well with so many people remembering,” he paused as a horrific thought crossed his keen mind, “Especially, if father remembers.”

“I think he'll have a extra special spike for your big head.” Daven agreed.

Tyrion winced and nodded, “....if father remembers...and believes. I believe you are right, he'll, make me the Quarterman instead of the Halfman,” Tyrion finished with considerable aplomb, “Right! I need to speak with Uncle Kevan now...and not in the morning.” he said sharply.

“You need to speak with me first,” cut in a hard demanding voice.

Tyrion turned to face the speaker, and a nervous smile spread across his face, “Aunt Genna. What a pleasant surprise.” he deadpanned.

His usually indomitable aunt stood there, looking flustered and nervous, “I heard you speaking. And I remember the cold. I remember the Winter.”

Another person to remember...thought Tyrion, fear rising in him.

He put on a brave face burying his disquiet, “And dear uncle Emmon?” Tyrion asked, “Does he remember as well?”

Aunt Genna snorted in a very unladylike fashion, “Emmon is cowering under his bed,” she pursed her generous lips in annoyance, “Though whether he's hiding from Arya Stark or the Dead is anyone's guess.” she explained in disgust. She paused and pursed her lips, “I shudder to think of the chaos that may be happening currently at the Twins, if they remember as we do.” She stopped and gave Tyrion a very calculating look, “You said you had a plan? A plan for what?”
Tyrion rallied and met his aunt's demanding gaze, “Basically, stop the War of Five Kings from beginning, then preparing for the Long Night.”

Genna raised an eyebrow, “That is a tall order and with Cersei and Jaime's mistakes, it's somewhat doubtful it will be achieved without at least some bloodshed.”

“Yes well we have to...if we don't, we all die,” Tyrion retorted.

“He does have a point, my Lady,” Daven added in support.

Genna huffed, and grew pensive before answering.

“I would like to keep my brothers alive...this time.” she remarked off hand in an uncharacteristically humble voice. After a moment she shook herself and then gave them both withering glares, “Let us go talk to Kevan, if that is your plan...he'll listen to me whether he wants to or not!” Genna announced in a huff, her proud tones once more restored. She walked off without giving either of them time to respond.

Tyrion shared with Daven a helpless look before they hurried to catch up with indomitable Lady Genna.

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**Kevan Lannister**

The pounding distracted him for a moment from Dorna. He tried to pay it no attention, giving all his attention to Dorna. And the here and now...their shared passion.

“Kevan? Kevan!” he heard a distant voice calling, it sounded like Genna. Why was she here now? What could she possibly want at this time of night?

He heard a crash from outside and Genna's irate voice came again and was much closer.
“Get up Kevan! We have to talk!” Genna shouted as she stormed into his bedchambers.

Dorna’s squeal of dismay and embarrassment echoed in the chambers as Genna was quickly joined by both Tyrion and Daven. The two men had the decency to blush and turn away as his and Dorna’s compromising situation was realised.

“Well? Come on brother we have important matters to speak of!” exclaimed Genna, not at all discomforted by the situation, “Either finish or come along,” she finished lewdly.

Kevan cast a glowering look at his younger sister, his face flushed red, “Genna! What are doing? Leave immediately!”

“Forgive us uncle, but time is not something that we have to spare,” Tyrion called out.

Kevan scowled darkly, “This is not the time for discussions!” he growled angrily as Dorna disappeared completely, using him and the covers of their bed to hide out of sight.

“You should listen to what we have to say, Ser Kevan,” Daven added respectfully, though in a chagrined tone.

“Unless the Rock is under attack by actual dragons, you need to leave now!” roared back Kevan, his mood darkening with every unwanted comment.

Tyrion audibly gulped before speaking plainly, “The Sept of Baelor. The Wildfire....”

“....Cersei,” finished Kevan breathlessly, his rage disappearing and being replaced with fear. Suddenly, for the first time in a very long time, he felt fear.

*It was a dream! A nightmare! Wasn’t it?*

“Get dressed brother, we’ll be waiting outside,” Genna said firmly, before gathering her skirts and returning to the antechamber of his rooms, Daven and Tyrion following quickly behind.
They were waiting for him. He’d dressed hastily, his clothes were disheveled but he was marginally presentable by Lannister standards. Dorna had a heavy cloak wrapped around herself, enough to make her somewhat presentable.

“It was just a dream!” were the first words out of his mouth as he confronted them.

Tyrion gave him a pained smile, “I wish it was Uncle, but I can assure you it all happened. Every mad, painful moment of it all.”

“How is all this possible? I...” Kevan faltered.

“The hows are not important now, it was magic. Leave it at that for now, I can explain later.” Tyrion explained. “What is important is why we did this! Me and you we should remember but no one else here should,” he finished gesturing at Daven, Genna and Dorna.

Kevan mulled over it slowly wondering why him and Tyrion? But his mind came up blank. A stray thought came to him...Lancel!

“What about Lancel? He wasn’t with us...when it happened,” Kevan suddenly asked. A part of him prayed that his last son had been spared his own horrid fate. Death by Wildfire was not a good death.

“As Varys told me, Lancel was next to the casks of Wildfire...when it happened,” Tyrion admitted slowly.

Kevan suddenly couldn’t breath for a moment. Lancel...you stupid boy. His last son gone...Willem, Martyn, Lancel and me...all gone. How did Dorna live with this after we were all gone?

“Lancel? What happened to Lancel?” squeaked Dorna in fear, cutting in. She cast perturbed looks between them all.
“He joined the Faith Militant, he was aiding the High Sparrow in King's Landing after Tommen became King,” Daven explained offhandedly.

Dorna turned pale and was trembling now, “What are you talking about? Tommen, King? But King Robert is still alive! And Prince Joffrey!”

Kevan's mourning was cut short as he frowned, and cast a look at her, *Doesn't she remember?*

Tyrion beat him to the question, “Don't you remember what happened?”

Dorna stared about in mystification as the others all stared at her in surprise.

“Remember what?”

Tyrion blinked twice before quickly asking, “What do you remember? Wait...no, what is going to happened tomorrow?”

“Lord Tywin is to hold court tomorrow. Many of the Lords are coming and he wanted Kevan to supervise all the preparations from dawn. And you were leaving on the morrow to meet the King and Queen in the Riverlands as they made their way to Winterfell.” Dorna said in confusion.

Tyrion stared at Dorna for a moment, the blood draining from his face, before responding, “That's bad...Jon Arryn's already dead, so the plan is now completely and utterly fucked....” he said in a deadpan.

Genna rapidly stepped in as Tyrion turned pensive, “My dear, why don't you go back to sleep and leave this to us. I'm sure Kevan can explain everything later,” she ordered firmly.

“Go back to bed my dear, I will join you after I finished with all of...this,” Kevan added with a wave of his hand.

Dorna cast them all disturbed looks, before nodding and quietly obeying.
After she was gone they all stared at one another before Tyrion finally broke the silence.

“Nothing is going according to the plan.” he looked very disturbed.

“What was this plan?” Kevan asked.

Tyrion cast a strange look at Genna before giving him the broad strokes of the plan. They wanted to depose and remove Tywin as the Lord of Casterly Rock and place Tyrion in his stead. Kevan was too stunned to immediately react. The Dragons of Daenerys Targaryen were coming. The madness didn't stop there, they told him why they really needed to do this.

*The Others* were coming....

...with their army of the *dead*.

The Long Night was upon them once more.

He looked between them looking for any sign of joking. This had to be a jape! They couldn't be serious! But all he saw were serious and tense faces staring back at him.

After a moment of staring, Kevan rubbed his face in disbelief. They wanted him to betray Tywin? After all the years of loyal service to his brother, Daven, Tyrion and Genna wanted him to break his oaths? His own brother? ....And the Long Night? To hear *Genna*, of all people talking about the Others! Is this madness? Is this what madness felt like?

“And this is a good enough reason to turn against Tywin?! If this threat is true and as great as you say then we should stand united with him against it! You would ask me to turn against my own brother and our rightful Liege!” he thundered angrily.

Tyrion's lips compressed into thin line, “All of Father's actions have made that an impossibility, there can be no unity as long as father leads the Westerlands. Our would be allies would never join with us because of him. And you know father, he will never believe that magic exists or that the Others are an actual threat till its too late! He would rage about snarks and grumkins. Just tales to be ignored.” he replied adamantly.
Kevan scowled as much of Tyrion's words rang true in his ears.

“We are despised by Dorne. The Stormlands are wary of us. The Vale, the Riverlands and the North do not trust us and think us dishonorable. The Reach are constantly trying to prove they are richer than us and would happily see us ruined. This is what father's hubris has wrought!” Tyrion finished adamantly.

Kevan squirmed not liking the amount of sense that was being thrown in his face, he cast about, mentally looking about for the right words to deny their words and dissuade them, “Tywin has always tried to do right by you and your siblings despite his own feelings.”

Tyrion snorted in derision, “Father's legacy is what doomed us.” he took in a deep breath, “Let's talk about what father's strive for a worthy Legacy led to. Cersei. Everything Stannis said about her and Jaime were true. Do you want to know what happened after your death? Sweet innocent Tommen killed himself because of what Cersei did. Then she took the throne for herself.” his eyes met Kevan's unflinching as Kevan winced at the words. Tyrion continued unabashed, “Uncle...Cersei burned you in Wildfire.” he calmly proclaimed. “When she became Queen, things became even worse with each passing day, until eventually...she sent Ser Gregor to kill Jaime.”

The beginning of Kevan's scowl at the reminder of his fate, turned into shocked incomprehension at Tyrion's last comment.

“Cersei...sent the Mountain to kill...Jaime?” the last come out as a whisper. “But...but...” words failed him as the depth of Cersei's madness began to shine brighter.

“In the end...it was Jaime. Jaime...it fell to him to bring her madness to an end.” Tyrion finished mournfully, the words coming out forced and not in Tyrion's usual glib manner.

He stared down at his nephew, he felt light headed now. He couldn't have heard that right. Jaime...Jaime...He shook his head unable to fathom the horrors that had come after his death.

He remembered them as children. Jaime and Cersei had been inseparable, even pretending to trade place while still very young. Jaime and Cersei. The Golden Twins. Just and bright, shining examples of the proud Lannister Legacy. Tywin and Joanna had been so proud. Kevan mourned for the sweet he girl he once knew. He mourned for the deed Jaime had been forced into. If Joanna still lived, she would have died of a broken heart.
A stray, hopeful, thought came to Kevan, *can we save Cersei from her own madness?* “What if she doesn't remember?” a hint of hope betrayed his thoughts to Tyrion and Genna.

“I think its a little late for that Kevan,” Genna gruffly cut in, “She's already doomed herself with her antics with Jaime.”

“Uncle,” began Tyrion timidly, “Cersei has always been evil. Joffrey didn't get his cruelty from Jaime. He got it from Cersei. She's always been cruel and evil.”

“If she doesn't remember, than we can get some sense into the girl!” Kevan argued. The image of the innocent little girl she had been, so like her kind mother, dear cousin Joanna, Tywin's better half, shone in his mind's eye. The memory was a relic of happier times at the Rock.

Tyrion suddenly looked at the ground looking guilty, “I'm sorry Uncle,” he looked up and his deeply saddened eyes met Kevan's, “Melara Hetherspoon.”

Kevan frowned, Cersei's dead playmate? “Melara? That girl's been long dead. What does she have to do with any of this?” he asked in confusion.

Tyrion sighed deeply, “Cersei murdered her. It was Cersei not the witch.”

A chill settled in his heart as the image of sweet girl Cersei had been burnt and became ash.

“What?” came Genna's shaken voice. She was white as a sheet now, the resolved look on her face replaced with actual fear and disbelief now. Apparently, this was news to her as well.

“The witch gave Cersei a prophecy and she pushed Melara down that well to keep it a secret,” Tyrion explained simply continuing on despite their sudden silence. The tone of his words belied the sheer horror his words contained.

The image had always been a lie. Cersei was a *monster*. She'd *always* been the monster. The strong and powerful woman Tywin had been cultivating, was a strong and powerful monster.

Kevan looked at Genna, they shared a horrified look. He looked at Daven who had an equally as
disturbed expression on his face.

Kevan rubbed his face, “I...I...” his legs felt weak and on pure instinct he moved himself to a chair and collapsed into it.

He was still and numb for a long time. Tyrion came to him and pushed a cup of wine into his hand. He stared at it for a minute dumbly, before raising it to his lips and drinking deeply.

The wine burnt as it went down his throat. The pain subsided as he stared into the empty cup.

“This is all true? It's not a nightmare?” Kevan asked hoarsely, not looking up.

Tyrion gave him a pitying look, “Beyond a doubt.”

Kevan blinked for a couple of times before holding his cup out to Tyrion. His nephew rapidly refilled it and Kevan rapidly gulped it, steadying his nerves.

“There is more, isn't there?” he asked.

Tyrion nodded mournfully, “Much more...but father must be removed first.” he paused and gave him a timid smile, “It...will help if you think of Martyn and Willem. They're alive again and they don't have to die this time. We can save them.”

“What of Lancel?” Kevan asked shakily. Was his firstborn as far gone as Cersei?

Tyrion winced, “If he remembers...probably. If he doesn't, there may be a chance.”

He closed his eyes in pain, remembering the innocent baby Lancel had been, what felt like a lifetime ago. His thoughts then turned to his older brother, that he loved. He remembered the older brother he'd worshiped, that he'd been loyal to for all his life. And they wanted him to turn against him...

He felt a hand on his shoulder, he opened his eyes and looked up to see Genna standing there, she squeezed his shoulder reassuringly.
“It has to be done Kev.” Genna said in a small voice.

He gave her a small smile, she hadn't called him that for a long time.

“Tywin restored our House after Father's missteps.” She shook her head, “But he took it too far. His path leads to the same end as Father's. Tyrion is right we must do this.” she finished mournfully.

Slowly, as if sleeping, he felt himself nodding. He would betray his brother. He felt a deep part of him shudder and break.

Tywin Lannister

He sat at his desk, in his solar, sipping a glass of wine. The familiarity of the surroundings calming his strained nerves.

*I am your son. I have always been you son...*

Tyrion's cold, calculating voice echoed in his ears.

Tywin could still feel the pain in his side were the quarrels hit. It was almost as if it had really happened.

“Madness...” he said to himself. *Such a vivid dream. What brought this on?*

He took another sip from his wine.

He'd seen the date on the missives on his desk, Robert and Cersei should be about to set out for Winterfell. And his damned dwarf of son would set out tomorrow to meet them. This dream hadn't happened. It was just a dream. Robert would go to Winterfell and name Eddard Stark Hand of the
King just as the missives from Pycelle had said.

Tywin sneered, Eddard Stark, that honorable Northern fool.

The dream came back to haunt him.

No... Cersei's smirking face came back to haunt him.

You don't know do you? Her smirk mocked him.

He took a deep drink from his goblet.

Everything they say about Jaime and me is true...

Your Legacy is a lie... her voice preyed on his psyche and tormented him.

No.. No! It was impossible! It didn't happen!

My Legacy is not a LIE!

He slammed his goblet down, wine sloshing on his missives, but he didn't care. He got up and paced around his solar, trying to calm himself down and banish the dream from his mind.

The door to his solar slamming open cut off his angry musings and he turned to face whoever was there with a deep scowl for barging in unannounced.

He found Kevan, Genna, and Tyrion assembling in front of him. Daven closed the door and stood by it. They all appeared tense and on edge. This did not bode well. His scowl deepened as his eyes lingered on Tyrion.

“What has happened?” he glowered, wondering what calamity had occurred at this hour, but
welcoming any distraction from his mad dream, despite his son's presence.

Uncharacteristically, they didn't jump to answer him. Kevan looked remarkably subdued and solemn. Genna looked angry, but looked to be actually holding back whatever barbs she wanted to say, and Tyrion...he looked defiant. His head held high and his eyes shone with contempt.

*What in the name of the Seven is going on?*

He sneered back at Tyrion's impetuous look, “Well?” he demanded balefully.

The silence continued on for several more minutes.

“I am your son. I have always been your son,” Tyrion finally stated.

All thoughts fled from Tywin's mind for a moment of disbelieving fear. He shook as the last words he had heard in the dream were repeated back at him by his killer. For a long moment he stood frozen and unreacting. He forced his mind to work and he stared daggers at Tyrion.

“You remember.”

*IT was a dream!* “Remember what?”

“It was no dream, father. I did kill you while you sat on the privy,” Tyrion stated fearlessly. Genna and Kevan winced at the words. “The great and powerful, Tywin Lannister, killed as he took a shit. What a way to be remembered.”

Rage overcame him and he trembled at Tyrion's words.

“It was just a dream!” he denied even as deep down he did not truly believe his own words.

“It was no dream, Tywin,” Genna shook her head mournfully, “we *all* remember it. And we all know what happened after you died.”
He turned on Tyrion, “You worthless worm! You are nothing without your family! And you would betray us? Betray me?” he seethed, exploding with rage, “I should have thrown you into the sea!”

Tyrion wasn't cowed by his wrathful words and reacted strangely to his ire.

“Worthless? I am nothing?” Tyrion laughed a hearty laugh and gave him a wicked smile, contorting his dwarfish features in a repulsive manner. “Oh I do love it when I prove you wrong on all accounts, dear father,” he began his tone now dripping with sarcasm and a hard mirth, “I am not nothing. I was...and still am! Hand to the Queen, Daenerys Stormborn of House Targaryen, the First of her name, the Unburnt, the Breaker of Chains, the Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea...and a whole bunch of other names that we can get to later,” he finished with a happy snort.

The sneer disappeared from Tywin's face and he stared down at his dwarf son in disbelief. His rage was replaced with confusion.

“All the reports were right, she really did have dragons at her command! She brought them to Westeros and decided to use them to play Gardeners and Targaryens with the Tarlys and Jaime.” Tyrion paused and rolled his eyes in annoyance, “And Jaime barely escaped that day, no thanks to his own stupidity. Father...it was a second Field of Fire.”

Tywin paled, dragons? His mind raced as plans came to his mind, she would have to eliminated quickly then! Before they could hatch this time. But first he had to deal with this traitor!

“Throw this traitor in irons! I will decide what will be done with him in the morning!” Tywin growled angrily at the strangely silent Kevan.

“No.” said Kevan quietly.

All his thoughts came to sudden stop for more than a moment as he suddenly twisted to stare at Kevan, “What?” he eventually asked in a startled tone.

Kevan had a resolved look on his face now, “No, brother.” he paused and sorrow came to his face, “I cannot obey you today.”
Tywin blinked as if seeing Kevan for the first time in a lifetime. A moment of confusion passed as he couldn't comprehend what was happening now. *What is Kevan doing? He would never betray me! It was Tyrion it had to be him, he has done this!*

“From today, you are no longer Warden of the West. From today, I am Warden of the West and Lord of Casterly Rock,” Tyrion clarified simply. “You will remain in here, and under guard, until I decide what to do with you.” he expounded further.

Tywin exploded, “YOU DARE!”

Genna cut him off, “Not another word Tywin, we have much to speak of.” She turned to the others, “Go! I have words to say.”

Tywin boiled as he watched as the others nodded and obeyed. They left, leaving him alone with Genna.

He stared at his sister, his rage boiling over at her next words, “I love you brother, but you will listen to everything I have to say whether you like it or not!”

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**Tyrion Lannister**

They stood outside Tywin's rooms and even with the doors closed they could still hear Aunt Genna's irate tone and Tywin's equally enraged bellows.

“Well that went well,” Tyrion said with a smile.

Daven and Kevan gave him equally appalled looks but he only shrugged in response.

“What? I expected him to go for a dagger or try to kill me with his bare hands!” Tyrion retorted in response to their unspoken question.
Kevan sighed and nodded quietly agreeing, “What now then?”

Tyrion winced as the sound of father's exceedingly loud bellow came from inside, before replying, “Now...Ravens to Winterfell...then wine....then planning...then lots and lots of wine.” Tyrion said rubbing his hairless chin, *I'll have to regrow my beard, it lends more weight to my words*, he thought idly, before continuing, “This is a good first step but I shudder to think what is happening in King's Landing if even a fraction of the Lords and smallfolk remember. In the meantime, the Westerlands must be secured for the coming Winter.”
Author's Notes: This was really difficult to write, I don't know why. Anyway, it's finished and I hope you all enjoy it. Don't forget to review! :D Warning! Cat bashing ahead!

Chapter 7 The Second Talk

Jon Targaryen

He stared after Bran, internally wincing at Bran's usual tactless Three Eyed Raven explanation. He turned back and looked to see his uncle's reaction.

Since they'd sat down, there had been many expressions on uncle's face. Horror and rage being the predominant expressions he'd seen. When they'd spoken of the Red Wedding, he'd felt that father was restraining himself from gathering men and riding for the Twins.

But now....

He'd never seen this look on his uncle's face before. He recognized it after a moment. It was the same one he'd seen staring back at him after Ygritte had died. Loss. A look of loss.

He looked to Robb...he looked lost. Not just feeling the loss but completely lost and alone. Jon frowned internally, he remembered his headstrong and proud brother...the man sitting next to him now only marginally resembled his dear brother, no...his cousin.

He sighed quietly, he knew they would take it hard. Too many things had changed over the years after they were gone. And there was still more surprise to come. He cast a look at Sansa, who returned an unhappy and exasperated look before giving him a pointed look and jerk of her head at her father.

He understood her, she was mad at Bran...a useless emotion considering how unreacting he was now, but they still had important points to explain. The original plan for starters and how they might start once Bran had his look around Westeros and Essos.

Jon cleared his throat and began, “Uncle...”
Ned jerked and turned to face him with a startled expression on his face.

“...Uncle we still have much to talk about. We had a plan and even with this turn of events we should still have many allies.” Jon paused heavily, “Both here in the North and in the South.”

His uncle stared at him, open surprise now written on his face. Robb's had the same surprise at this remark.

His uncle sat forward in his chair giving Jon all his attention, “Tell me more.”

Jon nodded and began speaking, explaining the reasons behind the plan.

xoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxox

Robb Stark

Yesterday he had been a King. The first King in the North in three hundred years. He'd had a beautiful, caring wife he loved. And he was soon to be a father...

And now...he'd lost it all...

Yesterday, he had two brothers he'd loved and now...he'd lost them as well. Sweet, smiling Bran, who had trouble loosing arrows, who was always climbing, was gone, replaced with whatever manner of creature this Three Eyed Raven was. His half-brother, dour Jon Snow, the bastard of Winterfell had never been his brother in the first place. Jon had never been a bastard either. He was Jon of House Targaryen, a Dragon Prince and the rightful heir to the Iron Throne. His aunt Lyanna's only son. Aunt Lyanna, a woman that neither father nor uncle Benjen ever talked about. Their faces would just close off whenever she came up and they would immediately change the subject.

Does Uncle Benjen know the truth? Does he know about Jon as well?

Jon was speaking again, but Robb could barely bring himself to pay attention. He knew the words
were important, he willed himself to pay attention.

Jon was talking about the Others. About the Night's King. How too much of the Seven Kingdom's strength had been spent on battling each other. Even reinforced by Daenerys's army of Unsullied and Dothraki, they had been no match for the Others.

*Unsullied?* Robb shuddered as he remembered what Maester Luwin had taught him about them. *And Dothraki? They actually crossed the Narrow Sea? What did Daenerys do to make them do that?*

Jon continued, there were missteps and mistakes at the beginning of the war. Some stupid, some completely unexpected. As he explained, who would have believed that the Night's King could bring a dragon down with a *single* spear? They were all overwhelmed, completely and utterly, even with the remaining dragons.

It was a very bleak and unimaginable picture that Jon painted.

The plan, as Jon explained was to undo the damage of the War of Five Kings and every other battle that came after that.

That had been Bran's plan, and with the help of the *Children of the Forest* and Stannis's Red Priestess.

“*The Children of the Forest?*” it took Robb a second to realise he'd spoken up in surprise.

Jon nodded gravely, “Aye, there are some living on the Isle of Faces, some others beyond the Wall.”

“Oh...” Robb muttered dumbly. *Another legend come alive.*

Jon continued on, after giving Robb an easy smile.

Robb frowned and realised quickly, Jon was smiling more, he didn't seem to be as dour as before. He shook his head...there were so many changes, it all made his mind spin.
Jon finally began explaining the plan that Bran had hatched. He would use *blood magic*, to send back a select group of people, who would manipulate things from the shadows and prepare the Seven Kingdoms for the coming Long Night.

The quiet surrounded them after Jon finished his initial explanation.

“What went wrong?” Ned asked seriously after a moment of reflection.

Jon shook his head, “I don't know...The Others knew where we had to be to perform the spell. They were attacking us on the Isle of Faces, we were prepared and we were *buying time* for Bran.” he finished grimly.

Robb went pale as he understood the meaning of Jon's final words. *Buying time*...just as he had done with his men at the Green Fork.

“What happened next?” asked father hesitantly.

“We fought. *We died*...and then I woke up here,” Jon replied. “And too many people remember. All of this was not part of the plan.”

Father's face twisted into look of dismay.

“Whatever happened, has happened,” cut in Sansa tersely, “We can only deal with the situation in front of us, if people elsewhere remember then our first step must be to secure the North. The Manderlys, the Reeds, the Glovers, the Mormonts, the Forresters can all be relied upon to be loyal no matter who remembers.” She paused and gave a father a steely look, “But, in all cases, the Bolton's *must* die.” she pronounced with the same sternness as father at an execution.

He stared at his sister not recognizing her. There was a predatory look in Sansa's eyes as she said it. Her eyes were sharp and angry, it was a look that had no place in his sweet, innocent, song obsessed sister's eyes.

Father was now giving Sansa a very disturbed look, “They may have betrayed us in the future but they have yet to commit any action against us.”
A part of Robb wanted to contradict his father, but instead he flinched as a very wolfish smile appeared on his sweet sister's normally placid face.

“Roose Bolton is already guilty of many heinous crimes against his own sworn vassals.” she announced confidently.

Father frowned, “Explain.”

Sansa took a deep breath, “Father, the Boltons have never stopped flaying people. I saw in the Dreadfort their flaying room, both Roose and Ramsay had prisoners there in varying states.”

Robb recoiled at Sansa's words, the implications of her words were brutal and unbelievable.

“...Ramsay's favourite hunt, was to chase helpless maidens thorough the woods, with his bow and his hounds. Each and every time, he would finish, by feeding these innocent girls to his hounds.”

Robb shook at her words, Ramsay Bolton? Who is this Ramsay? What manner of beast is he?

“...that beast is already hunting and has hunted. Do you think that Roose Bolton would be ignorant of such things on his own lands? Under his own nose?” Sansa questioned rhetorically.

Robb blanched and father's face turned red with anger, his eyes cold as ice.

“How do you know this?” he demanded of Sansa gruffly.

“Ramsay was my second husband. He and his whore, the Kennel Master's daughter, boasted of this to me after he killed his father,” Sansa paused and put so much venom into her coming words, “That beast became Warden of the North. And his first act as Warden, was to feed his stepmother and his new born half brother to his hounds. Walda may have been a Frey, but she did not deserve her fate...even if you do nothing, the other Lords will rise up against the Boltons for Ramsay Bolton's other actions.” she finished sternly.

Robb tried to imagine this beast as Sansa's husband but it was too much for him, his blood boiled at the thought. Mother who had been very quiet for quite some time, reacted to that, he could see her
hands clenched, her knuckles white as she stared at her eldest daughter in mortification.

He turned to look at father's reaction to Sansa's words. There was blood vessel in father's forehead that looked like it was going to explode now. Father's tone was colder now, than he had ever heard before, "That is more than enough. They will die." there was a finality to father's tone that brokered no compromise.

Sansa gave father the predatory smile from before, and sat back satisfied. “Good, then let us move on to our next step. After removing House Bolton, we should speak to the Karstarks.”

Robb winced as he imagined how that confrontation would go-especially if Lord Rickard remembered as they did.

Father was caught flat footed at Sansa's sudden change of topic, “The Karstarks?”

“Aye uncle, they stood with the Boltons when we took back Winterfell,” Jon explained.

“...It was my fault,” Robb cut in guilty. He began speaking in detail of his mistakes with them.

Father grimaced as Robb finished explaining what happened with Rickard Karstark and his sons. And Rickard's murder of Kevan Lannister's sons.

“Executing Lord Karstark could not have been avoided, not after he'd murdered those boys.” Ned said gravely after a moment of introspection.

Robb looked at his father in surprise.

Father cast an annoyed look at mother, causing her to sink further into her chair, “Jaime Lannister should not been released for any reason.” Mother looked even more contrite now. “If he remembers...he has his sons back again, and considering how close the Karhold is to the Wall, I doubt rallying him against the Others will be an issue. Afterwards...” he shook his head, “Rickard's prickly pride will be difficult to deal with.”

“Alys Karstark will help with that,” Sansa added, before casting an annoyed look at Jon, who
returned the look with a sudden smug, half smile, “And the fact that Jon didn’t take the Karhold from her, after her father’s betrayal.”

Jon cleared his throat and gave Sansa an amused and pointed look.

Sansa let out a disgruntled sigh, “Yes, your decision not to take their ancestral homes from the Karstarks and the Umbers was the right decision.”

Jon gave her a mocking smile in return.

*Wait...Umber?* Thought Robb in shock, he went over Sansa’s first pronouncements and realised that she hadn’t mentioned House Umber’s position. *Surely neither the Greatjon or Smalljon would have betrayed them?* His mind went to all his battles in the Riverlands and how Smalljon had stood with him. He had been one of his most loyal bannerman.

*The Umbers? The Greatjon...betrayed us?”* asked father in astonishment.

The jovial look on Jon’s face disappeared and was replaced with an angry scowl, “You’re right, the Greatjon would never betray us. But he was dead...and the Smalljon...he gave Rickon to Ramsay Bolton.”

Robb cast a look at Rickon, who was nodding now.

“He killed Shaggydog,” added Rickon mournfully.

Robb felt hollow now, the Bolton’s killed Rickon, and it was the Smalljon’s fault. This betrayal cut deeper than he imagined, he remembered his friend and loyal companion. His mind couldn't imagine him doing what Jon and Sansa were saying.

“Ned Umber will stand with us and he has stood with us, just as Alys will,” Sansa spoke assuredly.

Father stared between Jon and Sansa his face unreadable now. He turned suddenly to Arya, “You have been very quiet...and very still. You have nothing to add to this?”
Robb frowned, now that father mentioned it, Arya had been abnormally quiet after her first words, he’d almost forgotten that she was standing there.

Arya shrugged, “I've already said what I wanted to say.” she said evenly, her tone was not as emotionless as Bran's had been, but it was close.

_She's changed as well..._ Robb thought sadly.

Father stared about him, closely scrutinizing Jon, Sansa and Arya, his eyes unreadable. He focused on each for several moments before sighing deeply.

“It is late,” father eventually intoned gravely, “Go and rest. There is little else we can do today till Brandon...finishes whatever he is doing, correct?” Jon and Sansa nodded at this. He paused, running a hand roughly over his face. “There is...too much I must think on now.”

Robb rose obediently with the rest of his siblings and Jon. Mother hesitated and then rose as well, the pensive and downtrodden look still on her face.

“Stay, Cat.” called out father.

Robb cast a quick look at his mother as she turned paler at father's command.

“Of course, my lord,” she said quietly.

Robb and the others filled out quickly, none of them wanted to be here for what was probably coming. The door closed as he cast one last look, to see father approaching a trembling mother.

_xoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxx_

_The Three eyed Raven_
He spread his wings and flew.

He followed the skeins of time and watched. He looked to what had changed and what hadn't. He lost himself in time. He remembered how the spell had gone out of control, the sheer power of the number of the sacrifices had cast the spell's power to heights he hadn't imagined or seen in any of his visions.

Even now, he was still slightly dazed, too much power channeled in one person or one place was dangerous...as the Valyrians had found out, first hand.

The power should have been barely enough for their closest allies to remember, he would have pushed the minds of their future selves into their bodies of old. But instead he'd been forced to make sure that their enemies didn't remember. To force the power not to go down certain threads and into their enemies.

Euron Greyjoy. Cersei Lannister. Petyr Baelish. Their paths had been blocked first and foremost. Then Roose and Ramsay Bolton...maybe. Some power had already traveled uncontrolled down those paths before he'd cut the threads.

After that, other threads had been cut, others that stood against them, in the end it was too much to follow every thread, he'd been forced to channel the power towards areas filled with allies. Probable allies at least.

He looked to see what his handiwork had wrought, images came to his mind's eye. Flashing by in the blink of an eye.

He saw a Lion with a seven pointed star carved on his forehead ringing a great bell. He saw a radiant rose, wither and die. Two stags raged about a city, antlers dripping blood while a third wallowed, silent and brooding. A pride of lions running. A mockingbird lay unmoving and bleeding. Another pride of lions turning on their leader and then bowing to the littlest one. A Kraken cast out her arms to grasp an entire island. He saw a small, lone dragon standing on a precipice.

_Caw! CAW! I see you! What have you done?_ Cawed another Three Eyed Raven as it flew at him and beat its wings angrily at him.

He cawed back, _What had to be done!_ He stared flying away from the angry raven, putting some distance between them.
The Raven stopped attacking him and stared at him, *We will see*, it said cryptically before flying away, cawing darkly.

Shaken Bran withdrew slowly, trying to regain his bearings. Suddenly, he could hear someone calling out to him. He withdrew completely and returned to his body, in the Godswood of Winterfell.

He opened his eyes and found Ser Rodrick standing in front of him, looking disturbed and aggravated.

“Lord Brandon,” Ser Rodrick began tersely.

“How many remember?” Bran quickly asked.

“Many. I’d say at least two thirds of the castle.” Ser Rodrick answered, his eyes filled with suspicion.

Bran frowned, that matched what he had been trying to do, he’d sent a lot of power to Winterfell. The loyalty of the people here was unquestioned...at least in all matters bar Theon.

He cast a look at Ser Rodrick, “You cannot kill Theon.”

Ser Rodrick bristled, outright anger replacing his suspicion, “Lord Brandon, have you forgotten what he did?”

“I forget nothing now.”

Ser Rodrick's anger didn't abate, “He executed me! And not cleanly! He betrayed our cause! He betrayed Robb! Our King, your own brother! He betrayed you!”

“His actions have been undone. You are alive. The people of Winterfell are alive. Yara Greyjoy wants her brother back.” he replied simply.
“And so he is to have no punishment, then?” spat Ser Rodrick.

Bran blinked once then replied, “Ramsay Bolton, tortured him, flayed him and gelded him. Then he kept Theon as a pet in his kennels. Despite all that, he later saved Sansa and they escaped together from Ramsay.”

Whatever Ser Rodrick had been gearing up to say disappeared with those words. He stared for several moments, opening and closing his mouth, finally he said gleefully, “Aye, that would be a special hell for the fucking squid.” he paused then added, “He saved Sansa?”

Bran nodded.

Ser Rodrick frowned, “He still hurt us more than helped! And his punishment has been undone as well. He should receive some punishment now.”

Bran shook his head, “You have to let it go.”

“Let it go? These were our people! Our friends and families! Where is your loyalty to our people?” he demanded irately.

Bran blinked at him, “I'm loyal to Jon. He's our rightful King.”

Rodrick consternation turned into a frown of confusion, “Robb was our King and your father is alive again now. If anyone here is a King now, it's Lord Eddard. Your half brother is not even a trueborn son of House Stark, never mind a King.”

“He's not my brother. He's my aunt Lyanna's only trueborn son.” Bran explained simply.

Rodrick frowned again for a moment, before his eyes widened and his mouth fell open in surprise. He gaped for a moment before finding his voice, in a hoarse whisper he said, “Lyanna's son? Then his father is...”

“...Rhaegar Targaryen.” Bran finished for him.
Ser Rodrick puffed up red with rage, “Then how can he be a trueborn son? That bastard prince raped Lady Lyanna!”

“No he didn't. Robert's rebellion was built on a lie. She went willingly with Rhaegar.”

Rodrick fell silent and unmoving, the red draining quickly from his face. He was very pale now. He didn't say anything else just stood there staring.

Bran returned his stare for a minute before dismissing him, “Thank you Ser Rodrick, I still have more to do now,” he said with a nod, turning back to the Heart tree.

Ser Rodrick left without another word, looking more disturbed than when he first came to the Godswood.

Bran paid him no more attention as he focused on the Heart tree. He left his body again and flew once more.

More images came to him and he began to think deeply.

Even with those he prevented from remembering, Daenerys was in trouble, surrounded by enemies and with little power of her own or her dragons. The lone dragon on her precipice.

He thought hard about what to do to help her, and after a many moments of contemplation, the beginning of an idea came to him. He nodded to himself.

Yes, that could work.

He knew what to do now. A few quick modifications to her part of the plan could work. He cast out his mind and began weaving the dreams together, before casting them forward to the minds he wanted to touch.
Eddard Stark

Ned rose from his chair as his family left, coming out from behind his desk, he came to stand in front of Cat. She stood there pale and trembling. Deep down, he wanted to reach out and grab Cat, holding her tight. Reassure her that everything was fine, that it would turn out alright.

But he couldn't, the Others were coming. The Long Night was returning and before that, the Seven Kingdoms stood at the precipice of a war they could not afford. No one could afford any more rash mistakes.

“My Lord?” Cat's voice trembled with nervousness. Gone was all of her pride, all that was left was an old woman. The lines on her face stood out, making her look gaunt, gone was her mask. Her emotions were laid bare in front of him.

But he couldn't go easy on her.

Too many mistakes had been committed. Too many wrongs to let it pass. He had to show her, her mistakes. Her errors of judgment. He couldn't be her husband now, he needed to be the Lord of Winterfell now.

“What were you thinking, Cat?” he demanded angrily.

Her trembling increased, “My lord?” she repeated in a timid voice.

“What madness possessed you? You took Tyrion Lannister hostage! You forced me to act! You knew things were already precarious in King's Landing and yet you still did it! I had to act, otherwise I would have weakened my position...such as it was,” Ned lamented angrily. “You took precious time away from me to deal with the Lannisters. You usurped my authority! And for what?”

Cat swallowed skittishly, “I am sorry my lord...I couldn't allow him to escape free for what he did to Bran.”

“And for that you doomed us to war?” Ned demanded, eyes narrowing in exasperation at her shortsightedness. “So you defied me and acted. Acted against me?”
Cat couldn't meet his eyes and gazed downwards in shame. He reached out, grabbing her chin and forced her to meet his gaze. Her face turned red, she tried to flinch away from his implacable eyes, but he kept her still.

Finally after a long tense moment, he let go of her chin and stepped away, pacing back and forth in front of his desk.

“Forgive me my lord…I did not think,” she eventually stammered in contrition.

He stopped pacing and turned back to her.

“No...no, you did not think.” he replied darkly, “And it is a recurring issue with you.” he paused and glared at her, “After all these years together I see that you are still a Southern Lady. You have not embraced the North as I once thought. From the Sept to the raising of our daughters and your treatment of Jon...you have not grasped the way of the North. And we all suffered for it.”

Cat frowned, “Ned...that is too far. I know I made some mistakes-”

“Some mistakes?!” roared Ned angrily. “You undermined our son with his own bannermen! In a time of war! In the North, men have been executed for less! What were you thinking releasing Jaime Lannister?! He should not have been released...not even for our daughters!”

Cat went white as a sheet and stilled.

Ned continued his tirade unabated, “Aye, Robb made a mistake with this Talisa, but you should never have promised him to Walder Frey in the first place. Nor Arya. I married you to secure the Riverlands, the entirety of the Riverlands, not a single House's loyalty. An entire kingdom. It was the right choice at the time. Robb and Arya? That promise you made with the Freys was not.”

Ned stopped and rubbed his face, trying to clear his head as Cat stood still, not daring to utter another word in the face of his raging temper. He felt the wolfsblood burning in him, he rarely let it out. An idle part of his thoughts turned to his brother, Brandon. The wolfsblood had been too strong there, he thought mournfully. He controlled his rising ire and turned back to Cat.
“By the god's Cat! You have to think more! Think of the consequences of your actions! If you had, could the Red Wedding have been avoided? Robb went from having three important Lannister hostages to two and then none! That first action freed up Tywin's hand. He could afford to be utterly ruthless and treacherous! While Robb held Jaime, he was paralysed, unable to truly act against Robb! He would never have dared risk so much if Jaime's life still lay at a knife's edge!”

Tears were streaming down her face as she stood there and took his reprimand in silence.

He walked up to her. He stood in front her as she trembled with grief and shame, more tears cascading down her face as the words finally seemed to pierce her thick skull.

He pulled Cat to him and held her tight. He felt her arms squeeze him back, “I am angry beyond belief with you, but I still love you,” he spoke into her ear, the bite in his tone gone, replaced with a deep and loving one. “We've had too many years together for anything less, but...things will change Cat. Many things will change.” Gone now was the Lord of Winterfell and in his place stood Ned Stark, loving husband and dutiful father.

Cat began to sob into his arms and he just held her. For so many moments he just stood there as solid as the Wall, his calm demeanor comforting his dear wife.

He stroked her hair tenderly, “You will truly listen to me from now on,” he paused and added, “And to our children. And to Jon.”

He felt her head moving against his chest she nodded obediently.

He pulled back from her and met her tear stained eyes, “We will stay together this time, we will change our fate, and we will survive what is coming! And then...Winter will come to the South! I promise you that!”

Author's Notes: I know some people may disagree with with Ned's tirade but this is my opinion on matters. Anyway, As Always, Read, Enjoy and Review! :D
CH8 A First Step

Author's Notes: Just want to say thank you for all the positive support I've had for this story! Please keep the comments coming! :D

Anyway onto the story...

Chapter 8 A First step

Sansa Stark

The door closed behind them and Sansa turned to her siblings and Jon, “We should listen to father, you all need to rest, tomorrow will be a big day.” She didn't give any of them chance to retort, instead she grabbed Jon's arm and dragged him away.

Her mind was filled to the brim with emotions and thoughts. The spell worked...much too well. Everyone was back...but almost everyone remembered!

The rolling turmoil in her mind fueled her quick steps as she continued walking, dragging Jon behind her, the dire musings and possible eventualities rolling around her mind. These changes were too extensive, too many people potentially knew awkward truths. They'd reached a quiet corridor away from father's solar before Jon reacted and pulled his hand free from hers.

“What, Sansa? Are you going to drag me all the way across Winterfell?” Jon asked, giving her an annoyed look.

“We need to talk,” Sansa started tensely, “This is not good.”

“What are you talking about? We're all alive,” he gestured back towards father's solar, “Father, Robb, Rickon, Arya...your mother, they're all alive. How can this not be good?” Jon asked in confusion.

Sansa frowned, obviously, some things hadn't occurred to Jon yet. She rolled her eyes, “Of course I'm ecstatic that we're all back together. My heart feels like it's going to burst. I'd...I'd forgotten what
it feels like to be this happy,” she emphatically smiled, letting her joy shine through for a moment before replacing her mask, “We know what's coming and we're going to prepare, but...”

“But, what?”

“So many people remember...what if it's not just Winterfell? What if this is happening everywhere?”

She watched as light appeared in Jon's eyes, before he winced at what this could possibly mean.

“Have you thought of the implications of all this? With everything that some people know...how many Houses will openly declare for House Targaryen? How many will declare for Jon Targaryen, the First of his name?” asked Sansa pointedly.

Jon paled at the question.

“King Robert's still alive. What happens when he finds out?” she continued her dark line of ruminations. “We are in a better position than before, but the Kingdoms could still descend into civil war”

Jon was grim now, his eyes alive with emotion, “It won't be as bad as before, we have- should have, too many allies now.”

Sansa nodded, “Yes, but how much bloodshed can we afford, knowing what's coming?”

“Then let's hope it won't come to that,” Jon retorted grimly.

Sansa pursed her lips at Jon retort. He was being optimistic, but that never helped.

“We will act first,” Jon began, “We will move against our enemies,” he paused and smiled ruefully, “I have a list.”

Sansa looked at him for a moment before snorting in amusement, “A list.”
Jon smiled back, “See I can learn new things...and I can prepare for the worst.”

However she would have responded was cut off as Ser Rodrick entered the corridor they were in. He was just passing by the corridor, when he caught sight of them he stopped suddenly, before giving them a strange look. Or rather giving Jon a strange look. He entered the corridor and quietly approached them, his eyes never leaving Jon.

“Ser Rodrick, is something amiss?” Sansa asked as he neared, taking in the unsureness of their loyal Master at Arms's posture.

He didn't answer immediately, he just kept staring at Jon, “Lord Brandon told me something...” he eventually began hesitantly.

Sansa mentally kicked herself for not keeping a close eye on Bran. *Gods Bran, you need to stop just blurting things out!*

“...You do look like her, more than you look like Lord Stark,” Ser Rodrick admitted in surprise, “I can see it now. It’s in the eyes, the same daring eyes.”

Jon paled again, “Look like who?”

“Lady Lyanna. She's really your mother?” Ser Rodrick asked.

Jon sighed, “Yes.”

Ser Rodrick shook himself, “She really went with the Prince?” he asked in mystification.

Jon nodded.

Ser Rodrick gaped for a moment before quickly asking, “Then why didn't she tell anyone? Why didn't she tell Lord Brandon?” he accused in grief and disbelief.
Jon shook his head, “We don't know. I can't speak to that. All we know is that she was willing and she married him.”

Ser Rodrick looked unhappy at the response, he just continued to stare at Jon for a moment.

“She would have been Queen...” Ser Rodrick commented idly.

Jon nodded, “Aye, she would have.”

Ser Rodrick looked deep in thought staring down at the ground now. A quiet moment passed and then he looked up and nodded at Jon and Sansa, “Your Grace, Lady Sansa.” He shambled off without another word, looking like the world was weighing heavily on him.

Sansa stared after Ser Rodrick, frustrated with Bran unthinking actions. She turned back to Jon, he had a surprised and pale look on his face.

She sighed and shook her head, “This is what I was talking about...”

Jon Targaryen

Jon couldn't sleep, the bed was too soft...too familiar, yet not. It disconcerted him how being back in his old bed could unnerve him. Even after taking back Winterfell, Sansa had insisted that he take father's rooms. He hadn't lain here in too many years.

To be back here now...

Jon shook the dissonance off and rose from his bed. He couldn't sleep, there was still too many things he didn't know. Sansa's speculations haunted him...and Bran telling Ser Rodrick the truth hadn't put him at ease either. The ease with which Ser Rodrick accepted him was equally as disturbing. It gave too much weight to Sansa's words.
How many others are spreading the truth now? Jon wondered, Does King Robert know yet? Are we going to avoid a war with the Lannisters only to battle the Baratheons?

He paced in his room for a while stewing in his thoughts. He mouth felt very dry, he realised that he was thirsty now. He hadn't undressed so he left his room and went in search of something to drink.

He walked through the halls of Winterfell, heading for the kitchens.

Some ale would do nicely now...

He never made it to the kitchens, in the great hall he found Robb sitting in front of the lit hearth with a mug in his hand and bottle by his side, drinking sullenly.

He approached cautiously, “Robb?”

Robb jerked and twisted towards him in surprise, his drink sloshing over him. “What? Jon?”

“Couldn't sleep either?” Jon asked.

Robb stared at him eerily, before answering quietly, “Yes.”

Jon frowned taking a second to really stare at his brother...no, cousin, Jon reminded himself. Robb looked strained and lost. Again Jon, couldn't even catch a glimpse of the brother he once knew.

Jon pulled up a chair and placed it next to Robb's, in front of the roaring hearth, “You going to share?”

Robb looked down and stared at his mug before pulling out a second from somewhere and giving it to Jon. Robb filled the mug and then Jon gulped deeply of the ale before sitting down and staring at Robb. Robb was staring at him as well.

“I barely recognize you.” Robb finally said in an unsure voice.
“A lot happened,” Jon took another gulp from his mug.

Robb’s face darkened, “Aye.”

Jon frowned at him, “We've all changed.”

Robb stared down into his mug, “You smile more.”

Jon snorted, “I had friends that taught me to stop brooding.”

Robb turned to look at him with a sad smile, “Finally found some?”

Jon laughed, that sounded more like the Robb he knew, “Had to happen eventually.”

“Tell me about them,” Robb requested.

“There was Samwell Tarly, a fellow recruit.”


“Aye, his first born son, Randyll banished him from Horn Hill to the Wall ’cause he was fat and craven,” explained Jon.

“Randyll Tarly's son...fat and craven?” Robb repeated giving him an incredulous look.

“Sam liked to read more than...well anything else. But he wasn't truly a coward. He only fought when cornered and even then only for those he cared about. But he was fat, only at the end did he shed all the fat.” Jon explained.
“He doesn't sound like his father...” Robb remarked offhand.

“Sam was also the first man in thousands of years to slay a white walker,” Jon retorted.

Robb blinked, “*That* sounds like Randyll Tarly's son.”

Jon smiled, “He was fat and slow when he did that. Sam...Sam is like a brother to me, he was and is my most trustworthy adviser.”

“I think I'd like to meet this Samwell Tarly,” Robb said after a thoughtful moment.

Jon nodded and continued, knowing what he was going to say next would shock Robb. “There were two others though who truly showed me how to laugh more.”

“Who?”

“One was Tormund Giantsbane. A Wildling,” Jon stated.

Robb gaped, “You're japing? A *Wildling*?”

Jon shook his head.

Robb gave him an incredulous look before finishing off his mug. He reached for the bottle and refilled his mug, taking another deep gulp before turning back to Jon.

“A Wildling, really?”

Jon nodded, “You'll like him when you meet him.”

Robb gave him a skeptical look, “And your other friend?”
Jon smiled but inwardly he was bracing himself for Robb's reaction, “Tyrion Lannister.”

The ease that had been growing in Robb’s face disappeared and was replaced with a mask of anger, “Tyrion...Lannister,” he spat, “The Imp?!”

“Tyrion is a better man than you'd think,” Jon defended.

“That creature sent an assassin after Bran!” Robb near roared in anger.

“Joffrey sent the assassin. Tyrion never acted against us till the war started.”

Robb froze and gaped.

“In King's Landing, he protected Sansa from Joffrey. After you died, eventually...he even became Daenerys's Hand.”

Robb was blinking in surprise now, “He became her Hand?”

“He was a good Hand, loyal and not at all faithless like his father.” Jon explained.

Robb stared at Jon, his eyes unreadable.

Robb took a slow drink from his ale, before turning to stare mournfully into the hearth fire, “I feel like the world has gone mad, so much happened afterwards. There was so much we didn't know or realise...so many evil things happened....and that's not including the Others.”

Jon frowned, seeing Robb starting to slide back into his melancholy. Seeing his brother disappear before his eyes.

“Aye, it is unimaginable and so many things happened but it wasn't all bad, some good things did happen,” Jon leaned towards Robb, and gestured him close. He looked about for any hidden
eavesdroppers, before speaking again, in a very quiet and hushed tone, “Arya actually fell in love.”

Robb who had just taken a drink, spat it out in surprise, spraying Jon with ale. He looked at Jon in disbelief for a moment before a grin spread across his face.

“Really?”

Jon, face dripping with ale, nodded solemnly.

“That poor fool,” Robb japed, with a low laugh.

“Gendry wasn't the smartest man around, but he was a demon with a warhammer,” Jon admitted happily. “He loved her too.”

Robb snorted with laughter, “And all the times she mocked Sansa for wanting to fall in love!” He raised his mug to Jon, “To Gendry and Arya!” he took a deep drink, “I'm going to enjoy mocking her.”

Jon smiled widely, finally seeing his brother again. Arya's going to make you regret any mocking, he thought idly, me as well for telling you. At least it's worth it to see you laugh again.

They sat in silence for a moment, “So we're cousins then?” Robb said eventually breaking the silence.

“Cousins by blood only. Brothers by fact. Now and always.” Jon retorted quickly.

Robb stared at him eyes glistening for a moment before nodded sagely, “Brothers.” He raised his mug and they drank together.

“You...” Robb hesitated, “...you told father you didn't blame him for keeping the secret.”

Jon nodded, “Aye.”
“Do you really? You're not angry?” Robb asked insistently.

“Uncle had a choice before him, he did everything he could to protect me from his dearest friend,” Jon nodded and smiled sadly, “I understand why, and it had to be done.” Jon paused and gave Robb a smirk before continuing, “Though it would have been nice to know the truth...before I bedded my own aunt.”

Jon watched as Robb recoiled in disgust and shock. Jon laughed at the expression on Robb’s face.

“The look on your face,” Jon managed to say in between gales of laughter.

“How can you be laughing? It's a sin! It's Incest!” exclaimed Robb in shock.

Jon shrugged easily, “We're Targaryens...its not actually an issue. At least, not much of a one.”

Robb opened his mouth to retort but no words came out. After a moment he closed it. He remained silent and instead took a deep gulp of his ale.

“Oh....right...” he eventually managed to say.

Jon smiled, at his cousin’s consternation. “Just roll with the punches, laughter helps...” he raised his mug, “Ale and wine help as well- at least according to Tyrion.”

Robb gave him a dubious look before snorting in derision and giving him a small laugh. The stress in his face now completely gone.

“Whatever happens, whatever comes...the pack stays together,” Robb finally said with a smile.

Jon raised his mug in salute, with an easy smile on his face, “The pack stays together.”

They drained their mugs and then sat in an easeful silence, waiting for the morning to come.
Benjen Stark

He entered Jeor's solar, a mix of trepidation and exhilaration. The last of the traitors had been rounded up and either killed, if they resisted or thrown into a cell. Their fates would be decided at a later...

Strange thoughts filled his head as he saw familiar people acting in unfamiliar ways. Recruits acting like veterans and loyal men treated as traitors. The sight of the First Builder and First Steward in the cells chilled him. *What had they done?* Thorne he could imagine, but not those two, they'd always been loyal and reliable.

He shook his head, casting that away and remembering his last stand. He'd saved his dear nephew after the dragons had flown away. He'd known that a final death was coming as he'd stood alone against the army of the Dead, all alone. He'd fought. He'd died.

And then suddenly he was *back.*

Back at Castle Black.

Back fully alive.

Benjen shook his head, murmuring silently a quiet prayer to the Old Gods for whatever second chance this was.

He focused on the here and now, turning to look at the others assembled here.

Maester Aemon, Lord Commander Mormont and Dolorous Edd were waiting for him in the solar. They were sitting close together talking animatedly.

Jeor looked disturbed and thoughtful, though Benjen thought that was probably a look most people
had in this situation. Maester Aemon looked a little amused along with thoughtful.

But Edd...

Edd seemed to actually look jolly...and at ease. The wide smile on his face was definitely out of place and not like the dolorous Edd he was known to be.

“Lord Commander,” Benjen began as the Old Bear turned to him.

Jeor smiled at him and stood up, stepped towards him, “Benjen! Damn glad to see you!” Jeor grabbed Benjen and pulled him into a bear hug. He let go and pulled away quickly, “Everything went to shit after you went on that ranging of yours and died,” he scowled in annoyance.

Benjen smiled back at the enthusiastic welcome, “I didn't actually die.” he retorted ruefully. “Not on that ranging anyway.”

Jeor gaped, looking like someone had just clubbed him over the head for a second time, “What happened then? Where’d you disappear to then?”

“I ran into the Others, nearly died but the Children of the Forest found me.”

Again, Jeor looked like someone had just clubbed him over the head for a second time, “The Children of the Forest?” he gasped.

Benjen nodded, “Aye, they saved me...after a fashion.”

Jeor scratched his beard, “Sit down Benjen, we have a lot to talk about.”

Benjen found a seat and sat, while Jeor retook his. Edd opened his mouth to continue whatever he had been saying before, but Jeor cut him off with a raised hand. He paused and then cast glances at Aemon and Benjen before jerking his head at them, “Do they know the truth? About Jon?”

Benjen frowned and cast a curious look at Jeor before turning to Edd. “Do I know what about Jon?”
Edd opened his mouth but no sound came out, he closed it quickly and then frowned with confusion, “I don't know...” he gave Benjen a look, “Do you know his secret?”

Benjen frowned, “Secret? Jon has a secret?” he asked in surprise.

“The truth about his parents?” Edd asked plainly.

Benjen just shook his head, “Ned never told me about his mother, whoever she was or what happened between her and Ned.” That was the one thing Ned never shared with him.

Edd paled, “Ohhh....”

A thought struck him and Benjen frowned, “Are you saying you know who Jon's mother is?” he asked surprise, “And why is this relevant?”

“I'd say it was relevant,” stated Jeor firmly. “Tell them, Tollett.”

Benjen watched as Edd winced, “Ned Stark isn't Jon's father. He's your sister's son. Your sister's son with...Rhaegar Targaryen.”

He heard Maester Aemon's startled gasp but Benjen didn't immediately realise the meaning of it. The import of the words trickled slowly into Benjen's head and his heart seemed to stop for moment when he understood the import.

Lya's son? Lyanna had a son? Jon is Lya's son?

Her image flashed before his eyes and sorrow filled him as he thought of his long dead sister's fate. Abducted and raped by that damned dragon prince. He remembered the tourney at Harrenhal and, how the smug prince had rode up to Lya and crowned her Queen of Love and Beauty instead of his own wife. He scowled angrily as his long buried rage resurfaced. That damned Prince and his perverted actions!
He couldn't think but Edd was still talking, “...his mother went willingly with Rhaegar...they were even married by the High Septon.”

His rage cooled faster than a fire next to an Other, By the Old Gods and the New!

Benjen couldn't breath, Lya's son, echoed in his mind, Lya's trueborn son, “But that means he's...”

“Jon Targaryen, the rightful king.” Edd finished smoothly for him.

Benjen sat quietly now, trying to come to grips with these new revelations, Why didn't you ever tell me Ned? Why did you keep this from me!

He cast a look at Maester Aemon...Aemon Targaryen, a part of his mind quietly spoke relevantly, Jon's other uncle. A great or great great uncle...or was it great great great uncle?

The old Maester appeared curiously quiet and composed to hear that he still had kin in Westeros.

Jeor frowned at the blind Maester, “You're awfully quiet, Aemon.”

Aemon pursed his lips, his face now contorting with chagrin, “Too many times I would hear Jon's voice and for an instance I would think that Egg was speaking to me. I am an old man, sometimes my mind plays tricks on me. I thought that was all it was, the cost of old age, but....”

_Egg. Aegon Targaryen the IV. The Unlikely. Aemon's beloved dead brother...and Jon's, how every many greats, grandfather..._

Aemon shook his head, “...I...my heart is glad to know this. Too long I have been ashamed of what my family had descended too. I am glad there is one I can still be proud of now,” Aemon finished with an emotional tremble in his voice and a happy smile.

Edd smiled, “Daenerys Targaryen is someone else you should be proud of. She stood with us unflinching to the end.”
Aemon was beaming now, and his eyes were twinkling with moisture now. He nodded happily but didn't add anything.

Silence descended on the group for while as they contemplated this revelation. Too many thoughts stirred in Benjen's mind. *If things had played out differently, Lya would have been the Queen...*

Jeor cleared his throat bringing him out of his revere, “As shocking as this revelation is, Edd still has more to tell us.” he stated evenly. He nodded at Edd, “Get started- and don't leave anything out.”

“Right Lord Commander,” Edd began talking explaining just how all this was possible.

Benjen sat in silence listening as Edd spoke of the plan. An ambitious and costly one, especially from what Benjen knew of magic. They all shouldn't have remembered so something had gone wrong, though how wrong Edd didn't know. He spoke of the battle at Hardhome and how badly it had gone. He spoke of the traitors and how Thorne and the others had betrayed Jon, when he let the Wildlings through the Wall.

That jolted Benjen hard as Edd talked about Jon's *murder* and subsequent *resurrection* by the Red Woman. He saw Aemon pale considerably as he listened to that.

Finally, Edd stated that they had to let the Wildlings past the Wall. They had to let *one hundred thousand* Wildlings into the North. Edd was responsible for enacting this part of the original plan.

Benjen balked at that notion...old instincts warred with this. Against all he'd faced north of the Wall. Of the legions of he'd faced off against in the end.

“Trusting Wildlings will not be easy,” Jeor eventually stated evenly.

Benjen nodded in agreement, he thought of Qhorin Halfhand and others that truly despised the Wildlings.

“Given what young Edd has told us, we appear to have no choice in the matter.” retorted Aemon evenly. “A hundred thousand Wildlings or...one hundred thousand Wights.”
“As Jon says we're breathing, so we're all on the same side now,” Edd remarked ominously.

Jeor thought for a moment before nodding in agreement, he turned to Edd, “Since you know everything, we'll follow your lead on this, you'll be in charge of this,” he proclaimed evenly.

The smile vanished from Edd's face and was replaced with a stricken look. He gave Jeor a very concerned look, “Please don't make me Lord Commander again!”

Jeor snorted and laughed at Edd's stricken reaction, while Aemon gave Edd an amused smile.
Ch9 The Times They Are a-Changin'

Chapter 9 The Times They Are a-Changin'

Eddard Stark

On the surface of it all, it almost seemed like a normal day, like a normal family breakfast. Except that it had been a very late breakfast, it was already past midday.

The full Stark family was assembled, the same as before any of this happened...except for Theon. Theon was being kept sequestered in his quarters- with armed guards at the door and with orders to keep Ser Rodrick away.

Ned pushed away his tortured thoughts on Theon...he couldn't bare to think about how the boy he raised had betrayed them all. There were more important issues to deal with first.

He focused back on breakfast, on the surface it seemed to the same as before. Cat was sitting next to him eating sedately and unrushed, Sansa was acting as a lady, Arya and Rickon were wolfing down their meals with no regards to common manners. Jon and Robb sitting together and talking quietly.

But this was only on the surface, Cat should have been taking both Arya and Rickon to task at the lack of manners, while casting the occasional scowl or frown at Jon. Today, she was silent and focusing on her food, not daring to look in Jon's direction. While Arya, even while eating, was staring around her eyes watching everything in the room like a wolf looking for prey. The cold emotionless look in her eyes had taken him a long time to recognize. They were the eyes of a killer. It was something that disturbed him more than he cared to admit, to see the eyes of a killer reflected in Arya's. It was something that had no place in a child of Arya's apparent young age. Jon and Robb appeared to the most unchanged, though Jon smiled more than before, while Robb had become the more dour one. Their roles seemingly reversed now...

And Bran, no, the Three eyed Raven, was eating stiffly, not looking at anything, just starting ahead, emotionless as ever.

He should have been happy to have them all back...and he was...but too many things had changed.

His family weren't the only ones affected, the servants moved hesitantly, if competently, about their
duties. The guards stood at stricter attention, hands close to their blades, while searching for dangers that weren't there.

No one had escaped unaltered by the spell. Even those that didn't remember had obviously spoken with those who did.

Breakfast ended quickly, with nary a prompting, Sansa dragged her mother off, talking about proper preparations for the coming Winter, as Jon asked to speak with him. Ned nodded and they headed to his solar. Bran rose and followed them quietly. Robb moved to join them but Ned waved them off. He tried to wave Bran off as well, but he came anyway, much to Ned's annoyance.

As they came to the solar, they were met by Luwin who appeared to be bearing quite a few raven messages.


“Lord Stark,” Luwin nodded, “There are many important messages today.” he reported gravely.

Ned frowned, on the one hand, he had a deep need to speak to Jon alone. He had to explain his actions, why he hid the truth from him for so long. On the other hand, if Luwin was saying the messages were important, then they were very important.

The choice was taken away from him when Jon nodded at him and then gestured for Luwin to come, putting off their private conversation again, much to Ned's annoyance.

In the solar, they were gathered once more. Ned, Jon and Bran sitting while Luwin stood by Ned's desk.

For a man his age, Luwin was fidgeting in a childlike manner. Ned raised an eyebrow at him in surprise, “Is there something you wish to ask, Luwin?”

Nervously, Luwin glanced between him and Jon, “Is it true, my Lord?” he asked in trepidation.

Ned frowned, “Is what true?”
Luwin pursed his lips, he nodded at Jon, “Are you a Targaryen? Are you really the Lady Lyanna's son?”

Ned's face went blank. How did he know? How did he discover this?

Jon winced and then answered, “Yes. You spoke with Ser Rodrick?”

Ned shot Jon an alarmed look as Luwin paled at the answer, “How does Ser Rodrick know this secret?” he demanded.

“Bran told him,” Jon explained with an unamused glance in Bran's direction.

Ned glowered at his youngest son, “Why did you tell Ser Rodrick? This is supposed to be a secret! If Robert finds out it will endanger us all!”

“It's too late,” retorted Bran emotionlessly, “It's not just Winterfell. Too many people remember everywhere.”

Jon and Ned paled and shared a concerned look, “How did this happen Bran?” Jon questioned urgently.

Bran blinked, “It was the Isle of Faces. The entire Isle was an altar to the Old Gods. A few sacrifices would have let some us remember, but the roots of the Heart Tree ran through the entire isle. Every death there fed the magic of the spell. The deaths of over three thousand men and woman empowered the spell.” he paused and frowned before continuing, “It was no longer a matter of making sure we remembered...it was making sure the wrong people didn't remember. Not everyone will remember, but a lot will, both in Westeros and in Essos....and beyond.”

Ned looked at Jon and found him frowning and rubbing his head in exasperation, “Damn. Fine, who doesn't remember?”

Jon let out a sigh of relief before asking tersely, “And the Boltons?”

Bran frowned, “They shouldn't.”

“That's not very reassuring Bran.” lamented Jon dryly.

“They're not in a position to threaten us, they're too hated now,” retorted Bran.

Jon didn't look like he liked that answer much, “I'll give you that...it's probably true. Who else did you affect?”

Bran blinked for moment thinking deeply, “The ones I am sure of...Nearly all of the Slave Masters of Slaver's Bay, some of the Dothraki Khals, most of the Magisters of Pentos, the Warlocks of the House of the Undying, Robin Arryn...”

Ned listened to Bran's list in growing confusion, what did these people have to do with securing the Seven Kingdoms? Or preparing for the coming Long Night? And by the Old Gods, why Robin Arryn?!

“What about Tywin Lannister?” Jon asked cutting in.

Bran blinked several times, “Oh...”

“Oh? OH?! What do you mean Oh, Bran?” Jon demanded irately.

“I forgot about him,” Bran explained with a simple shrug.

Ned stared at his son disbelief, the Old Lion was not someone a person should have been able to forget about. The look on Jon's face was unreadable for several moments, before turning into concern.
“Tyrion is at Casterly Rock.” he stated darkly, “If Tywin remembers...then he will *kill* him.”

Again Bran shrugged, “He does remember, but Tyrion's already secured Casterly Rock for us.”

“Wait a moment...this is Tyrion *Lannister*, you're talking about?! The Imp, this Tyrion has *taken* Casterly Rock for *us*?” Ned asked having trouble believing his ears. Luwin was also blinking in surprise at this. “The same Tyrion Lannister that sent an assassin to *kill* you?” he finished acidly, with a gesture at Bran.

“The assassin was Joffrey's not Tyrion.” Bran corrected lightly, as if he wasn't taking talking about an assassin that tried to kill him.

Ned blinked in surprise, Joffrey tried to kill Bran? Not Tyrion? Still he was a Lannister and not to be trusted, “He's still a Lannister”.

“Father you will have to let go of old grudges, too much must be done, to stop the Others,” Bran retorted evenly.

Ned scowled darkly at the cold logic of Bran's words, they were true but he didn't have to like them...*at least they aren't talking about trusting the damned Kingslayer!* He thought in derision, *that would be too much!*

Jon shared an unreadable look with Bran before saying, “Tyrion Lannister will rally the West for us. Do not underestimate him- he was-*is* Daenerys's Hand. Lord Royce will rally the Vale. Samwell Tarly, the Reach and Edmure Tully, the Riverlands. Yara Greyjoy, the Iron Islands...though she wants Theon back unharmed in return. *Only* then will she join us. The Stormlands...Beric Dondarrion *may* try to rally them- but I'm unsure about that.”

Jon's words meant that most of the Seven Kingdoms would rally to them with ease to them but Ned still frowned, this was *most* but *not* all, “And the Crownlands? And Dorne? Who will rally them to our side?”

Jon winced, “No one. The Crownland Houses will most likely be divided and by the time of the spell, House Martell had been wiped out. In Dorne...the Daynes of Starfall *will* rally to us, but they're the only Dornish House that we can be sure of.”
Ned's eyes widened in surprise, “The Martells were wiped out? Why would the Daynes rally to you? Especially those Daynes?” The memory of Ser Arthur Dayne's twirling deadly swords coming to the forefront of his mind...and the memory of all the men that died to defeat him.

“It's complicated, as Lord Dayne of Starfall believes....as he sees it, Ser Arthur Dayne died protecting me, and not rallying to me is a betrayal of his memory,” Jon shrugged, “It's complicated and I'm not going to question it, if it brings us more men.”

Ned blinked at the convoluted logic, then shook his head, I'll never understand the Dornish.

“That's an interesting way of looking at things,” added Luwin evenly.

Ned turned to Luwin who had been very silent, he raised an eyebrow at the old maester.

Luwin shrugged, “The world has changed,” he stated with deep concern, “we must change as well.”

Ned nodded sagely, there was too much truth in Luwin simple words. Gods...too many people know about Jon...Gods...Robert...what will you do? What will you do when you hear of my lies? Ned thought sorrowfully.

Ned stewed in his thoughts silently till Luwin cleared his throat, drawing him out of his revere.

“I still have many highly pertinent messages, my lord,” Luwin stated.

“Well then, we should hear them,” Jon commanded.

Luwin nodded at Jon before turning to Ned for permission. Ned gestured for him to begin.

“A message from White Harbor. Lord Manderly rides for Winterfell with his men in support of the King...Jon Targaryen,” Luwin explained with more than a little disbelief, “He also relays a message from Lord Reed. Lord Reed has sent men to garrison Moat Cailin, and he also rides for Winterfell along with his children. They are also both bringing a lot of men with them to reinforce Winterfell.”
Ned's ears perked up at the mention of his dear friend, Howland Reed, his advice would be most welcome in this situation they were stuck in. And it had been much too long since he'd last seen him.

Jon winced and grimaced in response to the message.

“What's wrong?” Ned asked in confusion.

“This is a good initiative on both their parts, I am happy that they are coming, Jojen Reed is a Greenseer—”

“A Greenseer?” Luwin started, surprise on his face.

Jon nodded, “Aye.”

“Then why are you wincing?” Ned prodded.

“It's Meera Reed.” Jon admitted reluctantly.

Ned raised an eyebrow and cast a castigating look at Jon, “Did something happen between the two of you?” he asked feeling only a little disappointed, the memory of violet eyes reminding him that all men can be weak, under the right circumstances.

Jon shook his head and cast a look at Bran. He jerked his head at Bran

“She fell in love with me,” Bran stated evenly.

“Cripple and all- she still fell in love with him,” Jon clarified.

Ned stared at Bran for moment, before he let a small smile come to his lips. Apparently he had given him more than just his older brother's name. The older Brandon always had a way with women...and a match between this Brandon and Howland's daughter would be a good one.
“She fell in love with Brandon Stark, I'm the Three-eyed Raven now,” Bran again stated as that explained everything...and it did.

The smile disappeared from his face as reality came crashing back down on him.

Luwin gave Bran a concerned and confused look at this comment but didn't say anything.

“She doesn't like being near him now,” Jon added, “But she is a good friend to us.”

Ned pursed his lips, unhappy with this turn of events, but it was out of his power now, he gestured for Luwin to continue.

Luwin continued his report, there was many ravens from all over around Winterfell and from most areas of the North. A few were asking about strange inexplicable events that might be happening, but the majority were oaths of fealty to Winterfell. Some declaring for Ned and Robb either as Lords of the North or as Kings in the North. The rest were declaring for Jon of House Targaryen, the first of his name, King of the Andals, the Rhoynar, and the First Men.

Those ones were very jarring for Ned to hear his loyal vassals swearing fealty to his Targaryen nephew.

Luwin reached for another message and read it out, “This one is from Bear Island; We know no King, but the King in the North who's name is Stark...but we'll settle for a half wolf dragon. We wanted a White Wolf...but we'll accept a White Dragon.”

Jon snorted in amusement as Ned gave him a hard disbelieving look, he shrugged in response, “That's written by Lyanna Mormont. She's loyal but she's also still annoyed with me.” he waved off Ned's questioning gaze, “It's a long story....later.”

Ned shared a look with Luwin at Jon's words but didn't say anything. As strange as that one was, the one from Ironrath was far more so.

“And this one is from Ironrath my Lord...,” Luwin hesitated and blanched before continuing, “Lord Forrester has taken Highpoint and put all of House Whitehill to the sword baring Gwyn Whitehill.” Luwin stated with no small amount of perplexity in his tone.
Ned stared in alarm at Luwin, “Gregor has done what? What possessed him to do something like this?”

“Lord Forrester is protecting his family, and I don't blame him for this precipitous action,” Jon calmly admitted grudgingly.

Ned stared at Jon's calm demeanor in disbelief.

“...the Whitehills stood with the Boltons despite Ramsay's perversions and nearly wiped out the Forresters, this was justly done,” Jon paused warily, “that part of the Bolton's land will be secure now...and Asher Forrester will be glad that he can return to Gwyn. He's a good man to have at your back.”

Ned pursed his lips as he wrapped his mind around Jon's words. They'd need to speak about this, and many other things...later. He gestured for Luwin to continue, pushing forward to get through the last of the raven messages.

There was more of the same, though nothing as disturbing as the raven from Ironrath.

Luwin held up the last message, “There is also a raven from...the Dreadfort. Lord Bolton asks if something strange has happened here as well.” Luwin finished reading the last of the raven messages.

He heard Jon let out a sigh of relief. If Roose was asking for an explanation, then he obviously didn't remember.

“So we have some time to deal with the Boltons, or at least with Roose,” Jon pursed his lips and then sneered angrily, “We'll still have to find Ramsay.”

Bran, who had been silently watching them all, spoke up now, “Leave him to me, I can deal with him.”
Ned frowned worriedly at his son, “What do you mean?”

Bran blinked once, “I can warg into his hounds and have them turn on him.”

Ned's blood ran cold as he stared at Bran, “That is a cruel and evil thing to do, Brandon!” he decried the suggestion, as Luwin stared at Bran, aghast.

“Why? He deserves it. It's how he was killed the first time,” Bran retorted in confusion.

Ned paled and turned to Jon in disappointment, “That is not how I raised you Jon. A Lord should be merciful—especially when executing someone!”

Jon glared at Bran, and ground his teeth in frustration. He gave a long sigh before speaking, meeting Ned's angry gaze without flinching. “I didn't execute him. I remember your lessons.”

Ned frowned, “You were Lord of Winterfell...if not you...then who usurped your authority?” he demanded angrily.

Jon glared again at Bran before answering in a long suffering tone, “Sansa...it was Sansa.”

Whatever answer he had been expecting...this wasn't it. “S...Sansa?” The ice had returned to his thawing spine, Sansa, his sweet Sansa had...

Luwin appeared just as flummoxed as he was, gaping at Jon and Bran, mouth wide open, his face pale and eyes wide in surprise, “Lady Sansa...she...she...”

Jon sighed again and put it into simple terms, “She fed Ramsay to his own hounds.”

*By the Old Gods and the New!*

His mind couldn't reconcile innocent, sweet Sansa with this horrific act. He sat back heavily, his
mind in a state of congruity. Damn it! Damn it all! Every time I think I have a grasp on what happened...they throw something like this at me! What else are they hiding from me?

“You probably shouldn’t tell mother about this...she won’t like hearing this,” Bran suddenly added idly.

The irony of that statement coming from Bran, with how emotionless he had become was not lost on anyone in the solar.

Ned stared at Bran then Jon, as anger coursed through him...but not at his son or adopted son. He was angry at all fate had forced them through after he died.

Ned growled angrily, “It seems we have much to do...and I need to have a talk with Sansa.”

“We should gather men in preparation for riding for the Dreadfort- though only once Lords Manderly and Reed arrive...,” Jon trailed off and glared at Bran, “In the meantime...I need to speak to Bran,” he rose from his chair and grabbed Bran's arm, dragging him from the solar without waiting for Ned's dismissal.

Ned didn't stop them and stared after them for long moments, before gesturing for Luwin to sit down.

Still pale and disturbed, Luwin lamented, “Ned...they've all changed....so much has changed.” he hung his head mournfully.

“Aye...too much,” Ned agreed.

xoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxox

Robert Baratheon

Robert hadn't felt this invigorated in a long time. He had finally returned to his rooms, his warhammer laid next to his chair, the blood still staining it's previously pristine surface. Well, the one he had used today, a small part of him admitted surly. It wasn't the one he'd used at the Trident or during the Greyjoy rebellion. That one had been too heavy for him to lift, he'd had to take a smaller
one to deal with the unrest that had sprung up after...after whatever it is that was happening now.

He was invigorated, but enraged at the audacity of the Septon that called himself the High Sparrow. Daring to actually gather together a new Faith Militant? Daring to denounced him? His own king! Well he’d dealt with him just as he’d dealt with Rhaegar.

Robert smiled darkly remembering how the mewling coward had screamed as he caved in his chest. Damn, it had been too long since he’d had a good fight. Crushing this new Faith Militant in its infancy, crushing a defiant enemy was more satisfying then he remembered. The fight had gone out of most of the pious Sparrows after the High Sparrow was felled. He’d left Ser Mandon to deal with the remnants and retake the Sept of Baelor.

He grabbed a cup of wine from his table and drank deeply, enjoying the refreshing taste as it went down his parched throat. He drained the cup then quickly refilled it. This one he sipped at, as he sat down, weary, but a good kind of weary.

Thoughts swirled around his mind as he thought about what was happening, the chaos that was running through King's Landing, there had been fighting in the Red Keep, fighting in the Sept of Baelor and though nearly all of the districts of the city.

The Goldcloaks were in disarray, that much he knew, he'd seen Jonas Slynt strung up in the middle of a street, and many of his lieutenants had suddenly disappeared. As Master of Laws, Renly had actually had to take personal command of them and take to the streets to restore order. Robert snorted as he imagined his fastidious brother actually getting his hands dirty restoring order.

Robert paused thoughtfully, Renly had taken to his orders rather heartily. There had been a look his eyes that he hadn't seen before; fury.

And Loras Tyrell...Robert grunted angrily, that was bad business, the heir of Highgarden and the Reach was dead, though it explained where Renly's fury was coming from. And why he'd taken to the streets with such uncharacteristic vengeance in his eyes.

And the Lannisters for some reason had decided to disappear, every guard he saw was either sworn to House Baratheon or a Goldcloak, with a miniscule number of Tyrell men. No Redcloaks were to be found anywhere.

He frowned not liking this situation at all...as if there actually was anything he liked going on. Well
apart from the rebirth of his bloodlust for battle.

He could hear voice suddenly arguing outside his door, he focused and quickly recognized Renly's.

“Get your arse in here Renly, and tell me what the fuck is happening!” Robert cried out.

The voices cut out and the door opened quickly, a figure stepped in, and for a moment he didn't recognize him. It was Renly but he'd never seen his brother like this before. He was in armour, disheveled with his hair tousled, his armour was scratched and spattered with blood. A far cry form the fancy form he usually tried to project.

A second figure followed behind, with a hand on his sword, “Your Grace, you cannot allow this traitor to stand here,” grated out Ser Meryn Trant. The shifty eyed bastard glared at Renly.

Robert scowled, “Shut the fuck up, that's my brother you're talking about!”

Ser Meryn flinched at the King's angry tone.

Renly glared at the Kingsguard, “I've always been loyal to Robert,” he sneered angrily.

Robert waved a hand angrily at the pair, “I know he named himself King after I died,” he cast a glare at Renly, “But he's not going act against me now...are you?”

Renly swallowed once, “Of course not brother.”

“But it's alright to act against Stannis?” Robert retorted with a stern glare.

Renly's face darkened, anger and...fear flashing in his eyes. He remained silent.

Ser Meryn was silent but, he was fidgeting, his eyes had a crazed look in them and his hand was white from clenching the hilt of his sword. His eyes darted back and forth looking at the shadows and everything around them, as if seeing threats everywhere.
“Stop fidgeting you dumb fuck!” Robert shouted in annoyance at Ser Meryn.

Ser Meryn froze and paled, he stilled himself, though Robert could still see one of his legs seemed to be trembling. He cast that aside and turned back to Renly.

“What in the Seven Hells has been happening in my city?” he demanded angrily. He gestured with hand offhandedly, “I know about the Faith Militant...I crushed that fucking High Sparrow myself.”

Renly winced before nodding once, “We've restored a semblance of order. I've placed loyal Baratheon men in charge of the Goldcloaks.”

Robert nodded, “I saw what happened to Slynt. You know why?”

Renly scowled angrily, “Yes, that piece of scum. It was the smallfolk. It was vengeance for his corruption and...for rounding up all of your bastards and murdering them in cold blood. Children and babes murdered by grown men!” he paused dramatically, “And it was all done at Joffrey's command!” he spat angrily.

Robert's blood ran cold as he stared in disbelief at brother. He knew he fucked a lot of whores and woman. He knew he had a lot of bastards...probably all over the Seven Kingdoms...but what would posses the little shit to murder his own siblings? Kinslaying at this scale? Just how wrong in the head was Joffrey?

His voice trembled as he spoke, “That little shit! Why would he do this?”

“Because he's not your son,” Renly stated evenly. “None of Cersei’s children are yours!”

“What in blazes are you talking about? Of course he's my son!” Robert angrily retorted.

“The Lannister whore cuckolded you.” Renly retorted angrily.

He faced reddened in rage as suddenly the absence of all the Lannister guards took on a very sinister
implication.

“And he executed Ned?” Robert asked in a dangerous voice. The wheels in his head turning in a dangerous direction.

Renly nodded, “Ned discovered the truth. So did Jon...It's why they murdered him.”

Robert suddenly couldn't breath, the image of the kind and honorable man that had been like a father to him and Ned flashed before his eyes, he was shaking with fury, Jon...they murdered Jon Arryn?! “I'll fucking kill them! I'll kill them all!” was all his rage allowed him to say coherently in that moment. Jon murdered by the Lannisters?! And the children all bastards? And all his bastards murdered?

“...Pycelle hid it all. He knew the truth. I've had him thrown into the Black Cells,” Renly finished vehemently.

Robert's eye twitched as his fury continued to grow. He grasped at it, holding tight to it. In a low and dangerous tone, he turned to Ser Meryn, “Bring me that little shit, first. I'll have the truth of this all...from all of them....” he commanded imagining just what exactly he would do to the little prick. And Pycelle. And Cersei. And all the Lannisters! He would make Casterly Rock, his Castamere!

Ser Meryn stood still and didn't make a move to obey, he shifted uneasily on his feet.

Robert glared, “What are you waiting for you fool? Go get Joffrey!”

Ser Meryn swallowed nervously, “He's dead your grace.”

Surprise blossomed in Robert's gut and he shared a surprised look with an equally surprised Renly.

“...the servants found him beaten to death. They say...they say they saw the Hound leaving the Prince's rooms,” Ser Meryn paused, “His armour was stained with blood.”

“The Hound? Why would Clegane kill him?” Renly asked in bewilderment. “He was Joffrey's loyal dog.”
Ser Meryn shook his head, “The coward deserted during the Battle of Blackwater Bay.”

So he was yet another person that remembered the future? “What about the other Lannisters?” Robert asked quickly. A part of him was angry that he wouldn't get to kill the little shit. Another part couldn't really blame Clegane for doing it, considering how he had been treated by Joffrey.

“We have Cersei,” Renly answered succinctly.

“And the Kingslayer?” Robert demanded irately.

Renly paused and Robert was taken aback at the look of rage that came to his brother's face, “He escaped with Tommen and Myrcella.” He paused his face darkening further, fury etched on every part of his face, “He killed Loras.”

Robert slammed his wine goblet down, denting the table and spilling wine everywhere, he rose angrily, “Gods damn it all!”

It was all a complete and utter debacle!

“He wasn't alone Robert...” Renly began.

Robert grunted angrily and gestured for him to speak.

Renly seemed to be bracing himself now, “Ser Barristan was with them. And the Hound.”

Robert froze unable to believe his ears. Ser Barristan? The most honorable man of the Kingsguard, Barristan the Bold?! That Barristan? With the Lannisters? He shook his head trying to grasp what Renly was saying. And the Hound? If he just killed Joffrey...so what the fuck was he doing by the Kingslayer's side?

“And you couldn't stop them?” he exploded angrily at his brother.
“We tried...Loras...” Renly faltered for a moment at the name, grief overcoming his features, “...Loras died trying to stop them. They had too many men with them. We...I had Cersei hostage. She's in the Black Cells now, next to Pycelle.”

“Then how the fuck did they get away?” Robert asked confusion and anger coloring his tone. Jaime would never willingly leave Cersei behind.

The grief in Renly's face disappeared and was replaced with confusion, “The Kingslayer...I had my knife at her throat. I threatened to kill...”

“And?!”

Renly gave Robert a strange unreadable look, “The Kingslayer...he told me to slit her throat and rid us all of her madness. And then they left her behind.”

Renly's words were like a physical blow, they carried the weight of a heavy warhammer, Robert sat down heavily back into his chair, “The Kingslayer said...” he echoed in dumbfoundment.

Renly just nodded.

Madness!

Madness!

A new born Faith Militant, Barristan the Bold's betrayal, the truth about Joffrey, the unbelievable actions of the Kingslayer and the Hound.

Robert smashed his fist down again on the table angrily, his mind reeling with fury, “So they're conspiring to take the Iron Throne?! And in that fucked up future, you got killed by a fucking woman! By Brienne of fucking Tarth?!” he asked in disgust unable to grasp the enormity of all the revelations that were being heaped at his feet.

Renly looked at him in utter surprise, “Brienne? Kill me? Never! She would slit her own throat before hurting me! The sound of her anguished scream, that was the last thing I heard before waking
up here again. It's still echoing in my ears,” he paused shuddering, “I didn't know that a scream could have that much pain in it,” he admitted in a quieter tone. “Who told you she killed me?” he then asked in surprise.

It was Robert's turn to frown in confusion, “That cold fish Moore did. If it wasn't her, then who killed you?” he paused before adding, “And really a woman protecting you? That's not smart.”

“Brienne was a better fighter than Loras...” Renly lamented quietly. He edged towards Robert and pulled up to a chair next to him. He frowned, before bending closer, speaking in a whisper, “I was killed with magic, Robert. It was a shadow. A shadow...with Stannis's face.”

Robert blanched and sagged down into his chair in disbelief, *Stannis...a Kinslayer? And using magic?! How in the fuck does something like that happen?* It was madness everywhere he turned.

He turned to the silent and fidgeting Ser Meryn, “You! Find a maester and send a Raven to Dragonstone! I want Stannis here now!” he turned back to Renly, “What ever the fuck happened between the two of you – no more!” Robert roared angrily. “We are brothers and I'll knock this into both of your heads!”

As Ser Meryn made to leave, but the door opened and in stepped, Ser Mandon.

“We've taken back the Great Sept,” Ser Mandon reported loudly, his tone as emotionless as ever, his armour covered in blood and he had taken a cut over one eye.

Robert smiled wolfsishly, “Good. And the ringleaders?”

“It was Lancel Lannister, he was leading the warriors of this new Faith Militant,” Ser Mandon answered, “I've thrown him and the few survivors into the Black Cells.”

Robert stared gaping. It was a while before he found his voice, “Lancel? That dumb weakling?” *My idiot squire? Leading the Faith Militant?*

Mandon seemed to twitch, he fingered a cut on his forehead, before speaking, “He wasn't that weak.”
“Seven fucking Hells...” Robert gulped his wine before giving Renly a bewildered look, “What the fuck?”

Renly shrugged back helplessly, as surprised as he was.

Robert stared intently at Renly, “Tell me everything that happened after I died...then you two,” he said pointing at Ser Meryn and Ser Mandon.

Maester Cressen

For the first time in a long time, Cressen was afraid and he didn't know what to do as he stared up into the lifeless eyes of Selyse Baratheon.

Lady Selyse swung silently in the air, suspended lifelessly from the rope she'd used to hang herself. He shook his head as he waited for the men to come cut her down. He hadn't believed it when the servants came to him screaming about their Lady...and yet here she was hanging from the branch of a tree in one of the few gardens of Dragonstone.

He'd sent a runner to Lord Stannis, but when he came, he hadn't said anything, he'd just stared for a long moment before staggering away without a word or a command, wine bottle clutched in his hand.

What had driven the woman to this?! The severe woman had always been not quite right in the head, beginning with how she still kept her stillborn children and ending recently in inviting a Red Priestess of R'hllor to Dragonstone...but this? What drove her to suicide? Did it have something to do with this remembering business?

Cressen didn't have to be a maester to realise it was connected to why Stannis was suddenly drinking heavily...and why Ser Davos had absconded from Dragonstone with Shireen.

What was happening? Why were the servants and guards whispering of remembering? Why were they being so tight lipped? Remembering what?
He shook his head, there too many unknowns and Stannis was refusing to speak of any of it all.

Finally the guards appeared and started bringing the corpse down. They finished quickly and looked to Cressen for orders.

Cressen shook his head sadly, “Take her to the Silent Sisters.” he said gravely.

Without a word the guards obeyed and walked away with their macabre burden.

Cressen watched them for a moment before sighing and turning back, heading back to the main castle, at a loss. He had no idea what his next step should be.

With heavy, slow steps he continued forward, unsure of where he was going. He got lost in his thoughts and walked the halls, the exercise calming his spirits. The quiet was very calming, a balm for his strained nerves.

*Wait a moment...*

It was quiet, much too quiet. He cast a concerned glance around him and found himself very alone in the darkened corridors of Dragonstone. Even at this time, servants should be bustling about doing their chores and they should have started lighting the candles illuminating the corridors. The corridor should not be this dark. Guards should be patrolling.

Movement caught his eye and he saw single guard passing by the far end of the corridor he was in.

“You! Came here!” he called out quickly to the guard at the end of the corridor.

Guard was young, probably a new recruit, just learning his duties as a guard of Dragonstone. The young man looked about for a moment before obeying, “Yes maester?” he asked in an unsure voice as he approached.

“What’s happening where are all the servants?” he paused, usually the guards would patrol in twos, not ones. “And why are you alone?”
The guard gave him disquieted look before answering, “Strange things, maester. I can't explain it.”

Cressen frowned, before carefully asking, “What do you mean? What things? People remembering?”

The guard paled a little, “Aye, maester.” he paused before continuing in a whisper, “they say they're remembering the future.”

Cressen twitched at that madness, he'd heard that though...people had been tight lipped with him about that. “I heard that, but where is everyone?” he asked again.

The guard winced, and looked down, “They're...deserting. After Ser Davos left...so did so many of the others. They're few of us left now.”

Cressen stared at the young guard aghast, before swearing silently, yet more madness was being heaped on him. He dismissed the guard with a gesture.

This smelt of magic. He knew one person that was well versed in magic, and as much as he despised her, this was probably his best bet for some answers. Cryptic answers but anything was better than nothing at this point.

He walked quickly and came to the Lady Melisandre's rooms, he stood outside her door and steeled himself as he raised his hand and knocked unhappily on the door.

He waited and time stretched out as there was no response to his knock. He frowned and knocked again, harder this time.

Still no response came.

He steadied himself and knocked even harder this time, “Forgive the intrusion, Lady Melisandre, I must speak with you!” he called through the closed door.
Still there was no answer.

His frown deepened and he took it upon himself to reach out and open the door, hopefully she would forgive his breach of decorum, entering a woman's room without her permission. The situation was dire, she would probably be understanding of the situation.

“My Lady?” he called as he stepped inside of the opulent rooms.

He clutched his nose as a foul odor assaulted his senses, he recognized it almost immediately, the stench of human waste. The room melt like a privy.

He frowned and stepped towards the hearth. The fire was roaring and bright, as Melisandre loved it. The better to commune with her Lord of Light, he thought in derision.

Her chair was in it's customary place and as he neared, he saw the Lady Melisandre sitting their idly and unmoving.

Was she asleep? “My Lady?” he called out again hesitantly.

He approached and he grew nearer he realised the pungent smell of human waste was coming from her.

He stood next to her now and yet she didn't react. He frowned deeply and stepped in front of her, standing between her and the hearth. She was sat there her eyes were open and staring and she was very still.

“Lady Melisandre?”

He waved a hand in front of her eyes as he took in her state. The eyes were open, but she wasn't reacting to him. The stench was definitely coming from her. He reached out and gently shook her, but still there was no reaction. The front of her dress was stained, as he watched drool dripped down onto the stain.

He stepped forward with trepidation and examined her as a maester, after a few moments he stepped
She continued to stare blindly at him. Her eyes were open but she could not see him. Between the exam and that, it took him a second to finally realise *what* had happened, even if he didn't understand *how* it had happened in someone so young.

Cressen pursed his lips as he stared at Melisandre, her body still lives but she was dead inside. A head seizure. Some sort of head seizure and....a very bad one. He'd seen this before but usually in the elderly. The drool was still pooling on her lips and dribbling down her chin, down onto her red dress.

Cressen rubbed his forehead in consternation, as he felt the beginnings of a headache forming.

Selyse, Stannis, whatever was happening with Shireen and Davos, and now this....

Despair was nearly overcoming him, he forced himself to think clearly, to ignore the mounting absurdities. Too many unknowns...

*A raven to King's Landing. Yes, I can do that, Robert must know what's happening here.*

With steady movements, he moved from next to Melisandre and left the living dead woman alone in her rooms, heading to the rookery.
Jon Targaryen

Jon didn't let go of Bran as he dragged him though the halls of Winterfell. Angry and upset at Bran, he continued walking, looking for Sansa.

He passed a servant and quickly questioned her. She answered quickly, but she had wide surprised eyes that never left his face. He thanked her and continued on his way, as a part of his mind recognized that she had probably heard of his secret. He paid it no heed and continued on. It was something to be dealt with...later.

He found Sansa where he'd been told. She was with Lady Catelyn and Vayon Poole in the courtyard. Sansa was speaking animatedly with them while they stared at her with more than a little shock on their faces.

“Sansa!” he called out.

Sansa turned towards her name and he gestured for her to come.

She cast him a confused look, before her eyes focused on Bran. The look hardened as she took in Jon's unamused expression and how he was holding onto Bran.

He noted that Lady Catelyn's face was pale and she was looking down at the ground now, not daring to look at him, while Poole was staring at him in unabashed trepidation.

Sansa said something to them that had Poole bowing and scurrying off, she left her mother standing alone.

“What did he do this time?” Sansa asked with vexation, glaring at Bran as she neared.
“He told uncle how you **dealt** with Ramsay,” Jon said with a grimace.

Her vexation deepened as she turned to Bran, “Bran!” she cried

“...he's not happy and he's going to speak with you,” finished Jon.

Sansa winced and shook her head.

Jon opened his mouth to speak but instead nearly jumped out of his skin as Arya's voice suddenly came from behind him.

“What's happening?” Arya asked, while giving Jon an innocent smile.

Jon glared at her for a moment, “Must you do this **every** time?” he asked in annoyance.

Arya gave him a sweet look, “Yes.”

Jon scowled at her halfheartedly before repeating his news, “Bran told Uncle about what Sansa did to Ramsay.”

Arya shrugged, “And? He got what he deserved.”

Jon rolled his eyes in annoyance, as Arya missed the point, “He may have deserved it but we should have been more merciful, Uncle is not **pleased**.”

“And? Father should hear about everything, he will find out, one way or another. We should tell these things first,” retorted Bran tonelessly.

“It's been less than a **day**, Bran! We need to space these things out,” cried out Sansa in exasperation. She rubbed at her brows in pain and annoyance.
Bran looked unmoved by Sansa's ire.

What needed to be done was plain to Jon, “One of us needs to always be with him,” he announced unamused.

“So we'll be nursemaids for him?” Arya asked.

Jon nodded, “Aye, the less he says the better. Uncle still doesn't know about Jaime...” he gave Arya a dry look, “Never mind what you did to the Freys. He needs time to adjust first.”

Arya had the decency to redden and her smile became strained, probably imagining how upset uncle would be when that secret came to light.

Sansa was still frowning gravely, “Who goes first?”

“Don't I get a say in this?” Bran asked.

“No!” Jon and Sansa retorted in one breath.

Arya poked Bran hard in the shoulder, “You're coming with me, we'll chase cats first, then we can go to the Godswood.” She grabbed his arm and dragged him off, ignoring his protests.

Jon sighed and then smiled at Arya's antics, for a moment it was almost like old times, seeing her dragging Bran away. Him helpless to deny her, just like when they really were children.

Jon turned back to find Sansa looking at him, “What did Bran tell you? What has he seen?”

The smile disappeared and he said morosely, “Some good, some bad...let's talk privately.”
Brynden Tully

He stood in one of the many balconies of the Eyrie, staring at the vast vista in front of him. The spectacular view did nothing to calm his tremulant mind.

Two Day ago, the madness came. Raving and ranting, screaming for Petyr Baelish's head. Murder, betrayal and mad ramblings. Two short days had pasted since the madness came to Lysa. Since the strange awakening of many of the people of the Eyrie.

It stank of mummery...if not for the fact several no nonsense men under his command were also speaking of it. This...Awakening as it was coming to be called by some.

He grunted unhappily, he remembered that first night, Lysa's screams echoing thought the Eyrie. She screamed so long and loud he thought she would awaken the dead from their graves. She'd clutched at Robin so hard, they'd had to pry the crying boy from his mother's embrace, her nails had gouged grooves in his skin.

He shook his head mournfully at the memory. Lysa had always been a fragile girl. Whatever this, Awakening had done to her it wasn't good. Ever since, the maester had been forced to feed her a steady diet of dreamwine and milk of the poppy to keep her docile.

Heavy steps broke him from his revere, he turned to look. A large, grey haired man in bronze armour approached him. He wore a grim expression on his face.

It was Bronze Yohn Royce, the Lord of Runestone.

“Ser Brynden,” he called out, the welcoming tone, not matching his grim face.

“Lord Royce,” Brynden smiled amicably, turning to face him, and nodded at the honorable lord. “What brings you the Eyrie? Is there business for you here?”

Lord Royce paused, frowning for a moment before casting a measuring look at Brynden.

“You don't remember?” Lord Royce finally asked in surprise.
Brynden scowled darkly, his mood souring, “More of this damn Awakening?! No I don't remember-or understand this strange mummary!” he spat angrily.

Lord Royce's grim expression darkened further, “I assure you this Awakening as you call it is no mummary. It is very real and without it all would be lost.”

Surprise blossomed, “You know what is behind this?! What do you know?” he asked urgently.

“I know what the plan was...” Lord Royce waved his hand about, “But this is not it. Too many people remember...I have many things to tell you then.” he announced far too grimly for Brynden's peace of mind.

Brynden's eyes narrowed, “What things?”

Lord Royce looked at a loss for words for a moment before, he began gravely, “Lord Edmure begs your forgiveness,” Lord, “And he asks you to meet him at the Twins.”

“The Twins?” Brynden raised an eyebrow in surprise, “He's not taking a Frey bride is he?” he asked in disgust.

Lord Royce shook his head, “Not this time.”

Brynden rocked back on his heels, “This time?”

Lord Royce nodded, “Yes. He was wed once to Roslin Frey...but he will not marry her again...not after Walder Frey's betrayal.” he scowled and spat scornfully as he spoke Walder Frey's name.

Brynden scowled at the words, “Betrayal?” there was a dangerous glint in his eyes, as his mind wondered what could that old bag of piss could have done?

Lord Royce nodded gravely, “Lord Edmure has summoned your brother's banners and goes to punish the Freys. Houses Reed And Manderly march to join with him from the North as do the
nearest of the Vale Houses.”

Brynden gaped at the news. What the fuck did you do, Walder?! His mind scrambled trying to imagine what could warrant such a harsh response, but his mind was drawing a blank. This went beyond a Lord Paramount punishing a rebellious House, not if Houses from the North and the Vale were joining with Edmure.

He frowned, “Even so, I cannot go, Lysa needs me here.”

Lord Royce winced and hesitated before answering, “I am aware of Lysa's worsened madness and her other actions.”

“Worsened madness? Other actions?” he asked in surprise, “What other actions?”

“Forgive me, Ser Brynden, it is a long and arduous tale, and much stems from her first action,” Lord Royce gravely intoned.

Brynden cocked his head warily at Lord Royce, “Which was?”

Lord Royce looked as grim as death now; “I beg your pardon for my coming words, Ser Brynden—but this is the truth. Jon Arryn was murdered...poisoned by Lysa.”

His hand grasped the hilt of his sword and he just barely managed to stop himself from drawing steel on the Lord of Runestone. Only the long years of the Royces loyal service to House Arryn stopped him. He reined in his emotions as he reminded himself that Lord Royce was among the most honorable and good men he knew. Lord Royce would not say such an obscene thing without evidence.

Brynden was shaking his head rapidly, denying the words, “Why the fuck would Lysa do such a thing?!” he growled angrily at Lord Royce.

Lord Royce frowned, mightily unhappy now, “I can explain...you will doubt my words but I swear on the Old Gods and the New...and on the lives of my children, everything I will tell you is the truth. There is a great many things I must tell you. Much will strain your nerves.”
Brynden calmed himself with great effort, he grunted, grasping the hilt of his sword, knuckles whitening, “I will listen...”

Tormund Giantsbane

Killing a person for a second time was even more satisfying than just killing someone once. He grimaced as he raised his arm for yet another blow. The bastard had gotten in a few good hits this time. He brought the heavy club down a second time.

The gurgling sound the Lord of Bones had been making stopped completely now. Blood was pooling and there was no question who was the harder bastard now.

He stared down Rattleshirt's men as just as before they backed down in fear.

He smiled and threw the heavy club down over Rattleshirt's corpse and walked away. He gazed about watching the gathered Free Folk as they went about their business. The camp was the same as he remembered, it was the people that were changed. Men and Women clutched there weapons tighter, eyes were more haunted than he remembered. And most important of all, there were too few fights happening.

Some remembered- enough to cow the rest. The Free Folk had always been a quarrelsome bunch, but not now. The whispers of Hardhome and all that happened there was scaring them all into a more cooperative state of mind.

He looked back at Rattleshirt's cooling body, well at least most of them.

Tormund snorted, at the absurdity of it all. This wasn't the plan, it helped here more than than what the Three eyed Raven had planned. Even the fucking Thenns were being nice now.

He reached his destination, Mance Rayder's tent was just as he remembered it. He pushed inside, Mance was pacing in his tent when he entered.
“Mance.”

“You're finally here,” Mance said evenly, as he stopped pacing, turning to face him. He noticed the blood on Tormund’s furs, “What happened?”

Tormund shrugged, “Had to kill Rattleshirt again.”

Mance raised an eyebrow, “Again? So you remember as well?”

“Aye.”

“And why'd you kill him the *first* time?” added a voice from behind him.

He turned and found Ygritte standing at the door of the tent, staring balefully at him.

Tormund smiled and shrugged, “He was being stupid. I knocked some sense into him.”

“A little *too* much sense,” Ygritte snorted in derision.

“Seems having sense doesn’t agree with him,” agreed Tormund with a laugh and toothy smile.

Mance watched the byplay with musing eyes, “You as well?” he asked with a curt nod at Ygritte.

She nodded silently, her face a myriad of emotions.

“It’s a strange and disturbing business, this...remembering.” Mance stated in a disturbed tone.

“Aye, strange...not really disturbing, we did this,” Tormund admitted.
Mance's eyes displayed surprise at Tormund's words, “We did this? Who's we?”

“It was Brandon Stark and the Children of the Forest,” he paused and gave Ygritte a wink, “Your pretty crow helped.”

Surprise blossomed on both their faces at the revelation.

“The...Children of the Forest?” Mance asked with bated breath.

“Aye, still some of them down South,” Tormund nodded with a smirk.

“Why did you do this?” asked Mance with a fearful tone.

Tormund lost his smirk, “Why do you think? We lost.” he spat with disgust.

Mance gave him a beaten look and shuddered.

“And Jon?” came Ygritte's unsteady voice.

“What about Jon?”

“This is powerful magic...how did he help?” Ygritte asked in confusion.

“The boy...the man led us. Free Folk. Kneeler. We all followed him,” Tormund added with admiration, he paused for a moment before continuing, “Things will be better this time, we'll save more of our people this time. We have friends on the Wall now. We have friends down South now,” Tormund finished with relish.

Mance grunted, “This is...good, very good. What else happened?” his tone was lighter now, some of the strain gone from his face.
Tormund nodded, “Lot's of surprises came after you both died,” he suddenly gave Ygritte a wide toothy smile, “Some more than others...you know, your pretty little crow. Turns out...he's the King of the fucking Kneelers,” Tormund laughed heartily at the irony of it all. “Who knew? Ha, King of All the fucking Kneelers!”

Ygritte stared at him with a disturbed look on her face, “What the fuck are you talking about?” she demanded in a disturbed and disbelieving tone.

“Snow. He ain't no wolf. He's a Dragon.” Tormund retorted, enjoying how the girl was squirming at his needling.

“A Dragon?” echoed Mance a look of supreme shock on his face.

“He ain't Ned Stark's bastard,” Tormund added, “His father was...Prince Ragger? Prince Rogher? Some weird southerner name....”


“Aye,” nodded Tormund with a big grin, he was enjoying seeing Mance so flabbergasted. It was felt good to know so much. To be the one with all the answers.

“Sit you arse down and tell me everything!” Mance quickly ordered with an intense look in his eyes.

xoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxox

Balon Greyjoy

He stood staring in the fire, dark thoughts swirling in his mind.

_Damn you Euron! You fucking Kinslayer! Just as he was on the cusp of greatness that perverted fuck came back and ruined everything! That thieving bastard! To dare steal my throne? Not this time! This time all will bow to the Ironborn!_
This time...this time, he would, do things right, he had Yara and perhaps it was time to have some more sons...Theon was a lost cause, that damned wolf ruined him. And the boy was too damned stupid to protect his own cock! Better death than that!

Balon sneered haughtily, idiot boy, he thought with another shake of his head.

The door to his solar opened and Yara bustled in all business, armed and ready for battle. There was set look on her face, eyes as flinty as castle forged steel.

“You summoned the captains?” he demanded gruffly.

Yara nodded, “Most have arrived.”

“Bring them,” he ordered with a sneer.

He stared at the men that entered his hall, all scowling and angry, all typical and excellent examples of Ironborn strength. Here was the strength of the Iron Islands, his best and most loyal captains. This time he would make all the other kingdoms quail in fear. From Lannisport to White Harbor, no ship would be safe from the Iron Fleet.

He walked to the map table and gestured for them to join him. The men were silent as they gathered around.

“Whatever has happened...however this has happened. We are restored and we will make them all bow to us this time! We will start here in the North...” he began, his voice strong and flushed with bitterness.

A blow to the back of his head smashed his face into table. Pain exploded across his face and nose as his eyes crossed, his vision stayed dimmed as the blows kept coming. He reeled back and felt as a leg was hooked behind his leg, he crashed to the floor. The sudden assault didn't stop. A boot landed in his stomach and the breath was knocked form his lungs. Blows rained down on his face, arms, legs and stomach, the attack was relentless. He flopped onto his back and suddenly, a heavy boot was across his neck.
His eyes uncrossed enough to see his attacker.

He could barely breath, but it was Yara's boot that was on his neck. She was pressing down harder and harder with every second. He gripped her leg trying to move it, digging his nails with desperate strength, into what flesh he manged to reach above her boot, but she was unyielding.

“You stupid fuck! You want to repeat all of your mistakes! Again?! You stupid fool! I should kill you here and now! Growing up, I heard how cursed a Kinslayer would be...and yet all these perverted fucks here gladly followed Euron! He boasted to them all what he did to you at the Kingsmoot! And he still took the crown!” Yara wailed at him, her face flushed red.

Her words barely registered with his starving mind.

The pressure suddenly disappeared from his neck and he gasped for breath, he coughed and coughed, greedily gulping air, “You...bitch...you...ungrateful...bitch...” he croaked.

“Ungrateful? Ungrateful!” Yara roared back in contempt, “Ungrateful for what? For getting my brothers killed in your stupid rebellion? For driving my mother to her grave?! For spurning Theon?! He loved you despite it all and you destroyed him!” Yara spat in his face, “That's what I think of all your damn mewling...of your precious grand plans. We don't need it to be great. We ARE great! We are feared all across the fourteen seas!”

Balon grew redder and redder with each of her pronouncements, he tried to rise and face his rebellious daughter, “You dare!”

Her response was to kick him in the head- hard, snapping his head back and laying him out flat on his back once more.

The world spun and his eyes were dim again as he struggled to fight off unconsciousness.

Yara's commanding tone came again, “You are pathetic and the worse kind of fool,” she sneered, “Get him out of my sight and throw him in chains! I'll decide later what to do with him!, she paused her face red contorted with rage and anger, “...And when Euron shows his face...bring me his head!”

He felt hands grabbing him and roughly dragging him away from his usurping daughter.
The Forgotten Lady

The crowds in the marketplace of Duskendale, were more subdued than normal for a thriving coastal town. The smallfolk here had started calling whatever was happening, the Return. And it's all its affects were being felt here.

Oh, the merchants were out in force selling their wares, the farmers were buying and selling their produce, whores stood at their corners hoping to entice men into their dens of flesh. Guards patrolled and kept an eye out for thieves.

But there was an edge to everyone, eyes stared warily about, guards clutched at their blades while staring in suspicion at everything and everyone around them...and some insane Septon was shouting about the end of the world.

She shook her head in disbelief as she passed him. The Septon continued screamed about the army of the dead and the coming Winter.

She paid him no more attention then the rest of the people as she passed him, heading towards the docks.

Eventually, she reached the docks, she stopped and looked about searching for what she wanted and after a few moments of looking she found it.

She walked towards her objective, a large ship with purple sails. At the foot of the ship, an older man in aged brown leathers and with dark skin, stood barking orders at sailors as they loading the ship.

She neared the man, and one of the sailors saw her and pointed in her direction. The sailor said something to the captain but she was too far away and it was too noisy to hear him. The captain turned and gave her a surprised look.

She clutched at the dagger hidden under her cloak and straightened her back, approaching them, radiating confidence and assurance, “Are you the captain of this ship?” she asked, putting forth
confidence and an edge in her voice.

The man stared at her warily, the surprise faded and was replaced with a strange look in his eyes, he nodded, “Aye, Captain Varan Nesteros, my lady,” the lilt of his Braavosi origin heavily coloured his words.

“They say you're going to Braavos.” she stated with firm authority.

The man nodded but didn't add anything.

“I'm looking for passage there, are you taking passengers?” she questioned.

The old man raised an eyebrow at her, “Aye...we could.”

She frowned at the captain, he seemed to be a man of few words, something unlike most Braavosi she'd met before, “I have good coin. I want my own room and no questions asked...and don't ask for my name.”

The old sea captain huffed before giving her a long look, “That can be arranged, always looking for good coin,” the man paused and gave her a big knowing grin, “I don't have to ask your name...I already know who you are...your grace.” he finished with flourish a mocking bow.

She froze, paling at the captain's remark.

“...so do you prefer Queen Talisa? Or Queen Stark?” he asked insolently, “Queen in the North, maybe?”

She rallied mightily and gave him a dark glare, “Neither. I'm only Talisa Maegyr now.” her tone had more bite in it than she intended.

He raised his hands in surrender and gave her a toothy smile, “Now, now, put the claws away, I actually like the Starks- and the Northerners. Made a pretty penny dealing them over the years, always good money to be made bringing them food during the winters. Good honest traders there...and their pride isn't as prickly these southern Westerosi...least not concerning honest trade.”
His words didn't really reassure her, but she put on a fake smile and nodded at the captain.

The captain smiled at her, a glad look in his eyes now, “Be glad to have a good healer, on this- or any voyage,” he nodded, “You help keep my crew healthy- help with any and all ailments and wounds. Do that and I can knock down the price of your passage.”

Talisa haggled with him over the exact price for a few moments before nodding quickly, “I accept you terms, captain.”

He smiled, “Good...just so you know, we'll get to Braavos after a stop in Pentos. Have some cargo to deliver there first.” he explained quickly.

She kept smiling but was inside she was frowning, Pentos, yet another slave city she didn't want to set foot in again, but it would be a small price to pay to get to Braavos.

The captain was looking at her strangely again, “You sure you don't want me to take you to White Harbor?” he asked suddenly. “I'd have thought Robb Stark would be happy to have you back?”

Talisa's face reddened and she cast aside the sudden, keening, longing that comment brought to the forefront of her mind and heart, her heart beat faster. She missed Robb dearly...she missed Grey Wind's wet kisses. The booming voices of the Northmen in general and the Greatjon's off colour jokes. The openness and their gruff nature. She even missed Lady Catelyn's disapproving stares. They'd been so different than her native Volantis and the convoluted nature of noble life there. Things had been good for a while. They'd actually been happy for a while, more happy than she had thought possible, even with the war ongoing.

The phantom pain of the Frey's knife in her belly ached.

It had all come crashing down at the Twins.

She shuddered and cast it aside.

“They won't welcome me there,” she replied despondently, “I cost Robb the war.”
The captain shrugged nonchalantly, “That’s one way of looking at it...from what I heard, a lot of mistakes were made to get to the Red Wedding. Personally, I blame the damned Freys...fucking misers the lot of them. A King in the North was good for business.”

Talisa winced and her belly ached again.

“...though I think you’re right, these Westerosi are a queer bunch when it comes to these things. Not as enlightened as we Essosi are.” He straightened up and gave her a welcoming smile. “Welcome aboard the Wild Yalla...” he gave her lecherous look, “I named her after my own wife.”

She gave him a pained smile and retorted dryly, “I'm sure she was very pleased to hear that.”

The captain roared with laughter, “Aye, she was at that,” he replied with a broad smile, “Get aboard, we leave with the next tide.”
It worked...

She breathed deep, feeling the soft mattress underneath her. She just lay there bathing in the warm of the shining sun and warm humid air. She'd forgotten what it was like to be warm. She reveled in the feeling. The Winter had been too harsh. More than anyone had expected.

It will be different this time, she promised herself, we will stop the Others...

Thoughts of Missandei and Grey Worm came to her and with a pang of regret, she realised that they were slaves again of the Masters of Astapor. I'll have to liberate Slaver's Bay...again...

She tried not to think of Jon. Her nephew was safe in the North again, surrounded by his previously murdered kin. With the Uncle he had thought of his father for most of his life. The last of her kin in Westeros.

She pushed her thoughts past Jon and Tyrion came to mind. He'd be with his father in Casterly Rock. She frowned as Tywin Lannister came to mind. Gods willing Tyrion would overcome him without killing him this time. I would dearly like to meet him this time, a vindictive part of her mind glowered.

With a sigh, she rose reluctantly, casting away her dark thoughts. It would not do to stay abed all day. They all knew their own parts of the plan and she had to focus on hers.

She stared about getting her bearings, the room was just as lavish as she remembered it. Her day started just as she before. Servants came, a bath a change of clothes, all preparations for a new day as befit a Princess of House Targaryen.

After they were finished, she skipped breaking her fast for walking about the manse.
It was, again, all like she remembered it. Warm and airy, filled with lavish decorations and subservient slaves. She saw a vaguely familiar blonde servant staring at her from afar before the blonde seemingly turned to flee in the other direction. Daenerys frowned for a moment but paid it no heed and continued walking.

Another slave girl was polishing one of many decorations as Daenerys approached. The girl caught sight of her and stopped.

Daenerys smiled at her and nodded, expecting the girl to return to her work, but the girl just kept staring.

“Is something the matter?” Daenerys asked in a friendly tone.

The slave girl looked around fearfully before looked again at her with a strange expression on her face and before whispering, “Breaker of chains....”

Daenerys went very pale and froze at the words. She couldn't have heard that right.

“What did you say?” her tone stronger than she intended.

The slave girl gulped nervously and gave her a wide eyed hopeful look. “You are the Breaker of Chains....have you come to free us?” her voice quivered.

Incomprehension engulfed Daenerys, how the hell does she know that name? She stepped closer to the girl, “How do you that name?” she gasped fearfully.

The girl gulped, eyes filled with hope, “I remember. It was like a dream...you are the Breaker of Chains, you killed the Masters of Slaver's Bay...you are the Mother of Dragons...” the girl paused and grabbed her hand, “Will...will you kill the Masters of Pentos now? Will you free us?”

Daenerys stared at the earnest girl as a coldness spread through her as the full implications of the slaves knowing the future began to unfold in her mind. If the slaves remember, what about the Magisters? Or the Slave Masters? Only a few were supposed to remember...how does this slave girl remember?
She gathered herself mentally, and pushed past her hesitation, “Do not speak of this. Remain silent until I call for you,” she commanded firmly.

The hope in the girl's eyes shone brighter as she nodded, almost tearfully happy.

“...go about your duties and do nothing,” Daenerys finished.

The girl nodded and scurried away, almost skipping with elation.

Daenerys watched as the girl scurried away, but the coldness in her gut didn't disappear.

She continued walking but with trepidation now. If one servant remembered then who else? How else had events changed? She had no true friends or allies here...and no dragons. No power to speak of and too many that would rejoice to see her dead before she became the Breaker of Chains.

“Dany!”

Daenerys froze as the familiar voice called to her. She turned to face the speaker, a strong sense of foreboding filling her being.

Approaching her with a wide smile on his face was her brother, Viserys Targaryen. He was just as she remembered him, dressed richly with a haughty expression on his face. An arrogant smile was on his face as he approached her.

The panicked look in his eyes and his screams as Drogo gave him a gold crown flashed before her mind's eye.

She watched him approach with bated breath. Do you remember, brother?

He came to a stop and gave her scrutinizing look before placing his hands on her shoulders, “Ah, you are looking as beautiful as ever Dany!” he complimented her with a smile on his lips.
She breathed out a silent sigh of relief, she didn't realise that she had been holding in, as she realised that Viserys did not remember his gold crown.

“Thank...thank you, brother,” she stammered.

Viserys frowned at her hesitation, “Is something the matter?”

Daenerys shook her head quickly, “No of course not.”

“Good! The Khal is coming tomorrow and you must look and be your best!” Viserys retorted in a commanding tone and with a sure smile.

Daenerys blinked, *Tomorrow? But...but that means Jon Arryn is already dead!* Her mind screamed in shock. Jon Arryn had already been dead for a while when Drogo first came for her.

She buried her shock deep and gave Viserys a placating smile, “Of course brother. Nothing must go wrong tomorrow.”

Viserys beamed back at her, “That's the spirit Dany, when you marry the Khal, he will join our cause and help us take back our father's throne,” he nodded assuredly, “It's good that you're warming up to the idea. You have to look at the bigger picture, dear sister.”

She nodded ostensibly to placate her brother's delusions, “Of course brother, that is the most important thing.” Things were not going to go as he planned...not by a long shot. Not the first time and definitely not this time.

As she spoke, out of the corner of her eye, she could see Magister Illyrio Mopatis approaching. She turned towards him.

“Ah...your Grace, I would like to talk with you,” Illyrio Mopatis spoke casually, but there was sharpness to his gaze that disquieted Daenerys. His eyes were focused on her and it left no question as to who was calling 'your Grace'.

She looked about, he was standing there casually, but with him stood eight of his Unsullied guards.
All were armed and armored. To the causal observer they were standing at attention, unmoving, as unflinching as their reputation. But to someone that had spent so long with Grey Worm and his men, she could see the tenseness in them.

Her gut twisted in upon itself as realised why the Magister looked so off sorts and why he had so many guards with him.

“Yes, Magister? Is there more preparations we need to make for tomorrow?” Viserys asked irritably

Illyrio’s eyes flickered dismissively at Viserys before focusing back on her, “My dear, it would be best if you did not run.”

She raised her head defiantly, “I do not run.” she retorted regally, voice calm and collected.

Viserys frowned, “Run? Run from what?” he demanded irritably, his mercurial temperament showing. “What are you talking about?”

Now it was Illyrio's turn to frown, he gave Viserys an evaluating look, continuing to ignore Viserys's words he asked Daenerys, “He does not remember?” he asked in confusion.

She shook her head, “Apparently not.”

“Unfortunate.”

Viserys's nature asserted itself, “What are you babbling about Magister?” he mewled arrogantly. “I asked you a question! Run from who? You assured us we would be safe her from the Usurper's assassins!”

Illyrio turned unimpressed eyes to look at Viserys, “This is beyond you boy. Best to keep quiet and let your betters speak.” he commanded in a firm and unquestionable tone.

Daenerys winced internally, that was probably the wrong tone to take with her brother, the dragon was going to awake now, she thought with derision.
She was right. Viserys's face reddened and he glared angrily at the Magister, “Boy? Boy! I am the King! I am the rightful king of the Iron Throne!”

Illyrio snorted disdainfully and sneered, “You are nothing boy,” he jerked his head at his Unsullied, “You two, escort the king to his rooms and keep him there!”

Two of the Unsullied detached from the group and advanced on the sputtering Viserys. He tried to back away eyes opening in disbelief as the expressionless Unsullied advanced. They grabbed him by his arms as he started screaming in anger. They paid him no head as they dragged him away. His screams grew in intensity as he screamed about being King, about unhanding him and that the dragon would awaken if they did not obey him.

The screams and irate demands of Viserys echoed through the halls, getting quieter and quieter as the Unsullied dragged him away to his rooms.

As Viserys's voice finally disappeared Illyrio turned back to Daenerys and smiled, “Good...forgive the unpleasantness, my Queen. We both know who the true dragon is and we should go and speak of such things. Come along, I believe there is a great deal for us to sort out,” he said gesturing forward.

This is not the plan... she thought unhappily. She swore silently under her breath, Seven Hells Bran, what did you do? What happened?

Two of the Unsullied stepped forward and gestured for her to follow them. Daenerys gave Illyrio a defiant gaze before moving forward and following his guards.

The rest of the guards fell into step and followed behind with Illyrio.

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Jorah Mormont

The air was too warm...
That's what woke him up, he sat up in bed blinking away the sweat in his eyes, confusion foremost in his mind. He looked around in confusion, it took him a moment to recognize where he was and when he did his confusion only grew.

*Gods...Pentos?*

It was a little room he'd used more often than he cared to remember, in a clean but affordable whorehouse in Pentos. There was a warm body next to him. The warm body was pressed up against him, the warmth of her bare skin was unsettling. He couldn't remember her name. A skilled Lysene girl, he remembered her...just not her name.

This was Pentos from a lifetime ago. He was a different person back then, lost and spying for the Iron Throne.

He shook himself and tried to understand what was happening. The last thing he remembered was leading the rearguard at Moat Cailin as the dead came. Swarming over the defenses as the rest of the people fled from the onslaught. The Night's King was overhead, riding on Viserion's back, there had been a great scream and then...

Jorah shook himself and left the bed shaken.

...and then death had come for him. Such unspeakable intense cold.

He paced about the small room. *If I'm dead then how am I here? More importantly, what happened after I died?* His thoughts went to the Queen. He'd been with her for so long, through it all until the dead came for them.

*Did you defeat them?*

His mind rambled through possibilities. Most not reassuring in the least.

The Lysene girl rolled over in the bed, but didn't awaken. The covers shifted, displaying more of her smooth and enticing skin. Her soft snores rising and falling, the only sound in the room.
He frowned and started to dress, wanting to leave this unnerving vestige of his old life behind.

Again his thoughts came back to the queen. She would be here, in Illyrio Mopatis's manse. Would she remember as well? Does she know what's going on?

He finished dressing and belted on his sword belt. With little time lost, he raced from his room heading out. He knew where he was heading and he had a purpose...

Illyrio Mopatis's manse.

The Queen was there.

And he would return to her as he always did.

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**Doreah**

She walked swiftly down the street, she had begged to go the market, to do anything to escape from the Magister's manse. She'd volunteered to go and buy whatever supplies the cooks needed extra today...anything to get her out of the manse. It was impossible. Everything was impossible. She stared about seeing old faces that she hadn't seen since the Magister had gifted her to Khal Drogo.

She remembered the Vault. She remembered Xaro Xhoan Daxos. The Khaleesi had locked them in the vault together and left them to die.

She shuddered greatly, that had been a bad way to die. A long way to die...

And yet here she was back in Pentos. She had even seen the Khaleesi walking through the corridors of the manse without a care, looking small and innocent as she had all those years ago. Before Drogo. Before the Dragons. Before all those years of traveling in the dirt. Before all the hardships.

She shuddered again, what trick of the gods was this? Which of the gods would turn back time like
She came to the first stall she needed and spoke hurriedly to the trader asking for what she wanted, she didn't even haggle with him. She just thrust the money at him and took what was needed.

She moved on quickly, her mind still striving to understand it all. For a short while she lost herself in her task, distracting herself from the madness that threatened to envelop her.

The simplicity of the task at hand helped balance her quivering mind. She slowed down and looked about taking in the fresh air and the noise of the market.

She frowned, the market was quieter than normal. Oh the criers were there, their voices elevated above the others calling out the worthiness of their wares. The mingled voices of the hagglers continued on in the background...but there was a terse edge to everything.

She looked closer at some of the traders and saw disturbed and confused looks in their eyes. She stared about looking for threats or anything that could explain it all, but nothing stood out.

"Doreah!"

She twisted around and turned towards the call. A Dothraki girl was standing a distance away from her. A very familiar, very angry looking Dothraki girl...

It all came tumbling down as she realised who she was looking at.

The Dothraki girl with rage in her eyes was Irri...

*She shouldn't recognize me!* A panicked part of her mind screamed. Another part recalled the sounds Irri had made as she choked the life out of her in Qarth.

She dropped the purchases and fled from the market, without a word.

“Get back here you, fucking whore!” she heard Irri screaming at her in Dothraki. The sound of
running feet reached her ears.

A second scream of rage came from behind her.

She ran faster.

She finally stopped running and hid in a small alley, panting and out of breath, she stood there straining to hear, hoping not to hear the sound of running feet.

After many long moments, she heard nothing...

With a sigh of relief she turned around and then jerked back in surprise as the hate filled eyes met hers again.

They stood there for a long minute staring at each other.

“Irri...” she finally manged to say in a pained voice, the memory of Qarth flicking though her mind again. The struggle as she chocked the girl to death.

Pain suddenly blossomed in her stomach and she looked down, to see a dagger sticking out of her stomach, Irri's hand grasped around the handle. The feeling went our of her legs as Irri savagely twisted the dagger and Doreah fell backwards, as with a jerk, the dagger came free of her flesh.

She barely felt it as she fell on the solid ground, she started coughing, as blood began flooding her mouth. She stared up in incomprehension.

Irri spat in her face, the wet globule hitting her eye and blinding her, “Traitor...”

The hazy sight of Irri standing over her with the bloodied dagger in her hand was the last thing she ever saw before darkness claimed her.
Illyrio Mopatis's solar was a testament to his wealth, filled with trinkets from all across Essos and Westeros and probably beyond. Daenerys had never been here before, she had just been the idle girl to be bartered like a broodmare by the Magister and her brother for power. She had had no reason to be called into his solar before.

But now there many reasons to be here. Too many...

The false smile on his face hid away his true feelings and the truth of just how much danger she truly was in.

Illyrio gestured for to take a seat. She took the seat without showing a modicum of the trepidation she felt. However the plan had been changed, however this all had come about, she would deal with it.

There was a pitcher of wine on the table. Illyrio took it and poured out two goblets. He gave Daenerys a smile as he sipped from her goblet before putting it in front of her.

With an ease she did not feel, she reached out and took the goblet, sipping at her wine. She nodded in acknowledgment of the meaning behind Illyrio's act.

He took the seat opposite her and they sat there, silently assessing the other as they sipped their wine.

Suddenly, Illyrio laughed mirthfully, “You truly are a slight slip of girl,” he laughed again, “Who would have thought you could make all of Essos tremble?,” he snorted and shook his head, “Certainly not I!”

She gave him a long look, “I'm glad I amuse you.”

He gave her a toothy smile, “Defiant and unflinching...as strong as Valyrian steel. A true Dragon.”

She raised an eyebrow at his compliment but didn't retort.

“We used you to secure an alliance with the Khal...but your brother spoiled that plan,” he stopped and pursed his lips, “Too much like his father and brother that one.” He nodded, “Personally I wrote you off after that. You should have been a minor note in the histories of the Dothraki. The Last daughter of Old Valyria married and disappearing into obscurity, especially after your Khal died.” He paused with pursed lips, “I blinked and suddenly you had dragons. I blinked again and you were Queen of Meereen and the Breaker of Chains.”

“It took a little longer than an eye blink,” Daenerys retorted dryly, thinking back to the years of wandering, to Qarth and finally reaching Slaver's Bay.

“True...but it was a still a very quick ascent to power, much faster than credible...even with dragons to aid you.” He shook his head in disbelief, “Then somehow you conquered the Dothraki.” he paused his face pale, “You killed all the Khals and suddenly all the Dothraki were yours to command. That was a truly impossible achievement.” disbelief and amazement coloured his tone.

“And in all of this you were freeing slaves, the last daughter of Old Valyria- a nation built on slavery, freeing slaves.”

Ch11 Pandemonium level two

Chapter 12 Pandemonium level two

Daenerys Targaryen
Daenerys frowned at him wondering where he was going with this.

“...Lys, Tyrosh, Myr...even Volantis, all trembled in fear of your next act.” His amazement and disbelief turned to anger as he spat his next words, “Except the Sealord of Braavos. He was sitting back in his palace laughing at us! He knew he was safe from you! Oh, how the Free Cities quivered in fear of the Breaker of Chains! You have no idea how relieved many parties were when you set sail for Westeros.”

The cold feeling that been building in her belly intensified and turned to ice, she let no sign it come to her face.

“...All that was not what I had planned with Varys.” He finished in an unamused tone. He drained his cup in massive gulp, wine dripping down onto his beard. He placed the empty goblet on the table before giving Daenerys a grumpy look, “All that you did was very much not in line with my plan.”

“Then what was your plan? Varys was not as upset with me as you appear to be,” she asked and retorted smartly.

Illyrio nodded, “True, Varys and I have always differed on some aspects of the plan, but a Targaryen restoration in Westeros with our backing and the help of the Dothraki. I would have finally spread our trade to Westeros. Slaves across the Narrow Sea...instead well you know,” he lamented with a shrug.

Daenerys stared at him, her ire rising, “As long as I live, slavery will never spread!”

He gave her a deadly stare, “And there lies the crux of the matter,” he stood and spread his arms, “Here we are back at the beginning. You have no friends here, no loyal army...and no dragons. I don’t know how this happened-”

“We did this,” she cut off the Magister’s tirade.

He looked at her, taken aback, “You? Why? We who? Why would you weaken yourself like this?” he asked quickly sitting back down, and leaning towards her.

She grimaced, “The plan isn’t exactly going as planned. You should not remember.”

He snorted and nodded, “Yes, that would have been a better plan, but why do this at all?” he asked in confusion.

She frowned at him, surely he knew? “The Others. The army of the dead.”

He paled, “Those were just rumors!” he decried.

She shook her head, “They were no rumors. The Night’s King won. Westeros was his. We did this because it was the only way to save...everyone.” she paused and gave him a long look, “Even you...”

He sat back in shocked disbelief, becoming lost in thought as the implications of such things rolled around his mind. He remained silent as he absorbed this revelation.

As the silence continued, she fumed silently over her situation. Her part of the plan was over. Illyrio would never let her secure her allies once again, never mind hatch her children again. Sorrow filled her as she realised she would never see Jon or Tyrion or Missandei or Jorah or any of her other friends.
A soft tap reached her ears, followed by several quick others, dragging her out of her revere. She knew that sound from Astapor. It was the sound of a spear butt tapping the marble floor, she cast a look at the Unsullied who had stood in silence all through her talk with Illyrio. As before, to someone not used to dealing with Unsullied, they stood at rigid attention...but only to someone unused to dealing with Unsullied.

To her, their every action was practically screaming at her...screaming defiance. The lead Unsullied who had taped the ground with his spear, gave her an infinitesimally small nod.

She kept her face blank, I can't be that lucky can I? Her eyes darted to look at the other Unsullied, in turn each and every one gave her a small nod. She sat up straighter in her chair, she wasn't as powerless as the Magister thought. She didn't care why these Unsullied were choosing her...it was enough that they were.

She cast a look at Illyrio, still lost in thought. She cleared her throat, “What will you do now?”

“This changes much. But not as much as you hoped.” He shook his head, “It is not in my best interests to see you rise to power once again. And I think many will gladly pay to have your head.”

She snorted, “And what of my allies in Westeros? How do you think they will react to that?”

“They will thank me for the men and sellswords I shall gather to stand with them,” he retorted sharply, “Men and gold will buy them off. That is more than you can give them now.”

“And my nephew? How will you placate him?”

That brought the Magister up short, “Nephew? What Nephew?” he gaped in surprise.

She raised her head defiantly, “Lyanna Stark's son.”

Illyrio closed his mouth with a click, as his teeth came together. He blinked at her several times before gathering his thoughts again. “All men have their price.” he finally replied

“You will find it very hard to find a bribe heavy enough to bend the honor of a man raised by Eddard Stark,” she retorted with a snort of derision.

He shifted uncomfortably in his seat, “Be that as it may, I cannot allow you rise again...but do not worry I am a merciful man. Your end will be quick and painless. Take her outside and take her head. The Masters of Meereen will pay a good sum for proof of her death.” Illyrio commanded the Unsullied.

With languid slowness she moved her head to look at each of the Unsullied, before turning to cock a eyebrow at the Magister.

“Now! Take her and go,” he repeated, his tone not changing.

The Unsullied didn't move.

The polite smile on his face disappeared as comprehension dawned. He stared at the Unsullied with a look of dread, “What are you waiting for! Take her!” his tone suddenly held a scared edge.

The lead Unsullied stepped towards him and lowered his spear, pointed it at the twitching Magister's exposed throat, silencing him.

Daenerys held up a hand, “Hold.”
The Unsullied froze.

Slowly she stood up, and as the Magister had done before, she took the pitcher of wine and refilled their goblets, holding the Magister's goblet out to him.

With infinite slowness, he reached out and took it from her, pale and trembling he managed to not spill any of it as he drank deeply. The circumstance had turned on him and he probably did not think he would survive the coming moments.

“So you were going to kill me and sell my corpse to the Slave Masters?” she asked softly.

He gulped, his eyes now betraying his emotions. He held his tongue and didn't answer. Instead he just glanced at the Unsullied warrior's spear that was pointed unmoving at his throat.

She looked to the Unsullied warrior and gestured him back, “I don't think he is a threat now....”

The Unsullied raised his spear and stepped back as she assessed him. He was older than the Unsullied that had served her, he still wore the standard armour of the Unsullied sans helmet, but his figure was more rounded than a younger Unsullied. He was not quite an old man, but he was getting there, his hair graying at his temples, though his age did not seem to have dulled his edge. Dark eyes stared at her as she looked at him.

“What is your name?” she asked.

“I am Brown Waste,” he answered.

She blinked and wrinkled her nose, unamused, “The Masters and their damned names.” she said in exasperation.

“I would be like to be called Adaro instead,” the lead Unsullied stated.

She smiled at him and bowed her head regally, “Well met Adaro.”

A light came to his eyes, “I am honored to serve the Breaker of Chains,” he gestured at the other silent Unsullied, “We all will gladly serve. All of us will.” The emphasis on all was not lost on Daenerys. The manse was hers with the small troop of Unsullied that Illyrio kept to protect it and him. A little of the ice in her started to melt. This was a good first step. She could make this work.

Adaro jerked his head at Illyrio, “Shall we kill him now?”

She turned back to the fidgeting Magister as the focus on his fate came back to him.

“That would be the expedient thing to do, wouldn't it?,” she paused letting Illyrio's fear rise as she glared at him, “...But you did take my brother and I in when no else did, and I am a guest in your home. It would be rude of me to have you killed...and I am no Frey,” she spoke calmly and slowly.

Illyrio's eyes opened wide as he sensed that she was willing to give him a way out of his predicament.

“...you are aware of my stipulations to the Masters of what was Slaver's Bay. And how I punished those that disobeyed?” she asked with an even tone, as she enjoyed watching him squirm uneasily.

Illyrio was an intelligent man- and a survivor to boot, he jumped with with both feet onto her mercy.

“Of course...of course, my queen,” he bowed his head, and gave her a wide submissive smile. “I shall free all those slaves in my service and instead offer them gainful employment instead as free
men and women.” he waved a hand at the Unsullied, “I offer these Unsullied to you as a gift of my sincerity.”

Her eyes narrowed and she glared at the odious man, “The Unsullied are not animals to be given as gifts. They are people, with as much right to freedom as any man or women. They are free as well.” She turned to face Adaro and the others as she continued speaking in a more gracious tone, “And I am honored that you have already chosen to aid me.”

Illyrio winced and rose from his seat, bowing deeply, “Forgive me, my Queen. Of course they are free as well,” he apologized in a conciliatory manner, almost grovelling.

“Good. Very Good. I am glad you understand me. Let us move forward to business. Firstly, and most importantly...where are my dragons?” Daenerys asked in a sweet tone, her eyes flashing and daring him to lie to her.

Jorah Mormont

Illyrio Mopatis's manse was just as he remembered it. As expansive and beautiful as it always was, occupying a good area near the coast of Pentos.

There were Dothraki moving towards the manse...and he recognized many of them. There were a lot of Dothraki assembling around the manse and moving into the courtyard. A lot. Enough that they were probably making the Magister nervous. Both men and women were here. Some he recognized from Khal Drogo's original khalasar while others were from other khalasars that had joined Daenerys after she burnt the Khals in Vaes Dothrak.

As he entered the courtyard, he was quickly approached by a very familiar figure. He hadn't seen him for a very long time – since they were still wandering the Grey Wastes, before they reached Qarth.

“Jorah the Andal!” called out Rakharo, Khal Drogo's former Bloodrider.

Jorah remembered the loyal man and how upset Daenerys had been when his head had been returned to them in the Grey Wastes.

He smiled and greeted him, “Rakharo!” the man was as he remembered him, young and fit, though he kept scratching at his neck a little obsessively. Not that Jorah could blame him, considering his final fate.

“It is good to see you, my friend,” Jorah continued. More loyal men to Daenerys would be good, considering the strange situation they were all in.

Rakharo nodded uncharacteristically indecisive, “And you as well...but how is this possible? I remember...” he scratched at his neck, “I remember what they did to me.” He looked down crestfallen, for a moment, “I failed the Khaleesi.”

Jorah commiserated with him, and shook his head, “I don't know...in the end I failed her as well.”

Rakharo looked unhappy at this, “How is this possible? I...died.” he asked deeply disturbed. “This is dark magic...”

Jorah shook his head, “I don't know, but I do know this. Many things are possible with magic,” he paused and pursed his lips, “Many things happened after you died. Many impossible things.”
Rakharo’s disturbed look deepened.

“...Best to be thankful for this second chance and move on.” Jorah jerked his head at the manse. “Let’s find the Khaleesi, perhaps she has some answers?”

Rakharo nodded and without another word, together, they pushed through the gathering crowd towards the Magister’s manse in search their Queen.

Daenerys Targaryen

Daenerys looked down at the Dothraki assembled in the courtyard from the balcony of Illyrio’s solar and smiled. Suddenly her position was not so insecure. Between the Unsullied and those she recognized she had a good number of warriors at her command.

“My Queen,” Adaro called from behind her.

She turned to face him, “Yes, Adaro?”

“This one is claiming to be one of your handmaidens,” he gestured behind him revealing a small trembling Dothraki woman holding a round leather bag.

She beamed with delight as she recognized the woman for the old friend she truly was, she stepped forward to greet her with open arms.

“Irri!”

Irri took a step forward and then went down to her knees a look of contrition on her face. “Forgive me Khaleesi for failing you...” She opened the bag and emptied the content at Daenerys’s feet.

A severed head rolled out, blonde hair curled around the head as the lifeless eyes stared unseeing. It took her a second to recognize the face. It was the same face that had seemed so familiar to her in the morning.

Doreah...the servant from the morning....no wonder she ran from me! The last image of anguish on her face as Jorah sealed her and Xaro into the empty vault, and left them to their slow end.

“...She betrayed you...she killed me. She took your dragons. I beg your forgiveness Khaleesi.” Irri prostrated herself before Daenerys.

The betrayal in Qarth surged back into her mind...of returning to the Xaro's manse and finding so many of her loyal men dead, seeing Irri's lifeless body at the foot of the balcony and her dragons gone. The anger and rage came back as well.

She glared at the dead head, You killed Irri?! She gathered herself mentally and put the past/future behind her, it didn't matter any more. Doreah was dead again and Irri still lived. It was a win by her standards.

Daenerys turned back to Irri and casting away her anger, raising a semi-amused eyebrow, “What is it with people bringing me bags with heads and throwing them at my feet?”

Irri frowned uncertainly before looking down in fear, “Forgive me Khaleesi if I overstepped.” she bowed again in prostration.

Daenerys went to her and bent down before gently pulling her up. She looked at her loyal friend, the
smile returning to her face. “I missed you.” She hugged Irri, “You never failed me. You served me
faithfully and that is enough for me,” she whispered into her ear.
She felt Irri's arms return the hug before they broke apart a moment later.
There were tears in Irri's eyes, “Thank you Khaleesi,” she said, her voice quivering with emotion.
Daenerys just smiled back...however the plan had been changed, this was one part she was happy
had changed.
After a moment she noticed that Irri was staring at her while biting her lower lip.
Daenerys frowned, “What is it?”
“How are we back? What dark magic can do this?” Irri asked in trepidation.
“Do not worry. I know how this was done...it didn't turn out exactly as was planned, but I can work
with this.” She explained quickly, trying to alleviate Irri's fear.
Irri's eyes widened in surprise and her uncertainty returned, after another moment she found her
voice again, “Khaleesi...there are warriors of Khal Moro's khalasar here...they are calling you the
Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea...” she questioned, her tone filled with disbelief.
Daenerys smiled coyly, amused by Irri's confusion, “All serve me now. Many things changed after
you were gone,” she stepped towards the door, “Come along, let us see who else is here. There is
much I need to explain and more that must be done.”
She left Illyrio's study with a spring in her step and renewed vigor. Irri hurriedly followed behind.
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Jorah Mormont
Jorah was smiling as Daenerys began her explanation. Finding her had been easier than expected .
No sooner than joining with Rakharo they came upon her. She had swept out of the manse
accompanied bu Unsullied guards. Entering the courtyard she was greeted by the chanting of her
name by the people assembled. Mixed shouts of Mother of Dragons, Breaker of Chains and Khaleesi
had echoed from so many throats. As in Vaes Dothrak they screamed their fealty to her. And not just
the Dothraki, many of those assembled were Pentosi natives, mostly slaves – but not all. They too
screamed their fealty to her.
With quick simple words she had welcomed them all and hushed them. His heart swelled as he
watched her in her element, majestic and royal. Her tone commanding all who heard her.
Things progressed quickly after that, and Jorah found himself and Rakharo along some of the more
veteran of the Dothraki warriors gathered together for an impromptu planning session and an
explanation of how and why all this was done. Magister Illyrio was also present as sort of new ally
or 'honored' guest.
Jorah mused, telling the Dothraki that the Dead were coming for them had been a nasty surprise to
those who hadn't survived to see Westeros and the war in the North.
Rakharo had turned several interesting shades or red and white as Daenerys explained in very brutal
terms just how screwed they'd been. Dothraki as a whole were a superstitious lot and telling them
monsters were coming for them was a hell of an experience. Thankfully, they also viewed it as the


ultimate challenge of prowess for them. So they were surprisingly upbeat despite the situation.

Finally she came to part he hadn't known, his fall in the rearguard at Moat Cailin and the desperation that forced them to use magic to give them all them a second chance.

“...it was Brandon Stark,” explained Daenerys.

He winced as he thought of Ned Stark's disturbing son. The unblinking gaze and coldness of the boy always rubbed him the wrong way. His unnatural stillness was disturbing to all who knew him.

“...Brandon and the Children of the Forest cast this spell,” she spoke firmly, casting significant glances to all assembled, “This is a second chance for all of us...but it wasn't supposed to happen like this.” She grimaced in annoyance, “Only some of us were supposed to remember...too many of us remember and not all stand with us.” She cast a pointed look at the silent Magister, “that said, some can be convinced to join us.”

In response, Illyrio gave Daenerys submissive smile and bowed his head, “The Queen is most wise and merciful.”

She arched an eyebrow at him but pressed on ignoring his simpering, “The other Magisters here will move against us, sooner rather than later.” she admitted unhappily.

Jorah nodded agreeing with her, but one issue played on his mind, “They are a capricious group, their greed guides their every move and they do not lack for gold...” he paused wondering how to phrase his important question, “Forgive me my Queen but we are lacking your greatest advantage.”

Daenerys nodded at him, “My dragons. The Magister has graciously returned the eggs to me. And thankfully that I can correct that deficiency quite easily.” She turned to one of the Unsullied, “Bring me a quill and paper.”

The Unsullied nodded and what she requested was quickly presented to her. She took the gathered writing implements and with quick bold strokes drew a diagram of something. She finished and pushed the piece of paper into the center of the table.

He stared at the drawing in front of him with a sudden trepidation, “What is this?”

“This is the original ritual used by my ancestors in the golden age of Old Valyria,” the Queen explained, much to Jorah's confusion and surprise.

Jorah's mouth fell open as he suddenly gaped at her, “How did you find such a thing?” he choked out in disbelief.

“It was Brandon again,” the Queen pursed her lips and looked pensive. “He went back and observed the needed Valyrian rituals. He saw Valyria in all of its former might.”

Jorah's surprise redoubled as he imagined what the full might of the Ancient Dragonlords of Valyria would have looked like, “That is...impressive.” He wasn't the only one that suffering from the surprise reveal. Illyrio had a stunned expression on his face. Jorah pressed on, “Did he discover any other secrets?”

Daenerys's pensive look deepened, her eyes held a troubled look, “No....we were lucky to just get this.” She gave Jorah a look, “They sensed his presence.”

A chill settled in Jorah's gut, “They sensed him? But they are long dead!”
Daenerys shook her head, “It's...complicated. Brandon explained it but it made little sense, suffice it to say he was lucky to escape from them.”

Jorah cast the sudden dread he felt aside and focused back on the present and the plans the Queen had drawn. There were many details in it, with many spaces for sacrifices...

Finally after a moment of silent contemplation, “Fire and Blood, indeed,” he muttered at the irony of the words of House Targaryen. The secret in plain sight that none realised. He looked at the plans again and winced at the number of blood sacrifices the Queen needed to reawaken her children.

They spoke more of preparations until a harried Unsullied rushed into the meeting, “My Queen, soldiers have been sighted heading for the manse.”

“They've come for us,” Daenerys proclaimed with steel in her voice.

“Well?” she asked.

“Well?,” Adaro suddenly smiled wolfishly, his eyes twinkling, “I do have a few good plans...”

She smiled and gestured for them to rise, “With all of you by my side, I have no fear of that”

Bloodied but alive, Jorah looked out over the city. The sun was setting now and the battle was over and hard won.

The uprising had been bloody and costly. Daenerys's reputation preceded her and the slaves that remembered all rallied at a chance for freedom. The others who didn't remember didn't need much cajoling to get them to join in at the prospect of true freedom. Many of the Magisters died when their
own personal slaves suddenly rose up against them.

Adaro proved to be a cunning leader with a vicious streak fed by all the injustices he'd had heaped on him during his life. Apparently, he had liked to amuse himself imagining how he could subdue Pentos with force. Putting his plans into actions was a very sweet nectar for the Unsullied commander.

The few remaining Magisters that survived the initial onslaught surrendered once news spread of an approaching Dothraki khalasar. The gates of the city were unbarred and unlocked...and in possession of Daenerys's loyal warriors. A defenseless Pentos would be too much of an enticing prize to any Dothraki Khal. And no Magister in his right mind would think of repelling a Dothraki horde while the gates were held open. It was a madness that none of the Magisters had.

The last remnants of defiance died and all bent the knee to Daenerys Targaryen, the First of her name.

As darkness finally descended over Pentos, where once a Prince ruled in name only, now a Queen ruled in truth.
Ch13 Pandemonium level three: Awakening the Dragon

Chapter 13 Pandemonium Level three: Awakening the Dragon

Daenerys Targaryen

Drogo was coming today and nothing was as planned. He came for an innocent bride and was received by a bloody handed conqueror. He came for a lowly Princess of House Targaryen and instead found the new Queen of Pentos.

Her heart thundered in her chest as she prepared to welcome Drogo. He was coming, her scouts had reported his coming as well as other riders heading for the city. And now he would be her first audience as the new Queen of Pentos.

Do you remember me my Sun and Stars?! Gods...this is going to be awkward! Did you feel it as I suffocated you? She thought darkly. Her thoughts were scattered, jumping from point to point.

She remembered the time they had been together, for all that she had been completely unwilling in the beginning...she had turned her situation to her advantage by the end. In the beginning she had been a little better than a prisoner, but in the end she had had control, a great deal of control. Looking back she realised just how much she managed to make Drogo bend to her will. The fewer slaves taken in the raids as they rode for Westeros was but the most blatant of the signs of her control. Some had come to recognize and resent her influence, hence the challenge that gave Drogo his disastrous wound.

How different would things have been if you'd lived? A part of her lamented. Most of her realised that it had been for the better, if he hadn't died than her dragons wouldn't have been hatched. She wouldn't have been free to become the Breaker of Chains. Or start to change the Dothraki into something less barbarous.

Drogo, her Sun and Stars, was a part of the old world. How would he react to the new world she was forging? Old dreams and old possibilities came back to haunt her as before. The impossible possibilities had haunted her in Westeros as the plan was forged. As it became clearer and clearer that the plan was actually going to happen.

One of her last private moments with Jon came back to haunt her.
A private moment between them was a rare thing now. As she lay on the bed roll her mind was dominated by dark thoughts. Too many responsibilities, too many hours spent running South, the North had fallen. Moat Cailin had fallen and Jorah with it. The Twins came next. The Riverlands had been open to them and the Others spread all directions, gathering the dead with each mile they took. West they'd already taken Ashemark and the Golden Tooth. Casterly Rock was already under siege. To the East, the Eyrie had already fallen, the might of the Vale shattered and scattered. Roving bands of Others and Wights had been sighted near Gulltown and heading further along the coast. Bands of White Walkers and Wights had bypassed the strongholds and were ranging as far down as Dorne, raising a second undead army from the dead of the South. Riverrun had held for a while. But in the end it too had fallen...Edmure Tully had valiantly held the Others off as he set fire to his ancestral castle - all in the name of slowing the Others' advance. At the end he knew he was just buying time for them to put the plan into action.

But it was all to naught, each failure increased the numbers of Wights under the Night's King's command. With the fall of the North the numbers had reached catastrophic levels...

She shuddered, the dead were truly numberless now.

A warm hand rubbed her back, breaking through her dark thoughts, she turned over and faced him.

“You should be sleeping,” Jon said, his eyes filled with concern.

She looked at his dark eyes, not for the first time wondering how he could be her nephew. There were no signs of her family's features anywhere. The Stark in him dominated his face, with his dark eyes and black hair.

“Too many dark thoughts,” she retorted unhappily then raised an eyebrow at him in response, “You should be asleep as well.”

He huffed unhappily, “Too many dark thoughts,” he said throwing back her own words at her.

She sighed, “Is it about the Others or the Ritual, this time?”

His unhappiness deepened, he became more dour as she watched, “It's dangerous. Magic of this
She looked at him for moment before finishing his sentence, they’d spoken of this before, but maybe this time he would speak about whatever he was holding back, “…everyone we’ve lost will be back. Family, friends…even lovers?”

For a long moment Jon was silent. “Did you love him?” he asked eventually.

She knew who he was taking about; Drogo. It took her longer to answer than she was comfortable with.

“Not at first…he was bigger than Tormund and I was just a little girl sold off by her brother for an army…I was intimidated by him,” Daenerys pursed her lips. Old thoughts swirling in her mind. “We were not happy at first. I wasn’t happy - he was. At first I was just a warm body to warm his bed. A prize no other Khal could ever gain. The last true daughter of old Valyria. A trophy to be paraded around for his supporters and his enemies…and a beautiful girl to be bedded whenever he pleased.”

Jon winced at the description of her situation.

“…but that was just at the beginning, after so many years of thinking of that time, I realise how much I changed him when I began to assert myself. Eventually even the great Khal Drogo bent to me,” she shook her head, “He never realised it at the time, though others did. He was challenged because of it. He won, but his wounds festered…and then I became the Mother of Dragons and the Unburnt.” She pushed her thoughts past that the end of that time. Refusing to focus on Rhaego, the son that had never been. Those memories were too painful even after all these years.

They were silent for a while, idly she caressed his chest, her fingers walking over the wound over his heart.

“And what about this…Daarion?” Jon asked finally.

She snorted and gave him an amused smile, “Daario…I never loved him, but he was…” she paused and she cast a sly look at Jon before her smile turned smug, “…fun. Loyal as Jorah, but more fun.” She laughed.
Jon looked away unamused at her teasing.

She enjoyed his amusement for a moment, before her own insecurities came back to her.

“Jon...what about her...I know you loved her,” She began slowly,

Jon’s face when blank and unreadable before he finally found his words, “I loved her first...I’ve never stopped loving her,” he admitted, his eyes unable to meet hers, unhappy with his admission.

“You haven’t spoken of what happened to her, I know she died at Castle Black, Tormund told me that much,” she admitted, trying to gently pry the knowledge from him.

His face cracked, “Olly killed her to save me.”

Her face became hot, “Oh...” She knew who Olly was, and what he had meant to Jon...and just how much his betrayal and later execution still ate at him. The irony of him first saving Jon was not lost on her and added a level of absurdity to the situation.

Jon was blinking away tears.

She bit her lip, “What will you do when you see her again?”

She watched emotions war for supremacy on his face before he answered her, “She won’t remember. It won’t matter.”

“But you’ll remember her...”

His silence was his answer.

She didn’t let herself sigh. She hadn’t meant to make his mood darker, she tried to changed that, taking a light tone, “Too bad you’re not Dornish, you could have kept her as a paramour,” she teased, trying to lighten the mood.
He looked at her in disbelief before the absurdity of it overwhelmed him. He snorted in amusement and held her tighter.

“As if you'd let me have a paramour in the first place,” he retorted in amusement.

She raised and amused eyebrow at him, “And as if that overdeveloped annoying stiff sense of honor of yours would let you keep one as well.” She pushed herself up and kissed him lightly on the lips.

He pulled her closer and then kissed her harder, and for a moment they lost themselves in the kiss. Forgetting about the end of the world.

They parted and she lay her head down on his bare chest.

“When we go back everything will change. So...we just enjoy this moment now...for now nothing else matters.” he said hugging her against him.

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She shook the old memory off and the melancholy that came with it, and willed herself to return to the here and now.

Today...she was in her new throne room, formerly that of the Prince of Pentos, the Prince's small palace was hers now along with everything else in the city. A new place for her to project her power from. Surrounding her, her loyal Dothraki and Unsullied were arrayed. They guarded her and her new palace now.

Irri stood by her side as her loyal handmaiden. Jorah, Adaro, and Rakharo stood in positions of power near her, while Illyrio was sat at a lower station to signify his less trusted but still good position in her new court. All were arranged in a manner to project her newfound power and strength.

There were many coming to see her today, most coming to pledge their fealty to her or plead their case for something or another.
But he would be first, before all other Khal Drogo was here. Coming either to take his bride or to reclaim his Khaleesi. Whatever the reason so many were remembering was beyond her and would stay beyond her till she managed to get word from Winterfell.

She sighed and pushed that last thought away, there wasn't anything she could do about that now. Adding it to the long list of messages she needed to send eventually, she focused back on the situation at hand.

The doors of her new throne room were opening...with a deep breath she forced herself to relax and focus.

A contingent of Dothraki strode into her impromptu throne room, she recognized them all. Drogo's Bloodriders strode in proud and unflinching. They were all armed but their hands were not on their arakhs. Among them, Qotho was glaring around at everyone and everything- and not focusing solely on Jorah...he probably doesn't remember, her mind declared offhandedly.

Then he came...

Khal Drogo stood in front of her in all of his glory, tall, proud and strong. His smoldering eyes were staring at her, “Moon of my life.” he proclaimed in Dothraki.

Her heart jumped up into her throat as she knew without a doubt that he remembered her.

He took a another step towards her. In response, her guards stepped forward menacingly, stopping him from approaching further. He stopped and turned menacing eyes towards her guards, sneering at them.

She thanked whatever Gods were watching that the guards were here to stop him from coming closer. This close and already her resolve was melting. Her skin warming as she imagined what it would feel like to be back in his strong muscular arms again. She hoped that none of her inner turmoil showed on her face.

She stood up from her new throne, “Welcome my Sun and Stars...to my city,” she proclaimed proudly in Dothraki, projecting an assurance she didn't feel into her voice.

The menace vanished from his eyes and were overcome with confusion now. He gave her a long
scrutinizing look before turning around and looking at all the others assembled and arrayed in front of him. Finally recognizing the gesture of strength and intimidation that was in front of him. He turned back to her, “My love, what is going on? Your city?”

“I am Queen of Pentos now,” she said simply.

Confusion and surprise coloured his eyes now, “How?”

“I commanded it...and it was done,” she said standing firm and powerful in front of him. She cast a hand towards the Unsullied and other guards; Dothraki and otherwise, “All here have chosen to serve me now.”

Drogo's eyes widened in surprise and then narrowed as he gazed at Rakharo, Irri and others that had been a part of his own khalasar. He growled low and sneered them. “You betray me?” he asked in a dangerous tone.

Rakharo stepped forward defiantly, “We serve the Khaleesi.”

Jorah stepped forward, putting himself between them as Drogo's eyes flashed with anger, Jorah pointed back at Daenerys, “Know that you stand before, Daenerys Stormborn of the House Targaryen, the First of Her Name, rightful Queen of the Andals, the Rhoynar, and the First Men, the Unburnt, The Mother of Dragons, the Breaker of Chains, Queen of Meereen, the Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea...and now, Queen of Pentos. She is not the woman you once knew.”

The anger had disappeared from Drogo's eyes and he was staring at her with a considerable amount of confusion. The moment stretched out filled with tension, before Drogo spoke.

“Khaleesi...of the Great Grass Sea?” he asked inquisitively. “The Great Grass Sea belongs to no man.”

She raised an eyebrow at the phrasing, stopped herself from smiling at the opening he had unknowingly given her, “I am no man.”

He raised his chin defiantly, with some amusement, “How did you take the Grass Sea?”
She matched his amused tone and let a small smile play on her lips, “The Khals were weak. I killed them with *Fire and Blood.* I took their khalasars...*all of them.*” She let her, as Jon called it, her ‘imperious Queen tone’ dominate her voice.

The mirth disappeared from Drogo’s eyes and was replaced with disbelief that was gone just as fast leaving in its place a modicum of respect.

“...You have come to claim your Khaleesi once more...but I belong to no man now. My fate is my own...but be my guest tonight, this evening will be *special,*” Daenerys advised him aloofly.

Drogo continued to stare at her, his eyes again unreadable, before finally, nodding curtly.

She nodded, *after tonight no one will stand against me lightly and my Sun and Stars, you will see me in new light...*

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Many more petitioners came after Drogo left peacefully. Thankfully, none were as nerve wracking as Drogo’s initial audience. Near the end of the morning her second most important group came to her.

Qhono stood before her, he threw the still living, bound and gagged Khal Moro at her feet. Others with him threw the rest of their prisoners onto the polished floor.

She gazed down at them and knew them. The other Bloodriders of Khal Moro, along with another Khal, Qorro and his Bloodriders.

She smiled and looked to Qhono, “Welcome Qhono.”

He went down to his knees, “Khaleesi, I bring you these gifts. The rest of your loyal khalasars come more slowly.” he reported faithfully.

Her smile widened as the implications of his words were realised by her mind. Soon, her position would be more secure, much more secure.
“I thank you for these gifts...they will come in most handy...” Dany replied cryptically with a smug smile as she gazed into the terror filled eyes of the bound and gagged Khal Moro.

Everything was prepared. All that the Queen had requested was done. She had given him one special task because she trusted him...because he was probably the only one who wouldn't kill him if he became too annoying.

He would bring Viserys to the Ritual.

Daenerys had given him three Unsullied guards to help him with this task, not that Viserys would be that much of a problem for him. Though whether Khal Drogo took offense or not at his presence was another issue....so maybe the Unsullied were a good idea. This wasn't the time for another gold crown...

Reaching the door to Viserys's room cut short his musings. The memory of Viserys's grizzly end flickered across his mind's eye. With a deep breath, he opened the door and entered Viserys's impromptu prison, bracing himself for the Beggar King's self importance.

It was unconscionable!

How dare they lock him away like this! He was the King! Damn you Magister! Are you a servant of the Usurper now?

His thoughts simmered and boiled as he paced back and forth in his rooms. Whatever was
happening, they had awoken the Dragon! And he would show them the rage of the Dragon! And Dany! What were they doing to her now? If they hurt her, they would know endless pain!

Since yesterday, he'd heard such noises. At first, he'd thought that the Magister had been hosting a feast...at least until he'd heard the blood curdling screams and the sounds metal against metal. The sounds of swords clashing...had the Magister not betrayed them? Was he instead protecting them from the Usurper's assassins?

In the deepest part of his soul, he admitted quietly that fear had grown in at that possibility. Fear...especially for Dany, who the Magister had taken away to Gods know where after their meeting in the morning.

The hours started piling up and lengthening, the noises had gotten quieter and more spread out as time passed. Almost distant at times. Servants had eventually brought him food, they refused to speak to him or answer his questions, ignoring his every word. They dared! And he still remained locked away!

He picked up a goblet from his table and threw it across the room in frustration. He fumed with dark emotions, overcome with emotions and a furor of rage. The noise had eventually disappeared and despite himself sleep had eventually overcome him. The day had passed and the new one came, and he still didn't know what happened to Dany! Or Why there had been so much fighting!

It was already evening, and he still remained unenlightened. The second day of his imprisonment had passed with him so bored and angry! The servants still refusing to speak to him and treating him like he didn't exist.

The door of his room opened and instead of more servants coming to bring him his evening meal, in walked a large man.

Viserys gave him a scornful look hiding his confusion. The man was no Essosi, this was a large Westerosi man with dark hair and a scraggly beard, wearing proper armour, almost looking like a real Knight.

“Who are you?” he demanded angrily.

The man looked at him with a glower in his eyes, “I am Ser Jorah Mormont, previously of Bear Island.”
“A Northerner?” he asked in disgust, “So the Starks and the damned Usurper has have sent you to kill us? I am the Dragon! I will not die quietly!”

Jorah gave him a smug look, “Your sister wishes you to come,” he took a step back and gestured towards the open door.

Surprise blossomed on his face, “Dany?” he scowled suddenly, “What have you done to her?!” he demanded irritably.

Jorah shook his head, “I have done nothing to the Queen...I am only obeying her.”

Viserys frowned, “Queen? What Queen?”

The smug look remained on Jorah's face as he spoke with an amused tone, “Your sister.”

Viserys froze and blinked in surprised, Dany...a Queen? “Dany? How can she be a Queen? And a Queen of where?”

Jorah didn't answer him and instead just gestured again, “It is not wise to keep her waiting...”

Unsure and wordless, stunned by the Knight's strange words, Viserys warily walked forward and out of the room.

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They walked through the manse, the Knight, Ser Jorah leading the way with three Unsullied guards with them. For all the noise that he'd heard will in his rooms, the manse appeared largely untouched. Though there was more people going about tasks in the manse than before. Servants mainly, but there were a lot of Dothraki as well for some reason.

The came to the main courtyard of the manse and more confusion came to Viserys's mind as he saw the red three headed dragon standards of House Targaryen flying free over the gloomily lit main
entrance of the manse. They didn’t look to be of the best quality, some of them were quite simplistic in design with rough cloth. He was confused, on the one hand it was pleasurable to see his house’s colors flying boldly in the air on the other hand, he was uncertain, as it made the manse a target for those who hated the Targaryens. For Robert fucking Baratheon, the fucking Usurper...

“Where are we going?” he demanded of Jorah as they now left the manse and walked out into the streets of Pentos.

“You should pick up the pace, we still have a ways to go,” commanded Ser Jorah without looking back at Viserys.

Viserys fumed silently at the words, while more confusion plagued his mind. For once in his life, he chose to be silent as he looked about at the streets.

Here the signs of battle could be seen, men and women were still trying to clear away the signs of battle. And from the look of things it had been a lot of battle. The people barely gave them a look as they went about repairing the damage and cleaning the streets.

On and on they walked, till they came to the outskirts of the city itself. The darkness should have been everywhere but to all sides, people held burning brands and torches. It was almost like half the city was gathered outside the city. A lot more Dothraki as well.

The crowds were thick but the people moved out of their path, some even bowing as they passed.

Well, finally some people realise who I am, Viserys thought smugly.

As his feet became to tire, they reached their destination and that did nothing to answer any of Viserys’s questions. The people were gathered around a large wooden structure. It almost looked like a funeral pyre. But instead of a dais for a body, three thick wooden stakes were raised in a triangular pattern at the center of pyre.

The people in front of it parted and Viserys smiled as he finally laid eyes on Daenerys. A fetching Dothraki girl stood attentively behind Dany. Perhaps someone to fuck later? Yes...I’ll have Dany send her to me after whatever is happening here finishes, He thought smugly.

The smile froze on his lips as he looked back at Dany who was giving him a hard stare, her eyes
unreadable, her back straight and head held high with an assurance that he'd never seen in her before. She dressed in a severe and flowing blue dress that seemed to scream authority. A woman's dress not a girl's. Dothraki and Unsullied stood guard around her and the Dothraki girl.

Ser Jorah walked up to Dany and bowed, “My Queen.” Dany nodded in acknowledgment and turned to face Viserys, as Jorah rose and took a place by her side.

“Dany?” he called out warily.

She was giving him a look he couldn't decipher now, “Brother.” she finally said.

He cast a significant look around them at the crowd and then back at her, “What's going on Dany?” he finally demanded, “And why are they calling you a queen?”

“You're just in time for the Ritual,” she retorted cryptically, not answering him.

“Bring them out!” she commanded, turning back to the pyre.

Two men ran off to obey his sister and before long a great cry rose from the crowd. As he watched the crowd parted as a small group of men were dragged forward. He continued watching in confusion as the group became three groups. Nine men in total, six Dothraki and three Magisters that he recognized having met them before.

The men were all dragged onto the structure, and quickly tied to the stakes. Three men to a stake.

Viserys's eyes narrowed, as Magister Illyrio and assistants stepped forward bearing a chest in his arms. The assistants placed the box at his sister's feet and Illyrio opened the lid. Surprise blossomed in his gut as he saw the three dragon eggs in the box.

Dany quickly nodded and the dragon eggs were each taken from the box and placed in front of each of the stakes. Dany strode onto the structure, the men tied to the stakes, Viserys could see fear in the men's eyes as his lithe little sister approached them.

Light glinted off the blade of a dagger that was suddenly in Dany's hands. With a sudden slash, he
watched as she cut open the palm of her right hand. He could hear her chanting something softly in Valyrian as she moved and marked each of the prisoners with her blood, but he couldn't make out the words.

Finally, after all the men had been anointed, she strode to the middle of the pyre. She looked at Ser Jorah and gave him a curt nod.

She raised her bloody dagger above her head and cried out in Valyrian, “Fire and Blood!”

There was a whoosh of heat and the men on the structure screamed out in fear.

All rationality fled Viserys's mind as the flames rose to completely engulf Daenerys, the men and the whole wooden structure as he watched. The fires spreading faster than he could believe.

“Dany! Dany!” he heard himself screaming hysterically. In his hysteria, he broke past his guards and ran unthinking towards the flames.

“Aaagh!” he screamed reeling back in agony, his hand had entered the fire, and his sleeve was on fire. He recoiled back. Ignoring the pain and he stared into the fire looking for any signs of Dany moving in the flames. Strong hands clasped his shoulders and arms pulling him back and away from the flames and putting out his flaming sleeve.

“Dany!” he screamed again as they were dragging him to a safer distance. He fell to his knees, inconsolable, he could hear the men on the pyre screaming but not Dany.

He was weeping now, like a woman, his sobs audible to all those around him, as he clutched at his burnt and now smoldering hand.

*I'm sorry mother...I failed you...I couldn't protect her.*

He continued to weep loudly. He fell to his knees and stared forlornly at Dany's funeral pyre.

The fires leapt up increasing in intensity and then a great cracking was heard. Through tear streaked eyes, he began to see shapes moving in the flames. His breath caught in his throat, as quickly as the
fires first rose they started to die down, enough for him to get a clear look at what was moving.

Dragons...the shapes were Dragons! Real living Dragons!

A beast the size of a horse rose to its back legs, spreading it's wings wide and giving a savage scream that reverberated in Viserys's ears. Two more screeches came and he saw two other dragons standing by its side. They roared again, all in unison.

For a long while all thought of Dany disappeared from his mind as he stared at the impossible sight. The Dragons settled down for a moment before turning towards something between them.

A figure stood there and it took second for him to recognize her. Her clothes were on fire and yet she was standing tall unmoved and scarred by the flames.

Dany stood in the midst of the dragon...she raised her hands and the dragons came to heel at her feet, sniffing at her. She stood there uncaring of the fires around her and her burning clothes.

Viserys just stared unthinking, on his knees, unable to tear his eyes away from the incredible sight.

The fires had completely abated now and out of it, Daenerys stepped forward, the last of her clothes, burning and falling off, leaving her bare unburnt skin for all to see. She approached her brother walking steadily as the newly hatched dragons started to roar again behind her. He was cold and trembling now, his face still streaked with tears, as he gazed at her. She came to her kneeling brother and looked directly into her brother's eyes and gave him a dismissive look.

“Fire cannot burn the Dragon....And I am the Dragon!” she screamed out into the night.

Viserys stared at his naked sister as if this was the first time he'd ever seen her, his mind too addled to put together any coherent thought.

The Pentosi people screamed. The Dothraki screamed. All chanted the Queen's names as the dragons raised their heads to the sky and roared again together, as one.
Ladies were not supposed to rush or run and she had always been the perfect picture of one, but today it didn't matter.

“This is impossible, this is impossible, this is impossible...” she kept repeated to herself as she ran.

She’d woken up safe and comfortable in her own bed, the screaming has come back after that as the pain and memory of the green flames returned to her. Her handmaidens had come running after that. Her loyal companions, Sera Duwell and dear dead Mira Forrester had had shocked expressions on their faces. They’d asked what was wrong but the words wouldn't come. How could she tell them she had died? That Cersei had burned her, Loras, and father as well as so many others with Wildfire? Instead, she had gathered a shawl around her shift and fled from her own room. She ran from her handmaidens's kind ministrations leaving them behind in her room.

Her heart was pounding in her chest and she didn't know where she was going, but apparently her feet did. She found herself in front of Loras’s room. She barged in without knocking, suddenly keenly in need of her dear brother. To her dismay, the room was cold and dark, there no signs that Loras had been here for quite a while. She looked around the room for a moment, before sitting down on the bed, suddenly overcome with all the good memories she and Loras had had here.

She let the memories overcome her washing away her last moments in the Sept of Baelor, as she realised how much danger they had been in, that Cersei would not be denied this time. Loras, unresponsive with dead eyes, as she dragged him and tried to push past the Sparrows as the ominous roaring had started to echo through the Sept.

The old memories of her and Loras here, they washed away the tumult in her thoughts and steadied her. She felt her spirits rising, letting her focus on this new completely unexpected situation she found herself in. To catch her balance and regain her equilibrium in this impossible situation.

Movement caught her eye and she turned to see a mirror on Loras’s dresser. She saw her reflection and was startled by how young she looked. Connections began forming in her mind.
If I'm this young and Loras isn't here... than he's probably in King's Landing or somewhere with Renly.

She nodded, that was probably correct... or close enough. But what to do now? And is this just me? She pursed her lips as she thought hard.

Her first action came almost immediately to her, Grandmother...

Another short run later, breathlessly, she barged into Olenna Tyrell's room. This room wasn't unoccupied, Grandmother was in bed and snoring peacefully, blissfully unaware of Margaery's disarray and near panic. Margaery rushed to the bed and began shaking her grandmother, trying to wake her.

After a moment, the Queen of thorns stirred and opened her eyes. Before then blinking in surprise, “That was surprisingly painless...” she commented thoughtfully to herself.

“Grandmother?” asked Margaery in confusion.

Grandmother looked at her and her eyes widened in surprise, “Margaery?” she looked lost for a moment, “the Sept...”

“Yes, it's me... I remember but we're safe now... we're safe in Highgarden,” she responded with smile, her shock easing as she realised that grandmother remembered as well. That this wasn't some fever dream her alone.

Grandmother looked mournfully at her for a moment, “Not as safe as you think.” she stated in a deeply pained voice.

Margaery frowned at the words but grandmother didn't give her time to respond, she reached up and pulled her into a hug. Margaery hugged her back. It was an awkward position for her standing by the bed but it didn't matter, her grandmother was holding her as tight as she was holding her. They held each other for long moments. As they finally separated, the normally composed Lady Olenna Tyrell, the Queen of Thorns and bane of many witless Knight and Lady, had tears in her eyes.
“Oh my dear girl, is this a dream?” she asked, for first time in Margaery's life her grandmother actually looked lost.

She shook her head and sat down next to grandmother on the bed, “I don't think so....I remember dying.”

There was anger in grandmother's eyes now, “That cunt Cersei murdered you...all of you!”

She was shocked at grandmother's crudeness but couldn't disagree, “I should have know she had something planned.”

Grandmother shook her head, “We all failed. We underestimated Cersei's madness and cruelty.”

Margaery frowned but nodded in agreement, Ser Kevan had been with them at the Sept and Lancel had been milling about somewhere...apparently Kinslaying was not something Cersei shied away from. Her thirst for Tyrion's blood hadn't been an isolated perversion. Just how perverted are you Cersei?

“What happened...after?” she asked with baited breath, fearing the answer.

Grandmother shook her head, “Too many things, the Lannister bitch took the throne for starters.” She shifted in the bed slowly pushing herself up in the bed, trying to sit up.

Margaery’s jaw fell open in surprise, “But Tommen-”

Grandmother cut her off, “The daft boy killed himself on the same day.”

She rocked back as if physically struck, Tommen killed himself? The boy had been sweet and kind...where he learned those things with Cersei as his mother had baffled her at the time. She had had him under control but she'd seen the good man he'd have grown up to be. Together they'd have done great things...and in time she would probably have come to love him. It had been a surprisingly good match especially after what she'd seen of Joffrey before grandmother poisoned him.

“Why?” she finally asked.
Grandmother waved the question away, “Only the Gods and Tommen can answer that question. All that matters is Cersei murdered you all and became Queen. All I wanted was vengeance...and I thought I had it.”

“Grandmother...what did you do?” Margaery asked in trepidation.

“I threw our support behind Daenerys Targaryen,” she declared, as she finally managed to sit up in bed.

“You supported the Mad King's daughter?” she asked in surprise.

Grandmother suddenly had a very hard look on her face, “My dear it was a good decision at the time and she is not her father at all.” She paused and gave Margaery a speculative look, “You'd have liked her...but I also saw her Dragons.” The hard look was back now, “If you'd lived and been married to Tommen, we'd have been in a very bad position. She was the return of Aegon the Conqueror. She had three very large dragons. She could have burned all in her path and been done with it- why she stayed her hand escapes me.” Grandmother pursed her lips and then shook her head, “And then it didn't matter.”

There was ice in her stomach at grandmother's final ominous statement, “How did it not matter?” she asked dreading the answer.

“Randyll Tarly betrayed us. Jaime Lannister sacked Highgarden...”

Margaery paled at the words and her stomach clenched in anguish and dismay, but grandmother wasn't finished speaking.

“...It's true I died, but I learned much before I died. Jamie Lannister killed me. He killed me right here in this room...after his men had finished sacking Highgarden. At the end he was at least gracious enough to give me a quick death,” she huffed, “It was quite painless...”

The horror Margaery felt was petrifying now.

“...Joffrey was a cunt. Cersei was a cunt and a monster. Jaime...” she shook her head, “he was a poor
deluded fool in love with the monster. I pity him. I doubt it ended well for him after I died.” she speculated idly at the end.

“This...this is...” Margaery couldn't find the proper words. Where there any words that were proper?

Grandmother reached out and cupped Margaery’s face tenderly, “Do not despair my dear, whatever this is. This is a second chance. Help me up dear, we must speak to your father immediately!” she commanded.

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“Wake up Mace!” Olenna shouted in an annoyed voice.

She watched as father jumped up in bed and stared around, bleary eyed, confusion coloring his face. She couldn't help herself, she sat down next to father and pulled him into a sudden embrace, remembering the confused and pained look on his face that final moment in the Sept of Baelor.

She heard him muttering in confusion at the intrusion, but she didn't let go before he'd realised who it was and was returned the hug. She broke the hug and was surprised to realise there were actual tears in her eyes. She quickly wiped them away and stood up, standing at the edge of father's bed.

Father was more awake now, but was more confused now.

As Margaery watched, Grandmother sat down next to her father and then pulled him into a hug. She watched as surprise blossomed on her father's face at the unexpected action. A second passed before, he started to return the hug with a small smile appearing on his lips.

They broke apart and Grandmother took Mace's face between her hands, looking him straight in the eye she said, “You're an oaf Mace, but you're my son and I love you. Never forget that.”

Mace's face flashed with emotions, annoyance first at grandmother's standard insolence then red with embarrassment that was eventually replaced with a beaming smile.

“I love you too mother,” he replied his voice wavering with equal parts pride and annoyance.
“Good. Now that's over we have to plan our next moves carefully. We don't know how this possible or who else remembers, but we must secure our position in the Reach first. We must strike at the Tarlys first, then we must strike at the Lannisters before they are ready.” she announced with aplomb.

The beaming smile vanished as if it hadn't been there, quickly replaced with a poleaxed look, “What are you talking about mother? Remember? Remember what?” he asked in confusion, “Strike at the Tarlys? Then the Lannisters?! Have you lost your mind, mother?! The Queen is a Lannister! Never mind what Tywin will do in retaliation for any attack!” he finished aghast at grandmother's words.

Both Margaery and Olenna paused in surprise.

Grandmother scrutinized father with a long look, “You don't remember?” she finally asked, her face blank.

“Remember, what? What is going on?!” father looked between the two of them, his round face filled with confusion.

“Father, how can you not remember? We remember!” Margaery announced in dismay.

Father looked between the two them, his confusion written all over his face, “Both of you? What are you talking about?!”

“Mace...as impossible as it seems, we're remembering the future. Cersei murdered you, Loras and Margaery! Jaime Lannister with Randyll Tarly sacked Highgarden.” She snorted, “Though at least Jaime was honorable enough to gave me poison to drink. It was painless not at all like what I gave Joffrey...and he did spare me from Cersei's tender mercies.” She remarked in a miffed voice.

Father wasn't surprised now, he was now gaping like a fish, mouth wide open and gaping. His lips moved but no words came out. His head kept jerking between her and grandmother, his eyes wide with astonishment. When he finally found his voice he wasn't talking to them...he was screaming loudly and repeatedly for the maester.

Margaery huffed in annoyance while grandmother rolled her eyes.
“Mace, you will listen to us!” Grandmother commanded, her face the sternest Margery had ever seen. “The fate of our house is at stake!”

“Have you both gone mad?” father asked his voice incredulous, his face red with agitation, “Remembering the future?!” He screamed for the maester again.

Grandmother and father bickered back and forth as time passed and Margaery's own annoyance increased. The sound of running and shuffling feet caught her attention and she turned to see guards running into the room, hands on weapons, looking for a threat to the Lord of Highgarden. Finding none they simply stood at attention waiting for commands. A short time later Highgarden’s elderly maester came shuffling into the room huffing and puffing in exertion.

“My, Lord?!” Maester Lomys finally managed to say after catching his breath, casting a very confused look at the tableau in front of him.

“Lomys! Mother's lost her mind!” father screamed.

Lomys blinked and cast a concerned look at them, “My, lord?” he repeated as he approached them.

Father barreled along like a runaway cart, “She's says she's remembering the future!”

Lomys suddenly stiffened before asking in a peculiar tone, “The future?”

Margery's eyes narrowed, Lomys's tone was strange, Grandmother must have caught it as well as her eyes narrowed in suspicion.

“Jaime Lannister sacked Highgarden,” Grandmother blurted out bluntly, giving Lomys a searching look with narrowed and anger filled eyes.

Maester Lomys stared at them for a long moment, turning a deathly shade of white, “It was a dream! It didn't happen!” he suddenly screamed, “It was just a dream!”

Olenna took her cane and whacked the maester across the shins, causing him to hobble back, “It was no dream you fool.” she sneered in annoyance at the intractable maester. “I'm guessing the Lannisters
Lomys just stared at grandmother in fear and didn't reply.

Margaery sighed, *It's going to be a long day*...
radiates strength and shares it with all that were around her.

He sighed again, and looked down at the coming mob of armed slaves, “Valar Morghulis...all men must die.” he darkly muttered to himself. *But does it have to be so soon?*

He gazed down at his coming death and frowned. The mob and stopped moving forward. A figure detached from the mob and slowly walked forward, it took him a second to recognize the man.

“Hizdahr!” called out Daario Naharis in the same smug tone and mocking smile he'd always hated. “Good News! We're *not* here to kill you!”

Hizdahr blinked several times not understanding Daario's words for a moment. “What?!” he shouted down as he tried to understand what was happening.

Daario rolled his eyes and shouted up, “We're *NOT* going to kill you!”

“*Why?*” he realizing how dumb the question was after he'd uttered it.

Daario's laugh was muffled by the distance but Hizdahr can see the mocking look he was sending towards him.

Daario controlled his laughter and retorted, “Get the fuck down here! I ain't going to keep shouting up at you!”

Hizdahr squirmed as he looked down at the armed and what for most of two days had been probably been a rabid murderous mob, before swallowing nervously and nodded, “Fine! I'm coming down!”

He left the balcony and it was a fight to get down to the door and out of the manse. So many people tried to stop him, his father foremost among them. It took much longer than he wanted but after a lot of words and shouting he manged to convince the guards to open the doors and let him out.

He stepped out with only his dagger to defend himself, and the door to the manse closed hurriedly with a resounding slam. He eyed the many bloodied men and women that were standing behind Daario. Daario himself stood nonchalantly, his arakh on his belt was stained with blood, in front of
the mob almost without a care in the word.

Nervously, he stepped forward, closing the distance between him and Daario, “You're going to
explain, now? How...how is all this possible?” he asked his eyes darting back and forth nervously
between the mob and Daario.

Daario shrugged, “I have no fucking idea, all I know that I had to kill Mero and Prendahl again then
the slaves come to me and ask me to lead,” he waved a hand around, “...and then all this happened.
As for why we're not killing you,” he jerked a thumb at the mob at his back, “As far as these guys
are concerned you martyred yourself to protect the Queen. They really like you now...so you get to
live and help me rule Meereen...in her name of course,” he finished with that same damn smug smile
on his lips.

Hizdahr stared at Daario with a sinking feeling in his stomach. Surprise that the slaves actually
accepted him and that he, and his family probably, had a reprieve from death....but to be stuck in
Meereen without the Queen and with Daario in charge?

Daario was just staring back at him that smug arrogant smile mocking him, that insufferable fool...

Hizdahr closed his eyes in pain and raised a hand to rub at his tense brow.

He let out a deep sigh, Death may be preferable to this...

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Missandei

She held the bloody blade in one hand, the other held her gruesome trophy, at her feet lay the body
of Kraznys mo Nakloz. She'd awakened to this nightmare, a slave in Astapor once again, the
Master's interpreter again, surrounded by everything that she truly hated.

Her mind was reeling and in shock, disbelief coloring her every thought. The Others had ambushed
them as they fled Winterfell. She remembered the numbing coldness beyond anything she'd ever felt.
It had come first. Then the dead.
Missandei didn't know what was happening. One moment she was dying within sight of the burning walls of Winterfell. The next she was back in Astapor, bare and exposed in Kraznys's bed. She'd gone from one unbearable nightmare to another.

When she'd realised the situation she was in, she'd panicked and scrambled out of the bed. Her frenzied movements had awoken Kraznys, who'd stretched lazily before calling her back to his bed. She'd stared back in disbelief and revulsion, naked and afraid, she'd frozen ignoring her former master's commands. Her willfulness had angered him, he'd risen from the bed in a rage, his intent and morning arousal readily apparent to her. Closing the short distance between them, he struck her backhanded across the face, sending her reeling back. She'd been stunned for a moment...she'd forgotten what it was to be a slave. The silent and instant obedience that was required of her.

He'd grabbed her by the hair next, before pulling and pushing her, tossing her back onto the bed. That had finally shocked her back to reality despite the surreality of the situation. She'd scrambled back across the bed away from Kraznys. He'd looked at her for a moment before he'd laughed, probably thinking it some new game she was doing to amuse him. They'd dodged back and forth, her trying to avoid his grasping oily hands, while he tried to paw at her, his eyes filled with wanton lust.

All the while she was looking for a weapon to use against him.

Finally, after what seemed an eternity, her eyes fell upon his scattered clothes, among them half buried she saw the hilt of a dagger. She'd leapt for it, Kraznys had leapt for her. Her fingers grasped the hilt, as his hands grasped her waist and pulled her towards him, one hand moving downwards to crudely violate her. With one smooth motion, she'd turned and buried the dagger in Kraznys's neck before he'd even seen it coming.

The look of surprise that had blossomed in his eyes had changed quickly to disbelief and then horror as the blood began to spurt from around the blade. She'd pulled the blade out and he'd staggered back, hands around his throat trying to stem the blood flow.

He'd fallen backwards coughing blood, still staring at her. She'd stared back as he lay helpless at her feet, his life blood draining away. She stared at him, he was completely her mercy. The merciless master was at her mercy...and she found there wasn't any mercy for him to be had. As if she was possessed she went down to her knees, her eyes locked with his as he tried to speak. Thoughts of all he had done to Grey Worm and the other Unsullied in his long life filled her mind. She grabbed him by his manhood and with the bloody dagger, did to him what he had done to so many others...

She stood up naked and spattered with blood. She lifted the gruesome trophy and held it up for Kraznys's horrified and pain filled eyes to see.
It took him longer for him to die than she expected. When the Queen had burned him it had been quick and painful...but this was a more fitting death, he didn't deserve a quick or clean death.

As the light finally left his eyes, she took a deep breath before throwing her gruesome trophy on top of the body. She cleaned herself as much as she could before dressing. She'd killed him, when he was missed, they'd come for her now.

She kept the dagger in her belt and began barricading the door, they would come for her but she wouldn't make it easy for them. After she was finished, she sat on the bed and waited for the end to come.

The first knocking came after a surprising long amount of time. She ignored it. The second time came much later with much shouting. And the third time, the shouting and hammering had gone beyond frantic. She didn't pay attention to the shouts just sat numb lost in her memories of the Queen and Grey Worm.

Eventually, the noise outside cut into her trance-like disassociation as she waited for it all to end. So much noise was coming from outside, shouts and screams, she'd expected some commotion locking herself in Kraznys's rooms, but this went beyond that.

The hammering on her door started again, and didn't stop until the door started to splinter. She stood up and held the dagger in front of her at the ready. Finally the door broke and she gripped the dagger harder, she would not die softly, she would kill again before the end.

A jab of guilt lanced through her as she saw the armored Unsullied pushing through her barricade and stepping into the room, she didn't want to kill an Unsullied, she thought with despair. The lead Unsullied stepped forward and cast a look at the Kraznys's mutilated body before looking back at her. He reached up and took off his helmet.

“Missande...” Grey Worm uttered her name with joy and relief. His eyes filled with tears now. She saw the recognition in his eyes, he knew her!

The blade fell from her nerveless hands as she staggered forwards, towards him, flinging herself at him. He caught her and they embraced, his wiry arms holding her tight. There were no words to describe what she was feeling, beyond elation, beyond joy. She just clutched at him.
“I came here...I had to make sure that Missandei of Naath was safe,” he whispered into her ear.

Her fingers tightened against his armour and her response got stuck in her throat. Tears were streaking down her cheeks now, she felt his hands pushing away from her breaking the embrace. Reluctantly, she let go, and she faced Grey Worm. His eyes were clearer now but she could see his joy at seeing her. She grasped his face and kissed him deeply, savoring his taste and the saltiness of his sweat.

Eventually, they broke apart, and Missandei finally gathered her scattered thoughts, “What is happening? How is this possible?”

“We're are taking the city again,” Grey Worm quickly answered a smug look came to his face, “The masters die as we speak...and it was Brandon Stark, he did this...after you died.”

Her thoughts raced as she remembered the strange disturbing crippled Stark boy. “And the Queen?” she asked with pursed lips.

Grey Worm nodded, “The Queen and the King helped, there was a plan...” a look of concern crossed his features, “...but this was not it.” he shook his head, “But we have had to change it.”

Now Missandei was more concerned, she opened her mouth to speak but the sound of clashing metal came from outside, Grey Worm and the two Unsullied with him turned to the noise, bringing shields and spears to bear as she looked about and scrambled to reclaim her dropped dagger.

The two Unsullied went out into the corridor and shouts suddenly came back, she couldn't see anything but there was more noise that suddenly ended in pained screams.

The Unsullied outside called out all clear and Grey Worm, turned to Missandei, “Come we will take you to safety...soon the city will be ours and then we can speak.” He donned his helmet and held his weapons at the ready.

She nodded silently, and then closely followed Grey Worm out of Kraznys's room.
Chapter 15 On The Long Road

Shireen Baratheon

She'd been holed up in her cabin since they'd left Dragonstone. She'd been numb and fearful since...whatever happened and had brought her back to Dragonstone. Ser Davos had come to her many times since, talking to her and trying to console her. But nothing he said could change what had happened, the horror of the truth.

She'd always loved father...and he'd burned her as a sacrifice because Melisandre said so!

_I will not shed any tears!_ She screamed to herself silently. Father had always been distant and she'd heard enough of the men jape about him lacking any sort of kind emotion in his bones, but she'd always believed otherwise...showed what she knew, she decried herself with an unamused snort of derision.

She knew how Uncle Robert had messed everything up. She knew how Uncle Renly hadn't been any better. Mother had always been a little off, even Maester Cressen had said so, but she'd thought father was better than them!

_I am a Baratheon! Ours is the Fury! I will be strong! Because apparently Greyscale scars and all, I'm the only sane one in the family!_

The irony that she had been safer at the Wall, even with the Dead and the Others coming for them did not amuse her.

She loved her father and he'd...

She shuddered as she shook the dark thoughts away, the memory of the flames and the unending terrible pain. A tear threatened to be shed, but she fought it off. She fortified herself with better memories, drowning her pain with good and happy memories. She smiled as she remembered all the
times she'd talked with Maester Cressen, all that he'd taught her. He'd had such good stories and he'd taught her how to read...but he wasn't with them. Ser Davos had left him on Dragonstone.

She cast that aside and remembered Gilly and Sam. They had been a surprising couple. Sam had been skirting the bounds of his oath with Gilly and yet almost no one had cared much about it. Sam had shared her love of books and he had been kin. His mother Lady Melessa Tarly had been a Florent...though his descriptions of her had left Shireen wondering if Melessa and Selyse were actually related. The kind, warm woman he described had borne mother no resemblance at all...apart from the ears. Shireen rubbed her ears, she'd heard all the jokes about Florents and their ears.

*Maybe I'll meet her this time?* She thought idly.

Leaving thoughts of Sam behind, her mind came to Gilly. Now she had been a complete and utter pleasant surprise. She'd read so much about Wildlings while growing up and Gilly had been nothing like that at all. The hours as she helped her learn to read had been a joy. Gilly had wanted to learn, much more than Ser Davos. She'd been attentive, nice and kind. She'd listened and thought about Shireen's words without dismissing her as a silly little girl...and mother had hated Gilly. Demanded that she have nothing to do with Gilly, despite how harmless the Wildling girl had been. A small smile came to Shireen's face as she remembered how Gilly had been so happy as she learned.

She even thought of the Lord Commander, Jon Snow. He'd been dour and stiff like father except he'd always had a smile for her whenever she'd run into him. The Greyscale scars hadn't bothered him. Once, when they'd been alone, he'd ruffled her hair and said she reminded him of his little sister, Arya. That they'd both had the same inquisitiveness...

She frowned, Arya Stark had disappeared and was most likely dead then, and she'd seen the pain in his eyes as he spoke of her, knowing that Arya had most likely died in King's Landing, alone and afraid, running from the Lannisters. She wondered if Jon remembered now? She smiled, she hoped he did, he'd be surrounded by all of his lost family now. He'd lost so much more than her. She imagined how joyous those reunions would be.

Taking deep breaths, her melancholy under control now, casting aside her hurt, she forced herself to focus on what was happening now. There was some food on her table and she was hungry. She ate ravenously and felt much better.

Suddenly tired, she decided that it would be nice to sleep for a while. She crawled into her bed and was soundly asleep before her head hit the pillow.
She was watching as the water lapped against the hull of Ser Davos's ship, *Black Betha*. She didn't know why they were anchored off Blackwater bay and well away from the docks. They had been here for hours and Ser Davos didn't seem to be in a hurry to take them away from here.

She'd awoken refreshed and much happier, finding the courage to dress properly and leave her rooms with her head held up high. Coming onto the main deck, Ser Davos had seen her and given her a concerned look before she gave him a wide smile. He started for a moment before he'd returned the smile, he'd stood taller then before as if a heavy burden had been removed from his shoulders. He'd looked to want to came and speak with her but one of his sailors had come to him and stared talking at him.

She had walked around the deck for a while before finding a spot by the railings and watched the waves. She just stood there idly letting the waves, as if they could wash away all her dark thoughts. The sailors didn't bother her and her guards were below deck for the most part. Only Matthos came and gave her kind greetings.

And now, here they were waiting for...something.

She turned away from the water and looked about the deck watching as most of the crew just sat idly, also waiting. Ser Davos was standing at the wheel with his son, Matthos. She gave Matthos a long look as Ser Davos talked quietly with him.

Her thoughts turned morbid for a moment, *Did you burn to death or did you drown? Or both?* With *Wildfire* both were possible, maybe even both at the *same* time, she'd read enough to know that *Wildfire* burned *water*. She only knew he hadn't returned from father's failed attack on King's Landing.

She smiled, it didn't matter, he didn't remember, he was spared that and she was glad Ser Davos had his son back. Ser Davos had seemed almost merry now, and she envied him his new happiness. He was a good man and he deserved this happy reunion.

A sailor called out, pointing and shouting. Ser Davos's head jerked towards him and he was quickly moving towards the sailor.

“Ahoy, Black Betha!” came a strong voice.
Ser Davos quickly came to the railing, “Ahoy, yourself! Shouldn't you better at rowing by now?” he called out in an amused tone as he leaned over the side of the ship to shout back, “We’ve been waiting for while now.” He had a big grin on his face now.

Shireen moved to stand by him now, confused and intrigued, she looked out and saw a rowboat, she crept closer to Ser Davos, wondering who their mystery guest was. As they came closer she began to see it's occupants, there were three people in the rowboat. Their features resolved themselves as the closer they got.

Two were boys, older than her now, one fat and black haired, the other blonde and wiry. The one shouting was also the one rowing, he was older, nearly a man with big strong square shoulders and black hair. She didn't recognize any of them.

When they were near enough The sailors threw ropes to them and after a couple of tries the boys caught the ropes. The sailors pulled and when they were close enough they came aboard the Black Betha.

She watched as the black haired older boy more or less physically hauled up the fat one. They were followed by the thin and wiry blonde haired boy.

“Davos,” the boy said with a wide smile, “It worked.”

Ser Davos was grin was even wider now, he embraced the boy, almost full grown man, that she didn't know. Matthos was standing by them and she saw the look of surprise on his face. Now her mind was working scrambling and trying to figure out who the boy was, who was he that not even Matthos knew him?

*It worked? What worked?* She wondered in quiet mystification.

The embrace ended and Davos turned and proudly introduced Matthos to him.

The boy nodded and said, “I'm Gendry Storm.” He pointed a thumb at the other boys, “they're Hot Pie and Lommy.” His voice was deep and sure of itself. The other boys were staring about in mild shock, fidgeting as they stood there.

The voice sounded familiar as well now. Gendry turned towards her, his deep blue eyes found her
and he didn't flinch away from her as so many others did. It took a moment before her confused mind made enough connections.

Shireen blinked up at Gendry, “Who are you?” she asked dumbly, she bit her lip, “You look like uncle Robert?” confusion echoed in her voice.

Ser Davos was scratching his beard as Gendry nodded, “I'm Robert Baratheon's bastard son.” Gendry gave her a simple smile.

She blinked up at him in surprise before smiling unsure, “Oh...then well met cousin.” She knew Uncle Robert had a lot of bastard children, but who was this one to Ser Davos?

“It's good to meet you too, I've heard nothing but good things about you from Davos,” retorted Gendry giving her a bigger smile now.

Her face flushed with embarrassment, unused to the open compliments, finally she found her voice, “So you're who we've been waiting for.”

Ser Davos looked a little guilty now, he scratched at his beard nervously, “I should have spoken to you sooner, but...”

He didn't have to say more, she wouldn't have listened, she'd been too lost in the sudden change...all the sudden changes that had happened.

“Where are we going now? Somewhere safe?” she asked. Maybe somewhere across the Narrow Sea? She'd love to see Braavos and the Titan of Braavos and all their beautiful canals...of course the Others were also coming, so how far away was safe?

Ser Davos looked nervous now, “We're going to White Harbor.” he announced finally.

“White Harbor?” she squeaked in surprise.

“...from there we'll ride to Winterfell,” he finished.
Why are we going North now? What's in the North for us?

Though seeing Sam and Gilly...and even Jon would be nice, she admitted to herself. Plus she'd always wanted to see Winterfell, there were lots of stories written about Bran the Builder's famous fortress.

“It's a long story my Lady, but we have friends there,” Davos said with a degree of chagrin that confused Shireen, “Let's get their boat on board and these lads stowed and then when we're underway, I promise to explain everything.”

Shireen gave him a curious look and then nodded, “I like long stories...I can't wait.”

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Jaime Lannister

The rainstorm forced them to find shelter, and that is how they found themselves at a less than semi-respectable inn along the goldroad. The storm came surprisingly fast and turned the weather cold, which is how they found themselves at an inn he would have avoided under different circumstances. Under any circumstance, considering Tommen and Myrcella were with him.

The inn was more run down then was proper for a Lannister or a Royal Prince or Princess, Cersei would have screeched long and hard if she'd been with them.

Jaime sighed and tried to cast thoughts of Cersei away. If she remembered she'd despise him and if she didn't she'd feel so betrayed by his words in the courtyard of the Red Keep. There was a gnawing pain in his gut, his mind knew what was necessary but his heart wanted to do something else....and he'd seen how following his heart with Cersei had fucked everything up.

She's probably dead by now, he thought mournfully, if Renly hadn't killed her by now than Robert most assuredly had.

He cast those thoughts aside and looked about him, focusing on the current situation. A week of hard of riding had taken their toll of them all. The poor weather hadn't helped either. The Large size of
their group had helped keep bandits and other parties that had ventured too near to them. Near thirty Redcloaks, gathered from the Red Keep or picked up along their ride though the city, with him and Ser Barristan at the head of the group.

He shook his head as he remembered the escape from King’s Landing...and a hellish escape it had been. Rioting had broken out in the streets. As the bells of the Great Sept rung, he’d seen Sparrows goading people along to acts of violence against the Goldcloaks. Two Redcloaks had tried to join their party but had been beaten to death under a sea of angry bodies, though thankfully most had been too scared to attack armed and horsed knights. He’d run down a couple of the damned sparrows that got in his way, scattering the mob.

The smallfolk had had various reactions during their ride, most had through rocks and shit at them though a couple had actually cheered for them when they saw them...that had really confused him.

Leaving King's Landing behind, the riding hadn't been easy, especially on Myrcella and Tommen. Both had been withdrawn and untalkative. Tommen had barely uttered a word all week and been so sullen, Jaime was afraid to ask what was wrong...the dread over him remembering his last leap gnawing at his psyche. Myrcella...was just as quiet, her eyes betrayed her anger and shock over his actions and she shot accusations at him whenever their eyes met.

Jaime sighed, focus! Shelter first, ruminations second!

He pushed open the door to the inn and entered, hand on his sword hilt. His entrance didn't go unnoticed, hard to do that with golden armour and a white cloak. Silence descended quickly on the inn as eyes turned towards him and he was recognized as a Kingsguard.

Many of those eyes turned outright hostile as his golden armour and blonde hair was recognized. The inn seemed to be filled with more than its fair share of sellswords. Quickly counting the scattered men, there was ten maybe eleven of them. The rest of the occupants looked to be farmers and merchants.

The sellswords were exchanging glances and quiet quick words, setting off every survival instinct Jaime had as he took a couple of steps towards the proprietor's bar. Some of the sellswords started to turn and adjust their weapons, the first signs that they were willing to start a fight with him.

Then Ser Barristan stepped into the Inn, the sellswords stopped moving. These sellswords apparently had more sense than Loras Tyrell. Ten to one against Jaime Lannister was one thing, Five to one against Jamie Lannister and Barristan the Bold was another thing entirely. The Hound came next and all fight went out of the sellswords, like a candle in a rainstorm. A couple more of the Redcloaks
stepped in behind the Hound and the sellswords quickly turned back to their drinks and meals. Any notion of violence banished from their minds.

Jaime looked around for a moment before putting on a smug self-assured smile that he cast around at any man that met his gaze.

He closed the distance to the waiting proprietor, who had been eyeing the growing situation with growing trepidation and confusion.

“Barkeep, we need rooms worthy of a Lannister,” Jaime said in the most arrogant tone he could summon. He threw a bag of silver at the proprietor.

The proprietor was a large round man with a bushy beard and smelled like horse shit. The odious man nodded enthusiastically, “Of course my Lord! The best rooms in all my humble establishment!” he gave Jaime a wide smile, showing his rotted and broken teeth, avarice filling his eyes. The man began shouting for one of his wenches to prepare the rooms and came out from behind his bar to personally guide them to the rooms.

The bowed and nodded, the flesh of his neck jiggling, as he beckoned, “This way my Lords...”

Jaime turned around and shared a glance with Ser Barristan before casting a another arrogant and dismissive look at the watching patrons.

*The sooner we're back in the Westerlands the better...*

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**Myrcella Baratheon**

Her rear was numb, they'd been riding hard for days. They'd run from the Red Keep and King's Landing. And now they were in this rundown and dirty inn, their only recourse for shelter from the storm.

Fear, confusion and anger ate at her. Her rear wasn't the only thing that was numb. She'd been numb
since they'd rode out of the Red Keep leaving mother behind with a knife at her throat.

Her heart had stood still as not-Uncle Renly had threatened mother.

She could hear her heart beating in her chest but deep down she'd known that Father would save her...and then he'd said those awful words before leaving mother to not-Uncle Renly's mercy. She couldn't even cry out after that, she'd been too shocked...and then they were gone, out of the Red Keep and galloping into the chaos that was engulfing the city.

They'd escaped, and continued galloping or miles and miles, till the horses had been too exhausted to go further. They'd set up a rough camp, much rougher than Myrcella had ever slept in. And she still couldn't speak to father, she'd remained quiet and distant from the man she told she was glad he was her real father.

If that wasn't enough, after a tearful reunion, Tommen had been clinging to her, tears rarely leaving his eyes and with a sullenness filling every action he took. She knew he remembered but he wouldn't speak about what happened, all she knew was her sweet innocent brother was gone.

The events in the Red Keep haunted her thoughts, mother foremost but the impossibility of the entire situation...she'd been dead! Then there was Ser Barristan and father claiming loyalty to House Targaryen. That she couldn't understand at all, never mind what father said about Jon Snow....no, Jon Targaryen. There had even been whispers that the Hound had killed Joffrey...she didn't mourn him but it was all too much, too quickly.

The days of riding flowed into each other, merging and becoming indistinguishable from each other...and still her mind didn't settle. She avoided father, held Tommen as they slept in the rough camps that mother would have never allowed them to stay in and kept riding stiffly.

The sudden storm that came brought them to the inn they were in now. A dirty and rundown thing that would have had mother screeching and screaming her unhappiness at all around her. Their room had a big bed that she would share with Tommen.

A part of her chose to not question what such a large bed was usually used for in such an inn...

Tommen was sitting on the edge of the bed and while her septa was sitting at the only table in the room, quietly keeping an eye on them both. But she couldn't sit, she paced the room, willing sensation back into her rear.
The door to the room opened and in walked father, a grim expression on his face, the septa rose and bowed to him, with a gesture he dismissed her from the room. She obeyed and then he just as quickly shut the door behind her.

He turned around and gave her a long look, then he gave a similar look to Tommen, his eyes were unreadable, but she knew that this was the conversation she'd been avoiding. He still in his armour, he hadn't shed his armour once since they'd started the journey, the grim look on his face only enhanced his overall haggard look. The strain was showing on him...the tiredness was overcoming him.

“Myrcella...” he began.

She steeled herself and gave him her best imitation of mother's glare.

He wavered and frowned, he approached her and “I know there's much you don't understand...why I left Cersei behind...”

Her glare intensified and her lips thinned, “I don't understand anything! Except I'm really angry!”

Father faltered for a moment and actually looked lost for a moment.

“...Why did you leave mother behind?!?” she demanded letting her anger and hurt boil forth.

Father winced and it took him a moment to find his words, “I couldn't save Cersei not this time...and not the last time. You can't imagine what happened with....everything. You didn't see the depths that she descended to after you were all gone.”

Her anger intensified, “She's Mother! She's your sister! She loved us! She loved you! What could she do that would change all that!”

Father bit his lip, but didn't reply immediately. He just stared at her for a long moment. She just glared back in response, waiting for whatever weak excuse he would give.
“You did...the right thing,” Tommen added weakly, breaking the stare down.

Myrcella's head jerked so fast towards Tommen, she thought it was going to come off. She stared at him, dismayed and shocked, her anger evaporating. Sweet Tommen couldn't be condemning mother as well!

She realised that her mouth was hanging open, she closed it quickly.

More words started to come from him, each word seemed to be exquisitely painful for him to say, “Myrcella...mother was worse than Joffrey. She was a monster...but even monsters love their children.”

*This can't be happening...he can't be saying these things! He can't mean it!*

She cast a glance at Father, he was pale now, she could see actually see fear in father's eyes. “Gods...You remember, don't you, Tommen?” Nervousness filled his voice and he stammered, “Why? Why...did you do it?”

Tommen snuffled, “I wanted to stop mother...if I was gone she couldn't hurt anyone else. Her power would be gone. She couldn't hurt anyone anymore...”

Father closed his eyes in pain, after a long moment he revealed, “She took the throne Tommen...”

“*Gone?! What do you mean gone? What did you do?!”* she blurted out.

Tommen's eyes were down cast and he was slouching in defeat, he suddenly looked up and said quickly, “I Killed myself...I jumped from my window.”

Myrcella paled and wavered on her feet, feeling faint. *Tommen killed himself?* She felt wetness on her cheek, for a moment uncomprehending, she touched her cheek and it came away with drops of water. *Tears*, a part of her said.

She found herself moving and sitting next to Tommen, and after a moment they were hugging, he was holding her tight and she was doing the same, her tears were still coming and Tommen was
shaking, sobbing silently.

_Gods...what madness is this all? Mother...what did you do?_ She held him for so long, taking comfort from each other. Finally, as his shaking subsided, she took a shuddering breath and broke the embrace. Tommen looked a little better now after the cry, though father looked despondent now.

She steeled herself, she had to know what happened, she turned to father, “What did she do?”

“She burned the Great Sept with Wildfire,” it was Tommen who answered her, “...she burned so many people there. Great Uncle Kevan was there...the Tyrells...Margaery was there...” he said sniffling.

She heard the words but the words were so shocking she couldn't understand, Tommen wasn't finished, “She did so many things and it ended there...and after _that...after that_ I knew what I had to _do._” The finality in his tone...that disturbed her, she'd never heard it from him before.

Father found his voice, “That...that was just the beginning,” he came and sat down next to them, the bed creaking with his armored weight. He sighed before continuing, “She had Qyburn make more like Mountain...among other things.”

_More like the Mountain? How did someone do that?_ She thought, as she shuddered at the thought of Grandfather's monstrous Knight

Tomen's eyes were very wide and he swallowed nervously.

Myrcella watched his fear appear and asked, “Qyburn?”

“He's an odd little man, who also happens to dabble in necromancy and other perversions. But otherwise, he's quite nice,” father said in a deadpan.

_Necromancy?_ She paled in fear.

Father started talking again, the words spilling out like a torrential rain and her fear intensified with every earth shattering revelation, he explained everything that happened after they were gone, each
and every disturbing event, all of mother's perversions laid bare and the further chaos that beset the Seven Kingdoms. Euron Greyjoy and Dragons. And...in the end, how father had ended...had ended mother, after she'd sent the Mountain to end him.

That...that had...strained her heart, she'd seen the unshed tears in father's eyes, the nearly unbearable pain he'd tried to hide from her as he'd admitted what he'd done.

Then the true magnitude of what was coming was explained, and all thought of mother fled from her and Tommen.

She was happy that Bran was alive and unharmed but...this was a nightmare! The Long night? Wights and White Walkers? The Others?

The plan was quickly explained and who they had to thank for this second chance but it had all gone wrong somehow, why they were heading to the questionable safety of Casterly Rock, which would hopefully be under Uncle Tyrion's control by the time they arrived.

Father finally stopped talking. They sat in silence for so long, getting to terms with the new reality of their situation. Eventually father said he had to see to their guards. He left them, leaving them alone for a while before the septa returned, food came after that. She ate sparingly of the meal and afterwards the time for bed came. She tried to sleep, but she didn't sleep well that night.

Or any of the coming nights.

Too many monsters plagued her mind now, especially the one that wore mother's face.

Chapter End Notes

I just want to take the time to thank everyone that has written me a constructive review. Thank you all for the positive feedback! And I'm glad you're all enjoying my tale:

As for the trolls, it's been a long time since I've been trolled., I'd forgotten my cardinal rule.

From henceforth, all trolls will be ignored and shunned.
A ten day of watching this new Edmure was fraying his nerves. They'd been traveling around the lands of Riverrun when the change had come. One moment Edmure had been the same smiling self-assured man and friend that he'd known for so many years and then suddenly...the cold and bitter mask had appeared.

That first day, had started out the same as the last week...except Edmure's eyes had suddenly gotten harder. He'd greeted him that morning as if they hadn't seen each other in a very long time. Edmure had been positively beaming, but that hadn't even lasted until they'd finished breaking their fast.

Whispers and talk of impossible things had hounded them as they ate, and he'd watched as Edmure had lost he mask, and his smile. In the span of a single night suddenly the people in the inn were much more tense. He heard several strange whispers, whispers of some sort of unrest, maybe even a small battle....though that was probably only bandits, the smallfolk were always exaggerating these things. As they listened Edmure's disquiet had steadily increased, his eyes wary before, now they were hard and flinty.

Then someone mentioned Cat being murdered....

Patrek's veins turned to ice after hearing that, but Edmure hadn't reacted then and it had taken every ounce of control Patrek had not to jump up and demand answers of whoever was spreading such outlandish lies. He'd expected Edmure to take the speaker to task, but instead he'd turned around and asked about Jon Arryn instead.

Now, these answers had startled Edmure.

Edmure urged him to finish breaking their fast quickly and before he'd realised it there were back on the road, heading to Riverrun at a near reckless pace; they practically ran their horses to death.
Then Edmure had commanded— not asked, commanded, his friend to remain in Riverrun as he conferred with Lord Hoster. Bewildered, he'd obeyed, he'd tried to rest but it seemed that Riverrun was on edge more than the inn had been. The whispers here more, and much more outrageous and bizarre. He'd asked and questioned all those that spoke, servants and Knights, but they'd all been wary of him. Instead of answering, they'd all asked him the same question...do you remember?

Remember what? That was was always his reply...after that they were usually very tight lipped and said he should ask Lord Edmure. So he'd had nothing to do but wait and see what happened next, none had been forthcoming with him.

He'd sat, he'd waited, he'd walked around the gardens of Riverrun, he'd tried to flirt with the prettier maids but even they'd been too busy and distracted to pay attention. It was all very maddening.

Though the real madness came when he heard he heard someone mention pledging loyalty to the dragons...

He'd started, unable to believe his own ears. The dragons? Who would pledge to them after what the Mad King did to the Starks? After what Rhaegar did to Lady Lyanna?

He'd gone and tried to to find these mad conspirators, and then went to Edmure and Lord Hoster when he couldn't capture these traitors. He'd barged in on them, claiming he'd found traitors in their midst, explaining the situation to his liege Lord and Edmure and begging pardon for the sudden urgent intrusion.

Instead of outrage and horror, with demands for and calls for the heads of these men, grim determination and cold fury had met him. This was when Edmure explained that House Tully and the Riverlands were pledging allegiance to the House Targaryen.

Whatever he'd felt before paled in comparison to what was going though him at that moment. He'd stared at Edmure and his liege Lord, their treasonous words were beyond anything that he could have rationally expected. They then explained why...and that was a whole different height of madness.

Magic and monsters. The Long Night come again and the plan to unravel what was once history, to save all of Westeros and beyond...and to do that they had to pledge to House Targaryen?! To Jon Targaryen?! Who is the name of the Seven was Jon Targaryen?!
That answer was yet another revelation that had him reeling.

Lyanna Stark's son. Lyanna Stark's legitimate, trueborn son by Rhaegar Targaryen....also known as Jon Snow. Hidden by the honorable Lord Eddard Stark from his dearest friend for more than fifteen years...

That had truly shaken him, that Lord Stark could keep such a deadly secret from the man who according to all the stories was like a brother to him.

Lord Hoster and Edmure spoke of many things, and nearly all were just as shocking.

The Long Night came and Westeros lost.

The return of House Targaryen and their dragons.

The War of the Five Kings and the Red Wedding.

The truth about Cersei and the Kingslayer...though apparently the Kingslayer was on their side now despite everything...somehow...

It all boggled the mind and he'd been silent for such a long time, that Lord Hoster and Edmure had returned to their planing session, and had nearly finished by the time he'd found his voice again. Things had progressed from there, ravens sent out summoning Banners, other sent with orders to strengthen the borders with the Westerlands, the Reach and the Crownlands.

However the plan had changed, the Tullys and the Riverlands would not be caught unprepared.

First and foremost, the Freys had to be dealt 'with', which is how Patrek found himself at the head of an army with Edmure heading for the Twins, a day later. With Lord Hoster's parting command for heads on spikes, while his eyes were filled with sparkling and unflinching cold fury.

More and more men joined as they marched. All the time, he'd continued to watch this new Edmure, at times the old Edmure would shine through, a jape here a comment there, but those were rare occasions. This Edmure was hard and bitter most of the time...though he hadn't quite reached the
same heights as Stannis Baratheon, but for Patrek it was hard not to be startled by the resemblance.

Four days of dealing with the new Edmure...a nerve racking, very long four days, there were joined by Lords Jonos Bracken AND Tytos Blackwood. Their numbers swelled that day and Patrek braced himself, preparing to deal with the touchy and prickly pride of both those constantly feuding lords.

What he hadn't expected, that added a new layer to the surrealism of everything, was the sudden, complete and utter lack of animosity between both the lords and their men. Lord Bracken and Lord Blackwood were agreeing on everything in amicable fashion., even completing each others' sentences at times. He'd thought that their feud would last until the end of the world...which, considering the fact that a second Long Night was coming, it was the end of the world.

He did not take solace in the irony of that thought...

Finally, as they neared the Twins, Mallister men appeared. He'd expected them to help him maintain some semblance of control, to rely on the familiarity of the men he knew his father would send. He'd recognized them all and knew them and they'd all been happy to see him but...each and every one of them was grim faced and restrained anger was in their every glance as the looked towards the Twins. There was no solace to be found in the reassuring presence of men he had known for most of his life, just more of the disturbing transformations.

Then the siege of the Twins began. They were camped outside of the Twins with an army. Laying siege to the castle on their side of the river, while Northern and Vale Banners were camped on the other side laying siege to the other castle. He could see Reed banners and Manderly banners, but there were no Stark banners there.

It was a strange siege, a confusing one. They were in a strange situation. They were here to punish men for something they'd done...that had been undone. It was a horrific thing that the Freys did but this was something that didn't sit well with Patrek's honor. A man should only be punished for something they'd done...true the Freys had done it...and yet they hadn't now. It was all beyond confusing. He'd tried to raise the issue with Edmure once, and the coldness of the stare that had met his words had chilled his soul. Again, this drove home that this Edmure was not the cheerful man he'd known and grown up with. The truth was Edmure was changed...and it scared him a little...perhaps more than a little Patrek fearfully admitted silently to himself.

And so here they were on the second day of the siege waiting for the order to attack or for the Freys to do something.

The Freys had been quiet and content to wait behind their walls. Men patrolled those walls but other
than that no other action had yet to be taken by the Freys.

Walking the lines and among the men, the siege ongoing, Edmure, Patrek, Lord Bracken and Lord Blackwood surveyed and encouraged the men. All preparations for the final decision on how to lay waste to House Frey and the Twins.

At least that was the case until moments ago, ponderously the gates to the Twins had opened and five riders had left. The gate had quickly closed after them as the riders rode swiftly towards the siege lines.

Lords Bracken and Blackwood were flanking Edmure, and Patrek was by his side. As the riders began to near, Patrek saw one of the holding up a white parley flag. Of the five riders four appeared to be young men, and the fifth was an old man with well known facial characteristics of House Frey, weak chin and all. All seemed to be unarmored and he could see no swords at their belts.

“Archers!” called out Edmure gruffly. “Aim!” he pointed out at the parley group.

Patrek's head jerked away from the oncoming Freys, towards Edmure, “What?!”

Edmure gave him a dismissive look before turning back towards the oncoming Freys as the call for archers echoed and men scrambled to assemble. Lords Blackwood and Bracken had wolfish smiles on their faces and their eyes hungered for blood.

Patrek stared for a moment between Edmure and the Freys before launching himself towards Edmure. He grabbed his friend’s shoulder and turned him roughly away from the coming riders and towards him.

Edmure glared at Patrek but didn't speak.

“That is a flag of parley!” Patrek shouted in a near panic, “You cannot attack them!”

Edmure sneered, “They are Freys. They broke parley once, I will not give them the chance to do it a second time!” he spat angrily.
Frantic, Patrek mentally grasped for something to say. He looked about for support but found none from the two Lords with them. A part of him silently despaired, he seemed to be the only man here that hadn't completely all sense of honor. “What of honor? Where is the honor in attacking when they come under a flag of parley?!”

“Honor?!” Edmure spat back venomously, “The Freys have no honor!”

“But we do!” Patrek roared back, cold sweat running down his back, “They are surrounded, at our mercy...what can five riders do that our army cannot match?”

Edmure ground his teeth and glared for a moment before turning away.

“Family, Duty, Honor...those are the words of House Tully,” Patrek quoted at Edmure, pressing the point.

Edmure turned back to him and after a long moment he spoke. “Hold! Be wary...but let them come.”

With that Edmure actually stepped out from behind the siege lines, he pointed towards one the men holding a Tully banner and gestured him forward. The man came running and after a few words was waving the banner vigorously at the oncoming riders. After a moment the riders veered towards them.

Patrek let out a shuddering breath he hadn't realised he'd been keeping as his momentary panic subsided.

Edmure stood there with the man with him waving the Tully banner briskly in the air.

The riders were finally close enough for Patrek to recognize the leader, Ser Stevron Frey, the heir of the Twins...despite the fact that he was old enough to be both Edmure and Patrek's father. The riders stopped a respectful distance away from Edmure. Ser Stevron unmounted his horse and paced his reins to the nearest of his men.

Ser Stevron Frey stood shaking in fear, a wild and terrified look in his eyes as he approached Edmure. His face was pale and sweat was dripping down his brow. He gazed at him and the two Lords, who returned hate filled glares.
After another fearful moment, Stevron spoke, “My father is dead.” His voice quivered and shook just as he did.

Edmure stared for a moment before throwing his head back and laughing. Bracken and Blackwood joined him. Stevron flinched at the loud laughter as Patrek started at them, at their callous behavior but remained silent for now.

The laughter subsided and Edmure's steely gaze turned back to Stevron.

“What happened?” Edmure asked finally gruffly.

“He was ranting and raving, half mad, screaming about pies before two of my brothers killed him.” Stevron admitted shamefully.

Patrek gaped in shock, Kinslaying? And...pies? Even with all that he'd heard about the Red Wedding and the betrayal, Kinslaying had been one line the Frey's hadn't crossed...and what about pies?

“...They claimed that he poisoned them...” he paused, “that he poisoned all his sons and grandsons...” Stevron shivered with fear, he shook his head, “but...one of the servants said....” he stopped almost afraid to continue as he cast about furtive glances all around them.

Edmure smirked, “They were wrong, he didn't kill them it was a Faceless man.”

One wouldn't think that Stevron's face could have become any paler, but it did, he swallowed slowly, his eyes wide with fear, “A....Faceless man? It truly was a Faceless man?”

Edmure was suddenly smirking now, “In actuality...a faceless woman.” Edmure paused and then gave Stevron a cruel and wolfish smile, “Specifically, my dear niece Arya Stark. She took your father's face and murdered all your siblings in the same hall they murdered Robb and my sister!” he finished with a low chuckle.

Patrek reeled, he couldn't have heard that right...Arya...Stark?! Edmure's youngest niece? She couldn't be a Faceless man! If she was a Faceless man...does that mean that House Stark actually has an unstoppable assassin at their beck and call?
“Winter came for House Frey,” Edmure stated with a smile on his face, “…and it has come again.” His smile transformed into a death rictus.

Whatever composure Stevron had left finally fled him, “My Lord! I had no part in my father's betrayal! I was loyal! I died for our King! I died for Robb Stark!” quivering he turned and pointed back at the riders accompanying him, “Each and every one of these men did the same! We died for our King! And we are not the only ones! We are loyal sons of House Frey! We have always been loyal to House Tully!” He stepped towards Edmure and threw himself hard onto his knees, “We took no part of the Red Wedding! Mercy, Lord Edmure! I beg of you!”

Patrek stared between the kneeling old man and Edmure. Edmure's face was staring down at Stevron, emotions playing over his face…and Patrek had no idea what this new Edmure would do. That more than anything scared Patrek.

Finally, Edmure spoke, his eyes dark and demanding, “Bring me Black Walder and Lothar…then, and only then…will I offer you bread and salt,” he commanded coldly.

There was relief in Stevron's eyes as he nodded readily and rose quickly for a man his age, he mounted his horse and rode back to the Twins as fast as he could.

They met in the same spot, less than an hour later, Stevron returned with the same men and two bound and gagged men, being dragged along. Patrek recognized Black Walder immediately. The nasty and snide Knight was well known and despised in the Riverlands, and Patrek had been unfortunate enough to have dealt with him several times when he had been sent to Seagard on business for his now truly late- and unlamented Lord Walder Frey. The other man was obviously Lothar, though he hadn't dealt with him before.

Lords Bracken and Blackwood had left to continue walking the siege lines in case of treachery, but Edmure had barely moved from the same spot he'd first met Stevron.

Now, two of Stevron's men held up Black Walder as Edmure smirked at the bound man. Walder's eyes were filled with scorn and disdain. He gestured them forward as Stevron watched with trepidation.
Edmure now stood eye to eye with Walder, “Nothing to say now, eh?” he mocked.

Muffled words came from Black Walder as he gazed daggers at Edmure.

“Let me help with that,” Edmure continued in the same mocking and patronizing tone, a nasty smile on his face, as he reached up and removed the gag.

“I am an anointed knight! I demand a Trial by Combat!” screamed Black Walder angrily when his mouth was finally clear.

Patrek frowned as Edmure's face became unreadable.

“Aye, you are an anointed Knight...and yet you slit my defenseless sister's throat,” stated Edmure in a dead tone.

Patrek didn't like the tone at all and winced at the blunt words.

“Trial by Combat? You demand a Trial by Combat?” Edmure asked in the same dead tone.

Black Walder sneered at Edmure and spat at his feet, “It is my right!”

Edmure stared for a moment before seemingly coming to a decision, “Let go of him.” he commanded.

The guards obeyed and stepped back, away from Black Walder.

Patrek looked at Edmure in confusion, what are you going to do, Ed?

Black Walder continued to glare, his hands bound behind him and yet he stood defiant in front of Edmure.
Patrek nearly missed it as Edmure suddenly grabbed Black Walder and punched him in the face. Walder's head snapped back as he reeled from the first blow and almost lost his balance but Edmure kept a hold of him and as he kept punching, over and over again.

The blows kept coming and blood was covering Walder's face now but Edmure didn't let up...the opposite seemed to be happening. Edmure seemed to be in a frenzy. The blows kept coming until Walder's legs gave out under him and then both men fell to the ground. Quickly, Edmure straddled Walder and instead of continuing to punch and rain blows down on Walder he began smashing Walder's head down against the ground.

Walder was screaming incoherently now, but Edmure didn't let up. Instead, there was a rock next to them and reached out and grabbed it. Patrek watched in horror as Edmure raised the large rock high in the air above Black Walder. Time seemed to freeze for a moment before the rock descended. The sickening sound of bone cracking echoed. He raised the rock again. The sound of shattering bone echoed again.

Again the rock rose...

Blood and pieces of Black Walder splashed, over and over again, on an unflinching Edmure and those nearest to him as he brought the rock down over and over and over again, pounding relentlessly at Black Walder's face. The screams stopped and became gurgles. The gurgles stopped and became nameless noises. Then the noises died.

And still Edmure continued to hammer at what had once been Black Walder...

Silence, broken only by the rhythmic sound of the hammering of the rock meeting flesh filled Patrek's ears as he stared in mute horror as his good friend savagely beat a man to death and beyond with a fury worthy of a berserker. Edmure's face was filled with glee as he continued to beat the meat that had one been Black Walder.

Finally the rage seemed to subside and, Edmure lurched up, reeling back unsteady on his feet, from the mangled corpse of Black Walder, bloody rock in his hand, he spat at the cooling corpse, “There's your fucking Trial by Combat,” he turned towards the kneeling, bound and gagged Lothar Frey, bloody rock still in his hand, “What about you? Do you want a Trial by Combat, as well?” His eyes were wild, begging Lothar to ask for a Trial by Combat to feed his sudden unexpected bloodlust.

Lothar's eyes were filled with such fear, Patrek had never seen the like before- and he couldn't blame him, Lothar was shaking with emotion as a wet spot stared to spread around the crotch of his pants. The guards holding him scowled as the smell of piss reached them.
Edmure sneered at Lothar when he didn't dare even move, “Guards! Take him away! I'm sure Robb will be happy to receive this gift I'm sending to him,” he finished with a dark and menacing laugh. He paused and gave Lothar a sinister smile, “Perhaps my dear nephew will use your blood to feed Winterfell's Heart Tree. It's been centuries since its been fed a proper sacrifice...”

*Sacrifice? Robb Stark couldn't have reintroduced the ancient First Man custom of sacrifices to Heart Trees...could he have? Though...with all the magic that was being brandished about with this Return...it was a distinct possibility.*

Apparently, Lothar thought it likely as well, because an even more foul smell came from him now, letting Patrek know that he hadn't *just* pissed his pants now.

The guards grabbed Lothar, faces grimacing again at the worsening smell and dragged him from their presence.

Edmure cast aside the bloody rock and turned back to a pale and gaping Ser Stevron, “Bring bread and salt for Ser Stevron and his companions...we have much to talk about.”

*Men had dragged away the meat, that *had been* Black Walder away, and they'd adjourned to Edmure's tent to speak privately. Bread and salt were brought and eaten by Stevron and his men but Stevron could still barely string together two words in fear of how Edmure would react, and Patrek couldn't blame him. The brutality of the execution was not something he'd thought Edmure capable of *ordering*...let alone committing with his own two hands.*

Edmure hadn't even wiped off the blood and remains of Black Walder as he sat down and invited Stevron to join him for the negotiations. He sat there, his face bloody but speaking firmly and on occasion even politely to Stevron.

*Anticipation of what horrific thing Edmure would do next gnawed at Patrek's guts as the talks with Stevron began in earnest. Edmure recognized Stevron as the new Lord of the Twins with the death of Lord Walder, but Patrek's horror didn't abate, it only grew with Edmure's following words, as he detailed the bloody price that he would be extracting from Stevron and House Frey for the Red Wedding and their betrayal in the undone future.*
There would be a set level for tolls taken on travelers using the bridge, a much lower toll, a pittance in fact, compared to what Lord Walder's greed used to extort from people before.

More importantly, Lord Stevron would hand over each and every Frey that took part in the Red Wedding, irrespective of whether they remembered or not. Edmure left nothing to the imagination of what their fate would be...

And to violate any of the terms would see House Frey removed from the Riverlands.

*Completely and irrevocably.*

“But....but....” Ser Stevron stumbled over his words, he stopped being pale a while ago and had been truly white for a while now, “You will kill so many?”

The bloody faced Edmure stared back, his glare filled with unmatchable fury, “Most or all. Choose. Now.”

Ser Stevron flinched back from the stare and the horrific words. He sat there staring down into his hands, knowing that his house's survival was very much in *his* hands.

“Most.” Stevron said in quiet pained voice. It was an unenviable choice that wasn't a choice.

“Good....of those left,” Edmure stressed the word maliciously, “we will also be taking hostages. And they will be spread to all the houses of the Riverlands.”

Stevron nodded in utter defeat, probably thinking at least hostages wouldn't be killed outright. Patrek pitied him, the old man had always been a better man than his father and yet here he was paying for the sins of his despicable father.

Edmure and Stevron began speaking of the specifics of which hostages would go were. It was all very clear and quick, at least until Stevron mentioned Fat Walda.

“Not her. If she comes, she comes as a guest and not a hostage...” Edmure paused and pursed his lips, “Does she remember?”
Stevron wasn't the only one who was suddenly blinking in surprise at his friend's words, *Fat Walda? Why her?* Patrek thought as he remembered the obese and odious girl he'd seen the few times he'd been forced to come to the Twins.

“She...has not spoken much. She's been withdrawn...” Stevron admitted, rubbing his head in confusion, “Very quiet and frightened now that I think of it.”

Edmure actually winced painfully at this, “Gods, then she remembers. I am sorry to hear that.”

Patrek and Stevron shared a confused glance before Patrek asked, “Why are you sorry to hear that?”

“She's the only one of you that truly deserves mercy after what that beast, Ramsay Bolton, did to her,” Edmure shook his head mournfully.

Patrek was afraid to ask what happened but he felt he had to, Stevron looked too stunned to ask.

“What...what did Ramsay do to her?” his voice quivered as he asked, wondering just how horrible it had to have been for Edmure to actually feel pity for a Frey after all that had happened.

Edmure grimaced, “She was married to Roose Bolton and gave him a son. Ramsay murdered his father and then *fed* her and his half brother...alive...to his dogs.”

The answer didn't disappoint. Patrek stared in shock, feeling more than a little queasy at the words. Stevron was in much the same condition, gaping and turning green.

Edmure returned to speaking of hostages as Stevron could only listen and nod still numb from that last shock.

“Finally...” Edmure paused giving Stevron a sharp look, “you will also bring me Roslin. *This time* we shall be married in Riverrun,” he spat angrily.

Stevron started and stared unblinking in utter surprise...but he didn't dare disagree, he just nodded
quickly, suddenly enthusiastic, “Of course, of course.” he managed to utter.

Patrek blinked at the sudden reversal. The shock of the fate of Fat Walda hadn't subsided and yet more upheavals were coming. He stared at his friend not believing the words at first.

*Marriage? Ed, you want to get married? And to a Frey after all the hate and horror you've piled on them? And to Roslin Frey? Which one's Roslin?* Patrek wracked his mind trying to put a face to the name but his mind only drew a blank.

It all seemed madness at first...but it also almost seemed like a truly masterful stroke, punishing them with one hand, even making the punishment seem like a mercy while with the other hand, binding them to House Tully in the most binding manner possible.

Patrek stared at Edmure, the blood making him look like some kind of barbarian lord and so different from the old, cheerful and chivalrous man that he'd grown up with.

*Who are you? How did you become like this, Ed? More importantly is any part of my old friend left?*

Chapter End Notes

Author's Notes: I realise that a lot of folks will not like Ed's marriage choice, but his reasoning will be explained later...and there is an actual reason.
The riders they’d been expecting had finally arrived. Horses galloped into the courtyard of Winterfell. Lords Manderly and Reed had finally arrived.

The Winterfell guards led by Jory Cassel were out in force, an honor guard around Jon, Uncle and Robb who stood waiting for the arriving Lords to dismount. Uncle stood at the forefront with Jon a step behind and to the right while Robb stood on the other side. Maester Luwin and the Cassels stood around them forming a semi circle around them.

The horses were settling now, men were dismounting and Reed and Manderly banners were held high proudly proclaiming their identity, not that Jon need them to recognize the sight of the overly large Merman, Lord Wyman Manderly, the master of White Harbor. Or the small and lithe Crannogman, Howland Reed, Lord of Greywater Watch. Jon didn't see Wyman's sons here, but he saw a younger Meera. She had a pinched expression on her face as she gazed about Winterfell. There was a young boy with her that could only have been Jojen. Unlike his sister, he was looking around almost in a daze. It appeared to be a happy daze as there was a placid smile on his face, it was marred only by the healing black eye he seemed to have acquired from somewhere.

The Lords approached and Uncle stepped forward, “Welcome to Winterfell,” he said formally, in a grave tone.

Lord Manderly stepped forward, a wide smile coming to his face, “Lord Stark, I am overjoyed to see you here, alive and well.” He turned to Robb and nodded, “Lord Robb...to see you both here is more than I imagined possible.” You could hear the joy and emotion in his voice. He turned to Jon and stepped up to him. “My sons are alive,” he said, there were tears in his eyes now. The big man went down to one knee, “White Harbor is yours to command, your Grace.”
Howland joined him in kneeling, a happy smile on his face, “As is Greywater Watch.”

Jon smiled at them and nodded, “I thank you my lords, you are both most welcome here in Winterfell.” He looked to his Uncle and Robb and both wore identical expressions of dazed shock. He winced mentally and then said, “Let us speak more inside...with Lord Stark's permission?” he prompted, giving his uncle a look.

His uncle looked startled for a minute, before gathering him and nodding gravely, “Of course, let us speak in my solar...there is much we must discuss.” He turned to the Cassels, “See to Lord Manderly and Lord Reeds men, they must be tired after their long journey.”

The Cassels nodded in unison and began moving away, giving orders and gesturing to servants as they obeyed Ned.

“This way my Lords,” Uncle said, beckoning the Lords to follow him, as he began walking away.

Uncle took the lead, Lord Reed and Manderly following him. Robb hesitated for a moment before joining them. Jon started to followed them.

The noise in the courtyard grew as the assembled men began to disperse and the regular business of Winterfell resumed. He heard a small yelp and looked to see Arya up to her tricks as she surprised Meera. Meera looked annoyed for a moment before they embraced, the pinched look on her face disappearing and being replaced with happy smile. Jojen was with them and he had a...well not a scared look on his face as he looked at Arya, but a concerned one.

Jon winced again internally, so that was someone else that probably knew Arya's secret. He sighed silently, that was yet another secret that Uncle did not know yet and he wouldn't take it well when he did find out.

*A problem for another time*, he pushed those thoughts away and focused back on the coming meeting.

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In uncle's solar they found Sansa waiting for them with wine laid out for them.

Father cast her look and gave her a jerk of his head, trying to dismiss her...but she ignored it completely. It was yet another battle in the silent struggle of Wills between Sansa and Uncle that was ongoing ever since their first *little* talk about Ramsay and other things. Sansa was winning most of the time...including this time.

She stepped forward and welcomed the Lords as an exasperated look flashed over uncle's face for a moment before he conceded defeat and moved on.

As much as Uncle didn't want her here, she would help give them all perspective. He'd come to value her words, even if they didn't agree on everything.

Uncle, Robb, Sansa, Lord Manderly, Lord Reed and Maester Luwin, were all in the solar and not with a little trepidation Jon knew that after this meeting everything would change....

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**Eddard Stark**

Watching Wyman and Howland pledge fealty to Jon had been beyond jarring. It truly was a new world now.

He glanced at where Sansa was sitting listening attentively as Lord Manderly spoke. She was a Lady now, despite how young she looked, like a miniature Catelyn...only Catelyn's teeth weren't as sharp as Sansa's...being brought to task and called on one's mistakes by your young daughter was *not* amusing.

Jon was still avoiding their...*his* need for a private talk. When they weren't talking strategy, he trained in the yard, dragging Robb along. Both had improved in leaps and bounds beyond what he remembered...but that was what war did to men. And they were now men, the boys he'd left in Winterfell a lifetime ago, had become hard determined men. They had seemed to switch roles as well, Robb was the dour one now, with Jon being the one that smiled easily. Jon had blossomed into the better swordsman, a spectacular swordsman in fact, though many of his blows did come off under powered during training sessions. Ser Rodrik had pointed this out and Jon had nodded, saying that he need to get reacquainted to *not* using Valyrian steel. Ned's surprise had been great, where had Jon found Valyrian steel to fight with? That had actually been a short story, it had been a gift in
the previous life from Lord Commander Mormont, _Longclaw_, the ancestral blade of House Mormont. Surprises aside, imagining the new Jon with Valyrian steel in his hand just made him more impressive. And it made Ned even more proud of the man Jon had become. The rest of Jon's time was spent in private talks with Sansa. She seemed to constantly drag Jon away, whenever Ned approached. Thanks to her interference, he still hadn't managed to clear the air between him and Jon.

He pushed that aside, paying attention to Wyman as he explained how he had had a couple of Ironborn ships seized in White Harbor till they could figure out who they loyal to. His son, Wylis was fortifying White Harbor while Wendel was on his way to the Twins along with Howland's men. All their faces had turned turned dark as Wyman spoke of the Twins.

After the return, ravens had flown between White Harbor and Riverrun. Edmure Tully was taking men to the Twins and would lay siege to the Twins from the other side as the Reed and Manderly men attacked the other side. They should also have received reinforcements from the Vale.

Robb was grinning wolfishly at this news and Sansa's eyes had that bloodthirsty look that disturbed him so much whenever it appeared. Jon was grave but had a satisfied look in his eyes.

They turned to the other matters quickly enough, the plan for what to do in the North was already pretty much hammered out before Wyman and Howland arrived, a progression from the Dreadfort to the Karhold to the Last Hearth to settle their issues with these three major houses- or in the Boltons case, to wipe them out.

Roose Bolton's neck had an appointment with _Ice_ that Ned was eager to keep. Ramsay too.

Lord Karstark had sent a blustering, raging message with many colorful words expressly aimed at Robb. Most of them anatomically impossible. Their visit to the Karhold would not be pleasant.

As for the Last Hearth...the Umbers had been ominously silent.

The sundered North had to be healed and then...on to Castle Black to sort out the situation with the Wildlings....the larger plan to deal with the rest of Westeros and then the Others was another matter entirely.

All through the talks, Howland as was his habit spoke little. He added his succinct opinion about certain matters but for the most he let Wyman, Sansa and Jon do the talking.
“We must declare for Jon, Ned, it is our best option,” Wyman insisted, nodding energetically and making the folds of neck flap.

Ned pressed his lips together, it was the same opinion he’d heard from Sansa...at length and loudly, and now it was being repeated to him now by not one, but two of his most loyal bannermen.

Ned turned to Luwin, the maester had been silent for since the meeting began. “Luwin, you have yet to offer your opinion?”

The old maester sighed, Luwin had been silent, watching everyone with tired, unhappy eyes, “All of this is something that I never imagined possible. I doubt any maester has had to deal with such an impossible situation....but perhaps this will help you make your decision my Lord...” He reached into a sleeve and pulled out two scrolls, “We have received more ravens...from Riverrun and the Eyrie,” he paused heavily before continuing gravely, “From your goodfather in Riverrun...Lord Hoster and Ser Edmure swear allegiance to...Jon of House Targaryen, and they pledge the loyalty of the Riverlands to the rightful King.”

*Hoster is supporting Jon? And Edmure?* Jon hadn't done anything and he already had one kingdom swearing fealty to him?

Luwin wasn't finished as he held up the second raven scroll, with an unsettled expression on his face, “This one is from the Eyrie. Lord Yohn Royce, acting Regent for Robert Arryn, pledges the support of the Knights of Vale to Jon of House Targaryen.” He paused again, “Though both messages are asking for clarification of what exactly happened to the original plan.”

It had barely more than a week since...everything had changed and if he agreed to this Jon would already have control over almost half of Westeros. They had yet to receive word from the Westerlands, but Bran assured them that Tyrion Lannister was in control there, it was only a matter of time before they received a raven from him. The Reach, again according to Bran, was going through an upheaval though he’d been cryptic over what was happening there. The Stormlands, baring a few exceptions, they would probably stand with Robert. And you never knew which way the Crownland Lords would go till they moved.

As for Dorne...Bran had been grimacing as he mentioned them. *The less said the better*...that's what he had said. Whatever was happening there, he knew enough about the dornish to know that they would never stand with Robert because of Elia and her children. They’d also wouldn't see Jon in a good light, considering what Rhaegar had done, spurning Elia Martell for Lyanna. At worst they would remain neutral.
His bannermen had been pulling towards Jon since they arrived. They gave him the same reasoning as his children. It had all been a repeat of conversations he'd had with Jon, Sansa Bran, and Arya, of all people in the days since their return.

Ned closed his eyes and couldn't speak, he knew this was coming, he'd tried to deceive himself but deep down he'd known.

“You want me to betray Robert? You want me, to stand against Robert,” he asked carefully, not opening his eyes. The words were beyond painful for him to speak aloud.

Wyman and Howland didn't answer him. It was Sansa who answered him, “You've already betrayed him keeping Jon safe. And now, it is only a matter of time before he finds out about Jon. What do you think he will do then?” her child's voice was sharp, her adult words sharper.

He knew what Robert would do. It was why he'd hidden Jon all those years ago. The bloodied remains of Elia and her children showed him the depths Robert would sink to. Tywin Lannister had done the deed but Robert had stood by and clapped...nothing but Dragonspawn, he'd spewed venomously. Their arguments in King's Landing about Daenerys's fate showed him how much Robert hadn't changed in all the years since.

He mourned for the good and proud boy he'd know in the Vale all those years ago. For all that Jon Arryn had tried to instill proper sense into Robert all those years ago, but the old man had failed. Robert had laughed and whored and drank his way through life no matter what anyone told him. His charisma had helped people overlook his flaws but....

He opened his eyes and looked about him. Sansa was giving him an adamant look, that brooked no argument. She knew she was right and would drag him along no matter what he said. Robb was unhappy and uncertain. Jon's face was unreadable and blank, expectantly waiting for whatever he decided, he would abide by whatever was decided. Wyman and Howland had beseeching looks wanting him to agree...to rise up in rebellion against a man who was closer to him than either Brandon or Benjen had ever been.

It was unthinkable, unimaginable...it went against his instincts...

But the Long Night was coming. Everything changed because of that one fact...there was more at stake than his honor or his bonds with Robert.
Duty to the North, to all of the peoples of Westeros, dragged the words out of his mouth.

“You are right.”

The words rang with such a tone of finality in his ears. It was the death knell of the old and the birth of the new. In a haze, he rose from his chair and walked around his desk to come to Jon's side.

Jon's face was pale and unreadable now as he stared up him. Ned went down to one knee, he bowed his head in submission, “Your Grace, House Stark renews its fealty to House Targaryen. Winterfell and the North are yours to command.”

A pregnant hush fell on the solar, and he could feel his heart beating rapidly in his chest. There was no going back now.

He felt hands pulling him up. He looked up...it was Jon. His expression was grave and his eyes sympathetic, “I accept your fealty Lord Stark...but you need never kneel to me...father.”

There was lump in his throat at Jon's words. He didn't know how to react after those accepting words. Jon knew he was his uncle but he still considered him his father, despite the truth of his birth.

They really needed to have that damn conversation.

He was standing there numb. He done it. Jon had his oath now, and there was no turning back now. He felt drained and exhausted, he didn't think he had any words left in him now.

The solar was very quiet now.

Sansa broke the awkward silence as she rose and spoke evenly with an assured, light tone, “My Lords you must be tired from your journey, I'm sure that Mother has prepared a proper meal to refresh you. Afterwards we can finalise all we must do.”

Wyman rose quickly for a man his size and smiled at Sansa, “Lady Sansa is gracious and thoughtful, as always,” he complimented, “And right as well, a good hearty meal would do us all good now.”
Wyman offered his arm to Sansa. She took it and they left the solar together. Jon and Robb cast a glance at him, but didn't say anything as they followed, sensing his dark mood.

A hand fell on his shoulder, “Come on Ned, you look like you need a good drink,” Howland said with an easy smile.

Ned looked at his old friend and couldn't disagree, he nodded and he forced himself to move. Together they left his solar, following behind the others.

His feet were moving by their own accord, Howland was by his side, but his mind was focused on the irreversible change he'd agreed to not moments ago. It was done now and he had to move on. He pushed his mind and thoughts forward. He cast a glance at Howland as they walked, his old friend appeared to be quite happy despite everything...but he knew that there was more private things they needed to talk about. And it was better to breach the subject now, then let it fester.

As they entered the Great Hall, Ned pulled Howland aside, “Howland....about Meera...Jon told me what happened with Bran.”

Howland's didn't even waver as he cut Ned off with a wave, “Ned, everything's changed,” he paused and then gave a momentarily sad look at him before speaking, “Ned...I sent off Jojen from Greywater Watch, knowing full well I would never see him again...and yet he has returned to me! If the cost of that is Meera's broken heart, it's a price I'm willing to pay. I've spoken to Meera about it....and she agrees. And given enough time, broken hearts do mend.”

Howland's words brought him up short, he stared at his old friend, suddenly at a loss for words, he didn't know whether in his place he could have been as strong...or as forgiving.

Howland's sadness twisted into amusement and he let out a small laugh, “With everything that's happened, she was actually madder at Jojen than Bran that first day.”

Ned frowned as his confusion deepened, “Why?”

“She was mad that Jojen didn't warn her about what Bran would become. That first night, she was laughing and crying and hugging Jojen. Then she punched him in the face, laying him out flat. She started shouting for a moment and then she picked him off the floor and was hugging him again.” Howland laughed again.
Ned gave him a concerned look.

Howland held up a hand, “Don't get me wrong it was very alarming at the time, but it is funny now.” he finished with a grin.

Ned stared at his old friend for a moment before looking away and shaking his head, “As you say, my friend.”

Howland reached out and patted him on the shoulder, “Don't worry about it Ned, you have enough to worry about without adding this.”

Howland's kind words held more truth than he cared to admit.

The Crannogman jerked his head towards the dais where the others were taking their places at the table, “Lya would be proud,” he said quietly, a thoughtful expression on his face.

Ned turned towards Jon. He was playing the host, talking and gesturing with Lord Manderly and Robb. Sansa sat with them and simply watched with her sharp eyes.

Jon's face was welcoming and smiling, his back straight and proud. The dark and brooding expression that graced his face so much, gone and no where to be found.

Lya's son. He nodded. Yes, Lya would be proud of the man he'd become now.

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Robb Stark

They were gathering in the great hall. Father had called together everyone. He would address everyone, there had been so many rumors flying around Winterfell since they'd awoken here. Father would lay all the rumors to rest now. The Great Hall was crowded with the men and women of Winterfell. Servants and Guards. There were some Manderly and some Reed men but mostly it was
just the inhabitants of Winterfell.

Seeing Lord Manderly bending the knee to Jon had been a jolt to his psyche, and hadn't helped him to find his bearings. The adrift feeling he'd had since waking up back in Winterfell was still there, it was better, especially after his first talk with Jon. The training had helped, though it was a little galling to see just how much better Jon was with a blade now. Teasing Arya helped as well...at least at first. The look in her face as he'd mentioned Gendry and reminded her how many times she'd said she didn't want to be a lady had been spectacular. Seeing her turn so many shades of red had set him laughing so hard, he'd nearly fallen down. He'd turned to Jon, expecting him to join in the teasing but he'd actually stepped away from him and was slowly inching away with a pained expression on his face.

Jon's strange reaction aside, her retaliation had come, as expected; sheep dung under his bed and he'd been prepared...everything that came next he was not prepared for. Little things that could be passed off as embarrassing accidents...except that each and every time, he'd turn around and she'd be there smiling sweetly. The perfect image of innocence. The adrift feeling had started to return then.

His thoughts turned back to the present, the strange boy, Jojen Reed had disappeared to the Godwood with Bran hours earlier and hadn't reappeared yet. Arya was apparently keeping an eye on them. Meera Reed stood with him, standing next to Sansa and mother. Meera reminded him a bit of Arya. According to Jon, she was a fighter and a good friend to Arya. He'd also told him about her relationship with Bran of all people. They'd spent a lot of time together as Bran gradually became the Three eyed Raven, though she'd had no idea of what he'd become in the end. He didn't envy her.

Mother was quiet now, she had been ever since the truth came out...and she knew what was coming now. She may have looked the perfect picture of a composed Highborn Lady but her clenched hands betrayed her thoughts to him.

They stood at the edge of the dais of the Great Hall, and it was time. Father walked up to the dais and raised his hand before calling for quiet. It didn't take long for silence to descend on the crowded hall.

Father gazed around his eyes steely and determined, his voice was grave as he began, “Most of remember what happened...” a murmur of discord ran through the crowd. “We have a chance to change our fates and we will not squander it!” he called out gruffly. A second more upbeat murmur ran through the crowd and he could see the grim determination in the eyes of the people assembled, “Too many rumors have spread in the past days since we awoke...and many people have been acting strangely,” Father's eyes drifted to Jon and Sansa as he said the last words.

A bleak look crossed and disappeared from father's face so fast Robb thought that he imagined it.
“I am here to put those rumors to rest. Jon Snow...is not my son. He is Lyanna's son...his father was Rhaegar Targaryen.”

The words were said and the hall exploded with noise.

“Hear me! Hear me!” father called out his voice louder now and cutting through the din of the hall, “I lied to protect my nephew from Robert! He is of the blood of House Stark! And he is no bastard! Rhaegar set aside Élia Martell and married Lyanna!” he shook his head as stunned silence descended on the crowd, “I do not know why Lyanna sent no word of this. Nor do I know why Brandon did what he did....I did not know the truth till I found Lyanna on her deathbed.” Sorrow filled father's eyes.

Robb had never seen father so upset before. He looked around and he saw people gazing at Jon in disbelief. Most were looking at him as if they were seeing him for the first time. Some had heard and believed the rumors...others hadn't.

Father wasn't finished, and Robb knew what was coming next, “Understand, there is more to be said...much more. There are threats we knew nothing about. We must deal with them to change our fate...but I am not the one to speak of them,” Father paused suddenly looking much older, “To this end...I, Eddard Stark, Lord of Winterfell and Warden of the North...have renewed House Stark's pledge of fealty to House Targaryen,” father turned to Jon, “To my sister's trueborn son, Jon of House Targaryen. The rightful King of the Seven Kingdoms. The North is yours, command us.” Father grave tone carried in the silent hall as all assembled stared in disbelief and shock at him.

Jon's face was unreadable as walked up onto the dais and stood by father. Their eyes locked for a moment before Jon surprised father and embraced him. Father returned the hug after a moment before they split apart.

Jon turned to the shocked crowd and cast an evaluating look at the people, “You all know me. And I know you. You've all treated me well as I grew up despite my position as the bastard of Winterfell...at least most of you,” he said with a small laugh.

A nervous laugh spread through the crowd and Mother seemed to shrink into herself more at Jon's humorous barb.

“I didn't want to be King...but fate has other plans. My duty is to you, the people of Winterfell...to the people of Westeros. You all knew I joined the Night's Watch...the first time. What you will not
know is that I became Lord Commander of the Night's Watch...many other things happened and then I became the King in the North.”

The people were murmuring again now, he ignored the stares that some of them were giving him after Jon's King in the North comment.

“You all think you know who our true enemies are. The Lannisters? The Ironborn? The Wildlings?” As Jon mentioned each group his words were met by jeers and looks of hatred and rage.

Jon stopped and took a deep breath, it was time for the full truth, “We did this! We found a way to turn back time! Why, you ask? Because...the Night's King is coming for us.”

Jon's words were met with horror and disbelief. The Hall exploded again with noise as people began shouting and arguing, crying out in disbelief and denial.

“The Night's King is real! The White Walkers are real! A second Long Night is upon us! I have seen the army of the dead! I have seen the Night's King! With my own eyes!” Jon shook his head and there was actual fear on his face now. “They are coming to kill us!”

Robb could feel the fear in the people now. They did know Jon and they knew fanciful tales were not something he ascribed to.

“...We failed the first time,” he admitted grimly, “The strength of Westeros was wasted in petty wars as we ignored the pleas of the Night's Watch for help! But not this time! We have a second chance! Old wounds must be forgotten and new bonds formed! We must stand united! That is the only chance we have! We know now what is coming! And we will be prepared!” his voice echoed in the hall.

Robb felt his back straightening in response to Jon's sudden charisma. Jon's words stirred his heart, it beat faster his chest. He looked at him and Robb almost couldn't recognize his own brother.

Jon paused his eyes shining with emotion as he gave the crowd a look, “This time we will not go gently into the night! As Bran the Builder and our ancestors did, we will turn back the Cold- We will bring the Dawn! Winter will fall and Summer will rise! Do not doubt that! See to your duties and we shall to see to the rest!” Jon finished charismatically.
The people of Winterfell cheered, their looks of fear gone and transformed into determination and defiance. The words were a dismissal and as Jon and Father descended from the dais, the people, energetic and fired up, disbursed to obey their new King.

To Robb's eyes now, it wasn't Jon Snow standing in front of him now...it Jon Targaryen, the rightful king.

“You didn't used to be so good speaking to crowds,” Robb remarked in surprise as Jon and father joined them.

Jon just shrugged.

“It's too much time with Daenerys,” Sansa retorted with an amused smile, “Now she can truly command a crowd. You have to hear her speak to believe it.”

Robb thought he detected more than a little envy in his sister's words.

“Aye, that's true,” Jon added.

“She...she sounds like a formidable woman,” Robb said in surprise.

“You have to be when you ride a dragon as big as Drogon,” Sansa retorted dryly.

Robb mulled that over for moment, a little unnerved. He looked to Jon and changed the subject, “What now?”

The grimness returned to Jon's face, “Now...we ride to the Dreadfort.”

A wolfish grin blossomed on Robb's face as he imaged just what he would do to Roose.

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Robert thought back to his deeply disturbing conversation with Lancel. Lancel had been a foaming at the mouth zealot of the worst kind. The freshly carved seven pointed star on his forehead still dripping with fresh blood and his roughly shorn golden locks. His bruised face and lack of mewling had spoken to the blonde idiot's sheer resilience. Robert was still deeply disturbed by their conversation. It had happened so many days ago and still Lancel's words chilled him. The confessions Lancel had made...had it come from any other man, he'd have killed them were they stood. But the change in Lancel had been so stunning and unimaginable he'd merely walked away, almost in fear.

He cast that dark thought aside and focused. Lancel had confirmed Renly's insane story about Cersei and the Kingslayer. The perverted truth about his children's parentage. Lancel had proclaimed all of his sins proudly, actually challenging Robert to take his revenge.

He'd done that after telling him about how he drugged him during that final boar hunt...

The sheer audacity and fearlessness of the little shit unnerved him. The insults, the bare truths he slung like arrows...

He hadn't listened to the rest of the words he spewed haughtily, but Renly had. All he'd been able to do was stare at his once toothless, mewling, coward of a squire and his unimaginable transformation into someone that had managed to make the cold and deadly Mandon Moore call 'not weak'.

He'd left without another word, too dazed to even spit and threaten Cersei as she languished in her own Black Cell.

In a way, both she and Pycelle were lucky he had spoken to Lancel first. Pycelle especially. He'd probably have beaten him to death for covering Jon's murder, if Lancel hadn't so disturbed him.

But Lancel had disturbed him. And Robert's rage had cooled faster than he imagined as he thought back to all the mistakes that were now glaringly obvious to him now.

For once in his life, Robert had thrown himself into seeing to his duties and not whoring and drinking the days away. The days had pasted tersely but Renly had manged to admirably settle the city. King's Landing was mess but at least order had been restored. The Sparrows were dead or languishing in cells. A semblance of order had returned to the Goldcloaks, as a new Lord
Commander was installed, Ser Jacelyn Bywater, old Ironhand. Robert remembered him from Pyke, a good stout man to whip the city watch back into shape after the riots and the other desertions.

His Kingsguard were depleted now, Jaime Lannister and Barristan Selmy had deserted. His blood still boiled when he thought of those two. Boros Blount was slain protecting Cersei from Loras Tyrell. Preston Greenfield had fallen fighting...someone. No one was actually sure who he'd been fighting. Mandon Moore, Meryn Trant and Arys Oakheart were the only remaining members...though Arys didn't remember like the other two.

The Small Council was in tatters, there had been no Hand to begin with and his previous one had apparently been assassinated. His Master of Coin's head was found rolling around the Red Keep and his Master of Whispers had just vanished...there was no one who would admit to having to seeing Varys since before the chaos had began.

Only Renly, his Master of Laws was left...and Robert was proud of how Renly was shaping up, the unfortunate death of Loras Tyrell had ignited a fire in him. He was still as dressed up as he always was, but an actual battle and staining his sword red with his enemies' blood had awakened his Baratheon spirit.

As for Loras, his bones were already on their way to Highgarden, with an honor guard of Baratheon men and all the Tyrell men in the city. That situation was an utter mess, both Mace Tyrell and Olenna would be screaming for Lannister blood when they found out. At least that was one ally he could depend upon to stand with him against the Lannisters.

Ravens had been sent from the Red Keep after a proper maester had been found in the city to replace Pycelle. The new maester was young and became flustered every time he had to deal directly with Robert. The first raven had been sent to the Citadel, demanding a new Grand Maester to replace Pycelle. The second had gone to Dragonstone, demanding Stannis come to King's Landing. The third had gone to Highgarden for obvious reasons. The fourth had gone to Winterfell.

The raven to Winterfell had been the hardest to write. How does someone apologize for getting their best friend killed?

It would be a long time till they heard from Ned...though Robert imagined that his old friend was gathering his men to deal with his traitorous Lords...the Boltons were probably in dire straits now. And after that...after that Robert had no bloody idea what Ned would do. But it would probably include a lot of heads on spikes. The Freys first? Then the fucking Lannisters. Gods damned Red Wedding!
War was coming and Robert would be ready for it.

Many ravens had since flown to the Stormlands and Crownlands. Banners would be gathered and then he would drag the fucking Lions from their Rock kicking and screaming. He'd show them what a Baratheon Rains of Castamere would look like!

But that would take time...for now he was pacing the Small Council's meeting room waiting for Cressen and Stannis to arrive. Word had arrived from the docks that a ship from Dragonstone had finally arrived, many, many days late. Cressen's reply had spoken of unavoidable delays but it had taken him more than a week to come from Dragonstone!

*From Dragonstone!*

If it was anyone else, Robert would have thought that they were trying to trying to buy time to escape or something...

“You're going to wear a hole in the floor with your pacing,” Renly called out breaking his line of thought.

Robert turned to his brother sitting at the meeting table, nursing a goblet of wine. A tight expression splayed on his face...was that even some fear in his eyes?

Robert scowled, “How long does it take to get from the docks to the Red Keep?!” He demanded irritably before glaring darkly at Renly, “Your feud with Stannis will end today!”

Yes, it was *fear* in Renly's eyes, “As you say brother.”

“Yes as I say!” Robert retorted hotly, “We have enough enemies without fighting amongst ourselves!”

Renly didn't reply he just grimaced in response.

Whatever Robert would have said next was lost as the door to the Small Council chambers were opened and in shuffled Cressen, the links in chains jingling as he walked.
“Cressen!” Robert said with a smile, as he laid eyes on the aged maester. Seeing the old man was balm to Robert's heart. The old man had been with them since...well, forever.

“Your Grace,” Cressen said as he approached, he bowed, a strained expression on his face.

“None of that your grace nonsense, not for you. It's just Robert,” Robert welcomed his old teacher warmly.

Cressen nodded sagely, “Of course your-Robert.”

“I'm glad to see you as well, Cressen,” Renly said rising and embracing the old man warmly, a happy smile on his face.

Cressen gave them a strained smile as he broke from Renly's embrace, “It is good to see you both in these strange times.”

The old maester, formerly of Storm's End, now of Dragonstone, was finally here, but where was Stannis? He asked this of Cressen.

The old man looked pained for a moment before speaking, “Uh...he'll be along shortly.”

Robert growled, “What's going on?”

Cressen shook his head mournfully, “You won't believe me, unless you see it with your own eyes.”

Robert stared at the old man in confusion for a moment before unhappily letting the remark pass. He moved on, “It been more than a week, what took you so long to get here?”

Cressen was squirming now, “It was because of the...desertions.”

“Desertions?! What desertions?” asked Renly hotly, taking the words out of Robert's mouth.
Cressen paced for a moment before the table before turning to face Robert, “Dragonstone is nigh undefended, most of the men just up an left because of this...this...remembering business. It took me this long just to sort out and find an interim and proper commander for the few men left there.”

The words shook Robert, but as he was staring at Cressen, he suddenly realized, “You don’t remember?” Renly looked surprised at the question.

Now it was Cressen's turn to be surprised, “You do?” He looked at the Baratheon brother's faces, “You both do?”

Robert nodded, “Aye.”

“It's not some sort of mummer?” the maester asked in surprise.

Renly shook his head.

Cressen blinked, he asked hesitantly, “What happened?”

Robert shrugged, “We died.”

Cressen suddenly looked very old and pale as he digested the terrible words.

“You died. You both died?” he asked carefully, as if not understanding the words.

Renly answered, his face turning dark and hard, “Robert was...more or less poisoned,” he paused and the fear was back his eyes, “A shadow killed me...a shadow with Stannis's face.”

Cressen gaped at Renly, he was holding onto his chain with one hand now, and Robert could see Cressen's knuckles turning white. The old man was swaying a little on his feet as well.

“Perhaps you should sit down,” Robert said quickly coming to Cressen’s side and guiding him
quickly to a chair. That had probably been too much information too fast, he thought idly.

Cressen sat down, his eyes blinking, Renly came to him and handed him a goblet of wine, “Here drink.”

The maester gulped the wine, before turning back to Renly, “A shadow?” he whispered. He looked down and deep in though and mumbled to himself, “She’s a Shadowbinder...”

Robert frowned, _she, who? What’s a Shadowbinder?_

The sound of arguing voices and then the slamming open of the door echoed through the room. Stannis stood in the doorway, head held high, the same sullen and pinched look in his face as always.

Renly was on his feet in an instant, his hand going to his swordbelt, thankfully he was unarmed at the moment.

Stannis stared about for a moment before deigning to look at them.

Robert glared at Renly once, silently warning him not to do anything rash, before turning back to Stannis.

Stannis glared.

Robert glared.

Renly glared...but the fear was back.

Stannis opened his mouth...before emitting an echoing burp that reverberated through the room.

Robert blinked, _what?_
Stannis staggered into the room and now Robert could smell him. Stannis reeked of wine. Stannis gave him a dismissive look before locking his eyes on the pitcher of wine on the table. He walked to the table and grabbed the pitcher, but instead of pouring himself a cup, he raised the pitcher to his lips and drank deeply. He pushed a chair out and collapsed into it, the pitcher still in his hands. He glared up at Robert.

Robert met Stannis's glare and stared for a long moment before snorting and laughing in amusement, “Are you drunk, Stannis?” he asked with a smile.

Stannis lifted the goblet to his lips and drank, he hiccoped once, “Aye.” his voice was slurred and he gazed sullenly at Robert.

“Stannis is...drunk,” Renly was staring at Stannis, the fear gone from his eyes and replaced with disbelief.

Robert was still staring at this impossible image. Prim and dull, rigid Stannis...drunk...completely and utterly drunk. His smile widened as he finally noticed the healing bruises on his face. He chuckled to himself, did Stannis finally prove himself a Baratheon and get drunk and get into a drunken brawl? He laughed again louder, the image of Stannis actually doing something fun like that beyond amusing.

“Let me guess, you finally went to see what all the fuss about taverns and drunken revelry is all about, didn't you?” Robert japed, needling his younger brother.

Stannis suddenly looked guilty, he didn't answer and instead drank deeply from the pitcher again.

“Had your first drunken brawl, eh?” Robert's smile deepened, oh Stannis you've missed out on so much...

Cressen hesitantly answered for Stannis after a strained moment, “Not as such...it was Ser Davos.”

The mirth disappeared from his face, all thoughts of drunken revelry evaporating, “Ser Davos? Your own personal arse licker? That Davos?” thundered Robert in shocked surprise. “Why the bloody fuck would he attack you?” Ser Davos attack Stannis? That was like saying that Tywin Lannister liked and respected his father!
Stannis looked up angrily at Robert, “Fuck off Robert,” he sneered.

Robert shook, his eyes widening as he gaped, “What?”

Stannis huffed, “Fuck off Robert, you screwed us all.”

Robert didn't know how to react, on the one hand his stern and stiff brother was so far into his cups...there weren't any cups left, just a pitcher. On the other hand, the Lord of Dragonstone was telling the King of Westeros to fuck off...

Neither of these were situations he could have rationally expected when facing Stannis.

He turned to look at Renly, but he was too busy gaping to notice. He looked to Cressen. The old maester was staring aghast at Stannis's manner.

He turned back to Stannis, “What in the name of the old Gods and the new is going on?” he demanded. “Answer me Stannis! Why the fuck did Davos attack you?”

The guilty look intensified on Stannis's face and he gulped down more wine.

“He was angry. He despised me for what happened...before...You died and fucked us all. I was the heir! I still am the heir! We all warred! I went North...but winter was coming...Melisandre said we needed a sacrifice to melt the snows, to take back Winterfell from the Boltons,” Stannis's words were slurred and he kept jumping about, “She needed King's Blood for the sacrifice...so I burned Shireen,” he finished, before taking another gulp of wine.

Robert heard the words but couldn't think for several moments, the meaning of the words not fully registering in his mind for too many moments. He went white as a sheet when he finally understood. He stared at the creature sitting in front of him, who was this creature wearing Stannis's flesh?

He stomped up to Stannis and backhanded him across the face with enough force to knock him off the chair. Robert was shaking, seeing red and unable to think.

It was madness!
Madness!

The entire world had gone mad!

Stannis sat in a pool of wine on the floor, he looked up at the irate Robert and said, “And now you care about your fucking kin...” he slurred snidely. “You fucking moron.” he glared balefully at Robert.

Robert saw red again and roared for the guards.

Men came running, led by Ser Meryn. Meryn had his sword out as entered, he glared at Renly and Stannis.

Robert pointed at Stannis and roared, “Get him out of my sight! Throw him into a Black Cell!”

Meryn sneered, “Gladly, your Grace.”

The men with him, hauled up Stannis and dragged him from the room. Stannis just continued to stare balefully at Robert as he was dragged from the room.

Renly was staring after Stannis, an unreadable expression on his face, “There was so much I was going to say to him...” he trailed off, shuddering.

Robert was still raging, he glared at Renly.

“He told Davos to take Shireen and leave...” Cressen managed to say, his voice cracking with grief, “I couldn't understand why...till now,” the old maester looked heartbroken. “I didn't understand anything...” he whispered in profound sorrow.

“Where is this Melisandre?!” thundered Robert in a rage. This witch would pay for what she did to his niece!
“She's not a threat...not anymore,” Cressen said shaking his head, “She had...some sort of apoplexy...her body lives but her mind is dead.”

“Good,” growled Robert gloatingly. He looked at Cressen for a moment an idea forming in his mind, “Congratulations Cressen, you're my Grand Maester now, your first task is to send out ravens...find me Shireen and Davos!”
Chapter 18 The New World

Jaime Lannister

The days weighed heavily on him. The bad weather didn't help as well. The ride to the Westerlands had been hard but thankfully, uneventful in the physical sense, no bandit attacks, no Lannister haters braying for his blood. Emotionally, was another case entirely. The heaviness had lessened when they entered the Westerlands and reached the Deep Den, Lord Lewys Lydden had welcomed them and wanted them to rest. He'd also given him the best news he'd had since they'd awoken in the past. Tyrion was the undisputed Lord of Casterly Rock now. He'd been tempted to relax and enjoy the lord's offer but instead he taken more men from the Lord and forced ahead to the Rock...though not before sending a raven to Tyrion.

And now here they were at Casterly Rock.

Home.

Too many emotions threatened to overwhelm his already tremulant psyche. The emotional strain had lessened after that first difficult conversation with Myrcella and Tommen.

Gods...when she was mad, Myrcella looked so much like Cersei it hurt.

It had gotten better, Myrcella had been talking to him again after the revelations about Cersei, Tommen had even become more animated, the sullenness abating a bit.

It hadn't lasted long though. Both Myrcella and Jaime had believed that Tommen knew the truth about his lineage.

He hadn't.

Tommen had heard the rumors, the accusations of Stannis and Ned Stark, but he hadn't believed them. They'd been lies, nothing but lies.
It had been a shock when that truth came out...to say the least.

The boy had exploded with a rage that had shocked Jaime and Myrcella. The boy had a spine...it just took a lot to reach it. He'd screamed and cursed Jaime. He rushed him and started to beat him with his hands...but he'd only succeeded in bruising his hands because Jaime had still been in his armour at the time.

Jaime had retreated, leaving Tommen to his sister. After a lot of time, Myrcella had calmed him down, but...ever since then, he could see it in Tommen's eyes...he despised him now.

The emotional stress hadn't bated as the ride to Casterly Rock went on...but at least Myrcella still loved him. He'd had too much time on his hands and despite the real threat that was probably brewing in King's Landing, his thoughts had invariably strayed to Brienne. She was alive again and he had no idea where she was...never mind if she remembered as well.

He sighed heavily.

He was home again, in the relative safety of Casterly Rock. Tommen and Myrcella were safe and alive...even if Tommen hated him now.

He and his men passed though the gates of Casterly Rock, there were men assembled in the courtyard. Standing at the head of the assembled men, stood his brother Tyrion Lannister, resplendent in Lannister red, golden lions covering his clothes. The Imp of Casterly Rock, no longer. Now he was the Lord of Casterly Rock, Warden and Lord Paramount of the Westerlands.

Jaime's horse approached and slowed to a halt in front of Tyrion.

Tyrion looked up at him and smiled happily, “Welcome home, brother.”

Jaime smiled back, “It's good to be home.”
Tyrion had taken over Father's solar. The talks started just like Jaime imagined, and much to his surprise Tyrion didn't have any answers as to why the plan had changed, he was still waiting for a reply from Winterfell.

Uncle Kevan was there giving him alternating disappointed and angry looks, cousin Daven looked a little tired but at least he had a smile on his face for him. Aunt Genna seemed conspicuously absent for some reason. He'd asked about her and the answer had forced him to pity his father. Apparently, she'd been spending a lot of time with father...talking with him or rather at him since the spell changed everything.

As for Tyrion...Tyrion was in his element. Lord of Casterly Rock in name and fact now, while the great Tywin Lannister was locked in his room to stew in his hate. Tyrion's takeover of Casterly Rock had been effortless and with both Uncle Kevan and Aunt Genna as well as Daven backing him the other houses of the Westerlands had not raised an issue.

Jaime was glad that Tyrion was in power now, even if a part of him was a little shocked to have father so easily overcome. It would take time for him to get used to all the changes. It was a new world in the Westerlands now.

At first, Tyrion had listened to Jaime's story of their mad scramble from King's Landing. He'd been overjoyed to hear of Baelish's fate as well as Joffrey's...though he'd tried to keep the latter reaction to himself out of respect to Jaime.

He'd been less happy to hear about Loras Tyrell and Jaime's role in that, Tyrion gulped his wine and remarked in a deadpan that he wished Sam the best of luck when that news reached Highgarden.

The meeting progressed to the state of the Westerlands. Daven was giving Tyrion his report.

“'My men arrested Ser Amory Lorch, he's down in the dungeons now.’ Daven reported.”

“Excellent, he can be a gift, though whether to Daenerys or Jon or the Martells, I'll decide later,” Tyrion stated evenly, “What about Gregor Clegane?”

Daven grimaced, “We can't find the Mountain. We lost him.”

“How can you lose someone that size?” Jaime asked incredulous.
“He and his men were last seen riding east towards the Riverlands. Riding hard,” Daven shook his head mournfully.

Tyrion drummed his fingers noisily on the table top as he frowned, “Why the Riverlands? Where is he going?” he held up a hand forestalling answers, “It doesn't matter. Send out ravens to our bannermen and the nearest Riverland houses, name him a fugitive, I want his head. Anyone that brings me his head will get the Mountain’s weight in gold! And my goodwill!”

Daven nodded and left to obey. The meeting continued with news from the Riverlands, an angry raven from Hoster Tully had arrived. It warning them not to try anything as well as confirming the Tully's new allegiance to Jon Targaryen...and Edmure Tully was on his way to deal with the Freys.

Jaime winced, hopefully Edmure would have some good commanders to aid him there. He hadn't been as much of an idiot in the end as before but he was still the same foppish and incompetent Edmure as far as Jaime was concerned.

Uncle Kevan had been upset to learn that Lancel wasn't with them but Tyrion had assured him that he'd find out what happened despite the current turmoil. He'd also asked what Jaime intended to do now that Tyrion had pledged the Westerlands to the Targaryens. He took a gulp of wine as he waited for the answer.

Jaime gave him his answer.

Wine spewed from Kevan's mouth as he turned to stare at Jaime. “House Targaryen? You will pledge yourself to them?”

Jaime shrugged nonchalantly, “Daenerys gave me a full pardon after I explained everything.”

“The mad king’s daughter pardoned you?” Kevan gaped, giving Jaime a searching gaze.

“I told her why I killed him,” Jaime squirmed under Kevan's intense gaze.
“What possible reason could you give her to forgive murdering her father?” Kevan exclaimed incredulous.

Tyrion gave Jaime a long look, “I think this is where you spill that secret. I never could understand why you never shouted it out to everyone you met.”

Jaime didn't like being put on the spot but he knew it wasn't a secret anymore. Daenerys knew, Jon knew, Edmure knew, Sansa knew, Arya knew, Bran knew...though Bran knew practically everyone's secrets. He met Kevan's waiting gaze before answering.

“Aerys...” he paused sighing heavily, “Aerys had his Pyromancers place Wildfire under all of King's Landing. He commanded me to bring him father's head...and then he commanded the head Pyromancer to light the Wildfire...to kill everyone and everything in King's Landing.” Jaime paused and clenched his jaw angrily as he remembered that terrible day. “It was...too much. I killed the Pyromancer first. Then I killed Aerys.”

Kevan's face went white with shock.

“Uncle, you and father were in the city at that time. The whole of the Westerlands army was in the city. The Northern army and all the Lords had entered as well. Hells, Aerys's body was still warm when Ned Stark found me,” Jaime explained, putting into words just how bad things could have been.

Kevan turned progressively paler with each of Jaime's words trying to imagine the sheer catastrophe that Jaime had averted by breaking his vow.

Jaime suddenly cocked his head and smirked, “So that day I even saved the life of the indomitable and boring Ned Stark. I'm looking forward to rubbing that in Stark's face when I see him.”

Tyrion winced, “Please don't. Things will be tense enough when you met again without adding that.” He gave Jaime a dark look.

Jaime smirk only became smugger, “I make no promises.”
He'd left the Eyrie in disgrace, all Lysa had done under his nose burning in his heart and with Lord Royce's promises ringing in his ears. Royce would care for Robert Arryn as his own son. Free from Lysa's poison...both literally and mentally. The Royces' maester had confirmed the presence of actual poison, afterwards, Lysa's pet maester had been hung as his duplicity was revealed to all. The poison had made Robert Arryn feeble and weak minded and dependent on Lysa and then Baelish. And they had controlled the Vale through him. Without the poison Robert Arryn would grow up to be a true heir of the Vale, worthy of Jon Arryn's legacy.

Jon Arryn. Yet another thing that happened under his nose. Yet again, Lysa and Baelish. Brynden grimaced, he knew that Lysa had always been fragile...but this was madness...she was mad. Family, Duty, Honor...and he'd failed her so completely and utterly.

And the next time he saw Petyr Baelish there would be a reckoning!

He could never make up for his mistakes in the Vale...but maybe he could help Edmure. His nephew had always been and weak and foppish...though with this remembering business and his plea for help, maybe the boy was finally waking up to his mistakes. He could help make a proper man of him.

So here he was riding for the Twins, answering his nephew's plea for help.

Brynden's thoughts turned darker, The Twins, more revelations that Royce gave him. The Red Wedding made his blood boil every single time it crossed his mind! Those godsdamned bloody Freys! Edmure captured, Robb and Cat murdered! He gripped the handle of his sword, his knuckles turning white as he imagined what he would do to Walder when he go to the Twins.

And finally after so many days of riding, he was finally here. He was on the northern shore of the Green Fork, with the Twins finally in sight. He could see men camped around the northern castle. As he approached he could see the flying banners. Manderly and Reed were the northern banners. He could see Arryn and Tollett banners, as well as a couple of Riverland banners belonging to a couple of the lesser houses.

The outriders and sentinels of the camp could see him. The outriders rode up to him. Many of the men looking grim and determined...with an underlying sense of satisfaction.
The meeting went as expected, as soon as he was recognized, calls of the Blackfish, echoed through the camp. And in next to no time, he found himself with an escort through the lines and across the bridge and on his way to Edmure.

The fact that he was crossing the bridge unharassed told him that Edmure, somehow, already had control of the Twins. When the men had told him that the Freys had already surrendered to Edmure that had been a surprise, from Lord Royce's words he'd expected to have to come here and have to help his green nephew lay a proper siege and take the two castles.

He stopped at the beginning of the bridge looking down the length of it. Whatever he had been expecting Edmure to do at the Twins...this macabre display wasn't it.

He spurned his horse, Longshanks, onwards and they rode across the bridge slowly. The bridge of the Twins was decorated with hanging corpses along the length of it. And Brynden recognized enough of the weasely faces to know that the dead men were all Freys. The corpses were hung at regular intervals, each man still wearing Frey colours in death, with the occasion sigil of the Twins sown into their clothes.

The fact that the corpses were arranged on both sides of the bridge lay as a testament to just how many Freys had been executed. His horse neighed nervously, the smell of death hung upon the bridge. He spurred Longshanks onwards.

He frowned as he neared the middle of the bridge, he had been unsure at first because of the distance, but as he neared his initial assessment was correct. All the bodies were hung from the neck...except one. Nearly in the center, was one corpse that was hung from its feet.

He slowed down as he neared, it was readily apparent why this one was hung by its feet, it had a neck, but...there wasn't much of a head left on the body to support being hung like the others. It looked like someone had taken a warhammer to this Frey's head. Repeatedly.

“It's Black Walder,” spoke up one of his escorts, wearing Tollett colours.

Brynden nodded wordlessly, even in the Vale, Black Walder's infamy was know. A disgrace to all knights everywhere, a knighthood bought with his father's silver, and a nasty disposition to boot, he had been his father's son.
Good riddance.

Brynden spurred Longshanks onwards again, Edmure was waiting and he needed explanations, Lord Royce had spoken much but there was more he needed to ask. Questions only his sane kin could answer, Lysa was still raving.

The rest of the distance passed quickly as his escorts led him to what was Edmure's tent. He was led in, into what looked to be a planning session.

He recognized Edmure's good friend, Patrek Mallister, though the heir to Seagard looked to be strained and a little wild eyed, with dark bags under his eyes.

Though if Patrek looked strained, Ser Stevron looked like he'd been talking with the Stranger. It didn't take a genius to realise why the least offensive of the Frey's looked like that.

With them sat Jonos Bracken and Tytos Blackwood. Both Lords looked grim and satisfied. Brynden mentally grimaced, he expected to have to deal with the usual Frey unpleasantness not those two prickly lords and their never-ending feud.

They were all clustered around a table looking at a map with Edmure sitting in their middle.

Edmure rose and smiled as he caught sight of Brynden, “Uncle! Join us! I could use your sage advice.” He greeted Brynden warmly but there was something in his eyes that he couldn't recognize.

Brynden nodded in greeting before looking to the others, “Lord Bracken, Lord Blackwood, Ser Patrek, Ser Stevron,” he nodded at each as he spoke their names. They nodded back in greeting.

“It's Lord Stevron now, the Late Lord Walder Frey is truly late now,” Edmure corrected with a mirthful laugh as he sat back down. Bracken and Blackwood joined in with their own laughs. Stevron looked pained and the strain on Patrek's face only increased.

A smile spread across his face at the welcome news, Hoster’s going to overjoyed when he hears this, “What a damn shame. Lord Walder will truly be missed.” Yes, now that Stevron was Lord of the Twins, perhaps honor could return to the Freys.
“Of course he will be,” Lord Jonos said an amused tone.

“Aye, it was good of Ser Aenys and Ser Raymund to kill him for us,” Lord Tytos japed darkly. The two lords shared a look and then laughed together. Edmure joined them, laughing as if there was some sort of joke being shared between them.

The smile disappeared from his face, *Kinslaying? The Freys were always low, but I didn't think they were capable of sinking that low! At least...not until I heard about the Red Wedding...*

Then he registered that Tytos and Jonos seemed to be bantering with one another and his surprise deepened. Since when did those two talk that amicably with each other?

Stevron's face was red now, “It was a deed evilly done...despite everything, he was still our father.”

Lord Tytos's laughter stopped and he smirked, “A better second death than he deserved, but at least he remembered the pies!” he laughed hard again and setting off Edmure and Jonos, they were laughing again, mirth in their eyes.

“Pies?” *Why Pies? What's so important about pies?* Brynden looked between the laughing trio and then looked to Stevron and Patrek, both looked equally mystified.

“Father was raving and ranting about pies, before...” Stevron began cautiously before trailing off.

“Old Walder had a good reason to be raving about **pies,**” Edmure remarked with a smirk, nodding as he took a gulp of his wine.

Brynden frowned as Stevron leaned forward to listen and Patrek turned to stare at Edmure with a nervous look. Patrek didn't look very well now.

“...when Arya killed him-” Edmure continued.

“Arya?” Brynden interrupted him sharply, giving him a surprised look. He only knew one Arya and he didn't think that Edmure was talking about her. It couldn't possibly be Cat’s little girl!
Edmure floundered for a moment, before a look of understanding crossed his face, “Ah yes, forgive me Uncle, Lord Royce's raven did mention that you didn't remember, and I doubt he would have told you about her. Cat's youngest, Arya Stark. After all that she went through over the years, she survived, and returned to claim bloody vengeance against the Freys. She poisoned all of the Freys in a single night...she wiped out House Frey in a single night.” Edmure paused and laughed nastily, as Stevron turned several different shades of colours. “…I think only Emmon and his children survived? And only because they were hiding behind Lady Genna's skirts!” he laughed hard at the jape as Stevron's face turned even more colorful.

The laughter stopped and Edmure stilled, his face turning dark and angry, he smiled a cruel smile, “She paid back Walder Frey for every foul, black action he ever committed. She killed Black Walder and Lothar first....and then carved up their flesh and made a pie from it. I think you can guess who she fed the pie to....” he snorted snidely, “She was even kind enough to tell him what he ate after he finished before she introducing herself and slitting his throat,” he let out an amused laugh.

It was like something...as something...from the darkest and foulest tales of the North...and Edmure was laughing, amused and happy as if Cat's daughter had done something innocent and precious. He'd heard from Cat that Arya was a wild child, but this...this was...Brynden shook his head in disbelief. He looked around him quickly.

Stevron had the back of his hand pressed up against his mouth, his eyes wide, his face paler than ever now....but Patrek was green now. The heir of Seagard leaned forward suddenly and vomit spewed out from his mouth, he lost his battle against revulsion as well as his lunch. The spray thankfully missed everyone, but the smell of it hung in the tent now.

Tytos and Jonos gave Patrek a disapproving look before joining their laughter with Edmure's. They were chuckling together again, while Edmure...Edmure was sitting back in his chair with a goblet of wine in one hand while smiling maliciously.

Who was this man with Edmure's face? Where had his foppish nephew gone? Everything he was seeing, everything that Edmure was doing seemed to be something he would expect from Tywin Lannister, not his foppish green nephew! The new hardness, the sheer malign intent Edmure could put in his words was jarring and disorienting.

Brynden gathered his scattered wits, “Forgive me, my lords, Ser Patrek, I believe I need a word alone my nephew, if you please,” he gave each a pointed look, his face turning stern, brooking no argument.

Stevron rose quickly bowing and begging Edmure's pardon as he left, still very pale while Patrek just
fled the tent without a backward word or gesture. Jonos and Tytos rose as well more sedately, saying they had men to see to, with Edmure's permission of course.

Soon enough, Brynden was alone with his nephew.

Edmure was staring after the fleeing Mallister heir, the smile was gone and replaced with an upset look. He turned to face Brynden and a guilty expression now crossed his face.

*Guilty? Why guilty?* Brynden wondered. Of all the things he expected guilt was not one of them. Edmure seemed to be malicious and mean now, but he at least had the decency to be upset at how he had disturbed his friend, the Mallister heir...but why the guilt?

“Uncle,” he said gravely. He met Brynden's hard gaze without flinching.

The guilty look of Edmure's made Brynden unsure for a moment, the unflinching gaze didn't help as well. For a moment he didn't know how to begin, he knew what had happened in that other life, Lord Royce had explained the broad strokes of all the calamities, but there had been other things Royce had focused on...like the *Others* and the *Dragons*.

He decided to focus on the more impossible of things, namely Cat's daughter while he tried to figure out the right words to ask Edmure what he needed to ask, “What you said about Arya? That was true? She did all those things?” Brynden asked urgently, still unwilling to believe his nephew. Unwilling to believe Cat's daughter could do such a horrific thing.

The guilt disappeared and a thoughtful look came to Edmure's face, “Arya...is capable of all that and much, *much* more. Uncle...she became a *Faceless Man*,” he announced with none of the warning he should have added to this revelation.

His skin tried to crawl off his bones as Edmure's last words filtered though his mind. The Faceless Men of Braavos were a group not to be trifled with- for good reason. And they were feared *everywhere*. And now Arya was one of them?!

He gaped for a moment before finding a seat and sitting down heavily in one of the chairs and Edmure poured him a goblet of wine and gave it to him. He drank gratefully, the alcohol numbing him a bit.
After a moment, he turned to Edmure, “What happened to you, boy?” he asked eventually regaining his voice. He still didn't think he had the right words, but they were all his stunned mind could come up with now.

Edmure's face darkened as he took the seat next to him, the guilty look returned as well. Bitterness filled his eyes and his mouth twisted into a near snarl.

“I served Robb when he was named King in the North...but I was a complete and utter fool. I made mistakes. You were all mad at me. You called me a fool and an idiot...but I was the King's uncle and could not be cast aside for someone more competent. More mistakes were made...mine, Cat's and Robb's. Then the Red Wedding happened,” Edmure spat the infamous name and Brynden almost recoiled at the sheer venom in his words...not that he blamed him, he agreed wholeheartedly with the sentiment.

“...After the Red Wedding...I was the Frey's hostage. They held the Riverlands for Joffrey, you had escaped and I didn't. Cat didn't. Robb didn't. They held me and my new wife,” he paused and his face twisted again with emotion, “The Freys are a fertile bunch and soon they realised that Roslin was pregnant. After that I was just a plaything for them, something to be laughed at. My son was born and still they kept me caged, they could have killed me then but they didn't...they kept me to scorn mine and Father's legacy.” He bared his teeth and growled angrily, rage filling his eyes, “I was nothing but an court jester to them!” he took a deep gulp from his goblet.

Brynden could feel his blood boiling with all of Edmure's words. He couldn't keep the deep angry scowl from his face. Truly Arya's actions had been well done indeed. Walder's second death had been much too quick for his liking now.

“Where was I in all this?” he asked urgently, “Didn't I come for you?”

The guilt was back and he was gazing at Brynden, his eyes filled with shame, “You were free. A thorn in the side of the Frey's and the Lannisters. In the end, you even managed to gather enough men to take back Riverrun back from the Freys.”

Brynden humphed, “Good to know I still have some fight left in me.”

Edmure looked down, unwilling to met his gaze now, “You made such a nuisance of yourself that
Jaime Lannister himself, came to take back the castle.”

Brynden scowled again at the mention of the Kingslayer.

“During the siege of Riverrun, each and every day the Freys brought me out and paraded me in front of you, they threatened to kill me with a noose around my neck and a knife at my throat...and you did nothing.” Edmure took a deep shuddering breath. “I was angry...so angry at the time. You did nothing! They were going to kill me and you did nothing!”

Brynden frowned, “It was an empty threat, they couldn’t have killed you without threatening their own legitimacy if they wanted your son to rule after you.”

Edmure snorted in derision, “I know that now! But then all I could feel was anger. I had been a prisoner for so long and you were free. Cat was dead. I thought that all of Cat's sons were all dead. That Arya was dead as well. Only Sansa was left and she was the Lannister's hostage. And Lysa was hiding in the Vale! Doing nothing!”

Brynden ground his teeth at the words, “What happened when the Kingslayer came?”

“His threats were much more effective...he threatened to kill my son then released me to surrender Riverrun. I was its rightful Lord not you. I didn't speak with you. I didn't explain anything and I just surrendered the castle....but you didn't surrender. You fought to the last and they killed you. I just stood by and let them kill you uncle!” Edmure finished, ashamed of his admission and his weakness.

“Gods boy.” Brynden shook his head, he raised a hand and rubbed his face in pain. Idiot! That sounded like the Edmure he knew. Now the guilt on Edmure's face made sense.

“I was so angry with you...if I'd just spoken to you I could have saved you. You could have escaped! I didn't know it at the time but Sansa had escaped, she was in the North and begging for your help. If you had gone to her you would have survived!” Edmure lamented angrily. He shook his head mournfully, “Even after Arya killed the Freys I was prisoner! She didn't even realise I was in the dungeons! I was forgotten and alone till Jon and Daenerys's forces found me! They restored me to Riverrun and I kept faith with them till the Others came and took it from me!”

Thoughts whorled in Brynden's mind as he watched the turmoil in Edmure escape. The bitterness and rage in him made so much more sense now...and the hate Brynden had for the Freys and Lannisters burned like a fire in his belly now.
“Don't worry, I'll knock some sense into you and we'll make the Lannisters pay for all they've done. The damned Kingslayer will pay for all his sins,” he swore vehemently, silently promising to stand by his nephew and teach him how to be a better man.

Edmure winced, “The Freys have paid in blood now, but the Lannister's aren't the problem now, the Others are. The army of the dead and the coming Winter are the true enemy now.”

“Aye, but we'll make them both pay, we still have time before Winter comes,” he nodded gruffly, “They'll know not to cross us Tullys ever again!”

Edmure gave him an unreadable look before sighing deeply, “Jaime Lannister and I shall never be friends...but we cannot be enemies now. Too much is at stake. Tyrion Lannister is now the new Warden of the West and he's Daenerys Targaryen's Hand. As for Father, he's already bent the knee to Jon Targaryen. If Jaime remembers...he's an ally now.”

Surprise blossomed on Brynden's face, it turned into anger in a second, “The Kingslayer?!” he decried angrily.

“We cannot afford any great battles here we must conserve our strength and prepare for the coming Winter,” Edmure shook his head, “No matter how much we despise some or our new allies.”

“He's an oathbreaker of the worst kind! He's the Kingslayer!” he retorted gruffly.

“And he had a good reason for breaking that oath!” Edmure snorted in disgust.

With quick words Edmure explained everything about the Mad King’s final plan. Brynden blanched as the scale of the calamity that Jaime prevented was revealed to him. He sat back in his chair, suddenly seeing the Kingslayer in a whole different light. He shook his head, every time he thought he had a grasp at how Westeros had changed something else was thrown at him. He drank from his forgotten goblet and as his thoughts threatened to overwhelm him. He decided to push forward, best to focus on manners at hand and then come back to the Lannister issue.

He asked about the fate of the Freys and Edmure promptly explained...
Well that explained Stevron’s current disposition. And he was glad to see Edmure being so firm and relentless...it was a good example for him to set for any River Lord that thought to cross House Tully. Though one thing did bother him little.

“But I have to ask what happened with that cunt, Black Walder? Did a cart roll over his head or something?” he asked inquisitively.

Edmure seemed to shrink into his seat before speaking, “I did that to Black Walder.”

Brynden’s eyes widened in surprise. He remembered the shattered empty head of Black Walder.

“You...did that?” he repeated in disbelief, “What did you use? A bloody warhammer? I don’t remember you being any good with a warhammer.”

Edmure looked abashed and looked down into his wine goblet, “A rock.” He pointed to the end of the table, a large rock, larger than his fist was sat at the edge. Looking closely he noticed that the rock was stained red on one side.

Brynden blinked several times, it was yet another thing that had changed in Edmure...it also looked he was using it as a silent reminder for the Freys not to cross the Tullys.

Brynden pointed at the rock, “You used that to beat a man to death?” his tone dripping with disbelief.

Edmure looked at his uncle before nodding slowly.

Well fuck...who are you now boy? Where’s the little boy that used to hide behind Cat’s skirts from strangers? “Is there anything else you want to admit?” Brynden asked slowly.

Edmure started to squirm, “I am to marry the Lady, Roslin Frey,” he admitted slowly.

Surprise blossomed on his face, Edmure was getting married? And to a Frey? After everything he had done to them?
“Why in blazes are you doing that?!” thundered Brynden in surprise. “Lord Royce said you weren’t going to marry a Frey this time.”

Edmure scratched his head sheepishly. “That was the original plan. Things changed. I blame Patrek... if not for his interference, I would have slain all of house Frey. All of them would have died.” he admitted, “But he reminded me of our House's words. Family, Duty, Honor,” he began, his voice filled with emotion and pride, “I avenged our Family, I secured our House's position in the Riverlands. I did my Duty bringing traitors to justice, and I am Honoring those that honored us. Lord Stevron and others here did give the ultimate sacrifice for Robb. I had to Honor them.”

Brynden stared at his nephew in surprise, apparently he’d put quite a bit of thought into his actions this time. This was a very good beginning, “I think there's less for me to teach you than you think,” he admitted with respect.

Edmure ducked his head humbly, a small smile now on his lips, “I hope not to disappoint you this time, Uncle.”

The moment between Uncle and nephew was cut short when a guard called out from outside the tent “My Lord!”

“Come!” commanded Edmure quickly.

A guard in Tully colours entered, he bowed deeply and spoke, “Lady Roslin is here and begs an audience.”

Brynden kept his face blank as Edmure's face seemed to relax and his lips twitched, his smile becoming bigger.

“Let her come,” Edmure nodded as he rose to stand.

The guard nodded and turned to hold open the tent flap as a small lithe woman walked in.
Brynden failed to keep his face blank as he got his first good look at Edmure’s betrothed. He cast a look to Edmure and his nephew was beaming now.

He looked back at Roslin, giving her a closer look. The slight girl stood nervously in front of them. She had a small weak chin, that was the only feature she seemed to have inherited from Old Walder. She was a comely girl with delicate features and the weak chin actually complimented her features.


Edmure nodded, “Lady Roslin.”

Brynden gave her a long look before turning back to Edmure, “Are you sure she’s a Frey? She looks too pretty to be one of Old Walder’s get,” he asked gruffly.

Edmure chuckled, and gave his Uncle an amused smile, “You asked that the first time as well Uncle...it's the Rosby in her.”

Turning back to the Lady, Brynden noticed the red flush in her cheeks now. She bobbed her head at him and gave him an embarrassed look.

“Yes my lady, what is the matter?” Edmure asked when Roslin didn't immediately speak.

She curtsied again, he voice tremble as she spoke her mind, “Forgive me lord, I wished to speak in defense of my brother again...”

Edmure's face darkened and the smile disappeared from his face, “Olyvar's fate will be decided by Robb. He was Robb's squire and it is my nephew's right to judge him,” he retorted adamantly. “If he believes him to be innocent then no harm will come to him, if not....” he trailed off, he didn't need to elaborate further.

Brynden grimaced at Edmure's words as Roslin paled and shifted uncomfortably, but she didn't get the chance to say more.

“...We have spoken of this before and I will not speak again on the matter. We have more pressing
matters, now that my uncle is here we will be departing to Riverrun. The Riverlands are secure now, but there is much more that must be done. The Others are coming and we still must see what will happen further south.”

Brynden couldn't disagree with Edmure, with everything he knew now, there was still much more that had to be done...though he wasn't looking forward to his reunion with Hoster.
Ok, sorry to say but this will probably be the last update for this month, going on my first long vacation since......well I can't remember, that's how long its been :(

Anyway, hope you all enjoy this chapter! :)

On another matter, this story now officially has a TV Tropes page! :D So yay! :D

Chapter 19 Changes

Barristan Selmy

They'd given him a room to rest in, but he couldn't rest. The opulence of the room didn't help. He had been avoiding too many thoughts, and being in Casterly Rock after anything that had happened was very strange. As strange as the ride and escape from King's Landing. By some strange twist of fate, the Seven had seen him joining forces with the Lannisters.

After everything that Cersei did to see him dismissed from the Kingsguard and how she cuckolded Robert as well as so many other crimes...here he was in the Westerlands with Jaime Lannister. And both him and the Kingslayer were now sworn to House Targaryen once more. Though, Jaime had discarded his white cloak the moment they'd entered the Westerlands.

And the Imp was the Queen's Hand, just to make matter more surreal.

Tyrion Lannister, Hand to the Queen, Daenerys Targaryen...just how in the name of the Old Gods and the New that came about was beyond him. And Tyrion was now also Lord Paramount of the Westerlands. A bloodless coup with Tywin Lannister now locked away in his own rooms a prisoner in what was his own castle a scant moon ago.

To say it was bewildering was understating the matter.

And that wasn't even taking into consideration Jon Targaryen.
Rhaegar’s son. A son Barristan never even knew existed because Eddard Stark of all people lied and hid him. And a trueborn son at that!

Barristan rubbed his face. He mourned Rhaegar at the Trident. He’d been his friend till the end, despite the strangeness and dishonor of the Prince’s actions that last year.

He thought back to the long ride here, the Hound had been unusually talkative, but at least he knew now that he’d saved Grey Worm in Meereen. His death hadn’t been for nothing. The Unsullied commander had survived until the very end.

He rubbed his face again. That wasn’t the only thing the Hound had talked about. The Others are coming. The Long Night is returning. It would be a second Age of Heroes.

*Oh, what strange times that we live in...*

He sat and stewed in his thoughts and his reminiscence, feeling the pressure of all the years he had lived pressing down on his shoulders, thankfully a knocking at his door cut into his revere.

“It's Jaime!” came the Kingslayer's voice from behind the door.

“Come in.” Barristan called after a moment, gathering his thoughts.

The door opened and Jaime Lannister swept into the room. Gone was the golden armour and the white cloak and instead he was decked out in Lannister finery, the gold lion of Lannister stitched blazonly across his chest. This was the Lion of Lannister, not the bitter Kingsguard any more.

Barristan frowned at him, “Ser Jaime,” he cast a disapproving look at the gold Lion, “So you’re going to claim your birthright now?”

Jaime’s smug face turned aghast, “Gods no, Tyrion is Lord now, I'm serving him now,” he retorted his face now contorted with annoyance.

Barristan frowned, “That's it? You will *serve* him?”
Jaime nodded, “I’ve renounced any claim I have to the Rock. I’m not cut out to rule, Tyrion is father’s son, I just have my sword...” he faltered for a moment and grimaced, “That’s all I’m really good at, though we discovered we’re actually a pretty good team like that.” He pulled up a chair and sat next to Barristan, his expression turning thoughtful for a moment.

A silence descended on them as Barristan looked at Jaime, giving him a close scrutinizing look, the Westerlands Knight looked just like the Jaime he knew. Arrogant, self assured and conceited, but after so many years serving together, he could see the differences. The smile was the same, but there was an openness that hadn't been there before, his words had less of a bite to them and were less cutting. He'd seen him talking and dealing with those around him and this Jaime, seemed to be a gentler kind. Perhaps one could even say...a humbler man.

He cast a glance at Jaime's face as the smug look returned...at least a humbler man by Lannister standards.

Barristan thought back to their ride from King's Landing, there had been a lot of time to do nothing but think and talk...and the Hound had been very talkative, a certain unknown issue about Wildfire and the Mad King amongst everything else discussed.

That had been a shocking revelation. He'd seen Jaime in a new light, to stand by a vow and watch thousands burn or to stop the King and break his solemn vow.

He scowled at him, breaching that subject, “Clegane mentioned why you killed Aerys...knowing Queen Daenerys, I understand why she pardoned you of that crime...and I cannot help but agree with her. Aerys's plan was a beastly thing, it is good that he did not have the chance to commit that atrocity.”

Jaime looked chagrined and more than a little guilty now.

“...but you're an idiot for keeping quiet when Stark named you Kingslayer.” Barristan reprimanded, “We all named you an oathbreaker, and cursed you...but under the circumstances, I truly can understand and I cannot find it in myself to condemn you for that act.”

Jaime brightened and smiled that same haughty smile that he was so well known for.

“...but that doesn't excuse all you did with Cersei!” he scowled darkly, “Or everything else your
spawn committed.” Barristan spat in unamused annoyance. Jaime had always been a muddied person, but with the full scope of everything Barristan knew now, he was even more so.

Jaime squirmed in his chair at the compliment and reprimand.

Silence descended on them after Barristan finished, he'd been holding that in his mind, the words that he hadn't imagined he was capable of saying, the stain on the honor the Kingsguard was something he had imagined would never be removed...but much had changed.

As the silence stretched out uncomfortably, and Jaime continued to shift uneasily. Finally, he asked, “What will you do now?”

And that was the crux of the matter, what to do now? From Jaime's words, the Queen would be expecting him...but things were changed now. He had gone to her the first time because of duty. She was the only true Targaryen heir left...but that suddenly wasn't the case now.

“Jon Snow is truly Rhaegar's son?” he asked suddenly.

Jaime gave him a surprised look, “Yes.”

He'd heard it from Jaime that first night in the Red Keep and again many times on the road, from the Hound, that sellsword Bronn and a smattering of the Redcloaks.

Eddard Stark had done the unimaginable, he'd saved and raised Rhaegar's last son as his own.

Duty compelled him to protect the true King. Duty was pulling him North now. To protect his friend's last son. He'd failed Rhaegar at the Trident. He'd failed Rhaenys and Aegon not being with them when the Mountain came...the children's deaths had always lain heavily on him. It was why he'd stayed with the Lannisters till they reached Casterly Rock. He had no wish to see Tommen or Myrcella share a similar fate, it would only weigh on him just as heavily. Innocent children always seemed to be the first causalities of war.

“I was going to return to the Queen, but...if Jon truly is who you say he is...then my duty is to protect my King.” Barristan said gravely. Daenerys would miss him, but duty was duty. He had never shirked it and he had no intention of starting now.
Jaime stared at him for a moment before nodding his head, “As you say. Alright then, I'll personally arrange for a fast ship from Lannisport to the North for you.”

He rose to leave and make the preparations, leaving Barristan to his turbulent thoughts.

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Bronn

He watched as the Hound stared down at Tyrion. The tension was high as the stare off continued in Tyrion's new solar.

“Well what kind of a Lannister cunt would I be if I didn't have a Clegane cunt to help me?” Tyrion finally said breaking the tension.

The Hound scowled for a moment, “Not a very good one I think.”

“Heh, that's probably true,” Tyrion replied with a soft chuckle.

“What about my brother?” the Hound asked suddenly, his tone intense.

“He dies.” Tyrion stated with a finality of tone much too reminiscent of his father than Tyrion would ever care to admit.

“Good. Send me after him.” the Hound retorted quickly.

“No. I have need of a good loyal man here...and Gregor's probably already reached the Riverlands by now. I doubt you'll reach him before the River Lords have strung him up,” Tyrion denied the request.

The Hound huffed unhappily before asking gruffly, “So what now, then?”
“For now, continue being a sworn sword. Protect Tommen and Myrcella, with the truth about them coming out their lives will be very different,” he paused and gave Clegane an amused look, “I'm sure it'll be a more enjoyable job than before.”

The Hound snorted and sneered, “Better than dealing with the little shit, that's for sure.”

Tyrion shrugged, “Well nobody is going to be dealing with Joffrey now.”

The Hound's sneer turned into a happy rictus.

Tyrion gave him a sharp look, “Well what are you waiting for? Get to it!”

The Hound huffed and left leaving him alone with Tyrion, Tyrion cast him a speculative look and then walked around the table and took his seat...but he didn't say anything.

In response, Bronn, nonchalantly, took a seat opposite Tyrion. He gave a him a look and then said, “Now I believe there's the issue of what's owed to me.”

Tyrion raised an eyebrow at him and give him a look, “Of course, we Lannisters always pay our debts.”

“Well this one's been a long time coming,” Bronn retorted dryly. “Lot's of accumulated interest. Plus let's say two lifetimes of service.”

Tyrion just nodded slowly, a small smile coming to his face, “Your words are getting complicated again.”

He ignored the comment “There's the matter of some gold...quite a bit of gold actually...and my castle.” He stared down Tyrion daring him to disagree.

“Of course, the gold matter is easily settled as for a castle...well Castamere is vacant, and it even has rich gold mines,” Tyrion remarked idly with a smug smile on his face, as he took a gulp of wine.
“I am not fucking becoming the Lord of fucking Castamere, just so you can throw that damn song at me whenever you get mad at me!” Bronn cried out unamused by Tyrion's smug smile and smugger option.

“Really? The mines there are still quite rich,” he responded smugly.

“No. Just No.”

Tyrion laughed.

“The Westerlands are pretty damn big, I'm sure there are a whole bunch of castles that you can give me.” Bronn remarked idly.

“True, but I would prefer something directly sworn to Casterly Rock. We do have so much fun together when we are working together,” he added in a happy tone, “And with all that's happening I will definitely need your help.”

Bronn raised a speculative eyebrow at him, “Things aren't as stable here then?”

“Oh no, with both Uncle Kevan and Aunt Genna backing me, my new position is quite secure in the Rock. And enough of my lords seem to remember just what is coming for us. So they won't be a problem,” Tyrion admitted, “that said...Robert is alive and it's just a matter of time till he finds out about Jon and Daenerys.” Tyrion paused and took a deep gulp of his wine, “And won't that be fun...” he deadpanned.

Bronn winced, even a lowly former sellsword like him knew of Robert Baratheon's prodigious rage towards House Targaryen.

“Yes...well that's nothing to do with me...at least for now, we were talking about castles,” Bronn said bringing them back to heart of the matter.

“Yes we were,” Tyrion paused and cocked his head at Bronn quizzically, “How about the Golden Tooth? Lord Lefford only has the one daughter, and he has been looking for a good match for her. She is a little headstrong but also quite beautiful! Much more than Lollys Stokeworth is! Of course,
you'll have to take her name..how does Bronn Lefford, Lord of the Golden Tooth sound?"

Bronn blinked in surprise, the Golden Tooth and House Lefford were one of the Lannister's most powerful and rich bannermen, “It sounds a little too good to be true.” he remarked dryly.

“Lord Lefford is here. It is a small matter to work our charms on him while we're waiting for word from Winterfell,” Tyrion nodded, “Yes- that is an option, Lefford isn't the best tactician, but with you by his side it would secure that path into the Westerlands.”

Bronn gave Tyrion an incredulous look, “Really? You're going to use me like that? Is that all I'm to you? A sword arm?”

“I've always used you like that,” Tyrion snorted, “It's why you're so valuable to me. Plus think of it this way, the Leffords are actually family to the Lannisters of Casterly Rock, you get money, power, a castle and marry into a highborn family. Plus I have no intention of being a Kinslayer this time around...keeping father around to watch my triumph is much too much fun! So that's an extra plus for you.” Tyrion was grinning now.

The damned smug Imp had a point...and it was pretty much everything that he ever wanted finally being given to him and much much more. Of course there were some drawbacks. First of all being they had to survive the Long Night before he would truly be able to enjoy and revel in all of those riches, plus there were other drawbacks.

Bronn gave Tyrion a speculative look, “I'm not sure how I feel about becoming a part of your family...I mean that would actually make your mad sister my kin.”

Tyrion snorted and laughed.

The damned smug Imp had a point...and it was pretty much everything that he ever wanted finally being given to him and much much more. Of course there were some drawbacks. First of all being they had to survive the Long Night before he would truly be able to enjoy and revel in all of those riches, plus there were other drawbacks.

Eddard Stark

Ned stood in trepidation in front of the locked door. Unlike his need to speak with Jon, this was a meeting he had been dreading and putting off for some time...but they were all about to leave Winterfell and he couldn't put it off any more.
He gestured to the guards at the door and they opened the door, with heavy steps he entered, the sound of the door closing behind him echoing in the silent room.

The sole occupant was sitting at a table, a half eaten tray of food sat in front of him. He looked up and his eyes widened as he saw Eddard standing their. He stood up quickly.

“Lord...Stark,” came Theon's halting voice, he gulped audibly. The boy's tone had a strange lilt to it.

His face felt frozen stiff as he met the wide eyes of Theon. He took a moment and stared at the bruised face of Theon Greyjoy. Robb had been pulled off of him fast enough, but his son had still left his mark on Theon. The nose was crocked now, he had two black eyes that were partially healed now and the swollen lips had disappeared completely now.

“Theon,” he said gravely.

Theon flinched at his name and cast his eyes down staring at the floor, Ned could see the him trembling now.

Ned didn't know what to say, he'd imagined how this would go, but now that the moment had come he was at a loss at how to proceed, “What do you have to say for yourself?” he finally managed to say.

Theon mumbled something and didn't raise his head.

Ned's rage suddenly came to the forefront of his mind, he stepped forward and grabbed Theon's face and forced him to face him, “Look at me when I speak to you!”

Theon looked, his eyes wide with shock now, as tears started to stream down his face.

“You betrayed us. You betrayed Robb. What do you have to say for yourself?!?” Ned demanded again.
Theon just shook his head, his mouth opened but no words came. This wasn't the cocky boy he knew once, he looked miserable and downtrodden.

“You were my hostage, but I treated you well. If you had been anywhere else you would have been treated worse, much worse. I raised you along side my own children. Robb was like a brother to you! And still you betrayed him!”

Theon only continued to mumble. His words undecipherable and distant.

“Speak damn you!”

Theon gulped hard and this time he did manage to speak coherent words, “I'm...sorry...”

“Sorry? Understand, Only Jon's command keeps me from taking your head!” Ned thundered beyond angry, his tone as cold as ice, “This is far, far beyond sorry!”

Theon quivered but again, he could not form any coherent words.

Ned was hiding his own trembling now, this wasn't going as he wanted or expected. This strange Theon wasn't what he had expected when he'd come to confront the boy.

Since their reawakening, he'd listened as Robb had raged over Theon's betrayal, as Jon and Sansa explained just how much Theon had paid for his mistakes. He'd helped murder the people of Winterfell. He'd executed Ser Rodrik and pretended to murder Bran AND Rickon. It had cost Robb so much and had only aided in his subsequent demise. Just one more costly mistake for the then King in the North.

He'd wanted to speak and understand why Theon had done those things- though he could see Balon's greasy hand behind the betrayal. All boys wanted to make their father's proud but...Balon was not worthy of anyone's love or respect.

Instead, he found himself boiling with rage and anger...he should have waited it was all too fresh in his mind. He couldn't distance himself enough to be cold and pragmatic. This among everything else that was being thrown at him was just too much. He should have postponed this but he couldn't. By Jon's command Theon would be leaving Winterfell at the same time as them...but he would be going to Torrhen's Square with an escort of Manderly men, from there he'd be placed on a ship to the Iron
Islands, and back to his sister. As per Jon's agreement with Yara Greyjoy.

He let go of Theon's face and stepped back trying to gain perspective as his emotions continued to churn in turmoil. He paced for a moment back and forth in front of Theon. It was too much at times, all that had changed, all the new replacing the old. *His* own betrayal of Robert *tormented* his mind, coming to the forefront of his thoughts at the most inopportune of moments ever since he swore the North to Jon.

He cast it all aside, it all had to be done, for the Living. The Others were coming and nothing else matters now.

He turned back to Theon his face set in stone, “You will leave Winterfell, you will return to the Iron Islands...but if you ever return to the North...I will take your head myself,” his tone was ice as his heart broke at the words he had to say.

Theon’s eyes were wet as he turned away, still unwilling to meet his eyes, “I...I...I...understand.” he mumbled in his strange tone.

Ned turned around and swept out of the room, the guards locking the door behind him. He couldn't afford to spend more time dealing with Theon, he would mourn for the boy he knew later...there was more important things to do.

It was time to leave for the Dreadfort.
Ch20 The Changing Pieces

Chapter Notes

Had a great holiday, saw a lot of sites in northern Europe and Russia. Anyway, we're back with a bang now! :D Lot's of people have been asking for what's coming ;D Special Thanks to Cymraeg (also known as The Dark Scribbler) for letting me bounce ideas off of him concerning Dorne.

Chapter 20 The Changing Pieces

Oberyn Martell

His head ached.

It ached and ached. He grasped the right side of his head and held it tightly. The pressure alleviating the pain for a second before it came back again just as intense. The maester had given him a drought for the pain but that only dulled the pain slightly and he couldn't take milk of the poppy now. He needed all of his wits about him...now more than ever.

The pain was not the worst he had ever felt, the pain that came as he felt his skull crack had been worse but that had been over in an instant not this overwhelming dull aching that never ceased. Nor the itching that came from his new wound.

He scratched at the wound, around the eye patch that covered his right eye and the gaping hole where the eye had been. It was an eternal reminder now of his hubris. And the path that his unbridled rage had led him down.

Even now, everything at times seemed like a dream. He remembered Tyrion Lannister's Trial by Combat, his chance to finally avenge Elia and kill Gregor Clegane. He should have gone for the kill and not played with his prey, but it had been too enticing, the chance to have the Mountain beg for mercy, to have him scream out Tywin Lannister's sins to all the Lords and Ladies watching.

It had been his last mistake of that old life. The last chance of vengeance squandered by his arrogance.
The darkness and pain had consumed him, Ellaria's horror stricken screams the last thing to echo in his ears. The last sound he ever heard in that last life.

 Darkness and pain had consumed him and then suddenly it had all disappeared. The heat and humidity of the air had confused him before he recognized his chambers in the Water Gardens of Dorne.

 Ellaria had been by his side, sleeping peacefully at first. He'd woken her and questioned her but she'd been horrified and confused as he spoke of what he remembered. She called it a nightmare, but deep in his bones, he'd known the truth, even if he couldn't understand what was happening. Or how it was possible.

 Their reunion had came to a sudden halt as the doors to his chambers had suddenly been knocked off their hinges, the doors crashing to the floor with tremendous noise. The hulking and massive Areo Hotah had stood there outlined by doorway, a look of disgust and rage written across his face, his great halberd held at the ready.

 Oberyn had risen, his blood rising at this unwanted intrusion but his words of rage had died on his lips as Hotah had stepped aside and Doran had stalked forward on shaking legs a drawn sword in his hands. His rage had turned into joy as he tried to remember the last time he had seen Doran actually looking martial.

 Oberyn had smiled and opened his arms in welcoming but the joy at seeing Doran and seeing him walking as well, died as without a word Doran ignored him, stepping past him, towards Ellaria and proceeded to put his sword through her heart.

 Time had frozen for him as Ellaria quickly slumped to the ground, her lifeblood spreading across the floor.

 In an enraged fit, he had thrown himself at Doran, sending them both sprawling to the ground. They'd struggled together for a moment before he'd felt the large hands of Hotah grabbing him and throwing him across the room.

 He'd found his own weapon, where he usually left it, by the bed and he'd attacked Hotah, his blood boiling with little sense in his head, he'd attacked the big man, ignoring the sprawled Doran.
Unlike with the Mountain he hadn't played with Hotah, his rage had overridden his better instincts and he'd attacked without respite. The rage lent his arms strength, and he'd driven Hotah out of his room, leaving recovering Doran and Ellaria's cooling corpse behind.

On and on the fight went on. Both men were experts with their chosen weapon. Back and forth they went, down the corridors of the Water Gardens. Men were drawn by the sound of combat and seeing Prince Oberyn battling Prince Doran’s loyal sword Areo Hotah had been the second match that lit the fire that had consumed the Water Gardens.

The first match that lit the fire had been a much more public incident.

All he knew was what the surviving witnesses had seen. Prince Trystane had come to the sparring grounds and without warning had put his spear through Obara's head before anyone could react.

That had been the opening moment of the chaos that consumed the Water Gardens. The first match that lit the fire...the Water Gardens had choked with blood and smoke after that.

In the aftermath, he understood what had happened. Many had thought that Prince Oberyn was staging a coup to remove his brother. Others thought that Doran was purging Oberyn's seed from Dorne. It didn't matter...the result was the same. The unity of the Martell guardsmen had split, some declaring loyalty to Doran and others to Oberyn.

And then the fighting had started...

Oh, how Mother would be ashamed of them now. Oh, how House Martell has fallen because of their own hubris...

To make matters worse, this was the Water Gardens. The peaceful palace had been a both a refuge of innocence and a political home for heirs or spares, children of the various Dornish houses grew up here as guests or guests depending on the House they belonged to and their relationship with House Martell. It had been always a way to strengthen House Martell's ties to Dorne and to politely bind their bannermen to them.

When the dust settled, House Martell no longer had a legal trueborn heir, the Water Gardens was in flames and the pools were all red with the blood of the innocent. The heirs and spares of several noble houses dead in the fighting their small bodies floating in the red waters of the Water Gardens. Blood and rage had consumed what had once been the most peaceful place in Dorne.
Trystane was dead. Obara, Nymeria and Tyene were dead. Houses Yronwood, Uller, Qorgyle, Dalt and Toland had all lost children. Areo Hotah was dead but not without claiming a blood price from Oberyn. Oberyn's right eye was a ruined, useless mess. It was all an unmitigated catastrophe for House Martell. One that screamed weakness to the high heavens.

House Martell was shamed before all of Dorne and the Seven Kingdoms. Oh...how Tywin Lannister would laugh at their misfortune!

When he and Doran had finally spoken, after their retreat to Sunspear that shame had grown to unimaginable heights as Doran told him all that Ellaria and his daughters had done after his death. Doran and Trystane murdered...all because he died fighting the Mountain.

His only solace in all the tragedy was that the manticore venom would have consumed the Mountain painfully. There was no cure for that poison.

Oberyn shook his head, too many dark and consuming thoughts threatened to overwhelm him. He needed to pay attention now. Circumstances were much too tense and disarrayed for carelessness now. And something extra had been eating at Doran for several days now. Something he had yet to share with Oberyn.

He focused on Doran as he paced and stalked back and forth, a cane in his hands, in his own solar in Sunspear. Each step was painful and Oberyn could only imagine the agony that Doran felt...but Doran's rage was numbing the pain...or at least that's what he believed.

“I have had word from Sarella, she comes from Oldtown with news. Important news,” Oberyn cut in interrupting Doran's stalking.

Doran stopped and cast him a look.

“What news?” demanded Doran angrily.

Oberyn frowned and shook his head, “She would not say. She claims it is too dangerous to be trusted to a raven.”
Doran's already dark expression darkened further, “As if we did not have enough problems already! Toland and Dalt men already attack our men in retribution for their lost children. The Yronwoods call for our heads and gather men to attack. And we still have no idea what magic did this!” he shouted in exasperation.

Oberyn looked at his brother, seeing the changed man standing before him. Doran still planned and schemed but his anger simmered much more closer to the surface than before. Before, many had complained and questioned that Doran’s hot dornish blood didn't exist...but that was before the Water Gardens. There were many heads on spikes on display at Sunspear now...all men and women that questioned Doran's commitment to Dorne in the aftermath of the Water Gardens calamity.

All grumbles in Sunspear had disappeared after the executions.

Doran was still speaking, “...Whatever news Sarella brings will have to wait till she arrives, we have more pressing issues at the moment. You will command our men and bring me the heads of all our defiant Lords.” Doran commanded angrily, “They think us weak, but we will show them the bloody truth.”

“And what of you? What news are you hiding brother?” Oberyn said, eyeing Doran suspiciously. Perhaps now Doran would tell him, what had set him further on edge.

Doran turned to him and cast an angry look at him. He stopped pacing and pulled a raven scroll from his pocket. He held it and ran the scroll between his fingers.

“I have debated telling you...it is news from Starfall. Lord Alester Dayne vexes me,” Doran sucked in a deep breath noisily, “It is troubling...and infuriating news,” he sneered “And it turns all of my plans into mere whispers on the winds!” To Oberyn, there was a wild and disturbed look in Doran's eyes.

What news could the sickly Lord of Starfall have for the Prince of Dorne that was so important? Lord Alester Dayne was rumored to be nearing his deathbed and hadn't left Starfall in years. His son was squiring for Lord Beric Dondarrion. His soon to be goodbrother, when the Lightning Lord finally married Lord Dayne's remaining sister.

Oberyn shook his head, nothing came to mind...it yet more uncertainty for them and too much uncertainty already plagued House Martell.
Doran didn’t continue immediately, instead he paced forward and slid into his chair, grimacing in pain as his knees bent. Doran slouched in his chair as his look turned pensive. Oberyn watched his brother, as his eyes turned distant before Doran suddenly looked up. His eyes had turned into hard angry chips now.

“For now his words are secret but it is only a matter of time before this truth spreads,” he grimaced and snarled. “I expect news of what happened at the Water Gardens has already reached Lord Dayne, but still he begs caution and peace.”

Oberyn snorted angrily, “The time for peace is gone. Our men already fight and die! The sands of Dorne will run red with blood before the cries for vengeance are quenched.”

An unhappy look crossed Doran's face before it turned stony, “He also pledges his House and men to the one true King of Westeros. And calls on us to put aside old prejudices and join him pledging to the King.”

Oberyn looked at Doran for a moment before laughing out loud in derision, “One true King? Which one is that? The fat old Stag who laughed and named Elia's butchered children Dragonspawn?! Or the incestuous Lannister bastard? Or that pretentious fool of a boy at Storm's End? Which damned King? There are so many fucking possibilities!” His voice was hard and cutting as he named just a few of the possibilities.

Doran's face was unreadable as he stared at Oberyn, “Jon Targaryen.”

He blinked his remaining eye in surprise. “Who the fuck is Jon Targaryen?!” he asked in surprise. Only Viserys and Daenerys were left...and they were across the Narrow Sea in Pentos now.

Doran's answer was succinct and turned Oberyn's world on it's head.

“Lyanna Stark's trueborn son.” Doran said the words with a sour smile on his lips.

It took him a moment to absorb the answer and all that it implied. It was Oberyn's turn to stalk and rage when he finally grasped the full meaning of the words.

He roared as he jumped from his chair, “That fucking silver haired brooding bastard! Gods damn you Rhaegar to all the Seven Hells! He set her aside?! He set our Elia aside?! For that Northern
whore?!” It was Oberyn's turn to pace Doran's solar, his rage fueling him as he spewed curses and obscenities at the memory of the Silver Prince, Rhaegar fucking Targaryen.

The old memories filled him of that fateful day at Harrenhal. To the Lords' horror Rhaegar had rode past Elia and placed a crown of blue winter roses in Lyanna Stark's lap. The outrage he'd felt and the stilled tongue he'd had to keep because Aerys was there. The looks of rage and scorn on the faces of the Northmen and Stormlords for Rhaegar's dishonorable act. That was the day that the smiles died and it had been death knell for the Dragons. Or so he thought...

The laughter of Aerys Targaryen suddenly echoed in his ears. It had incensed him then and it still did! The Mad King had enjoyed the turmoil his son had created at the tourney. Laughing and laughing, perversely pleased by his son's dishonorable act.

He whorled back to face Doran, “Who is this Jon Targaryen? Where has he been so cowardly hiding all these years?!”

The sour smile turned genuine and strangely, Doran laughed mirthfully for a moment before answering, “Winterfell.”

Oberyn gasped and gaped in surprise. Winterfell?! The Starks had betrayed the Baratheons? For fifteen years?! The honorable Eddard Stark betrayed Robert Baratheon?!

Oberyn threw back his head and laughed at the sweet irony of that. Suddenly, he could understand Doran's mirthful laughter. The Baratheons' power was even more tenuous than the Usurper realised. Oh to see Robert Baratheon when that truth was revealed to him! The North would support their Lord's nephew...and with the North came their Lord's goodfamily; the Tullys. Riverrun would join with Winterfell...though what that madwoman, Lysa Arryn would do was anyone's guess. At the very least, it was the North and the Riverlands rising up in rebellion against Robert...

The irony, the delicious irony! Oh such sweet nectar!

“...Eddard Stark's bastard is not his bastard.” Doran continued.

Oberyn laughed again, “I had heard that the bastard takes after his father more than Stark's trueborn sons...except he's not his son!” he laughed again. He stopped his pacing and instead took back his seat, opposite his brother.
Doran was looking less angry than before and there was a strange glint in his eye now.

Oberyn’s mirth disappeared as he recognized the glint, “You cannot be seriously thinking of it?!” he spat angrily, realizing that Doran might just be doing precisely that.

Doran waved off Oberyn's accusation with an irritated look, “At the moment it does not matter who we support as King. Dorne rises against us and nothing can be done or decided till we bring them all to heel.”

Oberyn grimaced, for a moment, he had forgotten just how precarious House Martell's position had become. The fighting had already started and soon he would show them the full might of Sunspear.

“Brother, fulfill your duties. Go show our enemies the strength of House Martell... Unbowed, unbent, unbroken,” Doran's eyes shone with defiance and rage now.

Oberyn silently rose and bowed before leaving Doran to his scheming. He had preparations to make before he left. Thoughts of Dragons, Wolves, Stags and Lions danced in his mind. And of the silent serpent that would strike when ready...

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Olenna Tyrell

Watching her oaf of a son strategize was a painful thing to watch...at least he'd been convinced of the truth of their return. Enough of his sycophants remembered to convince him. Meetings dragged on and on as he proposed one useless and stupid strategy after another. Thankfully, he'd called his banners quickly enough and men were already securing their borders, especially those with the Westerlands.

He'd called his impromptu council meeting together again now, she was here in his meeting chambers along with the Lords of their nearest bannermen who had already arrived to reinforce Highgarden.

Mace sat at the head of the table holding up a raven scroll and beaming widely.
She wondered what the oaf was smiling about now.

Mace held up and shook the raven scroll triumphantly, “Good news! Mother! My loyal Lords! My Goodfather, Lord Leyton Hightower writes he is dealing with traitors and will march to Highgarden soon...he’s probably already on the move by now! And he’s probably already dealt with the Tarlys by now!” he proclaimed with a beaming smile, “And dear, loyal, cousin Paxter is with him! They’re both already moving to reinforce Highgarden. With the Reach secure, our enemies will see the might of Highgarden and I will crush them!” he proclaimed in the same arrogant and stupid tone that he always used.

Olenna paused as the assembled Lords cheered and clapped, that was actually very good news. Also, very surprising and troubling news. Between the Hightowers and Redwynes, they had enough men to completely overwhelm Randyll Tarly...but Lord Leyton Hightower hadn't left Oldtown in...far too many years for Olenna's ease of mind. All through the War of Five Kings and the unrest that followed, he hadn't budged from the Hightower. So why now? Why was he personally coming to Highgarden? Why not his heir, Baelor?

“Leyton is coming here?” she asked cautiously.

Mace continued to beam and nodded, completely missing the significance of her question, “My goodfather always stands by his duty to me.”

Olenna rolled her eyes and then narrowed them as she glared at Mace for his obtuseness. She would have reprimanded him and questioned Leyton's motives but the door to the meeting chambers burst open. Maester Lomys raced to Mace's side. Lomys was out of breath, his chest heaving as he gasped for air. His face was pale and there was fear and sorrow in his eyes.

“A...huff...raven...huff...from...huff...King’s Landing! From...huff...Lord...huff...Renly!” Lomys managed to exclaimed between breaths.

Mace frowned and grabbed the open message from the maester. He read quickly before freezing for a moment before his face cracked and he slumped bonelessly into his chair.

Fear fluttered in Olenna's heart.

The Lords looked amongst themselves, while casting nervous looks at their liege lord.
“Mace! What does it say?” she called out, breaking the silence.

Mace didn't answer, he just sat there in despair.

Olenna frowned and looked to Lomys who looked to have finally caught his breath.

“Well? You're read the message?” she demanded irately of the maester, who only nodded once, “Well spit it out! What else has happened?”

Sorrow dominated Lomys face as he spoke, his voice filled with anguish, “There was fighting in King's Landing...Loras...was slain.”

For a moment there was a pain in her breast but just as quickly it disappeared.

*Oh, my sweet boy...Loras, you daft fool...*

The Lords reacted just as she would have expected. They were in a complete uproar now. Mutterings and whispers and shouts of anger.

In the midst of this, Mace finally found his voice. It held a strange and dangerous lilt to it as he spoke, “Renly says...he says it was the Kingslayer. The Kingslayer slew my boy!”

Suddenly he stood, his chair clattering to the floor behind him as he began raging and screaming, vowing bloody vengeance on the Lannisters. He stalked back and forth along the length of the chamber before finally turning and calling for maester Lomys.

“Lomys! Send word to Lord Mathis, he's to gather the Houses around him and invade the Westerlands! After my goodfather arrives, we will *all* join him! I will have Lannister blood for my boy!” Mace cried out, his face was red and spittle was flying from his mouth in his rage as he commanded the maester.

*War...it would be war...much earlier than the first time. Oh Margery! Her sweet granddaughter would be crushed when she heard the news.*
For the first time in a long time, Olenna found her tongue silent as she sat absorbing and thinking of the implications of this...of the sheer scale of this calamity. Highgarden no long had a proper heir! Whatever happened after...the Lannisters had to pay in blood now. The Tyrells had to show their strength now or be finished for a second time. And for once, her oafish son knew what had to be done.
Chapter 21 Introspection

Eddard Stark

It had been two days since leaving Winterfell. They were making good time, and at this pace it was only a matter of days till they reached the Dreadfort.

Between Houses Stark, Manderly and Reed, near five thousand men marched forth from Winterfell. They'd left some Reed and Manderly men at Winterfell with Sansa...Sansa in charge. That had come as a shock when Jon had left her in command as his representative. Catelyn had turned quite a few colours when Jon done that, naming her young daughter as his emissary- as a Hand of the King in all but name. And such an emissary had much more power and authority than the Lady of Winterfell, but Sansa had Jon confidence in ways Catelyn would never have. She had his confidence and Ned knew all that Jon hadn't told him, Sansa already knew.

Ned shook his head, in all so bewildering.

They hadn't been the only ones leaving Winterfell, Theon was banished with a company of loyal Manderly men, they were on their way to Torrhen's Square and from there, Theon would find himself on a ship bound for Pyke.

He cast that thought aside. Leaving Winterfell, Jon had taken Robb and Bran with them. Ned had taken Jory with them to help command the men, Rodrick remained in Winterfell. They were been accompanied by Howland and Jojen. Meera had stayed behind along with Lord Manderly in Winterfell. Lord Manderly had placed one of his trusted knights to command his men and sent along with them.

King Jon...Gods that sounded strange! He led the way, setting an example for all the men. He spoke well, was polite and gave every man his due and gave all men respect no matter their standing. He set an example for all and Ned found himself proud of the man he'd become. The Stark men were confused remembering the young boy they'd known in Winterfell and trying to come to terms with the man he had become after they died. The Manderly and Reed men saw the man and the Dragon King he was now. That he had become in that dark and treacherous future.
Robb was the same. Diligent and honorable. The Young Wolf they called him. Each man who remembered respected him as a veteran commander be they Stark, Reed or Manderly. An honorable man and worthy man, a true Stark and one day...a good Lord of Winterfell.

They both went about their duties as men not as the boys he'd once known.

And inside he wept at the costs they'd paid to become these men...all because of his mistakes.

The first day they'd camped he'd been the one to put off his conversation with Jon again, especially after speaking with Theon. He'd needed time to cool down after that. He'd been so angry as the knowledge of Theon's actions reverberated in his mind. All he could see was the boy he'd been. And all things he'd done to wrong House Stark and the North. Sansa had whispered to him all the horrors done to him by Ramsay and yet in that moment as Ned stood in front of him, all he'd remembered had been the wrongs and deaths Theon had caused.

Theon's blubbering hadn't helped, he hadn't recognized the creature looking back at him with Theon's eyes. He'd seen broken men before...those that had been destroyed by war and Robert, who at the end, had been destroyed by peace and the crown that had been forced on him by fate. Theon...he never seen such a look in a man's eyes before.

It was the second night now...a second day's travel distance from Winterfell and he knew he had to speak with Jon now. There was no more time to hide...and Howland kept looking at him and giving him his damn knowing look. His friend was far too perceptive, much to Ned's annoyance.

Ned walked through the camp, the men nodded at him in respect as they passed him. It was a simple camp they hadn't pitched any tents, they had sleeping rolls with the House standards flying over where the Lords and King was sleeping. The Stark direwolf flew next to the red dragon of House Targaryen. The Black lizard-lion of House Reed was pitched elsewhere as was the merman of House Manderly.

As he approached their camping site, he saw Bran leaning back against a tree, Hodor sitting by his side, Jojen was on the other side and Summer lay sleeping at his feet. His hackles were raised as he neared and saw Bran's eyes open and completely white. Bran's body may have been there but his mind was...elsewhere. Neither Robb nor Jon were there.

Jojen heard him as he approached. Howland's son looked much to serious all the time. He wasn't as emotionless as Bran had become, but the boy was strange...at times his eyes looked ancient.
“His Grace is walking the camps now,” Jojen said without prompting, “He should be checking on the horses by now.” Those ancient eyes were watching him now.

The hairs on the back of his head stood up at Jojen's unlooked for answer.

“...this is the best time to speak with him,” the boy finished with an expectant look.

He didn't answer the boy, he just struggled to keep his face blank as he nodded back politely before going to find Jon.

A brisk walk to the outskirts of the camp brought him to where the horse were being housed. There were guards walking their rounds about, but they kept their distance from Jon as he tended to his own horse.

As he approached, Ned steeled himself and called out gravely, “We need to talk Jon,” he began.

Jon stopped brushing his horse and turned to face Ned. Despite the near darkness, the dark colours of his clothes were still distinguishable from each other. The dark red and black still could be seen clearly. As could the great Red Dragon that was stitched blazonly across the chest of his tunic.

That had been another surprise. Sansa's time before they left had been anything but idle. Whatever time she'd had left over from preparing Winterfell for the winter, she'd been spending stitching and making new clothes for Jon. And it hadn't been just her, Sansa had co-opted the skills and time of many of the ladies of Winterfell. All his new clothes were done in red and black. All with the Red Dragon of House Targaryen. It all made Jon stand out and brought out startled looks from everyone the first time he'd worn the clothes. She had even managed to customize his armour, she'd had Mikken engrave the Targaryen dragon all over Jon's armour.

Sansa had smiled smugly as she observed the results of her work, though she had lamented that she hadn't had time to properly fashion him a crown.

What would you think of him now, Lya? What would you think of me? I tried to keep my promise.

Jon was looking at him now, with a resigned look on his face. His eyes betrayed nothing and they
stood looking at each other for a long moment before Jon sighed.

“Aye, we do,” he said sadly. He looked around them before gesturing for Ned to follow him.

Ned followed and Jon led them away from the horses. They walked and reached a small clearing, within the camp but well away from most everyone else.

Jon turned back to Ned, “I heard what happened with Theon,” he began, “…you were a little hard on him.”


“Sansa and I saw him before we left, she hadn't seen him that bad since Ramsay still had him. He's not the Theon you once knew. No one is harder on Theon than Theon now. He's not glib or smug anymore...not after what Ramsay did to him,” Jon explained in a troubled voice.

Ned pursed his lips, his feelings ran rampant through him. On the one hand, he knew that he'd come down on Theon harder than he wanted. He didn't want to admit it, but he had to, all the events that had happened, all the changes had gotten to him. His patience was strained to breaking point and no matter how he tried to be calmer, his own wolfsblood was bubbling closer to the surface than he was comfortable with.

On the other hand, Theon had betrayed Jon and sacked Winterfell...and that was not something any Stark could easily forgive. Or forget.

Ned remained silent and didn't retort. Jon was eyeing him with an unreadable expression in his eyes, his face was blank and for a moment Ned imagined that he was actually looking in a mirror. Was this what others felt they were faced with his own judgment?

“This isn't what I wanted to talk about,” Ned finally managed to say.

Jon's face became graver.

“...I'm sorry Jon.” Ned began, “I should have told you the truth. You should have known about your
mother before joining the Night's Watch, you should have known everything, but...” he trailed of as
his words failed him. What could he say? What excuse could he make for his failure?

“She made you promise father. *Promise me Ned*, she said. She *begged* you to keep me safe. You
couldn't break that promise,” Jon stated gravely, his eyes not leaving Ned's.

Ned felt faint, the blood draining from face as Lyanna's final words were quoted back at him by her
son. Words he couldn't possibly know. Words that he hadn't even shared with Howland. Words that
had haunted and tormented Ned since the Tower of Joy.

“How do you know those words?” he demanded hoarsely.

Jon gave him a commiserating smile, “Bran told me. He was there at the Tower of Joy. He saw
everything that happened there.”

Of course it was Bran. The Three eyed Raven sees everything.

Ned felt like banging his head against a wall. *Every. Single. Time.* Every single time, something
unnerved him so much, it was *always* Bran's fault.

“You had to protect me from Robert. All he saw was Dragonspawn. I know what Tywin Lannister
had done to my *siblings,*” Jon's hands clenched in anger, “Siblings I will *never* know,” he spat
angrily.

Ned felt another stab of pain at that. The small bloody bodies of Rhaenys and Aegon, wrapped in
Lannister red were yet another of his failures. The siblings Jon would *never* have a chance to know.
If he hadn't been distracted by Jaime Lannister's kingslaying, he might have reached Elia and the
children before the Mountain!

Again Ned cursed the damn Kingslayer and his foul actions.

“I told you that first night, I understand. It was an untenable position. There was no perfect solution.”
He stopped and gave Ned a kind smile, “There's nothing to forgive...” he paused again,
“Though...all things aside, it would have been nice if Lady Stark could have been a *little* nicer to
me.”
Ned reddened with embarrassment, Cat's actions had always strained his honor and played on his mind. In the aftermath of truth and the changes, Cat had been treading on very thin ice, and she knew it.

Ned cleared his throat, “I am sorry that I did nothing. Cat has always been…” he stumbled over the right words.


Ned winced and cleared his throat, unhappy to have Southern thrown in his face. He'd heard it too many times from his own bannermen for his own comfort.

“Despite her, Robb, Sansa, Arya, and Rickon are my siblings. My cousins are my siblings. Nothing will change that. Winterfell is the home I always longed for through everything that happened, I am King now, but I will always be of the North,” Jon stated evenly, “But I am also of the South now. For one, I have more family now.”

Ned frowned at Jon's blatant omission, “What about Bran?”

Jon's lips thinned, “Bran will always be my brother...but the Three eyed Raven is not Bran.”

It was Ned's turn to feel anger. It was useless to feel anger now, but it still bothered him. He quickly jumped to another topic his nerves were frayed enough without touching on the creature Bran had become.

“The rest of your family?” asked Ned. The rest of House Targaryen...what was left it anyway. Daenerys and Viserys. They were across the Narrow Sea now.

It was Jon's turn to become dour. For a moment he looked like the brooding young boy he always known and the King he was now.

“I met Maester Aemon when I first came to Castle Black,” Jon stated, a smile started playing on his lips.
Maester Aemon? He thought in confusion for a moment before his mind reminded him who exactly the maester of Castle Black had been before he'd joined the Citadel. It jarred him as he realised that Aemon would be Jon's, several greats, Uncle.

“...I will be glad to see him again. He is a good and wise man,” Jon said with a proud smile. “He shared with me a lot of wisdom before he died.”

“How did he die?” Ned asked, curios.

Jon nodded, “In the middle of all the tragedies and battles that were happening, old age finally caught up with him.” He explained in mild disbelief and grudging respect, “It will be good to see him again, especially now that I know that truth.”

Ned nodded understanding the sentiment, “And what of your other relations...what of Daenerys? Sansa and Arya have spoken very highly of her.” She had to be a special woman to gain the respect of both his quarrelsome daughters. He had never known them to agree on much...if anything before.

Jon suddenly had a look of longing in his eyes, “Daenerys is...special. I met her as the King in the North, looking for allies against the Others. After the Night's King killed one of her dragons...we became...close. We stayed close till the end.”

Ned started, “You and her were...close?” The intensity of that word triggering alarms in his mind.

Jon gave him a chagrined smile, “Very close.”

Understanding came to him, “Oh...” Close. Targaryen close. Yes, Lyanna was definitely going to be waiting for him with a heavy mace now.

Jon remained silent, just giving Ned a look.

The silence deepened setting Ned on edge. He dragged a hand through his hair, “And this...this is something that will happen again? It is decided?”
Jon’s resolve seemed to break for a moment before he answered, “No.”

Ned was taken aback by the answer, he frowned in surprise, “No?”

Jon nodded. “We will do as duty dictates.” He sighed before continuing, “We talked before the end. Several misunderstanding aside, I do love her. And I know she loves me. But we have to do what is best for Westeros, not what we desire.” He began pacing back and forth, deep in thought. He spoke as he paced, “Depending on how things are changed, I may end up married off to Margaery Tyrell to secure the Reach in our favor. She may have to marry a Lord Paramount...Edmure Tully is a possibility...we even discussed the probability of her marrying Robb to satisfy the Northern Lords’ sense of honor and justice.”

Ned stared in surprise. Robb married to the woman Jon loved? Lya would be waiting for him with a rusty knife if that happened! He knew how agonizing duty could be! Violet eyes returning to haunt him again, now more than ever.

“But all of those plans were part of the original plan. Everything has changed now,” Jon finished in unease.

They both stood there pensive as unpleasant possibilities continued to occur to Ned.

“You have an uncle as well. Viserys. What of him?” He asked, moving the conversation forward. Viserys could also be used to secure Jon’s throne.

Jon expression turned darker. He was silent for a long moment, “Viserys was his father’s son,” he admitted slowly.

Ned winced and then frowned greatly. A second Mad King was not something anyone would tolerate, “If that is the case what will you do with him?” he asked unhappily.

“Best case, he’ll be locked away in some remote tower. He’ll want for nothing, but he’ll have no power. No matter how mad he is...he's still family,” Jon said with a grimace.

Ned nodded sagely, “Tis the honorable thing to do...but what if...”
Jon waved a placating hand in Ned's direction, “He could insult the Dothraki again...or try something with Daenerys's dragons...” he paused and let out a heavy breath, “That would neatly deal with that problem. But whatever happens it will be Daenerys's decision in the end, not mine. His fate is hers to decide.”

Ned paled as he understood Jon's words. A dead Viserys would make matters much simpler...but Jon was no Kinslayer. He paused as he repeated Jon's words mentally, “What did you mean insult the Dothraki, again?”

Coldness gripped Ned's insides as Jon quickly explained. He told him about Viserys's first death. Threatening to cut out his own sister's unborn child was something that would not have been tolerated amongst the Highborn of Westeros...never mind the barbaric Dothraki. Khal Drogo's actions were far from merciful...but he doubted any Westerosi Lord would have acted differently. A quick trial first at least, then an equally quick execution probably.

Ned became lost in his thoughts, this conversation had been as heavy and emotionally draining as he imagined it would have been...but it brought more to light than he had imagined.

Jon and Sansa were still keeping things from him...but he knew they'd tell him when they were ready. He couldn't force it.

“Was there anything else you wanted?” Jon asked when Ned remained silent.

Ned shook himself from his revere.

“No, Jon. I think I've said all that needed to said,” Ned said with brooding smile.

Jon nodded, he gave Ned a hard look, “I can only do what duty compels me to do now. No matter what, we have to defeat the Others, all other concerns come after that.”

Ned nodded, a sense of pride filling his gut at Jon's commitment. He was surprised when Jon suddenly came to him and grabbed him, pulling him into a hug. He returned the hug quickly, happy to have this reassurance. The boy he knew still existed under the King's Duty.

“You're always going to be father no matter what,” Jon said hoarsely into his ear. “Thank you for everything, Father.”
Ned gripped him harder for a moment before finally letting go of Jon. They stepped apart and Ned looked again at the man Jon had become.

*I will keep my promise Lya...and you would be so proud of him...*

He nodded once before turning around and walking away...before Jon could see the tears in his eyes.

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**Jon Targaryen**

He watched with a lighter heart as the man that was his father in all but blood walked away. The talk he'd been dreading and avoiding had happened...and it had been less painful than he imagined for either of them.

No shouting. No accusations. No recriminations...apart from Lady Stark, but that was always going to be sticking point between them.

Still...it had brought painful thoughts to the surface. He sighed, he'd been trying not to think of Daenerys. Bran kept saying she was fine, that the dragons had been reborn, but he wouldn't be happy till they received some word from her. Never mind what arrangements they might be forced into in the future. His words to his uncle hadn't helped. If he focused too much, it would distract him from what he had to do. His focus *had* to be on the Others. Nothing else mattered till they were defeated.

A nuzzling at his feet caused him to look down, Ghost had come to him when he wasn't looking. Ghost latched onto Jon's pant's leg pulling at him. He followed the urging and bent down to scratch at Ghost's head. Ghost was a still a growing pup now, he was still small- smaller than a dog but he was growing as rapidly as Jon remembered. Already, he couldn't be considered a runt any more.

“Hey boy, that went well, didn't it?” Jon asked.

Ghost ignored the question and leaned into the hand that was scratching his head, closing his red eyes as he enjoyed the sensation.
Jon sighed, it had gone better, but there was still much more that Uncle needed to know... would know, when the time was right, “I'll tell him about Arya soon enough. And Jorah. And Jaime. The right time will come.”

Ghost lifted his head away from Jon's hand and sniffed noisily, giving him a knowing, dubious look that a direwolf pup should not have been able to give.

“There will be a right time to tell him. I'll tell him about Arya, Jorah and Jaime when it's the right time,” Jon said in annoyance.

Ghost's red eyes just continued staring back, unconvinced.

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Cersei Lannister

She held her knees to her chest as she languished in one of the Black Cells.

The days were starting to run into each other, sitting in the darkness waiting for whatever came next. She didn't know how many days had pasted since the madness came. She didn't know what Robert and Renly were thinking, she just knew that everything had crumbled. She hadn't recognized the Renly that had confronted her. He'd looked more like Robert when he was angry than that weak sword swallower she knew Renly to be.

Her heart had frozen in fear as he named her precious children as Jaime's bastards. He'd dragged her screaming from her rooms all through the Red Keep till they'd reached the courtyard around the stables.

They had been a battle ongoing, she saw the dead bodies of Redcloaks littered amongst the rest of the dead. But many Lannister men had been gathered in the courtyard as Renly and his men approached...and for a moment she'd seen her salvation. He'd been sitting golden and as beautiful as ever, astride his warhorse. Myrcella had been sitting safe with him, protected by her true father.

Jaime would save her, he'd cut down Renly and all his men. Then they'd ride off back to the safety
of Casterly Rock with the children.

She'd screamed and Renly had shouted his obscene demands.

Jaime had seen her and frozen...

Then the impossible had happened.

She couldn't even scream after that. Her mind refusing to accept what was happening. She had to have heard Jaime wrong, he was incapable of saying such words!

It was a nightmare!

It *had* to be a nightmare!

For so many days, she couldn't believe it was anything but a nightmare....

It was not possible that Jaime...*her Jaime* had left her to die!

...*no worse*!

Actually told Renly to *kill* her!

And what *madness*? Jaime was the mad one now! Renly was mad as well! They were all mad! She was the sane one!

She had to have heard Jaime wrong!

Jaime and Her. They were one. Two halves of the golden Lannister legacy. Nothing could drive them apart! Not Robert Baratheon! Not Father! Not even the gods themselves!
She didn't know why she was still alive, if Robert truly knew, she should already be dead. Nothing would stay his hand if he knew.

No...Renly must have acted without enough evidence...but if so, why was she still in a cell? If that was the case, Robert should have freed her by now...

She shook her head, nothing made sense!

She grit her teeth as her anger threatened to overtake her.

Whatever had happened she at least took solace that all her children were safe with Jaime. He'd taken them with him as he left. Whatever madness was afflicting Jaime, he'd still protected the children.

She took a deep steadying breath, controlling her rage.

Jaime had forsaken...but Father...he would come for her!

She was still alive...and Father would come for her!

She fed off her rage and imagined what Father would do to those that had wronged them.

She would survive...and they would all pay for this!

Chapter End Notes

Author's Notes: Hope you liked that :) I just added the Cersei POV because why the hell not? Her delusions are always a fun read :D lol Anyway, don't forget to Review! :D
Chapter 22 This is too much change...

Daenerys Targaryen

She watched from the balcony of her new rooms, as her dragons lounged across the empty courtyard of what was formerly the Prince of Pentos's palace. Laying spread out in the middle of the courtyard was Drogo, enjoying the midday sun. Rhaegal and Viserion were splayed out lazily above and across arches. The arches that also happened to be entrances into the palace.

She mused amused, they were a menace to everyone trying to move about or enter the Palace. These were Rhaegal and Viserion's favourite sleeping places, much to the dismay and terror of her loyal subjects. Most people had taken to using the servants entrances when coming to the palace.

On the other hand, they also provided a layer of security and statement of power that no-one had been willing to test...

She sighed, Drogon, Rhaegal and Viserion. She'd tried to name them something else, but nothing except the original names felt right. She huffed in annoyance. It was done and despite Jorah's suggestions that other names may be better, it was done. They'd stay Drogo, Rhaegal and Viserion.

She huffed again. She could admit to herself that she was nervous. Events had been moving forward remarkably well. The turmoil that plagued Meereen after her takeover wasn't here. Though the city's proximity to Braavos and her Dothraki probably had something to do with it.

Unlike in Slaver's Bay, the antislavery sentiment was much higher here. Braavos was founded by runaway slaves and anyone trying to fund a second reborn 'Sons of the Harpy' would be lacking any nearby allies to help undermine her rule. And as always, the traditional fear- or rather terror, of the Dothraki that so many Essosi had could be relied upon to crush and quell any thoughts of rebellion against her.

Which was a good thing, there wasn't enough time to get into a long drawn out fight here in Essos. Westeros was calling and there were preparations for the Long Night that had to be done.

News from Westeros was still sparse...more like little to none, she thought unhappily. The unseasonably bad weather and rough seas had caused many delays in trade and travel. Only a single ship had docked from Westeros and they had already been at sea when the spell brought a couple of sailors back.

She shook her head, that was out of her control. All she could do now was consolidate and wait for her dragons to grow to a rideable size. She would prepare her armies and wait for the signal from Jon to cross the Narrow Sea and reinforce the Wall and take the fight to the Others.

She began pacing in the balcony, her worry returning to her. She missed Missandei and Grey Worm. She prayed they were well in Astapor though she shuddered at what must be happening there. Whispers of bloody uprisings in Slaver's Bay had reached them, but nothing on who was winning there.

She turned back to the balcony frustrated. Looking down, Drogo had awoken from his nap and
was stretching, he let out a high pitched yawn. A roar by any other that reverberated across his courtyard. And it was undisputedly his. Viserion and Rhaegal opened their eyes and roared back but in muted tones before returning to their slumbers.

Daenerys smiled indulgently at her children, they were coming along splendidly, the spell that Bran had brought back from Valyria had worked wonders. For one they were growing faster than before, more than two weeks later and they'd grown more than they had in the first time around. More importantly, the spell gave her a modicum more of control over them. They were still Dragons, untameable and prideful, but that extra control spoke volumes of her power over them, hence why she letting them lounge around in the middle of the palace and not finding them some place more remote. Not to mention safer to all those around the dragons.

She had to stifle a sudden laugh as a small group of Dothraki walked through one the arch ways and caught sight of Drogo in the middle of the courtyard. They froze, fear blossoming on their faces, which turned down right comical as the hot air from Viserion's breath made them look up and see him sprawled above them, over the arch.

They disappeared so fast back the way they came it brought out a snort of laughter from her.

This brought her mind back to the matter of the Dothraki. That was another thing had surprised and stumped her for a while. The sheer number of Dothraki that had come to Pentos surprised her, at first she had been mystified as to how so many had know to come to her here in Pentos. After talking with enough of them, she realised that it was no coincidence.

They'd all been dreaming, dreams of a chained three headed red dragon. The dream had shown herds of horses turning and running towards the chained dragon. When the horses arrived the dragon would break free from the chains. The dragon would rear back then let out an earthshattering roar, as the horses bowed down before the might of the dragon. Various variations of this dream had come to most of her loyal Dothraki, at least the ones here with her in Pentos now.

Thank you Bran.

It had to be Bran, she knew no other sorcerer with the power to do such a thing. Or reach so many people so quickly. So at least she knew that Bran still had his power and was working to pull together whatever scraps of the plan was left.

“Khaleesi, it is time, the Khal is waiting for you,” Irri informed her, the handmaiden's voice was light but tinged with a modicum of trepidation, as she cut off Daenerys's revere.

Daenerys turned and nodded at Irri, as her anxiety returned, the reason behind her anxiety being that Drogo had requested politely a audience with her.

She adjusted her clothes nervously, “Let us go see what Drogo desires.”

Unlike before, she'd made Drogo wait, it was a calculated risk. She was unsure of how he'd react but she had to show him who was the dominant one here.

She was the Mother of Dragons, the Unburnt and Queen of Pentos...and he was just one Khal. Khal to a very weakened khalasar now.

She paraded through the doors of her audience chamber, aloof and untouchable, her loyal guards, Unsullied and Dothraki by her side, walking past the waiting Drogo and his Bloodriders without a glance, only she after she ascended her throne did she deign to look at him and acknowledge him.
Irri stood to her right as her honored handmaiden. Qhono and Rakharo stood to her left as her trusted commanders. Jorah was absent, he had other duties to perform for her.

She raised her chin defiantly and said, “Be welcome Khal Drogo and speak. I will hear you.”

Drogo stood in front of her throne, his Bloodriders standing at his back. Or rather the few Bloodriders he had left. The rest had deserted him and sworn fealty to her after coming to Pentos. He stepped forward his smoldering eyes locked on her.

“Moon of my life...the Ancient Dragon Lords of Old Valyria have returned in you,” Drogo proclaimed gruffly in dothraki.

She raised an eyebrow at him, unsure of where he was going with this. All day she had had reservations and fears of what Drogo would do now. With so many Dothraki coming to her and swearing allegiance to her, his khalasar was growing smaller by the day. His power weakening and his strength waning. It was not a situation that any Khal would tolerate and had a great deal of potential to turn violent if Drogo tried anything.

“I am the Mother of Dragons...the resemblance is expected,” she retorted mirthfully letting a small smile come to her lips.

A wave of laughter moved through those assembled in her court at her comment.

Drogo's face went blank and he had an unreadable expression on his face, the smoldering desire filled look in his eyes disappearing. She'd learned to read his moods in the last life but she'd never seen him like this before, “With not a blade raised or blood shed...you have defeated me...” he trailed off.

Her guards tensed and went for their weapons, as his hand went to his arakh. He drew it and her men jumped to put themselves between her and Drogo. The people around him moving hastily away from him and his men, expecting violence to erupt at any minute. His men remained where they stood, unmoving.

She frowned at him. What was he planning? If he was going to attack, he would already have done so...

He didn't move towards her, he stood there, his arakh in hand. She gestured to her men to stand down, showing him no fear despite the fluttering of her stomach. Their eyes met and she saw no hostility there only the same unreadable look.

With one sudden swift move, Drogo cut his braid off and then held it up in front of the whole court. With a second quick movement, he threw it at Daenerys's feet, “You have beaten me. You have taken my khalasar from me. I am Khal no longer.”

Daenerys stopped herself from gaping, it was unseemly for a Queen to gape...never mind the Mother of Dragons.

Drogo sheathed his arakh and knelt to her, “Command me, Khaleesi.” His Bloodriders joined him in kneeling to her.

The Dothraki among her guards gaped in surprise, Irri standing by her side looked at the Khal with unabashed shock.

She found her voice despite the shock she felt tingling through her body, “Drogo, son of Bharbo, blood of my blood, rise. Stand with pride as a mighty warrior, bound to the Khaleesi of the Great
Grass Sea. I accept your fealty and I will not abuse your loyalty.”

She turned to Qhono, gesturing towards him, “Qhono, see to Drogo and my new and loyal men.”

She dismissed him with a wave of her hand and he left with Qhono, giving her a deep bow as he left. His braid was left where it had fallen. Drogo left without any other word, his former Bloodriders rising following him out.

She watched till the doors to her audience chamber closed behind Drogo. Slowly as if in a trance she rose from her throne and walked to the fallen braid. She bent down and took it into her hands carefully as if it was a snake that would bite her.

She felt disoriented as she held the braid and ran her hand over it. The touch and smell of the hair reminding her of Drogo and the good times they had once shared.

Despite everything and how things had started once, by the end there had been good times.

But now...she didn't how to react.

The second meeting of the day, found her with Jorah in her new solar, she'd delegated the rest of her waiting audiences and petitions to be heard by her newly appointed councilors in the aftermath of Drogo's unexpected submission.

She was still feeling lightheaded after Drogo's show of fealty. And she was still holding Drogo's braid in one hand, running her thumb over it.

Jorah was standing at attention, waiting patiently to speak. He had a thoughtful look on his face. Ever since her return to power, he'd been by her side and enforcing her will. She had also give him a very delicate task after the dragons had been hatched.

He was responsible for keeping everyone from killing Viserys.

He was the only she trusted to do it without beating Viserys black and blue. Or cutting out his tongue. He was probably the only one who wouldn't kill Viserys in a fit of frustration...probably...

“You've heard?” Daenerys asked Jorah pointedly.

Jorah nodded gravely, “Aye.”

“And?” she asked with an arched eyebrow.

He shrugged, “It is one less problem for us. Another step towards properly consolidating your army, my Queen.”

She began pacing in her solar for a moment. Jorah was right, her own thoughts mirrored his, but it didn't make the unexpected change any easier to swallow.

She pursed her lips, giving him a long look. She signed and placed the braid on the table, taking a seat behind her desk, “You had more business for me?” she asked expectantly. Whatever Jorah had to say would- could not be more surprising than what had already happened.

He nodded in discomfort, the thoughtful look intensifying on his face, “Yes, my Queen. Your brother has been asking for you.”
Daenerys grimaced, her brother. As if today wasn't hard enough, she thought in annoyance.

She'd been keeping him locked up and away from everyone else in a bid to keep him out of trouble. It had worked so far...at least until now. She didn't know what to do with him.

“And what has Viserys done?” she asked grimly. Her hopes for him weren't high.

Jorah shrugged, and gave her a strange smile, “He hasn't actually done anything...”

Daenerys raised a surprised eyebrow at this, then what was the problem?

“...he's actually been rather...biddable. He's also been asking for you...politely,” Jorah stressed the strange words he used to describe Viserys.

So apparently the surprises weren't finished for the day...

“Viserys...biddable? Polite?” incredulous couldn't properly describe her tone.

Jorah nodded, “Aye...it's more just that. Oh he still turns arrogant and snide at moment's notice but...I think you should speak with him.” He paused and shook his head, “You have to see it to believe it.”

She gave him an exasperated look, dealing with Viserys was always uncomfortable and difficult. She didn't want to do it today, there was still other business she had to deal with.

After a moment, she sighed and nodded in acquiescence, “Fine. Then let us go see my dear brother,” she said with dry annoyance.

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They reached Viserys's rooms, Jorah knocked, opened the door, entering and not even waiting for her brother to respond. Daenerys followed behind him.

As they entered she saw Viserys was pacing his rooms, he turned towards the door, the arrogant smile and sneering look she knew, growing on his face, “I did not say you could enter-”

The words died on his lips and the arrogant smile she knew so well and despised disappeared. It disappeared with an abruptness that surprised Daenerys as Jorah stepped aside and Viserys laid eyes on her.

Viserys knelt quickly, head bowing deep, “My Queen,” he said in an awed and trembling voice, he raised his head to look at her and she saw tears in his eyes, “My dear, dear sweet Dany...you make a radiant Queen. A true Dragon.” His voice reverberated with a pride she'd never heard in it before.

What?!

Daenerys stopped, blinked and suddenly found herself adrift, at a total loss for words.

Viserys wasn't finished speaking, he continued not seeing Daenerys's sudden disbelief and momentary lapse, “Thank you dear sister for allowing me this audience, a Queen is always busy, and you must have so much to do ruling this lowly city.”

Daenerys was staring in stupification at her brother, this earnest and polite and...proud Viserys was not what she was expecting. Despite Jorah's words, she hadn't expected anything like this!

She looked to Jorah, who shrugged and gave her knowing smile. He'd tried to warn her, she hadn't believed him. She still couldn't believe it!
She turned back to Viserys, he had an earnest look on his face as he stayed kneeling, waiting for her permission to rise.

Jorah stepped back, taking a position by the wall. He turned into a silent sentinel and invisible piece of furniture in the background as she began talking with Viserys.

She gestured for Viserys to rise as she started to gather her scattered thoughts.

Viserys rose with a smile, “Sweet Dany, oh you truly look radiant! Mother would be so proud!”

As if anything could take her aback any more, Viserys never talked about mother. Ever. A sense of warmness began to build in her stomach...yes mother would be proud of her now. She'd always imagined so, but however a skewed perspective Viserys had...he had known mother before she died.

“...and Father! He would be so proud as well!” Viserys finish with a beaming smile that enveloped the entirety of his eyes.

The warmness disappeared as if someone had dumped a bucket of ice water on her head.

Her eyes hardened, “Making Father proud is not something you should aspire to!” her tone was filled with venom. The Mad King was not someone to emulate. He was a stain on House Targaryen's long illustrious history.

Viserys recoiled away from her, the smile disappearing as a daunted look came to his face.

“...our father was mad! He burnt people for his own amusement! It was the ruination of our house!” she cursed angrily. I am nothing like him!

Viserys seemed to shrink with each condemnation. He gazed at her with such confusion and fear.

She grabbed a hold of her emotions and took a calming breath. Becoming worked up wasn't helping Viserys, he actually looked a little...afraid of her now.

She signed, Viserys's room had a large lounging couch in it and she walked to it and sat down.

“Viserys, come sit with me,” she said softly, patting the place next to her.

Her brother didn't say anything, he just carefully came and sat next to her. His eyes held a concerned look.

For a moment she was unsure how to begin, “Father is not someone to be emulated. It was him that truly started the Rebellion. When he burned Rickard Stark and strangled his heir...if he hadn't done that, the Rebellion could have been avoided, and we'd have never left Westeros.”

Viserys gaped at her. He answered hesitantly, “He was the King, that Northern barbarian threatened our Brother...it was treason.”

Daenerys shook her head mournfully, “There were other ways to deal with him. And even Kings and Queens must obey the laws. Those that are not mindful of their subjects...well you saw for yourself what happens when a King pushes too hard.” She gave him a grave look, “And father pushed far, far too hard...”

Viserys gave her a fallen look, and he looked down crestfallen and contrite, “Yes, Dany.”

Now came the hard part, she couldn't give him too much information too fast, “We will be returning to Westeros...soon enough, brother,” Daenerys began.
Viserys's head snapped up in surprise. His visage held an eager look.

“...The Magister wasn't wrong, we do still have allies in Westeros. Some more loyal than others...” she paused.

Viserys nodded, waiting for her to continue.

“Our loyalest allies are...the Starks.”

Viserys's face turned red, and he sprang up from the couch in anger, “The Starks?” he mewed bitterly, “Those northern barbarians? They're the usurper's dogs!” He gave her an unbelieving contemptuous look.

Unruffled by the outburst she gave him a cool look. Now this looked and sounded more like the Viserys she knew and had dreaded in her youth.

“They are nearer to us than any of our old allies,” she paused and took a deep breath, she had no idea how Viserys would take the coming revelation, “You have heard of Lord Stark's bastard son?”

“What does a bastard have to do with anything?” Viserys retorted snidely.

Another deep breath. “He's not Eddard Stark's son. He's Lyanna Stark's son.”

Viserys's face reddened further, rage coming to his face, “That northern whore's son? What does a-” The words cut off abruptly as the significance of that revelation quickly sunk in.

She took a breath and confirmed the truth to him, “He's Rhaegar's son. He's our brother's last trueborn son, and Lord Eddard has hid and protected our nephew from the usurper since the rebellion. Lyanna and Rhaegar were married, Jon Targaryen is their son and the legal heir to the Iron Throne.”

The dizzying number of emotions that were crossing Viserys's face now was truly something to see. Disbelief, rage, shock just to name a few of those that she recognized.

“Our brother has a living son?” he finally asked in quiet voice, standing still and unmoving. The red was draining from his face as she looked on.

She only nodded, “Yes...this will also be the last time you refer to our nephew's mother as a whore,” she commanded with steel in her voice.

Viserys nodded eagerly, before a giant smile came to his lips, “Of course, of course, Dany. There are more Targaryens!” he stated with joy, were those were tears in his eyes now?

He sat back down and grabbed her, pulling her into an enthusiastic hug. He even gave her a quick kiss on the cheek.

She froze, a warm hug was again not something characteristic of the Viserys that had threatened to kill her once. She could hear him mumbling happily into her ear, but she was too shocked to listen.

He broke the embrace, his eyes filled with joy and tears, “This is wonderful, Dany!”

Daenerys was reeling, this was going far better than she had expected...much, much better than she had thought possible. Still all things considered...an enthusiastic and warm Viserys was just disturbing.

“...yes it is.”
Viserys’s mood faltered for a second, as confusion clouded his face, “But how do you know this? Why has the Magister kept this from us?”

Now came the even harder part, with quick measured tones, she explained that with a magic spell, an ally had sent them all back in time because of...bad things. She skipped over mention of the Others and the Long Night and just said bad things, now was not the time to throw the army of the dead at Viserys. A quick mention of the War of Five Kings, her campaigns in Essos and then the failed attempt to retake Westeros due to again, bad things. She left out the real details. She mentioned that Jorah had died to protect her, commanding her rear guard against an enemy.

Viserys looked horrified at all this, he sat quietly pensive for moment before asking her, “What about me? Where was I in all of this?”

That brought her up short, there wasn’t anything she could say to camouflage and hide that, “You died.” She blurted out quickly in a pained tone.

Viserys deflated visibly, “Oh...uh...how?”

Daenerys kept her face blank as she remembered the crown of gold Drogo had given her as she looked on with satisfaction.

She waved his question off quickly, “That...uh...that doesn't matter now. There are more important things I have to tell you.” She said with a firm tone.

Viserys looked torn for a moment before nodding in obedience, “Of course, Dany.”

She surged ahead, he didn't need to focus on his death now, “The spell was cast by Brandon Stark, the Three Eyed Raven. His power is scary...and disturbing,” Daenerys admitted quietly. There was reason they’d all stopped talking to Bran, unless there was business at hand. The words that could potentially come spilling from his mouth...she shuddered. Disturbing was the least that could be said about him.

Viserys was giving her a shocked and scared look now.

“Again...this is something we can talk about later....the most important question now, is how will you serve me? What role will you play now? You will not be King, but you are still a prince,” Daenerys asked quickly changing the subject, again, and feeling out what was going on in her complicated brother's head.

Viserys seemed stunned for a moment before falling deeply into thought. He thought hard and deeply for a several long moments, before speaking hesitantly, “We have a proper Westerosi Knight here...perhaps he could train me?” he stopped and gulped, casting a respectful look towards Jorah, “I realise now there is much I still need to learn,” he finished humbly.

Daenerys blinked in surprise and gave the, until now, silent Jorah a questioning look.

He seemed surprised...and a little pained, before giving her a quick nod, “As my Queen commands.”

She turned back to Viserys and smiled at him, “Ser Jorah is a great warrior. His loyalty to me is unquestionable. I'm sure he will make a proper Knight of you.”

Viserys gave her a satisfied and happy saccharine smile, “Thank you, Dany! I won't disappoint you! I will serve you loyally and bring honor to our house!”

She returned the smile, considering all you did to me in the last life I think you can easily achieve
Finally, reaching her rooms, as the door closed behind her and Jorah, she allowed her public facade to fade. It wouldn't have been good to show everyone just how unnerved and disturbed she truly felt.

She turned to Jorah suddenly, “Is it actually possible to shock a man back into sanity?’”

“That's a question you'll have to ask a Maester, my Queen. I doubt anyone else could give you a proper answer,” Jorah stated evenly, shaking his head.

She huffed in annoyance grabbing a goblet of wine from a table and pouring herself some. She took a deep gulp and found a chair, “Please tell me there aren't any other surprises! I don't think I can take any more today...” she lamented as she slumped into her chair in an unqueenly manner, cradling and sipping at her wine. This changed Viserys was something she hadn't expected. Couldn't possibly have foreseen! She hadn't imagined it could actually be in the realm of possibilities!

Jorah gave her a rueful smile, “Only the gods know that.”

She let out an exasperated breath, “You're not being helpful now.”

Jorah's smile grew, he bowed deeply, “I live to serve you, my Queen.” he teased lightly.

She gave him a dark look, but she couldn't hold it for long. She snorted lightly, “Was there anything else you wanted to shock me with?” she asked dryly.

Jorah's smile was still in place, “No my Queen.”

“Fine then...I think I will have a ride around the city to clear my head,” she pursed her lips in annoyance, “I need to clear my head.” First Drogo, and then Viserys? Yes, a clear head was something she desperately needed now!

Jorah bowed, his smile growing on his lips, “As my Queen commands. I will have them prepare your horse and a proper escort.”

With a bow, he left her sipping her wine, troubled by the changes.

Talisa Maegyr

The Wild Yalla limped into the docks of Pentos, missing a mast. The seas had been unseasonably rough, a sudden squall nearly wrecking the ship, half way across the Narrow Sea. It was a miracle they hadn't all died. The journey to Pentos that should have taken less than a week had taken far longer. Far, far longer.

When the ship finally docked, she let out a sigh of relief and annoyance. They'd survived but she didn't want to be in Pentos. When she'd agreed to serve as a healer, she hadn't expected this. When she'd boarded the ship, she'd had no intention to set foot off of it till they reached Braavos. She'd thought she'd been done...dealing with Slavers and the trapped slaves...but fate was forcing this on her. The crew had had causalities and her medicines were nearly depleted...and she still hadn't been able to save everyone. She needed more supplies if she was to save a couple of them.

With a deep sigh, she walked across the gangplank and stepped onto the docks of the free city of
Pentos.

Chapter End Notes

He he Dany's having a hell of a day...and its not over yet! :D Hope you all liked what I did with Drogo and Viserys. The Viserys idea is actually why I actually started writing this story. So glad I finally managed to reach this point!
Ch 23 Unexpected Meetings

Chapter 23 Unexpected meetings

Talisa Maegyr

She hurried through the marketplace, she had her list and the marketplace in Pentos should have all that she needed.

More bandages, milk of the poppy, various herbs for her poultices, and other things to help save the injured men of the Wild Yalla.

She picked her way through Pentos. She remembered the last time she'd been here, the opposite of now, she had been fleeing to Westeros for the first time. Happy to leave behind the so called 'Free Cities' of Essos.

And now she was returning, fleeing from Westeros. And all the dark longing that threatened to drag her all the way north to Winterfell, and back to Robb. She hadn't meant to fall in love with him. She'd dealt enough with the Westerosi to know that Robb shouldn't have done what he did. A night of passion should not have forced him to marry her...but he had. It had seemed like a something out of a story, Robb the honorable Warrior King, and her the pure maiden. It had seemed like a tale told to children, but for a time even with the war ongoing...they'd been happy.

It hadn't lasted...

She shuddered, a chill coming to her despite the heavy sun beating down on her head.

She cast the dark thoughts aside, it had all been undone. Magic had undone everything. Every act, every mistake, every dream, every nightmare. How...she didn't care, it didn't matter, all that mattered was that it had happened...and here she was in Pentos again, living a different life now. Walking down a different path...far away from Robb and Westeros.

She had new responsibilities now, to the crew of the Wild Yalla. To the men that were depending on her now.

She was nearing the marketplace, she looked around, it was always wise to keep an eye out for
pickpockets and thieves in and around any marketplace.

She stopped, something was off with the city. She had reached the edge of the marketplace. She gazed around frowning, her eyes narrowing as she tried to understand what she was seeing.

There were signs of fighting, it had been cleaned up but there were still some signs left. There was some scorch marks and the occasional unrepaired stall or scratched wall.

She stared about at the people next. Life was continuing normally, the people weren't tense or scared...there was also a large number of Dothraki roaming about. Enough that the Magisters of Pentos should have been very nervous. The people should have been very nervous as well.

Yet...the people all looked unworried. They went about their business as usual, slaves roamed around doing their masters' bidding, merchants expounded the qualities of their wares and business continued on, unworried by the strangeness that was in the city.

Her frown deepened, there was something wrong with the slaves.

It took her far too long to recognize what was wrong with what she seeing in the slaves...there was hope. Happiness. Enthusiasm.

She was confused, slaves never showed such signs except in very extreme conditions, or if their owner was exceedingly good and rewarding.

*What could have happened here?*

She pushed herself forward eyeing everyone around her with suspicion, she still had business to do in the marketplace despite the strangeness.

She went about her business, buying up and haggling with the merchants over all the items she needed. The haggling and greed of the Pentosi merchants hadn't changed, that helped settle her wary nerves.

She continued onwards. She came to a stall filled with herbs owned by a Braavosi woman. Talisa
picked out what she wanted and haggled with the woman, finishing quickly.

A large shadow passed over head and she looked up, wondering what kind of bird cast such a big shadow. The sun blurred her vision, she raised her hand to shade her eyes and help her see better. It took a moment for her eyes to focus properly.

She froze.

It wasn't a bird.

The...impossibility spread it's wings wide and beat at the air as it ascended further into the heavens. The creature let out a loud roar and then disappeared among the clouds.

She continued looking up, even after the creature disappeared. It took her several long moments to react.

The creature looked like a dragon.

It was a dragon.

A dragon in Pentos.

She began trembling in fear, it seemed that magic had returned and brought with it dragons!

“Spectacular sight, isn't it? But you don't have to worry about them, the Queen has control of them,” the merchant woman's happy voice cut into her shock.

She twisted to look at the merchant woman, “Queen? What Queen?” she asked in surprise. The rest of the merchant's words registered with her stumbling mind, “Them?! As in more than one?”

The merchant gave her a big smile, “Daenerys Targaryen, the Queen of Pentos. The Mother of Dragons. She hatched three of them.”
Talisa gaped at the merchant in disbelief, her mouth dry, three? Three dragons? She pushed that aside and then managed to say, “Pentos doesn't have a Queen.” Her tone matched her face.

The merchant laughed mirthfully, “It does now.”

“How?...When?” Talisa asked stumped. The Magisters would never bow down to a woman, Targaryen or not. They only respected money, their greed driving their every decision.

The merchant woman shook her hand around gesturing, “When the magic returned us. The very same day, the whole city rose up in rebellion against the Magisters in her name. The Unsullied, the Dothraki, all the slaves.” The merchant shook her head, with a smile, with a small laugh she continued gleefully, “The Magisters got what was coming to them.”

Talisas was gaping again, “Unsullied do not rebel.” she stated with unequivocal conviction

“For Daenerys Targaryen, the Breaker of Chains they do,” retorted the merchant woman with a vindicated smile.

Talisas felt more than a little dazed now, silently, she took her purchases from the woman and walked away. So much was going through her head now, she couldn't focus.

She was on her way back, and almost out of the marketplace when a large Dothraki warrior stepped into her path.

She stopped and tensed, wary of the man. All Essosi knew to not take the Dothraki lightly.

A second Dothraki came up behind her and fear flaring in her body.

The first Dothraki looked her up and down, she stared back, not letting him see her sudden fear.

“You...come.” He said in broken Common Tongue, his look and stance brokered no argument. Not that Talisa would dare to argue with a Dothraki warrior.
A hand held her heart as she nodded silently. The Dothraki gave her an arrogant look before turning and walking slowly away.

*What do they want with me?* She thought fearfully.

She followed silently and thankfully didn't have to wait long as they quickly left the marketplace. Nearby, there was a crowd gathered there, men, woman and children, all looking overjoyed and happy. They were shouting out to someone.

Several of the slaves were even crying out Mhysa.

*Mother? Who are they calling out to?*

The crowd parted and Talisa finally saw what had the crowd so excited.

There were several mounted Dothraki there, and at the center of the group was a white mare, ridden by a beautiful woman.

The woman on the silver mare could not be mistaken for anything other than a *Targaryen*. The silver hair, the arrogant look in the eye, and the absurd beauty. This had to be Daenerys Targaryen, the new Queen of Pentos. The Mother of Dragons...and apparently *Mhysa* as well...some how...

The dothraki led her forward in between the horses till they stood in front of the Targaryen.

The Targaryen was gazed at her now, evaluating her, “They say you have just arrived from Westeros.” she stated evenly, her expression blank and commanding.

Talisaw swallowed nervously, this was a Targaryen with a dragon. In Volantis, she grown up with stories and warnings about how to deal with such creatures and what terrible fate happened to those who didn't head the warnings.

She nodded silently, not trusting herself to speak yet.
“We haven't had news from Westeros since the Return...and there is much I desire to know,” the Targaryen stated haughtily.

Talisa swallowed away her fear, she shook her head, “I was not there long before we left,” she admitted, hoping that would be enough for the Targaryen.

The Targaryen frowned unhappily for a moment before speaking, “Nevertheless- any news would be welcome. It is only a matter of time before my inevitable return to Westeros. I would greatly like to know what is happening there,” Daenerys explained plainly, “You will be adequately compensated for any news.”

_Oh Gods...Robb. She's going to be coming for you...with her dragons..._

A hellish and horrific image of Robb and Grey Wind burning in dragonfire played out in her mind's eye.

Talisaa cast away the sudden image and her equally sudden panic, as The Targaryen continued to speak.

“...tell me your name.” she commanded.

“Talisa. Talisa Maegyr of _Volantis._” she blurted out quickly, stressing her Volatene origin.

The Targaryen suddenly seemed taken aback for a moment, frank surprise blossoming on her face, “Talisa _Maegyr...as in Talisa Stark? The Queen in the North? You were married to Robb Stark, weren't you?”_

_I'm dead!_ A part of Talisa's mind suddenly screamed in fear.

The recent...and very bloody history between Houses Stark and Targaryen came unbidden to her mind, reinforcing her initial bleak thought.
Talis trembled, “I'm just Maegyr now. I am not a Stark. I am no queen.” she retorted as so many bad ends to this situation started playing out in her mind, much to her own disquiet.

The Targaryen seemed to assess her for a moment before speaking again, “Come, let us speak more privately,” she said, her tone leaving no doubt that it was anything less than command.

Talis hesitated, “But...”

The Targaryen frowned, “But what?”

Talis gathered her courage and quickly bowed deeply, “Forgive me, your Grace, I am a healer, I have men depending on me...our ship, the Wild Yalla, nearly sank. Many of the crew were hurt...they are waiting for my supplies...and me.”

The Targaryen's confusion turned into a look of respect, before turning to one of the Dothraki with her. She barked orders quickly and one rode off quickly. Another one of the Dothraki stepped forward taking her purchases from her before she could object.

“The best healers in Pentos will go to your ship and my men will bring your things to the ship. Now will you come along?” The Targaryen's tone was surprisingly light.

She was surprised by the Targaryen's actions, and on a level pleased...but now she was truly tapped.

*Not that you could refuse her anyway*, a part of her mind snidely reminded her.

Talis gave the Targaryen a small forced small as she bowed her head, “Of course, your Grace.” She didn't have a choice in the matter.

The Targaryen gave out more orders in Dothraki.

The nearest Dothraki warrior reached out a hand and quickly pulled Talisa up onto his horse. They galloped away from the crowd quickly as she tried to figure out how she was going to survive this encounter.
Talis’s soul trembled, but she tried to give no outside sign of it, the Queen had taken her to the palace, entering and walking past her slumbering dragons...

There had been three of them there. The one she'd seen in the marketplace had returned as they returned. She'd gotten a good look at them. They were larger than horses, but were probably not rideable yet. The largest of them, a black scaled beast, had bared their way with a snarl, baring his very sharp teeth and snapping at them. She'd felt the heat of his breath even from were she'd been cowering behind the Dothraki...who'd been cowering behind Daenerys.

With a single word in High Valyrian from Daenerys, the dragon had quieted down and taken to the air, before quickly finding another perch on the walls of the palace.

Suddenly, the arrogance in the Targaryen's stance and words didn't seem undeserved after that.

And now they were in what looked like Daenerys's solar.

Alone.

It was yet another statement of power and fearlessness from Daenerys, to meet with her alone.

Not that Talisa dared to do anything...not after seeing the dragons.

“Sit,” Daenerys commanded.

Talis sat quickly, finding her seat as Daenerys looked at her with a measuring glare.

“You remember all that happened...but you have no idea who I truly am,” Daenerys nodded, “Yes you died much too early to hear about me.”
Talisa stilled before nodding, “You are Daenerys Targaryen, the Queen of Pentos.” She was glad not hear a waver in her voice.

An amused smiled came to Daenerys's face, “Not just Queen of Pentos,” her expression turned annoyed for a moment, “This is usually the part when Missandei declares my titles,” she sighed unhappily before going on, “I am Daenerys Stormborn of the House Targaryen, the First of my Name, rightful Queen of the Andals, the Rhoynar, and the First Men...”

The image of Robb and Grey Wind burning in dragonfire returned again unbidden. Robb and the North would not welcome her as their Queen...not without a fight.

One they would probably loss...

“...the Unburnt, the Mother of Dragons, the Breaker of Chains, Queen of Meereen, the Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea...and now Queen of Pentos as well.”

Talisa stared, each name quickly adding to her confusion and disbelief. “Queen of Meereen? Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea?” Queen of Slaver's Bay? Inwardly, Talisa cringed, you're Queen of the Slavers? She didn't dare mouth her derision at that thought.

“Truthfully, not just Meereen. All of Slavers bay was mine in the old life. I took it...though it wasn't Slaver's bay by the time I was finished, it was Dragon's Bay. The cities there were free, in fact and not just in name. I freed all the slaves,” Daenerys explained proudly.

Talisa couldn't have heard that right, because the Last Scion of the Valyrian Freehold- who was also calling herself a Khaleesi of the Dothraki could not be freeing slaves...wait, no it was believable, she was also a Westerosi. Westerosi did not tolerate slavery, not even her most despicable ancestors, Maegor the Cruel, or Aegon the Unworthy had. Hells not even Aegon the Conqueror had had slaves...at least not after the Conquest at least. Her Father, the Mad King, in the depths of his madness hadn't been a slaver. It had been one of the few lines- if not the only line, he'd never crossed.

“You...freed the Slaves?” she asked carefully.

Daenerys nodded, a smile playing on her lips, “I am the Breaker of Chains after all.” She said it as if that explained everything.
“Oh...” Talisa’s mind swirled with possibilities, what did a world without Slaver’s Bay look like? She started as she realised suddenly what the happy expression of the slaves in Pentos meant...they weren’t slaves any more! Pentos truly was a Free City now! This was an unimaginable step to her! Her soul soared as she imagined what a free Essos could look like.

“Now...as much as I would like to hear of Westeros, I think I would like to hear about Robb Stark,” Daenerys explained simply, as she lounged in her chair.

The happiness in her chest died just as suddenly as it had appeared. For a moment, Talisa’s throat closed, I’m not going to live to see a free Essos, am I? she steeled herself, oh Robb...

She found her courage and rose defiantly, dragons or no, she wouldn’t betray Robb- not for anything. She’d cost him so much the last time, she owed him this, no matter what it cost her now.

“No.” She jutted out her chin defiantly, and dared to glare down at the sitting Queen.

Surprise spread across Daenerys’s face at the refusal.

Strength came to Talisa and she declared, “I will never betray Robb or the North. No matter what you do to me...you will get nothing from me!”

Talisas stood defiantly before the Dragon Queen, if this is the end, so be it! Goodbye, Robb...

Daenerys looked at her for a moment in confusion before understanding flashed on her face. A moment later she was throwing back her head and laughing.

Talisas froze in place, her defiance disappearing and being replaced with confusion. She frowned at the unexpected reaction. Was her defiance that laughable?

Daenerys continued to laugh until tears came to her eyes. Talisa remained, trying to keep her defiant front and failing, she stood disquieted by the reaction.

Finally, the laughter stopped and Daenerys wiped the tears of mirth from her eyes, “I haven't laughed like that in a long time.”
Talis a watched in fear as Daenerys stood up and walked to her. Daenerys took Talisa's hands in her own, looking Talisa directly in the eyes, while giving her a small embarrassed smile, “Forgive me, Talisa, I'm sorry if you've misconstrued my intentions…”

Talis a's confusion rose to new heights as her head began spinning, Targaryens do not apologize, their egos were renowned for their size, never mind a Targaryen with three dragons at their command. The last of the old Blood of Valyria were well known for their sheer arrogance.

“…I truly mean Robb Stark no harm, or any of the Starks for that matter- not even Lord Eddard Stark. My Father greatly wronged them…though that is perhaps understating things greatly,” she commented, rueful and unhappy.

Yes...this is happening, the Targaryen Queen really is apologizing!

The Queen let go of her hands and went to the table, grabbing a jug of wine. She poured two goblets, taking them both and walking back to Talisa. She held one out, which Talisa took hesitantly.

Daenerys raised her goblet and took a sip of the wine, the implication of the action not lost on Talisa. She took a grateful gulp, the wine helping to steady her suddenly very strained and abused nerves.

Daenerys sipped her wine and sat down, gesturing for Talisa to sit again, “I assure you, the Starks are very much my allies and friends…kin even,” she laughed softly. “For someone like you, after all that's happened, I can understand the confusion.”

Kin? How in the name of the Gods could the Starks be considered her kin?

“Tell me,” she began slowly, “What did Robb tell you of his half brother, Jon Snow?”

As if the situation couldn't get any more surreal, why was she asking about Robb's bastard brother? She wracked her brain for a reason, before a possibility presented itself.

Oh...OH!
If he was his lover...that would explain much. But the Night's Watch had vows of celibacy to uphold...how would that have worked?

Slowly, Talisa found her voice again, “Jon Snow?” her voice echoed her confusion, “He was a member of the Night's Watch. Robb...Robb always wished that Jon was by his side...especially after Theon Greyjoy betrayed him.”

Daenerys nodded, “Eddard Stark had a secret. Jon Snow was not his son. Jon is Lyanna Stark’s son.”

Talisa gaped, even in Volantis, the story of Lyanna Stark was well known and held up as an example of what not to do. If Jon was her son, there was only one man who could be his father.

*Rhaegar Targaryen.*

The kin comment suddenly made whole lot more sense.

“...he's my brother's last *trueborn* son, Jon Targaryen. He's not a Snow,” finished Daenerys with a smug smile.

All her thoughts came to a grinding stop and she gaped at Daenerys, “But..but how?”

“She went willingly with my brother, they were married by the High Septon in Dorne...though why Brandon Stark did what he did is still a mystery...and of course, you know what my father did in response,” Daenerys replied grimly. “A misunderstanding began Robert's Rebellion. Eddard Stark has protected Jon from Robert Baratheon since the end of the Rebellion. That is a large debt that House Targaryen owes him- especially considering how my father wronged him.”

Talisa's head was spinning, Daenerys's words had just upset *everything* she knew of the recent history of Westeros.

“...My nephew is the *legal* heir of the Iron Throne. Robb may be his cousin by blood, but he will always be his brother,” Daenerys let out a small laugh, “I would never hurt Jon's *family*...and they are my family now.”
Talisa continued to stare in surprise for a moment, before she gulped her wine.

The Queen smiled as she sat back, sipping at her wine, “So please relax and tell me of Robb Stark. Tell me of the Young Wolf. He sounded so impressive and yet Jon rarely mentioned him...the loss was much too painful for him.”

Talisa sat facing the Targaryen Queen, her head still spinning by the revelations. She took a deep breath and began speaking, a part of her still marveling at this strange and impossible turn of events.

xoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxo

Robert Baratheon

Robert stalked through the lowest levels of the dungeons of the Red Keep heading for the Black Cells. So much had changed and yet the dungeons stayed the same. Thieves, rapist, murderers and the scum of King's Landing were still gathered here. Ser Mandon followed unblinking in his path, a goaler rushing to keep up behind them. He went deeper and deeper into the dungeons, passing by so many wretched souls till he finally reached the level of the Black Cells.

The Black Cells were more crowded than usual. Most were filled with some captured Redcloaks and the remains of the Faith Militant. He passed by Lancel's cell trying very hard not to look, but he saw his former squire kneeling in prayer, just as fervent as he had been the first day of his imprisonment. The boy disturbed him too much and for the moment he was still Kevan Lannister's son, a valuable hostage despite all he had confessed. On another level, Robert did respect him somewhat, the zealotry aside, he was not the soft and mewling weakling boy he remembered.

He managed to pass Stannis's cell without a look, he still couldn't look at him after...after he confessed what he did to Shireen. Even Renly's anger had cooled and disappeared after Stannis's admission, neither of the Baratheon brothers knew to proceed with Stannis. Cressen beyond disappointed while simultaneously devastated and worried over Shireen...but there was still no news of her or Davos.

As Robert passed Pycelle's cell, he turned to glare and growl at the traitorous old man, who cowered even more, mewling for forgiveness and begging for Robert's pardon for whatever crime he was accused of. Robert ignored the words and continued past the traitorous Grand Maester.

Finally, Robert reached his destination.
“Open the cell,” Robert commanded the goaler.

The filthy and stumbling goaler rushed forward to obey, opening the cell and stepping hastily out of the King’s way as Robert brushed past as soon as the door was open.

The cell was dark only a dim light illuminating it, but it was enough for Robert to see the outlines of the occupant’s face. Ser Mandon stepped in behind him and the burning brand he had been holding shone in the dark cell, casting light everywhere, illuminating the occupant more.

Cersei flinched back, away from the light, raising a hand to ward off the sudden light.

Robert breathed in deep, trying to calm his rising rage. This confrontation had been a long time coming.

Cersei sat in a corner of her cell, her golden gown stained and filthy after such a long time in the Black Cells. Her hair was matted and her skin dirty...but her green eyes still shone with just as much arrogance as they always did. Her stay in the Black cells didn't seem to have dimmed her pride. Her eyes focused on him slowly and as she recognized him, she sheered, but at the same time, he could see the fear growing in her eyes.

“Robert!” she screeched as she rose unsteadily to her feet.

“You filthy lying whore!” he roared, “You tried to lie to me! The children are all Jaime's! You brother fucking whore!”

She paled even more “It's lies, Robert! I don't know what your idiot brother has told you but it's all lies!” she denied vehemently,

Robert laughed in her face, “Lies, eh? Lancel told me the truth! The truth about every perverted action you've ever done!”

She flinched back at his cruel laugh, “L- Lancel?” she asked hesitantly, her voice wavering.
“The children are all the Kingslayer's. You plotted with Lancel to kill me! You may have succeeded last time but you won't this time! Your perverted bastard will never sit on the Iron Throne!”

Cersei's fear turned into confusion. She seemed to be at a loss for words, her face furrowing with confusion, “Last time? What are you talking about?” she finally asked in confusion and fear.

Robert glared and frowned at her for a moment, “Aye, you bitch, you had him drug me during my last boar hunt! The damned boar gored me good! What a way to go!” he exploded angrily, hands clenching into fists, as he controlled his fury.

Cersei was pale and trembling, “Have you gone mad, Robert?” she retorted sharply, such confusion shone from her lying green eyes, “When did a boar gore you? You're speaking as if you died!”

“I did die!” Robert roared back wrathfully, “Your fucking plan worked! Your bastard was king! And the first thing he did was start a war that tore the whole fucking Seven Kingdoms apart!”

Cersei was staring at him aghast and horrified, “This is madness, Robert!”

“It was MAGIC! I don't fucking know how this happened, but...I am so glad that it did,” he finished quietly, his voice had a very dangerous quality to it now, that promised violence and retribution.

“Magic...magic doesn't exist,” Cersei denied angrily.

Robert's tirade stopped and he stared at her in confusion. She wasn't reacting the way he was expecting. He glared at her for several long moments, just looking at her.

It took him a long time to realise why Cersei was so confused.

“Gods...you don't remember, do you? We're all reliving out lives!” he stated in surprise.

“Remember what? Reliving our lives? This madness!” Cersei repeated in scorching tone.

Robert stared at her for a moment before letting out a deep bellowing laugh. He laughed so hard,
tears came to his eyes.

Cersei cowered more and more into the corner of her cell as Robert's laughter continued.

Finally, his laughter trickled away, the mirth draining away from him, he glared at her angrily, “After so many miserable years, after so many fucking lies, I will make you pay for each and every insult!”

Cersei flinched back, the fear once more shining through her lying green eyes.

Robert turned around, “Bring in my gift!” he roared out to the goalsers.

Two goalsers shuffled in with their burden. They were carrying a body. They threw the body into Cersei's cell. The body lay face first between the cowering Cersei and Robert.

She stared down at for a moment before her eyes widened in surprise and shock.

“Joffrey!” she shrieked shrilly. She went to her son, forgetting her fear of Robert.

The moment that Cersei realised that Joffrey was dead, was pure ecstasy for Robert. He'd had the Silent Sisters clean up the boy just for this. The signs of the Hound's beating was still there but they'd cleaned up the more overt signs of decay the body had undergo since that first night.

As she turned over the body, the sight of Joffrey's open and sightless eyes drove her into a mad frenzy. The anguish that came to her face was a delicious thing for Robert to see.

She screamed, “Joffrey! My boy! My poor boy!” she screamed it over and over again as she clutched the boy's corpse to her breast, uncaring of the putrid nature of the body.

She screamed and screeched in denial with soul wrenching anguish as Robert watched in satisfaction. His rage fed and was cooled by torment.

She rose suddenly and threw herself at Robert, “You brute! You monster!” she screamed as she beat at him uselessly.
Robert grabbed her hands and threw her roughly to the ground next Joffrey's corpse. She forgot Robert and clutched once more at her precious little lion. Her mewling voice carried her agony and misery well, tears streaming down her cheeks as she talked to and shrieked at the dead body.

He cast her one last satisfied look, before turning around and leaving her to wallow in her misery, Joffrey's corpse would be keeping her company...for a very long time.

He turned and walked out of the cell with a satisfied grunt.

As he walked away, he heard the door to her cell closing with a clink, her maddened shrieks echoing in his ears, filling his heart with joy and satisfaction.
Chapter Notes

Author's Notes: This chapter continues directly after the last one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Robert Baratheon

Cersei's shrieks of pain were still echoing in his ears as the meeting began. The Small Council meeting was going along well, dealing with Cersei had put him a good mood and better able to deal with all the issues that Renly and Cressen would throw at him.

He'd had to name new members to the Small Council, but that was to be expected, Varys had disappeared, Baelish was dead and Stannis was languishing in a Black Cell.

Lord Gyles Rosby was the new Master of Coin...despite his annoying coughing. They'd sent a raven to the Arbor naming Paxter Redwyne, the new Master of Ships, but they were still waiting for a response. Not to mention they were still missing a proper candidate for Master of Whispers, for the time being, Renly would act as Master of Laws...and Whispers.

Though the Kingsguard was still in tatters. With Arys Oakheart, Meryn Trant and Mandon Moore the only ones left, loyal and alive. All things considered Jaime Lannister's defection was expected, but Barristan Selmy's betrayal made Robert's blood boil every time he was reminded. There hadn't been enough time to choose and appoint new members.

Thankfully, King's Landing was much improved, the Goldcloaks under Old Ironhand and Renly were keeping order and peace. There was still a sense of tension in the streets but that could only be expected with all this remembering business.

All of this and they were still gathering men, Renly had summoned his bannermen, the strength of the Stormlands was gathering, near fifteen thousand men were expected in this first mustering. The Crownlands Lords were a mixed bunch, some were dragging their feet and making excuses while others had already marched their men to King's Landing and were camped outside the city.

News of the rest of the Seven Kingdoms was still reaching them. There was still no news from
Winterfell, but it did take time for ravens to travel that far north. The Westerlands were quiet, not that Robert was expecting anything from the Lannisters except preparations for war.

They had had ravens from the Riverlands and the Vale. Hoster Tully had summoned his bannermen and was consolidating and reinforcing his borders with the Westerlands. The Vale was more complicated...Lord Yohn Royce had answered from the Eyrie...as acting Reagent for Robin Arryn and acting Protector of the Vale. That had been an unexpected surprise. Royce had written that Lysa Arryn had taken ill and he was in command there now...though why wasn't the Blackfish the Regent? He'd have thought Lysa's uncle would have been a more neutral Regent rather than placing the Royces over the rest of the Vale Lords. This had upset some of his plans. The Knights of the Vale were gathering but they would be delayed by all of these surprise upheavals.

The Reach on the other hand had sent a very fast messenger from Highgarden, saying they'd already commanded men into the Westerlands. With news of Loras's death, Mace had already started the war without him...but it wasn't with the full strength of Reach. The messenger had also relayed that Mace had to first put down a rebellious house.

House Tarly.

The news that Randyll Tarly was rising in rebellion against Mace Tyrell had greatly tarnished the good news from the Reach. Not to mention bewildering Robert. He knew Randyll was a hard man and strong commander...and stubbornly loyal. So why was he rising up against Mace Tyrell, his rightful liege? Robert knew, even outnumbered Randyll would give his enemies a hard fight. Robert knew that this would not be over quick, no matter what Mace said or implied or how many men he had.

The lessons of Ashford were not easily forgotten.

And Dorne...well Robert was reluctant to summon them. Or try to, at least, Prince Doran's thinking was something that had always escaped him, but Oberyn would probably jump at the chance at to kill Lannisters. On the other hand, he may decide to sit back and watch them tearing each other apart. Dorne in general, and Oberyn specifically, had no love for Robert either...even if they did hate the Lannisters more.

Add to that some rather disturbing rumors were coming out of Dorne at the moment. Cressen had had men sent to Sunspear on a fast ship to confirm or deny those rumors as soon as possible.

Each day brought new news on the changes in the Kingdoms...and each day he was day closer to his war. It was an invigorating time to be alive, despite the betrayals that had been revealed. What time
he wasn't spending in meetings he was spending training in the yard and trying to get back into shape. It was no time for him to be fat. He had skulls to crush with his warhammer!

So now, here he sat at the head of the table in the Small Council room as another meeting began. The meetings had been frequent and many since...since it all began. And he'd been attending each and every meeting.

A tense Renly sat to his left, with a disturbed Cressen on his right, Lord Rosby sat beyond Renly with Jacelyn Bywater opposite.

As the meeting began Renly lent forward, “Is she still alive?” was his first urgent question as the Small Council meeting began.

Robert scowled at his brother, he huffed angrily, “Yes Renly. The cunt is still alive. I can control myself.”

Renly sat back at least a little relieved, “Good, just because the Kingslayer has been affected by this remembering business doesn't mean that Tywin Lannister hasn't. And even with whatever she did to drive the Kingslayer away, Tywin may still want her back,” Renly blew out a derisive breath, “He may even want her back just for pride's sake.”

Cressen was nodding in agreement now, “The Old Lion is many things...but most of all prideful.”

Robert scowled, “Fine...fine! The cunt will continue to live...for now.” He waved a hand irritably, cutting off further discussion of Cersei's fate. He turned to the newest member of the Small Council, Lord Rosby, “What news?” he demanded gruffly.

Rosby coughed nervously, “Lord Baelish's books have been found. They were hidden in one of his whorehouses,” he sounded a little scared as he admitted his news.

Robert glared at the man when Rosby didn't continue immediately, “It's about time! And?”

Rosby coughed again, “I have found some...irregularities. The crown's finances are not good right now. The crown has loans in excess of six million dragons. We owe most of the money to the Iron Bank, the Faith, and...the Lan...Lannisters.” he finished with a stutter.
“Then it's a good thing I will be crushing the Lannisters and taking Casterly Rock's gold!” Robert retorted quickly, causing Rosby to flinch back in fear.

Rosby nodded quickly, he coughed lightly, his eyes wide as he pulled out a handkerchief and wiped sweat from forehead, “It is indeed, your Grace...but...”

Robert frowned, “But what, Rosby?”

“It seems that that Lord Baelish was also stealing from the crown- I've had all of Baelish's former assets and whoreshouses seized. Anything I could find that he had a hand in I've taken in the crown's name!” Rosby quickly blurted out, there was fear in his eyes now.

Robert's mood darkened.

“If he was stealing from the Lannisters, that would explain why the Kingslayer killed him,” cut in Renly pointedly.

Rosby nodded quickly, “Yes, yes, he was stealing from everyone!”

Suddenly, that was one piece of the puzzle that now made sense...a servant had seen Jaime Lannister take precious time in the escape from King's Landing to brutally kill and decapitate Baelish.

Robert snorted ruefully, now there was only a thousand more pieces to fit together. Like why the Hound killed Joffrey- no that he could understand, but why would he then escape with the rest of the Lannisters? How the fuck Lancel turned into such a fucking religious zealot. What possessed Stannis to burn Shireen. How in all the seven hells had things gotten so bad after he died in the last life! And how in the name of the seven all of them were alive again!

Robert shook his head wearily before he nodded, “Good work, Rosby.”

The tension eased out of Rosby at Robert's simple praise.
The meeting descended into routine as Ironhand reported further improvement in the Goldcloaks. Crime was down and the smallfolk seemed to be preparing for the war as well. Many of them had uprooted themselves and were leaving King's Landing. There were reasons given to questions about why...and there were whispers of impossible things...but nobody could credibly listen to those.

Neither Cressen nor Renly had any news of Davos or Shireen. They'd disappeared like smoke on the wind, and knowing Davos, he'd stay hidden till he wanted to be found. It one Davos's best skills.

Renly had already shared all he knew with Robert and they were just waiting to for replies from the rest of the Kingdoms. They were just going over the same plans they'd already made. As soon as the Stormlanders and Crownlanders were assembled they'd march for Casterly Rock. By that time hopefully Ned would have mobilized the North and they'd either all meet in the Riverlands or around Casterly Rock. To Robert's disappointment, the unrest in the Vale made any support from there unlikely- at least in the first stages of the war against the Lannisters.

Robert was under no illusion that Casterly Rock would be a very hard nut to crack. The Last person to take the castle had been Lann the Clever...but with the combined might of the Seven Kingdoms behind him it was a forgone conclusion what the outcome would be. The only real questions were how bloody and how long would the siege of the Rock be...

Though, Gods it would be good to go to war with Ned by his side again. That thought brought a wide smile to his face.

The door to the Council chambers opened and in strode in a Kingsguard interrupting Robert's talks.

“Forgive the intrusion, your Grace,” began Ser Arys Oakheart as he bowed, “Ser Rober Wode is begging an audience. He claims that he has news that cannot wait.” He looked tense as he spoke.

Robert's smile turned into a frown as he remembered all he knew of House Wode. It was a Knightly House in the Riverlands, directly sworn to the Whents of Harrenhal. The head of the Knightly House was a Ser Robin Wode, during the Rebellion they had joined with the rebels quickly enough. The only reason Robert remembered this was because Ser Robin had a dry wit, which he wasn't afraid to use against anyone...and a knack for finding the best wines in the midst of a feast.

Rober Wode was Ser Robin's oldest son. Why was Ser Robin sending his heir to King's Landing? How dire could the news he carried be?
“News?” asked Renly tersely, beating Robert to the question. “What news?”

“Aye, my Lord, he says he brings news of...treason...and not the Lannister's treason.” Ser Arys finished gravely.


Ser Arys nodded obediently and went to get the Wode heir as Robert's mood darkened. What else could be wrong? And more importantly, who's treason?

Arys returned with a nondescript knight with a mop of brown hair and brown eyes. The three white hedgehogs on a yellow background sigil of House Wode sown prominently on the chest of his black doublet. The most prominent feature of Ser Robin's heir was the sheer nervousness and fear he was extruding. The fear was written plainly across his young face and in his troubled eyes. The boy looked barely ten and seven, barely a man grown and green as grass to boot.

Ser Rober Wode knelt quickly, “Your Grace.” his voice wavered and cracked as he spoke.

“Get up, what's this about treason, boy?” Robert challenged hotly.

Ser Rober quivered in his boots faced with Robert's ire, “My father has always been loyal...he sent me because his words could not be trusted to a raven...if it had been intercepted...” he paused and swallowed audibly, “It's madness, your Grace...it's Rebellion, your Grace,” he finished in a quiet and fearful tone.


“It's madness your Grace...it's Lord Hoster has called his banners, he not going to support you, your Grace...he plans rebellion!” the heir of House Wode said. Ser Rober was shifting uncomfortably as he announced his liege lord's act of betrayal.

Robert gaped for a moment, “Are you *mad?!* Hoster Tully is one of my loyalest bannermen!” he thundered angrily. He looked to the rest of the Small Council. They all had equally shocked and disturbed expressions.
As Robert turned back to face Ser Rober, who cowered back in the face of Robert's denial, Ser Rober gulped, “It's the truth my lord...Lord Hoster has forsworn his loyalty to House Baratheon!”

“Hoster is Ned's goodfather! He stood with us proudly against the Mad King!” Robert continued to roar in deal as stepped forward to stand face to face with Ser Rober.

“It makes no sense for Lord Hoster to turn against us!” decried Renly angrily, adding his disbelief to Robert's.

Rober was cowering again as he began, “Lord Hoster has bent the knee to House...Targaryen.” There was terror in his eyes as Rober spoke the name.

Robert stepped back unbelieving, as if Ser Rober had struck him.

The last of his good mood disappeared as he suddenly saw red. Again, fury gripped his very soul as Rober's words made his world shrink, old wounds being ripped open and old rages being ignited into burning hatred once more.

Such was his fury was that he found he had no words to deny the boy's mad words.

It was Cressen who found his voice first, his voice was confused but strong as he spoke, helping to steady Robert, “Viserys Targaryen is across the Narrow Sea, he has no army or true followers to his name. The Beggar King is no king. Surely you and your father are mistaken?”

Rober shook his head, “It's not Viserys Targaryen...the raven Lord Hoster sent said that this Targaryen is already here in Westeros...his name is Jon Targaryen,” he gulped in fear as he finished speaking.

The silence in the room was deafening. Cressen and Renly stared at Wode for a moment before turning to Robert with fear on their faces. Rosby seemed to be trying to disappear into his chair and Ironhand's face had turned to stone.

“Jon...Targaryen? WHO THE FUCK IS JON TARGARYEN?!” screamed Robert incensed.
Ser Rober shrunk back in fear. The boy looked like he was going to piss himself now—but he still he answered bravely, “I don't...know, your Grace...but Lord Hoster has already swore fealty to him.” He gingerly held out a scroll in a trembling hand, “Lord Hoster sent this to my father.”

Robert snatched it away from Rober and read it quickly...by the time he had finished reading it, his face was pale and he was the one trembling. The scroll was written in Hoster's hand and had the seal of House Tully. The words were horrific in their content...and it confirmed everything the boy had said of Hoster Tully.

Renly came to his side and took the scroll from him, his eyes rapidly reading the words. When he was finished he was just as pale as Robert.

“Who the fuck is Jon Targaryen?” Robert repeated. It came out as a hoarse whisper, “Where has this Dragonspawn been hiding?”

Renly shook his head, equally in disbelief, “I...I don't know....”

Robert whorled towards him, “You're my fucking Master of Whispers! Fucking find out!” he roared at Renly.

Renly stepped back in surprise, “Of...of course! Of course, brother! I find out immediately!” he rushed out of the room to obey, rather than facing Robert's burning rage.

First, the Lannisters...and now the Tullys? What madness is this? Ned's goodfather is turning against me for the fucking dragons?

“Ser Rober,” he began gravely, “this service and your father's true fealty will not be forgotten.”

The boy bowed deeply, a relieved expression coming to his face, his face flushing red with relief.

“Cressen! Send out more ravens, it seems we have Dragonspawn to crush before the fucking Lannisters,” Robert announced darkly as he began pacing back and forth, lost in thought.

He imagined his warhammer in his hand. His hand closed around the haft of the imaginary
warhammer. Another dragon to crush, just as he crushed fucking Rhaegar Targaryen.

A smile came to his face, it would be just like old times, him and Ned fighting and crushing the arrogant Dragons...goodfamily or not, Ned would be as incensed as Robert at this betrayal. Whatever madness was gripping Hoster and the Riverlands, he'd put an end to it!

They wouldn't know what hit them!

Oh, yes! The North would be the anvil! He and the Stormlords would be the hammer! And between them they'd crush the fucking Dragonspawn!

Daenerys Targaryen

Talisia seemed to be very flustered- not that she could blame her.

“Robb seems to a very formidable man, I look forward to meeting him one day,” Daenerys stated happily after Talisa had finished speaking.

Daenerys tried to imagine what was going through Talisa's mind, given her defiance and willingness to defend Robb and the Starks so fiercely. The girl had obviously thought that Daenerys meant them harm considering the recent history between House Stark and Targaryen. And despite leaving Westeros, she was apparently still very loyal to House Stark. They had continued talking after the misunderstanding had been cleared up, mainly about Robb and the War of the Five Kings.

After that things had become much more laid back and relaxed. They talked about other less significant things- even talked about the Starks Direwolves. Their ferocity on the battlefield and how they acted off the battlefield.

“...At other times Grey Wind seemed like a very big puppy,” Talisa said with a smile.

Daenerys's smile grew, “It was the same with Ghost at times. He'd be intimidating some uncertain lord one minute, the next...he'd be rolling on the floor giving you big beseeching eyes or slobbering
all over you.” she responded with fond amusement.

Talisa giggled, “You wouldn't think that Direwolves could be so affectionate.”

Daenerys nodded in agreement.

Talisa bit her lip and then sighed, “I do miss Grey Wind.” She laughed, “He was the best blanket I've ever had.”

It was Daenerys's turn to laugh. Ghost had been the same as well, “I can't disagree with that!” she raised her goblet in a toast, “To the best blankets in Westeros!”

Talisa joined her in the toast and they drank together.

They shared a companionable smile as they sat, the comfortable silence encompassing them.

Talisa was squirming in her chair now, “What will you do now?”

And just like that reality came back to Daenerys. The meeting had so far been amusing and fun- and distracting, but now she had to share the bleak truth of what was coming.

Daenerys put her goblet down and sat up straighter in her chair, “There are many things you have to know. After you and Robb died...”

Slowly, she explained all the salient facts that came after the Red Wedding, she watched as Talisa's good mood disappeared and she became pale. Daenerys's story culminated in the coming of the Others and the spell that had been cast by Brandon Stark.

The joyful mood of the moment was well and truly gone.

It took Talisa a while to be able to find her voice, as she voiced a simple question...What now?
It was deceptively simple question...and for the moment it had a simple answer, consolidation. Consolidation of Pentos, figuring out what was going on in Slaver's bay and the rest of the Dothraki. And more importantly, wait for word from Westeros. From Jon.

“For now, I am staying in Pentos, there are still many things that must done here. As for you...you are not my prisoner or enemy...though...an army always needs a good healer...” Daenerys started giving Talisa a sly look, “you would be welcome here among my people...” she offered.

Talis blinked in surprise. She pursed her lips in thought, a moment passed before she answered.“I think I would like that, your Grace.”

Her mind was excited by the prospects that were suddenly in front of her. She'd missed so much after she'd died. The whole world had changed so quickly suddenly.

For a day that started with such a possible bleak ending, things were greatly improved- beyond anything she could have imagined.

Another part of her was terrified, the revelations Daenerys had given her were horrific. Magic had seemed dead for so long...but that wasn't the truth. It had slumbered and waited and now...dragons lived again. If that wasn't enough...

Talisa shuddered as the rest of Daenerys's words returned to her.

Talisa had been among the Northmen long enough to hear their scary tales. Tall tales she'd imagined them to be...but they weren't tall tales at all. The Others and the army of the dead were coming for them all. Death was coming to claim the world and they had to stand against it.

Her decision to stay hadn't been a hard one. Daenerys was ushering in a new age of freedom for all here in Essos. It would be glorious...provided they managed to stop the Others.
Her thoughts had made time pass quickly, and she noticed that she had reached the ship. The *Wild Yalla* stood in port, nearly a wreck, but there men crawling up and down on repairing the ship as Captain Varan screamed out orders and insults at them.

He caught sight of her and for a moment a concerned looked crossed his face before it returned to the gruff and annoyed look it had had displayed there.

The Captain continued to bark out orders to his men as he approached with a concerned look on his face, “Is everything alright?” asked seriously.

Talisah breathed deep, “Yes actually.”

The Captain’s face turned pensive, “You care to explain then why I’ve had Pentosi healers- that I didn’t pay for, looking after the men you should be looking after?” he asked pointedly, more than a little miffed.

Talisah shrugged, “Queen Daenerys wanted a word with me, they’re here by her command. There wasn’t actually anything I can do about it.”

The Captain had a strange look on his face, “Queen Daenerys…insisted?” he paused and shook his head, “I heard about the changes from the Dockmaster. He had some outlandish tales-”

She interrupted him, “You should believe it all.”

The Captain look discomforted, “So…she's Mother of Dragons again?”

She nodded, “Among other things yes.”

The Captain rubbed his face, “What did she want with you?”

“Apparently, we had a lot to discuss…” she admitted sheepishly.

“And?” he gestured for her to continue.
“It seems I won't be coming with you to Braavos...I will be staying in Pentos,” Talisa explained simply with a shrug, “the Queen has secured my services for the foreseeable future.”

Daenerys Targaryen was building a better world and she wanted to be a part of it!

She would be a part of it!

Chapter End Notes

Author's Notes: Hoped you liked this. I know many of you have been waiting for Robert's reaction to this :D The rest and full truth will come soon enough ;) If anyone is confused about Robert's plans and the ravens he's received, remember- People LIE. As always, don't forget to REVIEW! :)


Myrcella Baratheon

She'd been enjoying being a child again, Cousin Martyn was nice. She hadn't spent a lot of time with him in the last life. He and his brother were fun to play with. They weren't as stupid or moronic as their brother Lancel...and Martyn remembered just like her, but Willem didn't. Martyn was also enjoying this second life with gusto, while also training as much as possible. He didn't want to end up like he did in the last life...not that she could blame him, she'd didn't want to meet the same end either.

Anyway, he was dragging everyone- the youngsters at least, around him, along in his pursuit of just letting go of everything and having fun despite all that they all knew was probably going to be happening in the near future.

War was a certainty that most of the people of the Rock understood was coming... and enough knew that it wasn't just against the living...

And yet, life went on, Uncle Tyrion was Lord of Casterly Rock now, and father had renounced all claims as the firstborn son, even though he had also disposed of his white cloak. She was unsure what exactly he would be doing now...well other than supporting Uncle Tyrion as he ruled the Westerlands.

Things had been oddly calm in Casterly Rock, but Myrcella didn't delude herself to think it was anything other than the calm before the storm...or maybe it was the eye of the storm?

Uncle Tyrion was in charge and things were going smoothly, Great Uncle Kevan was by his side, just as he had stood at Grandfather's side every time they had previously visited the Westerlands. Cousin Daven was running around, back and forth between the Rock and Lannisport, and other nearby areas on business, while various unbelieving Lords had come to see the new shift of power themselves. In the end, all had sworn fealty to uncle Tyrion, all their misgivings dissolving in the face of Uncle Tyrion's words and the supporting presence of Uncle Kevan, Father and Aunt Genna behind him...not to mention Uncle's lowborn sellsword Bronn. Myrcella wasn't sure how, but Bronn was now apparently betrothed to Alysanne Lefford. She'd spoken with the lady, and Alysanne had
seemed surprisingly welcoming- even a bit happy for the coming wedding.

It was strange to see how life had changed...Mother was gone, she knew no one would be trying to save her- if she was even still alive. No matter what father said about her, a part of her still missed mother. Also, she was openly calling father, father. And no one was surprised by that or disapproving or that.

Myrcella paused. of course father is still one of the best swords in Westeros...that probably has something to do with it as well, she thought dryly.

Then there was the Hound. Joffrey's sworn sword was her shadow now, at least for most of her time and any time she left Casterly Rock.

That had taken some getting used to....

He'd always been more than a little bit scary. The name Clegane was not one that was welcome in most places of Westeros. His big brother had given their House more infamy with a single act that most Houses accumulated in several lifetimes...and Sandor's visage and demeanor hadn't helped any in the previous life.

But that was the previous life...he seemed to be...kinder now. More foul mouth as well.

She'd actually seen him smile once!

Getting over initial fear of him, she had started to talk to him and was getting his story from him bit by bit but it was slow going.

At the opposite to end to the happier Hound...was Tommen...

Despite the merry mood Martyn was creating, Tommen was still as sullen as he had been since finding out the truth about father. His anger and disgust hadn't abated. This new Tommen only looked like her sweet brother. He was spending his time alone, withdraw from anyone but her. Only she could drag him out to do anything constructive, or get him to be somewhat less sullen these days.
The adults...she snorted mentally, she'd been an adult just a matter of weeks ago. The adults were all concerned for him, no one more so than father. Not that there was anything he could do now for Tommen.

She could see the pain in father's eyes every time he encountered Tommen. Her sweet brother always had a hateful look to throw at father whenever they were forced to be in the same room or hall.

Tommen was a source of concern for all of House Lannister. Which led them to today. Uncle Tyrion had summoned them both to his solar.

Uncle Tyrion was sitting behind his desk when she entered, with Tommen following behind her. Great Uncle Kevan was here as well. Uncle Tyrion rose to greet them.

Her uncle was looking at her with a beaming smile. He walked up to her and leaned forward to gave her a kiss on the cheek, “And how are you are doing this beautiful day?” he said with a witty over the top tone.

She giggled and smiled back at her impish uncle, “I'm fine, uncle.” She looked him in eye. They were of a height again now. Something else she'd have to get used again...at least for a while.

He gave a her a dazzling smile before turning to Tommen.

“Dear nephew,” Tyrion began, “You need to smile more! This is a second chance at life. It's best to enjoy it to its fullest!” Tommen was shorter than him, and he reached out and ruffled his hair as he used to when they were younger.

Tommen gave him an annoyed look that caused Uncle Tyrion to laugh.

“Do you know why I've called you here?” Uncle Tyrion began when he stopped laughing.

Myrcella and Tommen both shook their heads.

He nodded and began speaking, “As Hand to the Queen Daenerys Targaryen, I wield a great deal of
power,” he began smugly, “in my capacity as such I have decided to declare you both members of House Lannister. You will be Myrcella Lannister and Tommen Lannister from this day hence!” he finished happily.

Myrcella was surprised and more than a little happy, the life of a bastard had not been something she had been looking forward to. She'd known that Tyrion would always look out for them but this was beyond what she had expected! Or hoped for. She had expected to be married off to a loyal Lannister knight when she came of age...but that was it.

“No,” Tommen retorted fiercely, “I don't want to be Tommen Lannister. I'd rather be Tommen Waters.”

Myrcella's surprise turned to shock, and she wasn't the only one, Tyrion and Kevan held similar expressions on their faces as the one that she was probably wearing. Surprise. Shock. Disbelief. Tommen wanted to known as a bastard?

Uncle Tyrion frowned, “Tommen?”

“I don't want to be a Lannister,” Tommen repeated sullenly.

Uncle Kevan was gaping at Tommen, he sputtered and was about to say something, but Uncle Tyrion held up a hand stopping. Instead Uncle Kevan just frowned disapprovingly, but he didn't say what was on his mind.

“Alright then Tommen, then what do you want to be?” Uncle Tyrion asked inquisitively.

Tommen thought deeply for a moment before answering, “I want to be my own man...” he began earnestly, his sullenness disappearing for a moment as he trailed off. He turned to stare up at Uncle Kevan, “Can I be your squire?” he asked, suddenly earnest.

Uncle Kevan knelt down next to Tommen, his face softening, as a smile spreading across his aged face, “I think that would be a good idea.” He turned back to look at Uncle Tyrion, “Well Tyrion, what do you think?”

Uncle Tyrion was smiling widely, “I think that would be an excellent idea! Though...perhaps as a page, first? You're still a little small to be a squire right now,” he finished with a twinkle of
amusement in his eye.

Tommen looked a little startled at that and he stared down quickly at his body for a moment before giving Uncle Tyrion a sheepish look, “I think you're right Uncle...I forgot how young I've become...” he raised his hands and looked at his small chubby childish hands, “I suppose page will have to do for now.”

“So page to our dear Uncle Kevan, then squire and then knight, yes?” Uncle Tyrion suggested with sage nods.

Tommen listened and the old Tommen seemed to be reappearing now, he smiled his old happy smile, “Ser Tommen Waters, sounds good.”

Uncle Tyrion nodded and clapped his hands together, “Ser Tommen Waters it is! Listen well to Uncle Kevan and you'll be a good and honorable knight in no time! Our Uncle has always been a good knight! There's a reason the Westerlands don't have any bandits left!” he complimented Uncle Kevan.

Tommen gave them a small satisfied smile.

And Myrcella smiled at seeing Tommen smiling again, “A knight in shining armour to protect the people,” she added happily.

Tommen's small grew bigger at that thought.

The rest of the day had passed as a blur for her after the meeting with Uncle Tyrion. Tommen's mood had been lifted greatly as he started his service to Great Uncle Kevan, but now it was almost time for dinner. Tommen would eat with Uncle Kevan, and the rest of uncle's family.

She, on the other hand, had dragged father from the training yard and would drag Uncle Tyrion to dinner, whether he wanted to or not. He was working much too hard. It couldn't be healthy for him to be so overworked.
Uncle needed to take better care of himself- which was why she was going to insist on him joining her and father for dinner tonight. A little time with with family, in the quiet, and some rest before anything else happened. It would do him a world of good.

She treasured her time with father and uncle Tyrion, before mother had gone out of her way to keep them both away from her.

As she approached Uncle's solar, she saw a beautiful maid entering with a tray of food and wine.

She recognized the maid and sighed in disappointment. Despite mother, she knew her uncle's habits and her time in Dorne had educated her more than mother would have ever wanted...not that she hadn't understood what her uncle was usually up to with the pretty maids. Her uncle was probably going to busy for a while, if not the rest of the night.

No family dinner tonight then...maybe tomorrow?

She turned around and left him to his debauchery. Father was probably already waiting for her now.

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**Tyrion Lannister**

As soon as the children were gone, Kevan turned to Tyrion with a disquieted expression on his face, “You're not seriously going let him be a Waters?” he questioned urgently. “Tommen is a good lad, with proper guidance, he'd be a credit to House Lannister, even with the truth of his birth.”

Tyrion looked at his uncle and snorted, “Of course not. He will be Ser Tommen Lannister...give it time and I'll changed his mind. For now just humor the boy, uncle.” Tyrion took back his seat behind his desk and sat back thoughtfully. “I cannot imagine what it was like to decide to take one's own life after what happened with Cersei...we'll have to keep a close eye on him for the time being...as if there wasn't enough for us to do.”

Kevan scowled at the mention of Cersei, but he quickly shook it off. Moving on, he took a seat opposite Tyrion, and gave him a long look, “It's to be expected. A war is coming. Wars are complicated.”
Tyrion snorted, he replied dryly, “You don't say, uncle! I am well aware of how complicated things are...much more than you are.”

Kevan's lips thinned, “You have told me all that is coming,” he retorted in a deadpan.

“Hearing everything is different from living it,” Tyrion stated evenly, “To actually see the reality of it is something else. Be it dragons or the army of the dead or the Children of the Forest.”

Kevan looked nonplussed, before shaking his head, “It is a time of legends we find ourselves living in now...”

“A second Age of Heroes, uncle,” Tyrion replied gravely and quickly, “I only hope that this time, history does not find us lacking.”

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Time flew by and Tyrion's stomach was begging to rumble. Kevan had left earlier to see to his duties, leaving him to the paperwork that came with being the Lord of Casterly Rock. The days were shorter than he remembered, and there was always so much to do as the new Lord of Casterly Rock. The meeting with the children had been a good diversion, but he had important things he need to sort out.

First and foremost, the ongoing mining of dragonglass in Casterly Rock. All other mining had been stopped. Within six months, he intended for every Redcloak to be armed with a dragonglass sword and daggers. There were other sources of dragonglass in Westeros, Dragonstone and the Last Heath, most notably- and both were in uncertain hands for the moment. So, for the moment, it fell to them to mine enough to arm all the people of Westeros.

The door to his solar opened and closed with quiet efficiency. The soft footsteps of a maid reached his ears. The smell of freshly baked bread and roasted boar, assailed his nose next.

His mouth started to water but he pushed it away, he would finish going through the pile of reports in front of him first before he ate.
“Just put it down...somewhere. You can go, if I want anything else, I'll send for it,” Tyrion said without looking up from the scroll he was reading. More reports of movements of men along their borders with the Reach and the Riverlands. He put the scroll aside and picked up the next one.

“What if there's something I want?” the servant retorted angrily with a strangely familiar foreign voice.

Tyrion looked up sharply, intending to reprimand the servant, but his normally glib mind ground to a sudden and painful halt as he looked up. He knew why her voice sounded so familiar. He gaped up at the servant as he recognized her.

“Shae?” he breathlessly asked in disbelief.

The look of fury she gave him startled and scared him. He registered what she had said and along with the look in her eyes- it left no question as to whether or not she remembered him...or remembered what happened at the end.

“...Shae...” he repeated in disbelief.

“Yes...my lion?” she spat venomously.

Oh Gods! The sheer weight of his guilt threatened to drown him as the horrible night in the Red Keep came back to him. The frenzied, panicked struggle from that night as she went to for a knife and instincts he hadn't known he'd had came into play. He was frozen now, looking at her. The greatest of his regrets come back to haunt and taunt him. It had never occurred to him to search for her after the spell. What did she want? Why didn't she stay away? What could one say after...after what he did?

Slowly, he stood up, coming out from behind his desk. She didn't say anything, she just continued to glare. For a long minute they stared at each other. Words escaped him and whatever she was feeling, she didn't look she was in the mood to share it.

Tyrion gulped, finally finding his voice, “...I'm...sorry...”

“That's all you have to say to your whore?” she sneered angrily as she took a step towards him.
He flinched at her words, the word *whore* making his teeth hurt, father had called her that...

“...” he stopped, he didn't have the proper words.

“I? I, what? I'm sorry I scorned, you? I'm sorry that I hurt, you? I'm sorry I murdered, you?” she cried out bitterly. Her eyes danced with fire and with each word, she took a step closer to him.

Each of her words held such weight. Each one as heavy as a mace head. Each a blow with such *tremendous* power. He listened silently- he couldn't do anything else. His tongue was leaden and heavy, there wasn't a right thing to say here. No matter how smart he was, there just wasn't anything he could say to her. Not after all that happened before.

There was fury on her face as she suddenly closed the distance between them.

Too late, he saw the *dagger* in her hand...

He tried to raise his hands up to ward off the dagger, but...he wasn't quick enough.

Chapter End Notes

Author's notes: he he, Enjoy the cliffhanger! :D And don't forget to review! :D
Thanks for the reviews for the last chapter! Glad everyone enjoyed the cliffhanger :D ;p That said, I think a lot of you need to go back and re-watch the Shae/Tyrion scenes, her death scene in particular and the others in general. There are answers to most of your questions there. Also, hell hath no fury like a woman scorned- hence the previous chapter name. Anyway, on to the new chapter! Writing the Roose POV was like pulling teeth, I knew what I wanted to write but it just took forever to finish it. Anyway, don't forget to review! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**Chapter 26 Dread**

**Roose Bolton**

Roose stood on the battlements of the Dreadfort as he stared at the approaching men, in trepidation. Too many things were different. And not enough made sense. The raven he'd received from Lord Stark had commanded him to stay in the Dreadfort and await his coming. Stark hadn't given any more details other than *that*. The men approaching the Dreadfort were proudly flying the Stark Direwolf but it wasn't flying along. Reed and Manderly banners flew side by side. The number of the men accompanying were also not putting Roose at ease. Why did Eddard need so many men with him?

Things had changed and he had no idea why. Those that did were not speaking to him of it. Ravens to his own bannermen had gone unanswered and any messengers he sent to them never returned.

The only news he had had, had been brought to him by a half dead, very bedraggled and traumatized Whitehill guardsman that been half crazy when he arrived at the Dreadfort. The man had been crazed and screaming of an unwarranted *surprise* attack on House Whitehill by House *Forrester*.

The flaring up the Whitehill-Forrester feud was not surprising. A night surprise attack by the Forresters was. Lord Gregor Forrester, Lord Gregor *the Good*. That the guard was claiming that this *honorable* lord had mercilessly attacked Highpoint was ludicrous. He'd had the man thrown into the dungeons. Soon enough he'd have true answers to his questions.
Roose shook his head, too much no longer made any sense and he could trace it all back to that one night. Vestiges of a forgotten dream tried to come to the surface of his mind but it was just whispers on the wind...a half formed image....a wedding. Why a wedding? What was so important about a wedding? The dreams and the wedding seemed to be trying to haunt him since that night.

That was the night everything had changed...

Half of his men had deserted that night. Half of the smallfolk had fled the Dreadfort without any explanation and those that had stayed couldn't explain why the other half had disappeared so suddenly.

The only explanation he'd been given had been half whispered words about knowing the future and what was coming. Magic had been joined to those words as well.

It was impossible and insane.

But then again, for more than half the population of the Dreadfort and the surrounding lands to suddenly up and leave with no explanation was impossible and insane.

But now, perhaps he would get some rational answers.

Men were approaching the Dreadfort. A large number of them, enough to call an army. Normally that many men approaching would be a cause for disquiet and alarm, but at the head of the men, came Eddard Stark and his sons.

Whatever may be happening, Eddard Stark was still an honorable, predictable fool. And Roose had done nothing to gain Eddard's ire.

He watched silently as they approached.

The first sign that something was not right was came as the men came close enough for Roose to get a good look at the head of the column.
He frowned as he stared at Ned's bastard. His eyes widened in surprised as the boy neared. The boy wore fine clothes, finer than a bastard usually wore...but instead of the direwolf insignia of House Stark on his clothes, stitched brazenly over his chest was the red dragon of House Targaryen.

A sliver of ice worked his way into his gut. Why was the bastard wearing Targaryen colours? Roose stilled the uncertainty in him and steeled himself, keeping his face blank as he looked about as the men approached.

As the men entered the Dreadfort, Roose quickly left the battlements and went to greet them in the courtyard despite his sudden misgivings.

Lord Stark, his sons and some of his men dismounted in the courtyard of the Dreadfort. The rest remained mounted and sat watchful and waiting. It took Roose a moment but he recognized a stoic Howland Reed standing deferentially to Lord Stark’s side.

Lord Stark strode forward at the head of the group, his bastard stood to his left with his heir on the other side. Lord Stark's face was mask of stone. The bastard had an identical expression on his face as his father, but Robb Stark's eyes held such hate in them, that Roose nearly recoiled from it. A smaller figure came out from behind them and stood between Stark and his bastard.

Blank emotionless eyes stared up at him. The intensity of the gaze disturbed Roose. Usually, it was his gaze that disturbed people not the other way around. A small boy's expression should not be enough to scare the Lord of the Dreadfort.

He stepped forward to greet his liege lord, collecting himself as his expression turned guarded and blank, “Welcome to the Dreadfort, Lord Stark,” he bowed deeply.

“Lord Bolton,” Stark nodded gravely, his expression darkened. His tone was cold as ice. He didn't add anything more.

Roose glanced about warily waiting for Lord Stark to continue...but he didn't.

He shifted uncomfortably, “Lord Stark, I...there are questions.” he stated simply breaking the silence.

Lord Stark's gaze remained cool, he raised his hand towards his bastard and caused Roose's world to come crashing down with Stark's next words.
“Bend the knee my Lord, to my sister's son, Jon Targaryen, and our rightful King.”

Roose couldn't help himself, he gaped at Eddard Stark. His mind was reeling with the implications and the new world he was being forced into.

*Rebellion? Against Robert Baratheon? The honorable Eddard Stark rising up and seizing power over the Seven Kingdoms in his nephew's name? The world truly has gone mad!*

Suddenly, all the men with Stark had more sinister overtures.

Roose's expression wasn't guarded or calculated. One couldn't prepare for such a sudden and impossible to predict paradigm shift in power.

“Our...King?” Roose's voice was higher than he wanted when he finally managed to retort, he quickly cleared his throat and asked again, “King, my lord?”

Stark nodded, “My sister's trueborn son,” he stressed the word, trueborn.

Roose cast a look at Jon Targaryen. The boy looked back at him and Roose was startled by how hard and unforgiving his dark eyes were. The boy was pretty enough to pass for a Targaryen, but his colours spoke only of his Stark ancestry. He was young but neither his demeanor nor eyes betrayed his youth. He looked more like a veteran than a green boy.

“He doesn't need to bend the knee father!” cut in Lord Stark's heir, his voice venomous and angry, “He won't live long enough for it to matter! Seize him and let us be done here!” The boy suddenly had a sword in his hand and pointed towards to Roose.

Roose wasn't the only one in danger, the few Bolton men around them suddenly found themselves with bow's draw and pointed at them or with blades pointed at their throats by Stark's men.

Lord Stark had a look of surprise on his face, but his nephew cut him off, “Robb's right. Seize him! Take the castle!” commanded Jon Targaryen. He sounded more like a man used to command than the green boy he looked to be...he should have been.
Roose jerked about looking about in surprise as the Stark men ran to obey. Screams and the clash of steel on steel started to echo through the Dreadfort as his meager forces were taken by surprise by the Stark men.

It was over before he knew it, and all Roose could do was stand there with Robb Stark's, very steady, blade at his throat as the Dreadfort was sacked around him.

“There is much we have to discuss, Lord Bolton,” Jon Targaryen declared firmly. He reached out and lowered Robb's blade.

Roose gave him a long look, much to discus was an understatement...

xoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxo

He'd been led to his own solar by the Starks and Targaryen King. Lord Reed had stayed behind to command the men and finish securing the Dreadfort. The young boy, apparently, Brandon Stark, had led them there as if he been there a thousand times. Maester Wolkan had met them there, he'd gave them all one look and then seemed to sag in relief for a moment before bowing deeply to Jon Targaryen calling him your grace.

Wolkan had known been silent. All these weeks and he'd been silent. Never once had he spoken a word to warn Roose or explain anything. That betrayal aside, upon reaching the solar, the Starks had woven an impossible tale for him. Death, betrayal and magic. Including Roose's own betrayal of the Starks and his murder of Robb Stark. The maester had confirmed much of the story before being sent from the solar to help Lord Reed control the castle.

And the Others...the army of the dead was coming. A second Long Night was coming and if he prepare his words properly, he'd likely not live to see it in all its horror.

Now, suddenly everything was starting to make impossible sense...and there was such a sense of dread in him. It was almost overpowering all of his senses.

“It was your dagger in my heart,” spat Robb enraged. His eyes danced with restrained violence.
Robb's angry words added even more turmoil to his already scattered thoughts. Roose could taste just how precarious his position was now, his mind scrambled for words. “That was the other Roose, I have no recollection of this and you still live. I cannot be judged for what I have not done,” he rebuffed, “I have always been loyal to House Stark.” he finished firmly, a sense of assurance coming to him. Eddard Stark would not punish a man for something he hadn't done.

“Our blades are sharp. Always keep our blades sharp, the Starks think they are safe, but we will always be waiting...and ready to take what has been denied us for so long. Your father told you that, over and over again,” Brandon finished speaking.

For the first time since he was a boy, Roose completely lost what was left of his composure and gaped again, “How? How can you know this!” Father had always reminded him of that...but only when they had been alone!

Brandon Stark just stared back and didn't answer.

Roose looked around him, Eddard and Jon were giving him hard stares. Robb's was down right murderous now.

Jon broke the silence, raising a hand, “Before we continue, there is one matter we must speak of...where is Ramsay?” he demanded, his face darkening as he spoke the name.

Roose was still reeling, but he answered simply, “He's dead. My men found what was left of him...it looked like his own dogs turned on him...”

Jon looked startled for a moment before twisting to look at Brandon, giving him a long stare and then letting out a heavy sigh as he started rubbing his face.

“What?” asked Eddard, frowning in confusion while looking at Jon.

“I told you what I was going to do,” Brandon said, “I warged into his dogs and dealt with him. He's one less problem for us.”

Warged? That word startled Roose greatly as even more magic was thrown at him.
Jon signed again, rubbing his head as Ned suddenly seemed to understand. He fumed and exploded.

“How could you Bran! We do not do such things!” Eddard cried out in anger, he turned to Jon his anger undimmed, “You will allow this?”

Jon's jaw clenched and unclenched, “Ruling the Seven Kingdoms is one thing...getting my siblings to obey me is a completely different issue.” he said in a deadpan, his voice dripping with annoyance.

The emotionless boy choose that moment to speak up again, “At least it wasn't Sansa this time,” he pointed out with an indifferent shrug.

Eddard Stark's face turned red.

_Sansa? This time?_ It took Roose a moment to make sense of those words together. _Oh..._

Suddenly, the Starks seemed far more dangerous than he ever gave them credit. The ruthless streak of the Ancient Kings of Winter was very much alive and well in this generation of Starks.

Robb's murderous look had disappeared and been replaced with a shocked and stunned look.

Brandon frowned, “We have bigger issues to deal with.”

The boy had just admitted to murdering Roose's bastard son to the honorable Eddard Stark and he just wanted to move past it as if nothing had happened?

Roose kept his amusement to himself, the boy had provided more than enough of a distraction for him to work with. Probably enough for him to save himself.

Instead of speaking further, Brandon moved behind Roose's desk and unerringly, opened the secret passage there...that _no one_ outside of House Bolton had ever been shown.

And with that all his hopes came to naught. It was at that moment that Roose realised just how fucked he truly was...
Brandon turned to his father, “Come father, see all the Boltons have hidden from you and the Starks of old...”

Time became a blur for Roose. Eddard returned from the secret passages red faced and enraged beyond anything that Roose had ever seen. Not even Eddard's notorious argument with Robert Baratheon over the Targaryen children's fates had seen him this angry.

The torture chambers and centuries of Bolton secrets had been laid bare for the Lord of Winterfell...and he would make Roose pay in blood now.

Two Stark guards dragged him back out to the courtyard, a chopping bock had been hastily prepared by the Stark men.

Roose stared at it in disbelief. All he saw was the end of House Bolton. This truly would be the end of the Red Kings.

Stark men were gathered, Lord Howland Reed was glaring at him, undisguised disgust in the Crannogman's eyes, judging Roose as he approached his death.

The Captain of Eddard's guard grimly approached with a sheathed Ice, held out to his lord.

Robb grabbed Eddard's shoulder as he reached for the sheathed sword. “No father, he's mine. This is my betrayal to avenge.” His words were heavy with death.

Eddard frowned, “No, I am Warden of the North. This is my duty to perform. He will pay all the people he has flayed under my watch.”

“No, uncle, let Robb deal with him,” the Targaryen King countermanded. His eyes were hard and brooked no argument.
Eddard's face was pinched, but he bowed stiffly, stepping back, “Yes, your Grace.”

The murderous look was back on Robb's face. He unsheathed *Ice* with one smooth motion, the two guards forced Roose done onto his knees. Robb came to stand by the chopping block.

“I, Robb Stark, heir of Winterfell, in the name of Jon, the first of his name of House Targaryen, King of the Andals, the Rhoynar and the First Men sentence you to *die*.”

Roose stared with baleful eyes at the Valyrian steel blade and the all consuming hate in Robb Stark's eyes.

The guards pushed Roose forward onto the block.

The blade rose.

“Enjoy the Hells,” spat Robb Stark hateful and satisfied.

The blade came down.

Robb Stark

*Ice* felt heavy in his hands as he stared at Roose's corpse, as it lay at his feet.

Ever since they had awoken, so much had gnawed at his soul, crushing it. His failures and ultimately his brutal murder...Jon had tried to lighten the burden as a true brother would...it had helped some...but still so many mistakes haunted him. More than once he had wondered would the North follow him again? He'd be Lord of Winterfell one day, would they still follow him? He'd led them to ruin, his failures at times almost felt insurmountable. To much plagued his mind these days...but now with Roose dead his mind was clearer now...

He bent down and grabbed the Leech Lord's head from where it had rolled away, he held it up at eye
level and smiled wolfishly at Roose's unseeing eyes.

“No more betrayals. Enjoy the hells you pale bastard...and be sure to give my regards to Lord Walder,” he said with more satisfaction than he felt. Images of Talisa's broken body in a pool of her own blood haunting him as Roose's unseeing eyes stared back at him.

He turned around and found his father staring at him with an unreadable expression. Jon had a satisfied look on his face.

He held the head up triumphantly, “Justice, your Grace,” he gave Jon a heavy nod.

Jon nodded back just as grim and dour as he always was, though there was something else in his eyes that Robb couldn't identify.

Jon turned to Jory, “Jory, put the head on a spike...and make sure you put it somewhere everyone can see it!” his face turned grimmer, “Take down all the Flayed Man banners and raise up Direwolf banners! Let everyone know the cost of betraying the Starks and the people of the North...and don't worry Sansa made sure we had enough Direwolf banners for this.”

Jory cast a surprised look at Jon before hesitantly taking the head from Robb.

Robb watched Jory as he walked away to obey, a tightness he hadn't realised was in his chest had eased. Roose was dead. His bastard was dead- no matter how it happened. House Bolton was gone and would never return. They could never betray the Starks ever again.

“Wipe the blade,” father ordered suddenly. He had an upset look on his face.

Robb started and looked down at Ice. The blade was red and dripping, stained with Roose Bolton's blood.

Robb nodded quickly, “Of course, father,” he obeyed and wiped the blood off on Roose's corpse.

His father took the blade from him, the expression on his face hadn't changed.
“Father?” asked Robb as an uncertain frown came to his face.

His father sheathed Ice and used the strap to carry it over his shoulder. He looked between Robb and Jon before sighing uneasily.

“What now?” Father asked Jon gravely.

“We leave men to secure the Dreadfort and the former Bolton lands. For the foreseeable future, as we agreed these lands will be Stark lands. After we've dealt with the Others, you can do with the lands as you see fit, Uncle...but we need to get to the Karhold now. We will have to speak with Lord Karstark. He must renew his fealty to you,” Jon reminded them, “But first ravens back to Sansa. We will need to appoint someone to oversee these lands for the time being.” he paused thoughtfully, “she probably has someone in mind already, though she knows who I want here.”

Father looked annoyed, “We should have decided this before we left Winterfell.”

“I did, but I still need to hear from Sansa. Perhaps something new has happened since we left.” Jon shook his head, “In any case, this is merely the first step. The Karhold and Last Heath must stand with us to heal the broken North.”

Father looked less annoyed, maybe a little satisfied now.

“I'm not expecting a warm welcome when we get there,” commented Robb in a deadpan. The Karhold and dealing with Rickard Karstark was something that he had been dreading since they left Winterfell. Even father hadn't been looking forward to it. The grim set to his features never seemed to leave him these days.

Not that he felt any better...he glanced down at the decapitated body of Roose Bolton. Alright, he did feel better. One less traitor to be dealt with.

Robb shot a look at were Bran had been standing watching, unflinching and silent even as Robb had executed Roose. Father's anger was under control but it was still there. Bran's words and actions had dealt with one other traitor, and sealed Robb's consternation over how Bran had changed. The Three Eyed Raven looked like his brother...but he wasn't Bran. Not by a long shot...
It mattered, but there wasn't really anything he could do about it now. All he could do was steel and prepare himself.

All too soon, he'd have to face Rickard Karstark again.

Qyburn

He hurried, they would be searching here soon enough. They were coming for him. He was coming for him...

He pulled up another floorboard, making enough room for him to hide his books. He'd wrapped the books in a thick fireproof wrap he'd made years back. Even when they set fire to his dwelling, the books and all the knowledge he'd accumulated in the last life would be saved. Quickly, he replaced the floorboards and pushed the bed back over the secret compartment in his hovel. He turned back to the door of his hovel, waiting for his coming doom.

This return, had initially, surprised and delighted him. It was a second chance to finish all the work. Things had taken a turn for the worse at the end of his last life. There was so much he'd learned and had been unable put into practice when it all came to an abrupt end.

Cersei had been a good patron- with the proper managing. Her rages and anger had been easy to direct, she'd had more than enough enemies to deal with, he hadn't actually had to make anything up. He'd used her for the free rein she'd given him for his experiments. Clegane and the others that he'd eventually made for her were more than enough to buy him the privacy and trust he'd needed to discover so much.

He sighed, and adjusted his robes, it had all come crashing down at the end, far too quickly for him to save any of his new found knowledge. Death had claimed him as all of Cersei's enemies had finally come for her and all who stood with her.

But then...this...second life had happened. Some remembered, others didn't enough for him to slip back into obscurity to record all his findings to save all that he had discovered. It had been a blessing! No a miracle- almost enough of one to make him believe in the Gods.
The screams from outside had stopped a while ago. The last of the villagers were probably dead by now.

He sighed again, *I hope someone eventually finds my books*....

There was shout outside that was answered by a very deep and angry bellow.

Qyburn composed himself, it would be unseemly to meet death any other way.

He knew *who* was coming for him now.

He didn't have to wait very long as the voices approached. The man's entrance did not disappoint. The door was smashed from it's hinges and created a small dust storm as it landed well away from the doorway.

When the dust settled, a monster in black metal stood blocking the doorway. The monster bent low to pass through the low doorway. Inside, he made the small hovel Qyburn had been living and working in seem even more cramped than it actually was.

The monster removed his helmet as he stretched to his full towering height.

Ser Gregor Clegane stood there in full plate, helmet in hand and the hilt of his greatsword poking out from behind his shoulder. His face held the same scowling, dark expression that had been the very *last* thing *so* many people had beheld, but it looked even darker than usual.

“You,” the word dripped with hate as it left Ser Gregor's lips.

Qyburn didn't let his nervousness show. It was never good to let an animal know just how nervous you were. “Ser Gregor.” He gave the knight a small respectful bow.

Gregor's scowl darkened even further.

Gregor seemed to close the distance between them with a single step.
Suddenly there was a hand around his throat and Qyburn's feet left the ground as Ser Gregor lifted him up one handed to his elevated own eye level.

“I should kill you for what you did,” Ser Gregor growled, eyeing him as one would eye a pitiful morsel.

Qyburn squirmed for a moment in Gregor's grasp. He tried to sigh, but with the hand around his throat it had enough just trying to breath. His end was coming and there really wasn't anything he could do to stop it. Not now, not against the Mountain That Rides.

“All the things you did to me...maybe I should return the favor?” Ser Gregor menaced, a crazed look in his eyes.

Qyburn couldn't answer, breathing was starting to become an issue and there were spots appearing in front of his eyes. He could hear Gregor growling like an animal in anger.

Suddenly the pressure around his throat released, he fell roughly and painfully to the ground below. He sputtered and coughed as he tried to catch his breath. Slowly, painfully his breathing returned to normal and he looked up at Ser Gregor.

Gregor seemed to be trying to control his violent tendencies. He glared down at where Qyburn was lying at his feet.

“You did so many things to me,” Ser Gregor began slowly, “There was so much pain...I didn't know that such pain was possible!” there was some respect coloring Ser Gregor's tone now, it disappeared as he continued, “the fucking dornishman poisoned me,” he spat angrily, “But you managed to save me when that fucking toad Pycelle failed.”

Qyburn watched Gregor as he ranted, unsure of what exactly was happening, pain and death were what he had expected when Gregor found him. Ser Gregor seemed uncharacteristically verbose now with this rant.

“...but it was so quiet. It had never been so quiet. So peaceful,” Ser Gregor admitted in a much surprised tone, loosing the growl and anger of his previous tone and words, “None of the Maesters could do that. They all promised and lied! And I was so powerful! So strong!” Gregor raised up his arms and clenched his hands as if crushing...something, with them.
Skulls, most probably, a part of Qyburn's mind morbidly.

Ser Gregor paused and “Can you give that strength again? But this time I will be my own master! I will control my own actions!” he glared down at Qyburn, with almost an earnest expression on his face, “Can you do that? Can you make that happen?”

Qyburn looked up at Ser Gregor in surprise. Rarely had anything so stunned him. He realised quickly enough the unexpected lifeline that was dangling in front of him. He brushed himself off and quickly rose to his feet as he smoothed out his disarrayed robes.

Perhaps, it's not my day to die today...

“It's...possible...but I will needs some things...expensive things,” Qyburn began slyly.

“You'll get them,” growled back Ser Gregor. He cracked his knuckles noisily and smiled widely, “You'll get everything you need.”

Qyburn nodded as he looked the crazed animal that was the Mountain That Rides unflinching in the eye, “Yes...I believe I can do what you ask...”

Chapter End Notes

he he, Qyburn and the Mountain :D Also, Tyrion's fate will be coming soon enough ;p
As always don't forget to review! :D
Chapter 27 Love makes fools of us all

Myrcella Lannister

She sat down at the table as her father gave her his usual smug smile.

“You're late,” he started, “a Lady should never be late.”

She huffed and then stuck out her tongue at him before dissolving into giggles.

Father laughed heartily, “That's not ladylike either.”

She just smiled as she got comfortable in her chair. The small dinning room they were in was one of the private family rooms that were scattered across the personal floor of the Lord of Casterly Rock. A place that members of the Lannisters had gathered with close family since the time of Lann the Clever.

Father had said this one had been the one he’d shared meals with his own mother once upon a time, a very long time ago. It was also the nearest to the traditional solar of the Lord of Casterly Rock.

The room was very cozy and very opulent. Lannister red and Golden Lions were everywhere she looked. A servant waited patiently for orders to bring them their meal.

“And where is my dear, brother?” asked father, “I doubt he was able to resist your charms and refuse to break for dinner.” He leaned back easily in his chair.

She gave her father a bright smile, “And if I had managed to speak with him, he would have come,” she answered assured of her words.

Father frowned, “He refused to speak with you?” he asked in a doubtful tone.
She shook her head, and thought carefully before wording her response properly, “I didn't try to speak with him, he seemed...a little busy, with his own amusements.”

“Really? You think Tyrion is a little busy now? He's been busy since the day he became Lord of Casterly Rock,” father retorted in amusement. “Which is why we decided to distract him bit with this quiet dinner.”

Myrcella rolled her eyes at his amused tone, and denseness. “He's a little busy with his old friend,” she stressed the word, knowing what her Uncle was probably busy doing now. She'd been in Dorne long enough to know how some men amused themselves. And she'd know her Uncle's tendencies long before that.

Father raised his eyebrows at that, as recognition began to appear in his eyes, “And which old friend is this? Someone I know?”

She nodded, “You know her. It's that foreign one– what was her name? Uh...Shar...No! Shae! That was her name,” she exclaimed, as the proper name came to her.

The amusement disappeared from Father's face as it went blank for a moment, then he paled, horror blossoming on his face. He jumped up, knocking his chair over, and ran from the room suddenly frantically shouting for the guards.

Myrcella gaped at the vacant spot for a moment at the sudden action.

What's going on?

She rose, gathering her skirts and raced after her father, suddenly fearful for Uncle Tyrion's safety.

Jaime Lannister
His heart pounded in his chest like a drum as he raced through Casterly Rock. The last time he'd run like this in the Rock he'd still been a small boy and Mother had still been alive. He'd never run like this as an adult in the Rock.

A group of servants were in his way and he barreled into them sending them flying to the floor. He paid them no attention and continued onwards towards Tyrion's solar.

The distance wasn't far, but as every second passed, Jaime's dread grew. He remembered Shae. He remembered how angry Tyrion had been at the trial at her appearance and how he completely lost it as he heard her lies.

He also remembered how she had been found strangled to death in Father's bed and Father dead with two quarrels in him as he sat on the privy.

He ran faster.

He came to Tyrion's door, and kicked the door open.

He rushed in and found himself in a scene from his nightmares...

Shae was standing over a prone and still Tyrion with a bloodied dagger. His brother's clothes were Lannister red and hid his blood, but the small pool of blood around him...

Jaime tried not to think of the blood as he ran at her. She turned to him, surprise and anger written across her face. She raised her bloodied dagger and met his approach with a downward stab. He dodged the dagger and grabbed her wrist, before pulling her off balance and towards him. She stumbled forward and his fist met her face with all of his strength. Her head rocked back as he put all of his fury and fear into the blow.

Shae dropped like a rock, as if he'd hit her with a mace. She fell bonelessly to the ground, as he released the hold he had on her.

He paid her no more attention before rushing to Tyrion's side, kneeling down next to him. He grabbed him and shook him.
“Tyrion!”

Tyrion's eyes remained closed but he gave a painful groan when Jaime shook him. Jaime's hand moved over Tyrion's body looking for where his brother had been stabbed.

Myrcella was suddenly by his side, white faced and wide eyed, ripping off a strip of her pretty dress. He grabbed the strip from her and applied pressure to the biggest wound he could find.

He could hear the commotion behind him. Other's were coming into the solar, Jaime turned towards them and saw Redcloaks with draw swords standing around stupidly.

“GET THE MAESTER! GET MAESTER CREYLEN!” he screamed at them as he continued to put pressure on Tyrion's bloody wounds.

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Time passed and Tyrion remained sleeping despite old Maester Creylen's assurances that the wounds were healing well with no sign of corruption.

In the aftermath of the attack, he'd had to take over Tyrion's solar to deal with everything...starting with how the in the seven hells did Shae manage to get so close to Tyrion in the first place!

Heads hadn't rolled as he found his answers fairly quickly. Tyrion had been a victim of his own reputation. Shae was an exotic, sensual woman. Combined with Tyrion's own lecherous reputation...it didn't take a genius to imagine how someone could use that, trying to get in good with the new Lord of Casterly Rock.

The guards, the stewards and various head maids had been warned about this happening again, he, Daven, and Bronn had given them a list of Tyrion's real enemies. As well as enlightening them as to just what would happen if something like this ever happened again...

He sighed, the real headache was dealing the rest of Tyrion's duties. Uncle Kevan and Daven helped, but Kevan was insistent that Jaime deal with the bulk of the issues and reports...and preparations.
All the preparations needed for a long winter and a hard war.

The reports in front of him strained his eyes, the words moving around in front of his eyes as he strained to read them properly. Farmers were sowing extra crops, more Redcloaks were bring armed and armored. Scouts were reporting some worrying movements along the border with the Reach...

Knocking interpreted his work.

“Come!” called out Jaime irritably.

The door open and in walked in a Redcloak. He bowed deeply and stepped forward. He stood at attention in front of Jaime.

“I'm assuming there's a good reason for this interruption?” he asked irritably when the Redcloak didn't immediately speak.

“Yes, my lord, there are visitors demanding to see you.” the Redcloak quickly reported to him.

Jaime sighed again, lamenting the situation again, ever since Tyrion had been injured he'd been thrust into a position of authority. Tyrion was still sleeping, recovering from his wounds and Uncle Kevan had made sure that everyone knew Jaime was the one in charge now.

“What visitors?” he barked. They could wait till he held court. Unless for some mad reason, Jon or Daenerys had come here, whoever they were, they could wait for court. He already had too much to do. He told the Redcloak as much.

“Yes, my lord, but they insisted that someone inform you of their arrival. It's an arrogant Stormlander...a Lady Brienne of Tarth...” the Redcloak began with derision.

Jaime was out of his chair before the Redcloak had finished speaking, “Take me to her!” he demanded, not even listening to the rest of the Redcloak's words.
Haste was undignified, and he was the acting Lord of Casterly Rock. Not that he cared at this moment one iota over how he looked. He wasn't running but he was setting a fast pace for the Redcloak that was trying to guide him towards wherever he'd had Brienne wait.

The Redcloak guided him to a large atrium two floors under the top one, where Tyrion's solar was located. It was mainly empty, with only a few guards standing at attention in their places.

The world seemed to freeze for Jaime as he caught sight of her standing proudly in the middle of the atrium. She looked just like she did the first time he saw her. Her hair was a little longer than he remembered, but still very short for a woman. She had the same armour he'd first seen her in—nowhere as good as the armour he'd gotten for her in King's Landing, he'd had have to rectify that. He couldn't give her another Valyrian steel sword, but better armour was something he could—and would do.

He waved the Redcloak off, and approached her, a smile on his face.

“Brienne,” he called out almost breathlessly.

She turned at her name and her eyes fell on him, but instead of smiling, she gave him a serious nod and said gravely, “Ser Jaime.”

He came to an abrupt halt at the lukewarm greeting. He'd expected more after her untimely death fighting Euron Greyjoy.

A unknown knight suddenly stepped up to her side with a nervous face.

“Ser Jaime...” called out the knight as Jaime turned his attention to him and gave him his best arrogant Lannister look.

The knight's was nervousness got worse and he wavered for a moment before finding his courage again. He had a black eye covering most of left eye. The white and purple chequy and gold coins of his heraldry identified him as a knight of House Payne.

“...I am Ser Cedric Payne, my lord,” the knight introduced himself as he bowed deeply to Jaime,
“And this is...” he gestured to his left to as his young squire approached.

“Podrick Payne!” Jaime exclaimed happily, as he recognized the younger Payne. No one had seen Pod since coming back. Getting him and Brienne back on the same day, made today a very good day. A very good day indeed!

Ser Cedric was taken aback by the warm of the greeting, “...forgive me, my lord, but they both said you would want to meet you immediately and not in court...they said it was because of this remembering business,” the man explained quickly and apologetically.

Jaime smiled and nodded, “They were right...and you have done well bringing them here,” he stated smugly.

Ser Cedric seemed to let out a breath and with it what appeared, his nervousness. He stood with a straighter back and smiled a reassured smile at Jaime.

“Never fear Ser Cedric, you have served House Lannister well, but come along now we have business to take care of,” Jaime commanded. He turned and headed out of the atrium with the rest following hastily behind him. They left the atrium behind and as the came to a deserted corridor Jaime stopped abruptly and turned to Ser Cedric.

“Oh and I'll be taking your squire. He'll be squire to Tyrion Lannister, the Lord of Casterly Rock,” Jaime commented simply.

Ser Cedric's eyes practically bugged out of his head in surprise at that announcement.

“...Pod go talk to Bronn, you'll find him another floor down with the Leffords, he'll find a place for Ser Cedric here at the Rock,” Jaime ordered Pod.

“He's here as well, my lord?” Pod asked with a growing smile.

Jaime shrugged and gave him a smug smile, “Where else would he be? Tyrion finally found him a castle.”
Pod laughed and bowed, he gestured for Ser Cedric to follow him before casting a knowing look at Brienne. Pod and Ser Cedric left Jaime alone with Brienne.

They stood in the hall looking at each other for a long moment.

“Ser Jaime,” Brienne finally said with a nod, repeating her previous aloof greeting.

“Lady Brienne,” Jaime returned the greeting cautiously, hiding his frown.

Again silence overcame them both.

Jaime let his frown show, “Are you mad at me for something?”

The first hint of emotion appeared as she glowered at him in response, “Do you have any idea how long I've been riding through the Seven Kingdoms? I made it all the way to the outskirts of King’s Landing from the Stormlands before I heard word that you weren’t there- that you'd escaped and no one knew where you'd run to! So I decided to head North to Lady Sansa, if she remembered she could explain all this madness! I was halfway to the North when I heard rumors of you in the Westerlands. Which is when I decided to turn westwards...so yes I am mad. Mad at the damned chase I ended up doing searching for you!” Her lips were thinned, pressed together and her eyes filled with supreme annoyance.

With each sentence describing each step of her journey, she'd taken a menacing step towards Jaime. By the end of her tirade, she was standing almost nose to him now. He smiled smugly at her and then reached up and pulled her head down to his. He kissed her and after a moment's surprise she was kissing him back.

Jaime felt a part of him relax, having Brienne here with him. He wrapped his arms around her, her armour making it a little awkward, she reciprocated as the kiss lengthened.

Finally they broke apart and he said simply, “I missed you.”

Her expression softened and she smiled back, “I missed you too.” she admitted with annoyance. “But I'm still mad about the chase you put me through.”
They turned and were going to resume their walk, but they discovered that they had had an audience.

The Hound was standing there an amused and mocking smile on his lips, and with him was Myrcella. She was standing there staring at the two of them as if couldn't believe what she was seeing. Her mouth was hanging open and it didn't look like she was going to close it any time soon.

Brienne and Jaime turned red and flustered.

“That mad ginger Wildling is going to be disappointed,” The Hound japed, with a nasty laugh.

“Tormund can go fuck himself,” Jaime retorted with an incensed scowl before looking at the shocked Myrcella and wincing at his behavior in front of her.

He cast a look at Brienne, who seemed to be trying to turn invisible. He grabbed her hand and pulled her forward, “Myrcella, this the lady, Brienne of Tarth. A good friend of mine. Brienne, this is my daughter the lady, Myrcella Lannister.”

Brienne cast a questioning look at him before she bowed to Myrcella, “My, lady.”

Myrcella still seemed shocked, it took her a while before she found her voice. She closed her mouth before raising a eyebrow at him, “Good Friend? Is that what they're calling it now?”

Brienne turned redder as the Hound started laughing again.

Jaime gave her a hard, unamused look, “I think someone's been spending too much time with Tyrion. Don't you have lessons with the maester now?”

Myrcella sniffed, she lifted up her skirts and curtsied gracefully, “Father, Lady Brienne.” She walked off giving them both long lingering looks. The Hound nodded at them, before following in her wake, a big amused grin on his face.

That was unexpected, he...he'd never given any thought to how Myrcella or Tommen would react to Brienne. Of course, having Myrcella catching him in a comprising position with Brienne was not how he'd intended to introduce them. Now that he thought about it, it also had gone better than he'd
expected. He turned back to Brienne.

Brienne seemed to have recovered her composure with only a slight tinge of red coloring her cheeks.

“Come on Brienne, there's a lot that I need to tell you.” Jaime admitted with a sigh.

He began filling her in on what had been happening as he led her to Tyrion's solar. He had a spring in his step as he walked, in spite of Tyrion's illness, he felt happier now.

The fourth day, Tyrion finally awoke, seemingly as grouchy and irritable as father ever got. Awake and alive and asking about Shae.

As they stood in Tyrion's rooms, a part of Jaime admitted that Tyrion looked frightful now. Pale from the lost blood. A bruised face, though his eyes still shone with light and intelligence. The bandages around his midsection and shoulder made him look round and fat.

Perhaps frightful was the wrong word. Absurd was a better one. The fright was all Jaime's feelings. He tried to imagine a world without Tyrion and he couldn't...he didn't want to. Tyrion had to live and rule the Westerlands, too much depended on him for them to lose him now.

“Well?” asked Tyrion impatiently with a scowl on his face.

“You lost a lot of blood, she stabbed you in the shoulder and in your left side, thankfully she managed to miss anything vital...” Maester Creylen explained slowly.

“It's also been four days, Tyrion,” Jaime quickly admitted cutting in.

“...but you should make a full recovery- if you rest properly, and allow time for your body to heal,” finished Creylen firmly glaring at Jaime for second before giving Tyrion a kindly smile.

“At least after this assassin, you still have your good looks,” Jaime joked not in the least intimidated
by the maester's disapproval.

Tyrion laughed snidely and then quickly groaned wincing as a hand went to his side, “Don’t make me laugh, it hurts,” he commanded in annoyance.

“Well heal quicker and then it won’t hurt at all,” retorted Jaime.

Tyrion gave him an unamused glare, but didn’t retort.

Jaime continued talking ignoring the glare, “...in any case I do have some good news for you, while you were taking your enforced rest,” Tyrion let out an indigent sound at that remark and Creylen gave him another unamused and disappointed look, “Brienne showed up and she wasn't alone.” He raised a hand and gestured for Podrick to come forward.

The boy stepped forward and bowed, “My lord, it's good to see you awake,” declared Podrick Payne with a wide smile.

Tyrion grinned, “Podrick Payne! I'm stealing you back from Brienne. You're my squire and it seems I need someone to keep an eye on my back...it seems some people are forgetting their place...and our arrangements,” he finished with insulting look towards Bronn.

Bronn didn’t look guilty, he just shrugged nonchalantly, “Had wedding preparations to see to.”

“Anyway, I already stole him back,” Jaime admitted quickly, “He's your squire...though I've been teaching him a few things on the training field.”

Tyrion nodded with a smile, “Good, good,” he paused as his face suddenly lost it's good cheer, “Where is Shae?”

“Perhaps, later once you've rested more-” began Creylen.

“She's in the dungeons,” Jaime answered quickly cutting off the maester.
“I want to see her,” Tyrion commanded, throwing off his covers and struggling to get out his bed, “Pod! Help me up!”

Jaime frowned angrily, “You need to rest first.”

“No! Now! It wasn't a suggestion! I am still Lord of Casterly Rock and this is my command!” Tyrion stubbornly commanded and as started to get out of bed.

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Shae

The pain in her jaw ached. Her whole head ached and she felt nauseous. The dampness of the cell didn't help any. Jaime Lannister hadn't been gentle and neither had her guards.

As the days passed, they'd kept her alive and hadn't touched her yet, but each time the goalers brought her food, they'd gloated. They'd threatening her, telling just how they would rape and violate her once Lord Tyrion was awake to hear her screams of agony. She'd dared to attack the Lord Of Casterly Rock in his home and now she would hear him roar!

Time didn't have any meaning to her now, except when they brought her food that was the only thing she had to measure the passing of time.

Things hadn't got as planned, she'd thought she'd have more time with Tyrion. She'd avoided everyone who knew her from before. She known that Tyrion usually spent the nights in his study going over his papers and planning, usually alone. He'd been arrogant, keeping his guards distant from him, he'd never imagined that something could threaten him inside the walls of Casterly Rock.

Damn you, Kingslayer. She almost done it, she'd almost had her revenge, if it hadn't been for him! She'd almost paid Tyrion back for every broken promise, for every lie, for way that Tyrion had used her faithlessly with his honeyed words!

She sat and fumed in a corner of her darkened cell, with her dark thoughts and recriminations...they were all she had left now.
She didn't know how much time passed when the clinking of keys interrupted her wrathful contemplation.

She looked through the bars of her cell toward the sounds. Muffled low voices came to her and steeled herself for the coming insults they would throw at her. She could hear the shuffling of feet on the floor approaching.

Surprise blossomed in her, as instead of seeing the goaler, Tyrion himself came waddling in, heavily bandaged and leaning heavily on a wooden cane. His face was stony and he grimaced with every step he took. Innocent little, Podrick Payne stood behind him giving her disapproving looks. She ignored the young boy. He didn't matter now. Her eyes focused on Tyrion and she sneered at him, enjoying every moment of pain she saw in him.

Tyrion came to a stop at the bars of her cell and stared in at her, an unreadable look on his face. They stared at each other, eyes locking.

Tyrion broke the silence first, he sighed and looked as a defeated look came to his face, “Shae.”

She sneered at him and spat, “My lion.”

He flinched at her words, his lips thinning and pursing but he remained silent and had no smart retort for her.

The silence was oppressive and prolonged.

“Meeting you was the worse thing to happen to me!” she shrieked angrily, rising up and taking menacing steps towards him.

“On that we can both agree...” Tyrion retorted sadly, not moving away from the bars, as he stared up at her.

His retort incensed her, “That's it? That's all you can say?”

He frowned, “It's the truth! What more can I say?”
“You used me! Then you discard me like a whore! You kept saying I wasn't your whore and then you treated me like one at the end!” Her anger boiled over and even she knew she sounded a little unhinged and hypocritical.

“That's why you betrayed me?” Tyrion retorted bitterly.

“What was I supposed to do? You used me and scorned me. You cursed me. And then you discarded me! I had to look out for myself!” she screamed back, her rage rising.

Tyrion's face was indescribable now and she enjoyed the colours he turned. She didn't enjoy the words that he threw back at her.

“I scorned you and I cursed you because I loved you!” he screamed at her, his blood rising and overcoming all of his cleverness. “I lied to you! I wanted to keep you safe and away from my father! And Cersei! I kept telling you how much danger you were in! Varys told you! Bronn told you! You didn't believe us! How else was I supposed to protect you? You left me no choice!” Tears were streaming down his cheeks now. His face broken with grief.

Shae's rage came to an abrupt halt. No...he couldn't have been lying, she'd have know! She'd heard the truth in his hurtful and angry words! Suddenly, she was unsure how to react. Her tongue stilled, her face blank, she watched in silence as Tyrion broke down.

He fell down to his knees, he was sobbing now, “I killed my father for you. He kept calling you a whore, I warned him not to...but he kept calling you a whore...and I killed him for it,” he admitted hoarsely and trembling, “Why did you have to go for that knife? Why, Shae?”

She couldn't answer him. Her mind had ground to a halt. Whatever she was expecting from confronting him- this wasn't it. A quick death. A painful drawn out death...probably...but not this. He hadn't been that good of a liar, she'd always known when he was lying, she'd heard the hate and truth in his words.

He was kneeling down in from of her cell, sobbing...and all she could do was stand and stare down at him in bewilderment.

She didn't know how long they stayed that way, her standing stunned, he kneeling. It felt like an eternity. She still couldn't answer him. After a while, his sobbing slowed and stopped. He wiped his
eyes on his sleeve. He looked up at her with sad eyes.

“I'm truly sorry Shae. You will never know how truly sorry I am this all happened...but I can't spare any more time on you. I want to live too much...and the Dead are coming for us all,” Tyrion spoke fearfully.

*Wait...what? The Dead? Has he gone mad?*

“The Dead are coming. The Long Night is coming and I have too much to do. I don't have any more time for you...” His voice still trembled as he spoke, but it didn't break. He grabbed his cane from it had fallen and rose from his knees. He cast a look at silent, loyal and disapproving Podrick, “Come along Pod, we have to go and save the world...”

He turned away from her and without a backward look, he walked away, his cane making the only sound that Shae could hear in the oppression silence to the dungeon.

He left her alone to her thoughts as she tried to come to terms with how everything she'd thought she'd known was wrong. His final comments had made more questions for her, but truthfully, she didn't care about that...she'd lost too much to care about it.

Later, it matter...but not now.

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**Tyrion Lannister**

He'd thought long and hard on what to do with her. Another two days had passed before he decided Shae's final fate. Thoughts of her ate at her him. He'd loved her, she'd been his escape from reality when dealing with Joffrey and Cersei had been too much. He wouldn't have survived King's Landing without her. She'd been kind and happy with him, even after he'd been forced to marry Sansa, she'd helped. It had been a hard decision and one that would not make anyone in his family happy.

The meeting in his solar was filled with his family, Jaime, Uncle Kevan, Aunt Genna, and Daven...they were all waiting for him to hand down her sentence.
“Put her on a ship to Braavos,” Tyrion announced quietly.

The looks of surprise and disapproval that met the announcement were just as he imagined they would be.

Daven was the first to react, “But Tyrion...”, he began, rising up from his chair in surprise. Jaime and Kevan both gave him identical looks of disbelief, while Aunt Genna pursed her lips.

Tyrion didn't give him a chance to add more, “I am not killing her a second time!” he exploded angrily. “I'm not going to kill her again...” he repeated in lost quiet voice.

“Tyrion, she tried to murder you! She almost did!” Uncle Kevan sputtered, “This is not something that can forgiven! Tywin would have had her drawn and quartered!”

“And I am not my father!” Tyrion roared back at his uncle in a harsher tone than he had intended.

Uncle Kevan rocked back in his chair at the harshness of the words. His face shocked and the disapproval still written there, but he didn't add anything else.

“Be rational, Tyrion,” Jaime started, rising from his chair, banging his fist on the table, “You'll look weak after this!”

Tyrion stared at Jaime for a moment, “I. Don't. Care.” he spoke each word clearly and firmly. “Killing her was the one thing I truly regretted most. I will NOT repeat it.” He stopped and glared about at the rest of his family, “She will be put on a ship leaving the Westerlands, with enough gold to start a life in Braavos...and never comes back...and I never have to think about her again!”

“You're sending her away...and giving her gold?” Daven asked gaping in disbelief, “She tried to murder you! She almost did!” he repeated Uncle's point.

Tyrion gave Daven a murderous glare.
Daven closed his mouth quickly at the glare.

“Uncle, you will escort her to Lannisport and send her to Braavos,” Tyrion commanded, moving forward. Ignoring the silent look Jaime was giving him with narrowed eyes.

Uncle Kevan gave him an unhappy nod, but didn't argue.

“I can do that,” Jaime cut in quickly, “I can take her to Lannisport.”

“No! Absolutely not!” Tyrion decried, understanding just what his brother probably intended to do.

“In this you don't trust me?” Jaime asked giving him a mock hurt look.

“In this...absolutely yes. Oh you'll put her on a ship, yes...but probably to Pyke or Slaver's bay or somewhere worse,” Tyrion retorted without missing a beat, “I know you too well brother.”

Jaime sat back down heavily, an annoyed look on his face.

Tyrion looked about at each of them, gauging how they might try to defy him in this command. He stopped as he stared at Aunt Genna. She was giving him a strange look. She had been strangely silent while the others all argued with him.

She broke her silence now as she locked eyes with Tyrion, “Leave us alone. I wish to speak with Tyrion privately.”

Tyrion frowned at her, she'd been very accommodating with all the changes that had been happening. She'd helped smooth things over with various Lords, she'd taken to supervising Tommen in this difficult time. She and Uncle Kevan were the only ones that Tommen was listening to now. She'd also been the only one who willingly dealt with father after he'd been removed from power. That had been a headache and burden that she'd willingly shouldered.

One he was very thankful for.
“Leave us,” Tyrion commanded, whatever she had to say, he had to listen to her.

The others rose, Jaime looked to her, “Aunt Genna, please knock some sense into him.”

Aunt Genna didn't answer him, she merely shooed him away with a curt gesture.

When they were alone, she gave him a long look, the unreadable expression still on her face.

Tyrion raised his head defiantly, “Yes, dear Aunt? What did you wish to say?”

Her eyes narrowed, “I'm not going to try to change your mind. Tywin is the same when he makes decisions we didn't like. I couldn't change his mind then. I can't change your mind now.”

Her words hurt, “That stung, Aunt.” he retorted.

“Doesn't make it any less true,” she retorted smartly. “I have said it before and I will continue to say it. You are Tywin's son more than Jaime will ever be.”

Tyrion frowned unhappily, “If you're just going to insult me...I have more important work to deal with...”

“...But you are also Joanna's son.” Aunt Genna finished with a sad smile.

Tyrion felt his throat closing, no one ever spoke of mother. Not to him. Not since Uncle Gerion left. At least never when father had been in charge.

“Tywin never wanted to hear it, but that is the truth. You can be as merciless and destructive as Tywin, but you have a merciful streak you inherited form Joanna,” Aunt Genna looked uncharacteristically sad, “We all say that the best of Tywin died with her and that is another truth. She would never have allowed him to commit the atrocities he committed when he sacked King's Landing,” Aunt Genna shuddered, “The Queen and the Princess of Dorne were like sisters to Joanna. Joanna would have stopped Tywin. If she had seen what happened to Elia and her children...she would have wept and never stopped...” Genna shuddered, shaking her head in grief.
Tyrion was uncomfortably aware of that. The few stories he'd heard of mother had described her friendship with Queen Rhaella and the previous ruling Princess of Dorne. And just how close all three of the women had once been. It was uncomfortable for him to imagine just what the three of them would think of what came after their deaths.

“...I sometimes wonder how things would have different if she'd lived. Would she have seen the monster Cersei was becoming? Could she have prevented it? It is a certainty that she would have restrained Tywin's actions. She was his mercy. And all of Tywin's mercy died with her.”

Tyrion gulped his feelings away, and put on a brave face, “Are you going somewhere with this, Aunt?”

Aunt Genna gave him a scathing look, “You could do with a little more patience, Tyrion...and yes I have a good point.” She paused and sighed, “You have her mercy. I can imagine her sparing the girl. It's why I haven't argued with you like the rest...but I need you to understand if you do this, the next person to cross you must be dealt with harshly. Very, very harshly.” she finished dryly.

Tyrion was still reeling but he managed to nod, he understood her reasoning, “I can understand that.”

Aunt Genna nodded firmly, “Good. I am glad that you are listening to all of my hard truths,” she chuckled suddenly, “It's a new feeling for me.”

“I can imagine,” he deadpanned. Father would have had a fit if she'd said all those things to him while he was still ruling.

“Tyrion...Joanna would be proud of you...never forget that,” Aunt Genna added softly.

So many emotions whipped through him at Genna's admission. He trembled in his seat, as unshed tears threatened to come forth. No one had dared speak of mother to him before, not since Uncle Gerion. And not like this. It was surprising and bittersweet to hear Aunt Genna's words do so now.

“Thank you, Aunt.” he said quietly.
More days passed and life continued on. Shae was gone and time waited for no man's injuries and more meetings dragged on as Tyrion's wounds healed.

“There's been raiding on our border with the Reach,” Daven declared gravely.

That was an unwelcome development...Tyrion thought unhappily.

He paced around his solar. Maester Creylen had recommended mild exercise to help him recover quicker. He'd even had a small cane with a lion's head made, replacing the simple piece of wood he'd been using before, to help him walk. Or hobble around as his waddling had become. He was meeting with Jaime and Daven now. Aunt Genna running the household and was pestering father again. Uncle Kevan was still in Lannisport after escorting Shae there.

Tyrion walked around the room, he sighed, no an attack from the Reach was not welcome, in any shape or form. He came to stand behind Jaime's chair. He sighed again and then quickly cuffed Jaime- hard, on the back of the head.

Jaime sat forward and reached back, rubbing his head, “OW! What was that for?” He complained turning to face Tyrion.

“This is your fault, you know?” Tyrion grumbled unhappily, “You couldn't have just knocked the Tyrell boy unconscious? Did you really have to kill him?” He sighed again, “If I didn't know that Sam has something up his sleeve...I'd be really upset now!”

Jaime looked like he was going to complain again, but instead he kept his mouth shut.

“We cannot afford to fight amongst ourselves- not with the Night's King coming for us all...oh, we'll have to fight Robert, there's no escaping that.” Tyrion paused as his wounds ached more. He took a deep breath, “Daven. Take a hundred men and head south. Find the Reach commander and parley...try to talk some sense into him. If he doesn't remember explain everything! Stress the coming Dead to him at every opportunity! And promise him anything to stop the fighting- except Jaime's head! And make sure to keep the fighting to a minimum till Sam finishes whatever he's begun in the Reach.” He sighed deeply as he walked back to his chair, the strain on his body making his limbs tremble, “I don’t know who's ordered this, but if Lady Olenna remembers she will not want to oppose Daenerys- and by extension Jon. I'd offer her Cersei's head, except Robert still probably killed her by now.” He rubbed his face, everything was so difficult and uncertain now. Even with the backing of half the Seven Kingdoms, the outcome of the true war was still uncertain and the Reach's
raiding wasn't helping. He looked up and gave Daven a steely gaze, “Make sure my bannermen know that you carry my full authority in all matters.”

Daven didn't look pleased, but he nodded obediently as he rose, “I'll sort things out,” he cast a reproachful look at Jaime, “It's not going to be easy.”

Jaime had the decency to grimace and acknowledge the rebuke, “Thank you cousin, I am well aware of who's fault this is.” He rubbed the back of his head again, but didn't throw back a snide remark at Daven.

Daven nodded again, “With your leave, my lord.”

Tyrion waved a hand, “Go cousin, time is wasting and will wait for no man.”

Daven left without further comment and Tyrion was left alone with Jaime.

Tyrion turned to Jaime and gave him a hard look.

“What?” Jaime asked after a moment.

“Please try to keep your self destructive tendencies to a minimum,” he waved an irritable hand around, “this second life of ours is hard enough with so many people running around with only half the truth or less...”

Jaime looked chagrined and gave Tyrion a sheepish smile, “I'll do my best, brother,” he answered sedately.

Tyrion looked at his brother. Jaime meant what he was saying, he'd changed. He'd finally grown some common sense. Not a lot, but it was there. The end of the world tended to always help people grow common sense.

Tyrion sighed, he moved on to lighter matters, taking a lighter tone, “Moving on...you're been running my squire ragged. He's not here to bring me my wine! He's too tired! Give him the night off, I know a very good establishment where he can relax, he can even use my tab...I'm much to busy use
it now. Not that I think that he will need money after his first time,” he snorted with a knowing smile.

Jaime smiled and snorted with derision, “He's too honorable for that now...too much time spent with Brienne and our dear king,” he retorted snidely, “Best to keep training him. He'll be a proper knight in no time.”

Tyrion laughed despite the pain in his side. It felt good to laugh despite everything.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 28 First Arrival

Maester Luwin

He shuffled about from raven to raven gathering the messages. There were fewer today then yesterday.

The preparations were ongoing, in this new and unexpected reality that Luwin found himself living in. Winterfell was changing, it was busier than it had been in the last life. Though the old life still haunted him. He remembered the Ironborn. He remembered the pain in his belly after they'd left him to die. And he remembered as Osha gave him the mercy, he'd so desired.

Osha...where are you now?

Since the first day of their return, he'd wondered about her new fate. Each day, his thoughts would come to her. She was a Wildling...and yet, she'd been more leal to the Starks than the Boltons or Karstarks. And where was she now? Did she remember? What would happen to her if she didn't remember? It was obvious what would happen if she did...the Starks always rewarded loyalty well...and Rickon was always asked about her. When Lady Catelyn had been given the whole story about Osha, the Lady had looked like she just swallowed a lemon...though truth be told, that was beginning to be her normal look ever since the first night of their return.

He sighed unhappily, the stress on Lady Catelyn now was immense. While Lord Eddard had been here, they'd shared the burden together with dealing with how the children had changed. Now alone, the strain was showing. The fact that the new Targaryen king...

...Gods, Jon.

It sounded so strange to name Jon a king! And a Targaryen one at that!

That Jon had left Sansa in charge of Winterfell, and by consequence the entire North had not helped.
Seeing biddable, kind, demure Sansa act as a Northern Lady; strong, fair and wise...with teeth as sharp a direwolf. More than one than one of the denizens of Winterfell had felt her teeth when they’d tried to treat her as a child. Even Lord Eddard and Lady Catelyn had felt her teeth. In the first week, Septa Mordane had nearly been banished from Winterfell for failing to accept the changes in her.

Even he had not been unaffected by the changes, sometimes he found his hand unconsciously going towards his wound. Where the Ironborn had stabbed him...like a man who has lost a limb, it felt strange to him. A phantom pain that would trouble him from time to time...though with each passing day it seemed to lessen.

He shook himself, there was no place for his self indulgence. He was a maester if the Citadel and he had duties to perform. He gathered up the last of the new raven messages and went to meet Sansa, in Lord Eddard's solar.

He walked through Winterfell. It seemed just like always, but there were differences. The servants were industrious and diligent but wary as they went about their tasks. The Stark guardsmen patrolled the halls and kept eyes on everything- which was normal, except they were aided by Manderly men. And every now and then a Reed man could be seen in the castle.

He reached the solar without anyone waylaying him. Entering, he found Lady Sansa waiting for him, sitting in her father's seat going over yesterday's reports again. It was strange to imagine, seeing the young lady Sansa, in Eddard's chair acting as a lady, sitting in the over sized chair.

The changes were blindingly glaring in Sansa, as she sat in her father's chair and commanded with as much poise as an icy Lord of Winterfell. She held herself high and aloof, dealing with one message after another. There was a coldness about her that he'd never seen in her before. It was a mask, the same one that Eddard wore. The mask of the Lord of Winterfell.

The little girl, one he'd help bring into this world, was gone and replaced with a woman of tremendous talent and foresight. She effortlessly maneuvered through the politic intricacies of the Northern Houses as she answered all ravens from the Stark's vassals.

There was something hidden in her that made him ill at ease whenever he glimpsed it...whatever it was...

But it wasn't evident now...she had a smug smile on her lips as she read what was in front of her. As Luwin approached, she looked up and gave him a wide smile on seeing him.
“Lady Sansa,” he nodded in greeting, coming forward and placing all the raven scrolls in front of her.

She looked at the small pile and raised an eyebrow, “Anything new? Or urgent?”

He reached into his sleeve and brought out a large letter, “This came in the night.” The letter was painted and stamped with a large three headed red dragon. The seal of House Targaryen, “I realise you should have been told, but it was very late...or very early, and you are still a growing girl despite your mature mind. And a few more hours would not make any difference.”

She looked at the letter with narrowed eyes, “I'll let it pass this time...but I should have been told immediately...” she sighed, taking the letter from him and quickly opening it as he took a seat across the desk from her.

Sansa's eyes moved back and forth as she quickly read the long letter. A smile began tagging at her lips, as she began reading it. The smile turned into a frown as she neared the end of the letter. The frown seemed tinged with jealousy as she read Daenerys's letter, “Show-off...” she muttered jealously under her breath as she finished the letter.

“My Lady?” Luwin asked frowning in curiosity.

“We finally have word from Daenerys...and it seems we shouldn't have been worried about her at all,” Sansa said with strange lilt to her voice.

“I would assume that is a good thing?” Luwin asked, still mystified by Sansa's strange reaction.

“Oh it is...she's in the process of consolidating her position in Pentos...she's also the new Queen of Pentos,” Sansa revealed dryly.

Luwin blinked and then stared, “Pentos doesn't have a Queen.”

Sansa's lips twitched, she held up he letter, “It does now...she has also begun rebuilding her army and hatched her dragons,” she finished in a miffed jealous voice.
Luwin blinked again, his confusion not abating, “She is one of our allies...is this not good news? Why are you upset by this?”

Sansa nodded, “Oh it is, don't get me wrong. This is magnificent news, knowing that Daenerys's position is so strong now, its one less thing that Jon will worry about.”

“Then the problem is?” Luwin prompted with a frown.

Sansa sighed, “Every time we blink Daenerys rises and conquerors all around her,” she then began reciting titles, most that he didn't recognize...and it was a very long list, “...and now Queen of Pentos. She collects titles as a child collects seashells on a beach,” she finished dryly. She then blinked in embarrassment, “I guess I'm just a little jealous.”

Luwin raised an eyebrow at her, “Jealous? Jealously is unbecoming of a lady.”

Sansa gave him a very dry look at that. She looked a little like a petulant child for a moment.

He chuckled in response, “Moving on,” he started, ignoring her continuing stare. He reached out and began opening raven scrolls and passing them to Sansa to read for herself.

They sat there going through the messages, it was mostly uneventful, answers to questions and requests for information. The most important thing was a message from Casterly Rock, confirming Tyrion Lannister's position as Lord of the Westerlands and a couple of colorful questions about what was going on. As well as his oath of fealty to House Targaryen.

Sansa read that one with another smug satisfied smile.

She dictated to Luwin several answers to them, though she herself wrote out the answering note to Tyrion Lannister.

They continued like that till Lady Catelyn and the steward, Vayon Poole, came to the solar for the daily report on the preparations of Winterfell itself. The new fortifications, preparations for a larger harvest and more glass houses for winter...the list went on and on and Sansa dealt with it all efficiently and quickly.
A sense of pride always filled Luwin as they went through these mundane things. Sansa had been listening to him as he tutored her in the other life, his lessons and time hadn't been wasted on her. He idly wondered if Lady Catelyn felt the same way as well...even with the colder and more brutal ways Sansa had dealing with some other things.

He was brought out of his musings as Master Vayon hesitated after Sansa had dismissed him back to his duties.

“Was there something else that you wanted, Master Poole?” he asked the steward as he took in the disturbed pensive expression that was written across the man's face.

Poole looked between Luwin and Sansa before turned to her, “Begging your pardon, my Lady, I...” he faltered and stopped his courage failing him, his question unfinished.

“Master Poole, you a loyal and good man, ask whatever it is that is troubling you, I welcome any questions you have,” Sansa with a kind tone and benevolent smile, encouraging him to continue.

Luwin nodded and watched, it was best to deal quickly with whatever was bothering Winterfell's steward.

“What happened to Jeyne?” Poole blurted out in a blubbering despondent voice, “Forgive me, I remember them killing me...but what...it haunts me to imagine what they did to her after...” He looked discomforted as he asked his question, not that Luwin blamed him, a young girl left alone and defenseless among the hostile Lannisters was not a good position.

Sansa's smile disappeared in an instant, her lips thinning. She sat for a moment before coming out from behind the desk to stand in front of the steward. She reached out and gripped Vayon Poole's hand hard, “Thank the Old Gods that Jeyne does not remember her fate...” she started gravely.

Vayon's despondent face paled.

“...I will protect her this time, and she will have a good place in my future household when I am married, I failed her the last time. I will not this time,” Sansa finished vehemently. She let go of Poole's hand, “Do not ask again, we have enough worries without borrowing more, especially things that will never happen again. That neither I, nor Jon, will allow to happen to again.”
Vayon gulped hard and nodded once, before excusing himself and leaving them alone, his shoulders heavy and his face dark.

Sansa turned back to her troubled mother and a thoughtful, unhappy Maester Luwin.

“What happened to Jeyne?” asked Lady Catelyn angrily after Poole had left.

The angry look on Sansa's face intensified, “Don't tell him or her, after they'd finished killing our men, Cersei gave Jeyne to Lord Baelish,” she spat the names with the same degree of venom that she used when referring to the Boltons.

“And?” Lady Catelyn gave her a confused look.

Sansa gave her a long suffering look as if her mother was being dense about something, “A sweet innocent northern beauty, like Jeyne? What do you think he did? He took her to one of his whorehouses...I don't know how long she survived there.”

Lady Catelyn looked murderous now. He imagined that his face also held a similar expression. Jeyne was yet another child he'd ushered into this cruel world. It was yet another fate for him to lament.

“Do not worry mother, Baelish will pay for everything soon enough,” Sansa stated icily, “if he has not already been dealt with.”

Lady Catelyn held her hands together in front of her, in a calm posture even as the murderous look remained on her face. “There is much, Petyr will pay for.”

Sansa nodded again, and took her place back behind Lord Eddard desk.

Lady Catelyn joined them sitting in on their meeting...or rather tried to. A knocking on the door interrupted them before they could begin anew.

“Come,” Sansa called out quickly.
A guard quickly entered with a bow, he reported smartly, “My Lady, riders are approaching Winterfell. They’re flying Baratheon banners.”

Lady Catelyn looked up quickly, casting a concerned look at Sansa, “Baratheon men, here?”

Sansa smiled and ignored her mother’s outburst, “Excellent, we've been waiting for them,” she stated evenly.

Lady Catelyn's concern turned to surprise, “We have?”

Luwin nodded, “We received news of their arrival at White Harbor a while back, they are allies and friends, there is nothing to be concerned about, my lady,” he reassured her. Didn't lady Sansa tell her they were coming?

Catelyn looked between them both, discomforted.

Sansa rose, “Come let us greet them,” cutting off any response her mother may have had.

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The gates were open and they were waiting for the riders. The Winterfell guards were standing at attention as an honor guard, they were a little on edge, they'd heard that Baratheon men were coming and were uncertain how this would all turn out.

Sansa stood still and posed, as opposed to her mother who was still surprised and probably trying to imagine who there visitors were. Thought why Sansa was keeping it a secret escaped him. In either case, Lady Catelyn didn't have to wait long.

A dozen riders came riding through the gates, the ten they were expecting a two Manderly men who were their escorts to avoid accidental mistakes and misunderstanding along the road between White Harbor and Winterfell.

The riders stopped and dismounted, some quicker than others, at the forefront of the party was an older man with a graying beard and a black bag hanging from his neck.
As they approached, it was Lady Catelyn that broke the silence, “Ser Davos?” she asked in surprise, not believing her eyes.

Ser Davos smiled at her and bowed, “Lady Stark, it good to see you again...especially under better circumstances than the last time.”

She nodded back graciously, “Welcome Ser Davos, I was not aware that you were coming,” she cast a cross look at Sansa, who was unaffected by it.

Ser Davos nodded, casting a look at Sansa before speaking, “Thank you my lady,” he gestured for a small hooded figure behind him to come forward and stand next to him, “May I present to you...

The small figure lowered her hood and he heard Lady Catelyn inhale sharply. Luwin's first glance at the girl had also caused him to instinctively tense.

“...the Lady, Shireen Baratheon.”

He relaxed at those words, that explained the Greyscale scars. Even knowing she was coming did not prepare one for the initial shock. The story of Stannis Baratheon's daughter and her battle against Greyscale was a well known one among maesters. And such scars were usually indicative of a fatal disease. It was natural for a man to tense despite knowing what to expect.

Lady Catelyn cast a stunned look at Sansa before turning back to Lady Shireen and giving her a welcoming smile, “Welcome to Winterfell, my Lady.”

Lady Shireen curtsied awkwardly, a shy smile coming to her scarred face, “Thank you Lady Stark.”

Sansa stepped forward, a warm smile on her face, “Welcome Lady Shireen, I am Sansa Stark and Jon has told me much about you.”

Shireen's shy smile became warmer, “Thank you Lady Sansa.”
Sansa took Shireen's hand, and in a warm tone, “I want you to consider Winterfell home. Here you will be protected from everyone, including you father. You have my word and Jon’s.”

Shireen’s smile became strained but she nodded.

*Protect her from her father?! Was Stannis Baratheon seeking to harm his own daughter?*! Luwin hid his disquiet but Lady Stark couldn’t.

She gasped but Sansa held up a hand, releasing Shireen's, “I will explain later, for now we must welcome the rest our guests as well.”

Lady Catelyn rallied and forced a smile, “Of course, my dear.”

“Ser Davos,” began Sansa regally, turning to the Onion Knight.

“Yes, my lady?”

Sansa withdrew something from her dress and threw it to Ser Davos. The man caught it and looked at it in surprise.

He looked up at Sansa, “Really? I'd have thought his Grace would picked someone else for this...this time anyway,” Ser Davos said in dubious surprise.

“It is what Jon has commanded,” Sansa assured him.

Ser Davos sighed and then fixed the badge to his shirt and then it was Luwin's time to be surprised. The badge was in the shape of a hand. All maesters knew what the badge signified...and the power it carried.

*The Hand of the King.*

Lady Catelyn's knew the badge as well, her face seemed to have frozen now from the constant surprises this party was bringing her. Lord Eddard had worn such a badge once. And now, Ser
Davos Seaworth, the Onion Knight, Stannis's man, was Hand to King Jon Targaryen?

“...The king insists...for the time being at least,” Sansa explained, “We need a man that knows as much as we do, at least until things are sorted.”

Davos sighed, “As the King commands...do you think he'll actually listen to me this time?”

Sansa's laugh was unexpected, “He's learning.” She gestured towards Luwin, “this is Maester Luwin.”

Luwin bowed, “My Lord Hand,” he greeted with respect.

Ser Davos winced, “Davos will be fine, I'm not one to stand on ceremony.”

The humble response spoke well of him, and matched what Luwin had heard about the former smuggler, “As the Hand commands.” Even in the North some decorum and pomp had to be observed. Especially with the Hand of the King.

Ser Davos sighed, before giving Sansa an annoyed 'this is your fault' look, before smiling again and responding graciously, “Thank you.”

Ser Davos and Sansa shared an unreadable look before she glanced behind him at the others that were with them.

Luwin took a moment to look at the back of the group. Before the Baratheon guards were three youths, who didn't look Highborn to Luwin's experienced eyes. The younger two were scruffy and staring about with wide scared eyes. They also seemed almost be opposites of each other, one thin and one fat. One blonde and blue eyed, the other dark haired and dark eyed.

The eldest of the group was different. He was a tall muscular boy on the cusp of adulthood, he stood stiff and uneasy. His eyes moving back and forth with familiarity. He recognized Winterfell and he was looking for something. There was also something about him that was familiar. The sharp blue eyes and black hair and square jaw were very familiar.
The youth stepped forward nervously, “Sansa.”

Sansa smiled again, “Gendry.”

Ser Davos cleared his throat, “This is Gendry Waters. King Robert’s natural son.”

Now, Luwin was worried, and Lady Catelyn's surprise had turned into scorn as she stared at Robert Baratheon's bastard son. Yet another question for Sansa later, and yet another mystery...and one more reason for Lady Catelyn to look like she'd swallowed a lemon.

“Gendry?” came a sudden voice from behind him.

Luwin kept his wits about him and didn't jump at the unexpected voice...he was starting to get used to it. He knew Arya and she had changed ever since their return. Greatly changed...

He turned and found her standing there with a surprised and shocked expression on her face. There was something else in her face that he didn't recognize.

“Arya,” breathed out Gendry.

He looked back at the boy and then back at Arya. There was a very far fetched idea forming there but nothing he believed possible...even with all the impossible things that were had happened lately.

But apparently, the impossible was again happening again, because suddenly the two were running towards each other.

As they neared Arya leapt up and Gendry caught her, hugging her tightly to him.

He cast a concerned look at Lady Catelyn and saw her looking at the unfolding scene in front of her in incomprehension before turning into mounting horror.

He looked back at Arya and Gendry. They didn't look they were going to let go of one another any time soon.
He looked to Sansa. She was looking at them with an endearing smile on her lips. Standing next to her, Davos had a similar smile, while the Lady Shireen seemed surprised.

Eventually, Gendry knelt down, letting Arya find her feet. They broke apart wide smiles on both their faces. Gendry reached out and ruffled her hair.

Gendry gave Arya a serious look, “No more running off alone...” he paused giving her a long look up and down, “I forgot how small you used to be,” he then teased with a small amused laugh.

In response, Arya ducked away from his hand and pouted which only caused Gendry to snicker more. Her pout became more prominent and then she stepped forward and pushed him. He lost his footing and sprawled back on his ass, as a satisfied Arya walked past him to Davos, his laughter only got louder.

Her face reddened, but she ignored Gendry's echoing laughter, “Ser Davos.”

“Lady Arya,” responded Ser Davos with a small bow and an amused grin.

Arya turned to Lady Shireen, “Jon told me about you. It's good to meet you, Lady Shireen.”

“And you...Jon told me about you as well,” Lady Shireen replied with a timid smile.

Arya frowned, “You remember?”

Lady Shireen grimaced, “Yes.”

Arya winced, “Sorry.”

“Me too,” Lady Shireen nodded forlornly.

Luwin watched the cryptic exchange with concern...it was something else he'd have to remember to
ask Sansa about.

Arya nodded and turned to the two other boys that had come with Davos. Her eyes widened in surprise.

“Hot Pie! Lommy?!” she exclaimed in surprise.

Luwin raised an eyebrow at the names. The two boys waved hesitantly at her. So they were friends of Arya? As usual, she was befriending people that Lady Catelyn would consider unsuitable company for a Lady of a Great House.

“Found them in King's Landing, decided they'd be safer with us than there,” Gendry explained, as he brushed the dust off his clothes. He came to stand next to Arya.

As Luwin watched the byplay, he saw their hands find each other, and Arya stood there holding hands with Gendry. The height difference made them look more than little absurd...and Lady Catelyn's polite smile looked more like a death rictus now. Luwin silently winced as he imagined what was probably going through her mind now.

On another note, the stillness that he'd been seeing in Arya had disappeared and she almost seemed like the energetic and mischievous Arya of old that he had once known.

The fat boy, Hot Pie, seemed to gather his courage and he stepped towards Sansa.

“Lady Sansa,” Hot Pie bowed, a serious expression on his face.

“Hot Pie, it's good to see you again- I've missed your cooking,” Sansa said with a happy welcoming smile.

A cook? Why bring a cook? Winterfell had more than enough cooks already.

The fat boy puffed up with pride and beamed, a childish smile coming onto his round features, “Thank you, my Lady! I've been thinking about how to perfect my meat pie recipe! I've had some great ideas! I think you'll love it!” he babbled happily.
Sansa grimaced, “Just as long Arya doesn’t help you make the pies.”

“Hey!” cried out Arya in indignation.

_Pies? There it was again...what was it with Arya and pies?_

The fat boy, for some reason, turned a little queasy at the comment, “If I have to chase her out of the kitchens with a broom before I start, I promise will!” he assured her willfully and bravely.

Sansa smiled sweetly, “Good. Just as long as we're agreed.”

Arya opened her mouth to retort but Gendry turned to her a gave her a stern look, “No pies.” his tone brooked no argument and she closed her mouth with an upset twitch of her lips, without retorting.

Luwin watched silently. Who was this boy for Arya to obey him so? It was just one more piece of the puzzle that Arya had become. A part of him dreaded the answer because there was much that was disturbing about the little girl he once knew. There was a secret there that many people were keeping out of fear.

Out of fear of Arya...

How could they be afraid of her? What was he missing? Rodrick had told him of an incident with the Manderly and Stark men, he'd seen fear in good northern veteran soldiers in its aftermath. Arya had pranked Tomard as usual and he'd given her a small playful cuff in response...the reaction from the Manderly men after that had been something else...their fear had been palatable as they gave a confused Tomard a wide berth. A very wide berth...

The mask that Sansa wore was evident, it was the same one that Lord Eddard wore as the Lord of Winterfell...but the one Arya seemed to wear was almost seamless...at least to everyone else. He knew the girl too well. There was something...there. A blankness that occasionally appeared and a bloodthirstiness that reared it's head every single time their enemies were mentioned.

It was a mystery that he was not looking forward to solving and he worried over how Lady Catelyn would react to these changes. He paused in his musings...Lord Eddard would not react well either.
“Come, let us get you all settled,” Sansa proclaimed, gesturing and leading them out of the courtyard of Winterfell, acting the dutiful host.

He followed behind dutifully, his shoulders heavy with the burden of this unknown mystery.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Notes: Cookie for the person who gets the reference to another fanfic I've added :) More on Cat's reactions soon! :D As always don't forget to review! :D
Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the reviews! Here is Cat's reactions! Also, this is the longest chapter yet! Also, the same reference to another fanfic from the last chapter. So far across four websites, only two people have gotten it! :D :P So enjoy and don't forget to review! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 29 More Arrivals

Sansa Stark

Mother looked like she'd swallowed a lemon. She always did these days, not that she could blame her.

Sansa knew there so many shocks still to come, both she and Jon had been avoiding telling mother and father many things. Or at least avoiding telling them everything at once. That would have been too much.

And now Ser Davos was here with Shireen and Gendry. That was one thing that had been revealed to mother rather spectacularly. She was glad that Gendry was safe and remembered Arya, but the whole bastard issue was going to be a prickly point with mother.

…

More than a prickly point. There would probably be shouting involved...and Sansa couldn't really explain everything without explaining more of the truth about Arya.

And then there would probably be more shouting...

She stifled her sigh quietly, and paid attention to the meeting.
They were gathered once more in father's solar. They all sat as Davos told them all he knew. Lord Manderly had joined them and the portly northern lord had been quite happy to see Davos again much to mother's surprise. Arya had taken Shireen and Gendry to get settled in Winterfell while Maester Luwin was finding a place for Hot Pie and Arya's other friend.

Davos was sitting stiffly as he relayed what he knew, “We stayed long enough anchored off King's Landing to hear a few things, and Gendry...”

Sansa didn't miss the angry look in mother's eyes at the mention of Gendry.

“...did tell us more of what's happening in the city. The Sparrows were running about shouting about the End of the World and denouncing the crown. Thankfully, they were losing, King Robert was dealing with them quite brutally,” he said with amused chagrin, he then paused and cast a concerned eye towards mother before continuing, “Also...I heard the first night after our return, Jaime Lannister carved his way out of King's Landing. He and a large group of Redcloaks were seen riding west away from King's Landing...they also say he slew Loras Tyrell in his escape,” Davos revealed unhappily.

Sansa's polite smile turned into a rictus, “That's not good.”

Lord Manderly nodded equally grim, “Lady Olenna will want Lannister blood for this...not that she wouldn't have been braying for it before.”

Sansa nodded offhandedly, as her mind reeled with all the horrible possibilities, “Be that as it may, before he left, Bran keep assuring me that Sam has matters in hand, but this...the Tyrells will be out for more Lannister blood,” she said with a pained grimace.

Lord Manderly and Davos nodded in agreement with her.

“You're putting a lot of trust in this Samwell Tarly,” mother added dryly in concern, dubious of Sam's skill and their trust in him.

“Sam is capable...he's capable of much more than anyone imagined- especially his father,” Sansa reassured her, “Until we hear otherwise, we can't really do anything. We don't even know how to properly help him if he is indeed in trouble. We can only continue onwards securing the North and the Wall.”
“Best to wait and not do anything rash,” Davos said nodding in agreement.

“Anyway, that aside, I have received word from Daenerys today,” Sansa quickly shared the content of the message.

Lord Manderly and Davos chuckled while mother tensed at the news of dragons.

“This is excellent news, my Lady!” Lord Manderly said beaming.

“Yes indeed, because her Grace needed another title,” Davos added chuckling again with an easy smile.

Sansa found herself unconsciously rolling her eyes at Davos’s comment, “Yes,” she said putting forth a fake smile, as she regained control of the expressions on her face.

Davos pushed forward, “I’ve been at sea for while. The Narrow Sea was uncharacteristically stormy, I don’t remember it being like this last time, and this trip took much longer than I expected...but what about the other kingdoms? What’s happening?”

Sansa nodded in understanding, “Jon took father and Robb they’re sorting out the Boltons, Karstarks and Umbers. Jon’s last raven said that the Boltons were dead and they haven’t lost anyone,” she informed him with glee. She’d been very happy to receive that news.

Davos nodded with a satisfied smile, “Good riddance.”

Lord Manderly nodded with grim satisfaction, “That's one less stain on the North's honor,” he added gruffly.

Sansa nodded, “We were all happy to hear this. They're headed to the Wall after that, the Wildlings must be allowed to pass into the North this time, before it's too late. As for my grandfather, he has declared for Jon and sent Uncle Edmure to deal with Walder Frey. And he's already dealt with them quite severely,” she declared with a wolfish and toothy smile.

Davos looked a little pained now. Uncle Edmure had been very bitter and angry by the end. She
could only—rather gleefully, imagine just how savagely he'd dealt with them. His raven had been sparse on details, but he'd promised that they would not be a problem. He'd also cryptically mentioned a gift he was sending to Winterfell along with a long letter with all the details.

Davos scratched at his beard nervously, “Are there any Freys left?”

“According to Uncle...some,” she retorted smartly.

Davos shifted uncomfortably in his seat, “Anything else?”

She nodded, “Lord Royce has control of the Vale and the Knights of the Vale have pledged to Jon as well.”

“That's very good news,” Davos smiled, perking up.

She nodded in agreement, “And Tyrion has sent me a colorful raven demanding answers...as well as swearing fealty to House Targaryen.”

Sansa didn't miss the pained expression on mother's face at the mention of Tyrion Lannister. That was one more issue that mother would have to overcome when they inevitably met again.

Davos snorted, “I would expect nothing less from him.”

“But we know nothing new of King's Landing, and we just know nothing of the Stormlands and Dorne,” she finished unhappily. Of all the Kingdoms those two were a mystery. Bran's cryptic words about Dorne didn't help her apprehension, and as far as she knew other than Beric Dondarrion, they had no friends in the Stormlands. Brienne didn't count, the Stormlords were a prideful and rigid bunch, they would not follow a woman.

Davos sighed, “That's unfortunate, but we're still doing pretty well, despite all the chaos.”

Sansa nodded in agreement, “True.”
The meeting continued on as they discussed their next moves and what was potentially brewing in the Reach and other southern kingdoms.

Another arrival? They weren't waiting for anyone else. The Baratheons and Davos— they'd know were coming, but...now who? We aren't expecting anyone else...

For a second time that day her work had been interrupted.

“My lady, the visitor is a Kingsguard,” the guard reported gravely concerned and surprised, “You should come my lady...quickly.”

She hid her worry and gave the guard a long look, he also seemed to be a little awed as well. She nodded and followed him out after asking Lord Manderly to continue reading the financial reports while she dealt with this surprise visitor.

As before, she followed a guard out, mother and Ser Davos tagging along. Along the way they were joined by Ser Rodrick who had a concerned look on his face and a hand on his sword. A Kingsguard unexpectedly coming to Winterfell would be a cause for concern for the master at arms of Winterfell, especially after they'd declared for Jon...who didn't have a Kingsguard yet.

Quickly, they came to the courtyard and she caught her first glimpse of the visiting Kingsguard.

“Gods be good...” she heard Ser Rodrick gasp from behind her.

The Kingsguard stood at attention, his helmet held under his arm, the white armour shining bright in the morning light. The man was old but still looked very formidable, with a straight back and broad square shoulders.

And she recognized him.

And she didn't hate him...
Not like the rest of Joffrey’s Kingsguard and in the end this man been a Targaryen loyalist before his death. Just not one of Jon's men.

She didn't mince words, in spite of her surprise, with a regal look and neutral tone, she spoke easily, “I am Lady Sansa Stark of Winterfell, in the name of King Jon Targaryen, the first of his name, I welcome you to Winterfell...but I have to ask why have you come here?’

If he was surprised that she was the one speaking and not her mother he didn't show it, “My lady, I am Ser Barristan Selmy,” the legendary old knight bowed deeply, “I am here to protect and serve my true King, Jon Targaryen.” He straightened up, standing proud and tall despite his age, shining like something out of the stories she had so loved when she was younger.

She heard her mother's gasp of surprise at Ser Barristan the Bold's proud pronouncement, but mother kept silent.

For a moment Sansa's stoic resolve cracked and she gaped before getting her emotions under control. This was a surprise. Barristan had been Daenerys's creature in the old life. Despite his words, why was he really here? To serve Jon? As her mind went through the implications of this, she gathered herself, getting her expression under control.

Yes, yes this would be good. To have Jon with Ser Barristan at his side would add an extra degree of legitimacy to him. No one in Westeros doubted the word or honor of Ser Barristan the Bold. She held back the grin that now threatened to come to her face at the image. This would be most advantageous. However this came about, this was a very good surprise.

“Welcome to Winterfell Ser Barristan,” she nodded in greeting, giving him a small and hiding her eagerness, “You are most welcome here.” She gave Davos a look.

“On behalf of his Grace, Jon of House Targaryen, the First of his name, I accept your fealty,” Davos said smoothly after a moment

Ser Barristan's eyes focused on Davos and confusion filled them, “Ser Davos? What are you doing here?” he asked supreme surprise coloring his tone.

Ser Davos shrugged and pointed to the Hand's badge on his shirt, “Hand to the King...where else would I be?”
“You...you...are Hand to the King, to Jon Targaryen?!” Ser Barristan asked in shock.

Davos nodded simply, “Aye.”

Ser Barristan suddenly looked at a loss for words at this surprise. Davos was always known as Stannis Baratheon's most loyal man and Ser Barristan's surprise was to be expected. The old knight remained silent for several long moments.

“Come along Ser Barristan, I think there is much we need to discuss,” Sansa said breaking the silence.

As they returned to the solar, Lord Manderly looked up from the paper he was reading and then gaped as he laid eyes on Ser Barristan. He cast a questioning look to Sansa.

“Ser Barristan has come to serve his rightful King,” Sansa declared proudly.

Lord Manderly continued to gape for a moment before grinning manically, “Welcome Ser Barristan, you're most welcome here!” he said rising to shake Ser Barristan's hand.

“Thank you Lord Manderly,” replied Ser Barristan, a little flustered at the large lord's enthusiastic greeting.

She took back her chair as they sat, Ser Barristan looked uncomfortable in his armour before he sat stiffly.

“Please be at ease,” Sansa began, “this is unexpected, but any man loyal to House Targaryen is welcome in Winterfell.”

He nodded gratefully, before looking around expectantly, “Where is the King?”
Sansa decided to take the lead, quickly speaking and explaining much to him. Yes, Jon truly was a Targaryen and he was her Aunt Lyanna's trueborn son. No, Jon was not here, and neither was Lord Stark. They was in the process of consolidating their hold on the North. Then they were heading to the Wall to make the Wildlings their allies. She also shared with him news of Daenerys.

A small relieved smile came to his face as she spoke and he nodded happily, glad to hear of his Queen. Or former Queen, if he was swearing fealty and naming Jon the true king.

He was less surprised about Jon than she expected, it was obvious someone had shared much with him.

She finished and waited for his reaction.

“Thank you, my lady,” he paused pursing his lips thoughtfully, “When I first heard of his Grace, I doubted the words. My source was dubious...at best.”

“Dubious?” questioned Davos in confusion.

Ser Barristan nodded, before reaching under his armour and pulling out a thick envelope. A sigil was brightly drawn on the face of the envelope.

The proud Lion seal of House Lannister.

“I am coming from Casterly Rock. Lord Tyrion sends his regards,” Ser Barristan declared handing her the letter, “I was to give this either to the King or to you, Lady Sansa. And it was Ser Jaime that first told me the truth.”

Sansa bit back a growl, now she'd have to rewrite her message to Tyrion. She took the letter and tore it open, reading it quickly. The gist was still he same as the raven scroll...but it had more details. It had also obviously been written after Tyrion had sent his raven.

Jaime, Myrcella and Tommen were at the Rock, Bronn and Sandor with them. Cersei was a Baratheon prisoner and probably dead by now. Tywin Lannister was locked in room like an errant child and Tyrion had the support of both Genna and Kevan. And none of the Lords of the Westerlands were currently contesting his new role as Lord Paramount of the Westerlands....and many other little things.
Oh the details were oh so glorious!

Especially one in particular!

She grinned and looked up, announcing, “Joffrey's dead.” The insufferable little worm was dead, thanks to Sandor Clegane.

“You were with the Lannisters?” mother asked, stressing the name dangerously, her eyes flashing with anger, “with Jaime Lannister?!” she was still stuck on that despite the good news.

Sansa fought the urge to roll her eyes at mother's focus, while at the same time resigning herself that this was probably going to end in screams.

“Lady Stark, you are not the only one surprised by this turn of events, hearing Jaime Lannister declare his fealty to a Targaryen King- one I didn't even know existed was very jarring...to say the least! If it wasn't for Lord Varys's intervention things would have been much bloodier in the Red Keep.”

Mother face was turning several interesting colors now, as Sansa winced internally, imagining just how mad she was becoming now.

“Is it true that Ser Jaime slew Loras Tyrell?” Davos quickly asked.

Ser Barristan looked uncomfortable as he shifted in his seat, “Aye, it's true, Ser Jaime did slay Ser Loras.”

Sansa shifted unhappily in her seat as she sighed, this confirmation was not welcome, and not from such a trustworthy source.

“...but it was no treacherous attack on Ser Jaime's part. The Tyrell boy attacked us. He attacked Ser Jaime and I. At the same time.” Ser Barristan finished in exasperation, “If Jaime had not slain him first, I would have.”
Sansa digested that news for moment before letting out a disgusted growl, “Idiot...”

Davos and Lord Manderly's expressions shared equal amounts of annoyance and exasperation at the news, while mother was still lost in her angry thoughts.

“Did Lord Varys accompany you as well?” Sansa asked, moving on. The Spider had been very quiet since their return...no one had mentioned him or had word from him since their return. She still had reservations over his true loyalty despite repeated assurances from Daenerys and Jon.

Ser Barristan shook his head, “He said he still had business in King’s Landing.”

Sansa frowned unhappily, “What of Lord Baelish?” her voice had an edge to it as she spoke the name.

Ser Barristan scowled darkly, “I have since heard of Baelish's crimes...you don't have to worry about him any more, Ser Jaime saw to that.”

“He'd dead?” asked Davos cutting in, as surprise blossomed in Sansa's heart.

“It's hard to be alive when you're missing your head,” Ser Barristan replied dryly.

Sansa's surprise turned into joy, she felt like getting up and dancing around the room in triumph as she heard that Baelish was dead. She grinned letting her normal mask fall, so much was going their way, she was almost giddy!

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**Catelyn Stark**

Catelyn looked away from Ser Barristan, bile rising in her throat as she tried to come to terms with having to thank the Kingslayer for getting rid of Petyr. At the same time, she couldn't bring herself to mourn for the boy she'd known in Riverrun. Petyr had done too many things in the enjoining years for her to spare him any scrap of sympathy.
And good riddance to Joffrey! He'd murdered her Ned, but she was so angry! No, not angry, distressed. That was a better word for what she was feeling.

No...she was angry!

Sansa and the others were happy and she couldn't blame them, but she was still angry! About so many things!

Oh, she was proud of Sansa. Proud of the woman she'd become, just not of why she'd had to become so hard and aloof.

It was unnatural to be reprimanded by one's own daughter. To stand at attention as an errant child as a list of her mistakes were thrown back at her by her young daughter as if Sansa was the parent. It was humiliating enough when Ned had done it, but he was her lord husband and it was his right.

Arya as well had changed, she seemed biddable and obedient most of the time. She listened when Catelyn spoke, was courteous to Septa Mordane but there was something off about the way she reacted. Something that only a mother could see...

...and then there was the business with Robert Baratheon's bastard!

She pressed her lips together, subduing her anger. That, that detail she was well and truly angry about! A bastard! And the bastard had been welcomed to Winterfell with open arms by Sansa as if it was the most natural of things!

And she'd seen the way Arya had been looking at him! Arya! Her little wolf cub had seemed almost...smitten.

But that was impossible, Sansa was the one that pinned after boys...or at least the old Sansa had.

And now...this business with Jaime Lannister?!
“We're just going to let this pass us by?” she demanded irritably, “Jaime Lannister? What of his crimes?”

Sansa sighed heavily, for the first time in a long time, Catelyn could see a little trepidation on her face, “Both Jon and Daenerys have pardoned him. He is a trusted ally now.” she explained in a resigned tone.

And now she was hearing things, because Sansa couldn't have just named Jaime Lannister as a trusted ally. Not the Kingslayer!

She rose from her seat, “Are you forgetting that he tried to murder Bran! Right here in Winterfell!” she screamed angrily, “He pushed him from the Old Tower! He crippled my poor boy! Your own brother! You nearly murdered Ned in King's Landing! And what of Lord Karstark's sons?"

Sansa's face hardened, “I am well aware of all his crimes...and all his services to the realm.”

Catelyn was irate, “Services? What services? All he has done is betray his oaths at every turn!”

Sansa stared back unfazed.

Catelyn stared back at Sansa unflinching.

“You didn't tell her about the Wildfire?” asked Davos, breaking the stand off between mother and daughter.

Catelyn twisted towards Ser Davos, “Wildfire? What Wildfire?!”

“One surprise at a time,” Sansa replied dryly.

Catelyn turned back to Sansa mystified as her daughter began speaking of Aerys Targaryen. When Sansa was finished, she sat back in her chair stunned and shaking.

The Mad King had truly lived up to his name. She trembled at the sheer calamity that had been
narrowly averted by Jaime Lannister.

The smug Lannister bastard had saved her Ned and never said anything! He'd saved so many with his oath breaking...

They were speaking again and it took Catelyn a while to be able to focus back on the conversation.

“...the Lady Shireen is here as well?” questioned Ser Barristan in disbelief.

“Aye, she's a guest here now,” Ser Davos answered with a nod.

“Forgive me Ser Davos...your story is well know- almost as much as my own. Your loyalty to Stannis Baratheon is legendary...What happened to bring you to the true King? And why bring the Lady Shireen? She's not a hostage is she?” he asked in concern.

Davos snorted angrily, “Of course not! I love that girl like my own! I brought her to protect her from her damned father.”

Catelyn's ears perked up eagerly, this thread of the conversation overriding her anger and disbelief...perhaps she'd get some answers now. One less mystery to deal with would be most welcome.

Ser Barristan was taken aback, “Protect her from...Lord Stannis?”

She saw Ser Davos's face darken and turned a startling shade of red, “Aye...what he did to her was unforgivable....” he trailed off for a moment, seemingly lost in his memories. He struggled with the words for a moment, “ Stannis...gods curse that man! And damn Melisandre! They needed a blood sacrifice...so he burned her! He burned Shireen!” the grief in Davos's tone was like a physical blow.

Ser Barristan reared back away from Davos, he looked aghast and stunned by the words. Lord Manderly looked equally angry and disgusted as Sansa did now.

“Jon has promised to protect her. She is his cousin, and Jon does not harm innocent children. She is not a hostage, no matter what happens with her Uncles or father,” Sansa was saying, but Catelyn
wasn't paying attention any more.

She'd met with Stannis at his parley with Renly. She'd seen how cold and unforgiving he was. She'd also seen the Shadow that had murdered Renly.

But this...

The world was mad. Because this was all mad!

That poor girl! And she remembered! First, to be cursed with Greyscale and then...

Catelyn shuddered.

Gods be good! Father protect us all from this madness!

She didn't hear anything more of what was discussed, there were too many things on her mind now. Her anger warred with her shock. It was too much!

She didn't notice when the others left till Sansa came to stand by her and took her hand, slowly rubbing her back.

They'd left her and Sansa alone. She looked up and stared into her daughter's eyes. The hardness was still there...it never left these days. But there was compassion there as well.

“I'm sorry mother,” Sansa shook her head, “it's not something we could tell you all at once. There's too much you didn't know. One revelation at a time.”

Catelyn stared up at her. The world was mad...her daughter was a grown woman now. Something was wrong with Arya. Jaime Lannister had saved Ned's life. Jaime Lannister had tried to murder both Ned and Bran. And the Bastard was a King...

Since she'd first laid eyes on the boy, since Ned first brought him back after the rebellion, she'd been so afraid that he would steal Robb's birthright...and he'd been the one who's birthright had been
stolen. A birthright greater than Robb's. King. The Seven's Kingdoms were his by right. Not a bastard and not a stain on her honor.

It was too much to absorb quickly or easily...

She stood up quickly and straightened her back stiffly, freeing her hand from Sansa's, “I have duties to see to,” she stated evenly.

Sansa nodded, “Of course, mother.”

She walked out of the solar stiffly.

A distraction...that's what she needed, a distraction- and time. Time to adjust to all she now knew.

The afternoon saw more visitors come to Winterfell...

After Sansa's distasteful and disturbing revelations, Catelyn had thrown herself into her work. Trying to get past it...the Kingslayer...an ally?! She tried not to think of the Wildfire and how close she had come to loosing Ned.

The scene she found in the courtyard was a strange one. There were three people there surrounded by guards...and with the primitive furs they were wearing, they could only have been Wildlings. Most of the Stark guards were tense, but the Manderly men were less so.

She approached them, finding that Maester Luwin was already among them. The maester was speaking animatedly with one of the Wildlings, a woman with unkempt wild hair and dirty furs.

They turned towards her and she saw that Luwin was, unexpectedly, smiling broadly.

“My Lady,” he began in a delighted tone and wide smile, “allow me to introduce, Osha!”
She started as her eyes jerked towards the Wildling woman.

*This was the woman who had saved her sons?*

She looked the woman once over again. The woman looked just like she expected a Wildling to look, she also had a very unnerving stare. This Osha didn't seem to blink much.

The woman gave her an insolent and languid imitation of a curtsy, “My lady,” her voice was hard but not hostile.

Catelyn nodded, “I have heard what you did to help my sons,” she stated evenly.

Osha gave her a toothy smile, “They're good boys, them little lords, twas right to help them.”

“Yes, well, I thank you Osha for your service to House Stark,” *And now she was thanking a Wildling...because this day wasn’t enough of a strain on her sensibilities...*

True, the woman deserved the praise, her loyalty had been proved beyond a shadow of a doubt, and she'd died by the Bolton Bastard's hand. When Ned returned he would reward her greatly.

“Osha!” came Rickon's cry of joy from behind her.

The Wildling, Osha, smiled wide, “Little Lord.”

Catelyn turned and saw Rickon running towards them, his direwolf on his heels, barking as excitedly as his master seemed.

The Wildling knelt down as Rickon threw himself at her. Rickon held onto the woman hard, an expression of childish joy on his face. His direwolf danced around the duo just as excited.

Catelyn didn't know how to feel, she'd been told that Osha was a Wildling and the service she'd done
for the Starks...for her precious boys. She more than appreciated how Osha had protected Bran and Rickon...but seeing it in front of her eyes was something else...seeing just how much Rickon was attached to the woman, grated greatly on her nerves.

It drove home, just how alone she'd left her son for him to become attached to such an unsuitable replacement.

They broke apart and Osha ruffled Rickon's hair as he beamed happily.

Rickon turned to her, “Mother, this is Osha! She took care of me and Bran when we escaped from the Ironborn!” the boy crowed happily.

Her smile became strained, “We're met. Maester Luwin introduced us.”

Rickon nodded and then hugged Osha again. “I'm glad you're back and remember,” he said happily.

“Not as much as I am, little lord,” Osha rejoined dryly.

Catelyn let them have their moment of joyous reunion. It was only right, despite how she was feeling.

“Osha,” a female voice called out.

The voice belonged to Lord Reed's quiet daughter, Meera. She was coming across the courtyard. She came up to Osha with an amused smile on her face.

“Meera,” Osha said in surprise.

The Reed girl then actually embraced the Wildling, “It's good to see you.”

“Aye, tis good to be alive...again,” Osha admitted, “Strange...but good.”
They broke apart and turned to face Catelyn expectantly.

“Perhaps a hot meal for Osha and her friends, while I speak with Sansa about all this,” Catelyn suggested gracefully, taking the hint.

Luwin nodded, “Of course, my Lady, I'll see to their needs.”

Rickon began talking excitedly with Osha again as the two other Wildlings still remained suspicious of all around them. Meera watched them all from Osha's side with a bittersweet smile.

Catelyn turned her back and walked stiffly away to look for Sansa, leaving her joyous son with a Wildling, feeling like a complete failure as a mother.

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Already, in such a short period of time, Osha and the other Wildlings were settling in. By Sansa's decree, as long as they abide by the rules, they would be welcome in Winterfell. Osha hadn't been surprised, but her companions were still skeptical, especially after Sansa mentioned that the King would be allowing Mace Ryder and his host passage past the Wall and into the North. It had taken a lot of words and they were still dubious of the truth Sansa had given them.

Catelyn sighed heavily.

And today wasn't over yet...

Today was turning out to be a busy day- far too busy and disturbing for Catelyn's peace of mind. Now, men flying Tully banners had been sighted approaching Winterfell. Apparently, Edmure's gift was arriving today as well.

Catelyn was the first one to meet them. She smiled brightly as she recognized the lead knight.

Ser Edmyn was a old man, his hair was white now but otherwise, time didn't appear to have changed or weakened him at all. She remembered him well, he'd served father faithfully since she was a little girl. She remembered the grief she'd felt when she'd been told he'd fallen to the Lannisters during the
Ser Edmyn smiled broadly as he stepped up to her, “Lady Catelyn...forgive me, Lady Stark,” he corrected himself abashed, “It heartens me to see you again after so many years! You have been sorely missed in Riverrun.”

She smiled back, his familiar- if aged, face reassuring her, “Welcome Ser Edmyn, I am glad to see you as well.”

“Thank you my lady,” he responded with a bow. He gestured behind him to the men with him, “your brother sends his regards. He had a gift for your son, as Lord Edmure said it, he hopes that Lord Robb will forgive him his mistakes from the last life.”

She nodded, her lips thinning, she was well aware of Edmure's mistakes and what it cost Robb. She cast a look at the men. A dozen grim faced men in Tully colours, with Ser Edmyn being the most senior of them. The rest where young men that she didn't know. They'd all dismounted and at Ser Edmyn's gesture two of them dragged a man forward. The man was dirty, his faced bruised with two black eyes and a swollen nose. He was gagged and bound, they Tully men didn't seem to have treated him well at all.

As they dragged him forward and threw him at her feet, she understood why.

Her ire was rising...no, it wasn't simply ire now, it was rage. The rage was building in her as she locked eyes with the bound, prone and fearful prisoner. She recognized him and understood why he had been so badly treated by her father's men.

“Lothar Frey!” she spat angrily. The loathsome bastard had murdered Talisa and Catelyn's unborn grandchild!

One of the men, roughly dragged him up. Lothar rested on his knees a hand tightly gripping his neck and holding him in place. There was unabashed fear shining in his eyes, as he stared up at her.

“Aye, my lady, Lothar Frey. Lord Edmure has grudgingly accepted Stevron as Lord of the Crossing now- and his subsequent surrender. And good riddance to the old weasel!” Ser Edmyn announced with a grin.
A happy feeling blossomed in Catelyn's gut which then turned to glee, as the import of Ser Edmyn's words were realised. If Stevron was lord, then Walder Frey was dead! Edmure's raven had been short and to the point, and confirmation of his actions please her greatly.

“...there's not many Freys left at the Twins- your brother saw to that,” Ser Edmyn added in gruff glee, his eyes twinkling with satisfaction.

“Indeed?” This was even more welcome news, they'd known that Edmure was going to the Twins with a lot of support from all sides, but again confirmation of his victory was reassuring, “this is very good news.”

“What's very good news?” came Sansa's voice, as she stepped up beside her.

Catelyn turned to Sansa, “This is Ser Edmyn, I've known him since before I was your age. Ser Edmyn, this my eldest daughter, Sansa of House Stark...the King has left her in charge of Winterfell, till Lord Stark's return.” She added the last part with a pained smile.

Sansa gave him a long look, before smiling gracefully, “Welcome to Winterfell Ser,” she cast a look at Lothar, “I'm assuming this is my uncle's gift?”

The knight smiled, and nodded, before quickly sharing with her all he'd already said to Cately. By the time he was finished, Sansa had a wolfish smile on her face.

“That is excellent news,” the smile waned as she focused behind Ser Edmyn, “And who is this? A second gift?”

Surprised, Catelyn looked to where Sansa was gazing. There was a second prisoner shackled and bound, though not gagged. She'd missed the second prisoner as first because he was only a boy. This one was in better condition than Lothar...but he was unquestionably a Frey.

She scowled darkly as their eyes met, “Olyvar,” she spat venomously. It was Robb's traitorous little squire!

“I didn't have anything to do with the Red Wedding!” Olyvar blurted out loudly, defended himself.
“Then why are you here?” Catelyn questioned pointedly with a snide, disbelieving tone.

Olyvar looked down despondently, “Lord Edmure didn't believe me.”

Catelyn sniffed haughtily and looked down at him, “And I don't believe you either! Where were you when they were murdering my Robb?! You were his squire! Where were you?!”

The boy looked away discomforted by the accusation, after a moment of silence he answered, “They locked me away...they kept me away. I wanted to warn him, but they stopped me...” he finished in an upset tone.

“A likely story,” she dismissed his words and his acting, he was a Frey, he would say anything to save himself.

“A sorry excuse for a squire,” Ser Edmyn agreed with a sneer, “Lord Edmure was unsure of the boy's words. He's for Lord Robb to judge.”

The boy didn't retort, he just looked more despondent.

“I know him,” came Arya's gleeful voice from behind Catelyn.

She only jumped a little at the unexpected voice. Arya was suddenly standing next to her. And next to Arya, much to Catelyn's disapproval, stood the bastard, Gendry.

“This is Uncle Edmure's gift,” Sansa quickly stated in an amused tone.

The bruised and battered Lothar began to squirm in his guard's grasp as Arya stepped up to him, ignoring the now silent Olyvar, who was suddenly giving Arya a very fearful look.

As Catelyn watched, Arya gave Lothar a wide delighted smile, “I'll have to thank Uncle Edmure for sending you here,” she said with a mirthful tone that did not match the predatory murderous look in her eye.
Lothar’s squirming became worse, and a second grim faced Tully man was forced to grab him along with the first to hold him in place.

“So how are we going to kill him this time?” Arya asked innocently, much to Catelyn’s unease.

Lothar wasn’t squirming now, he was outright fighting to break free, his guards hard pressed to keep him kneeling.

“Anyone for Pies?” Arya suddenly asked causing the blood to drain from Lothar’s face and his struggles to increase. He turned so white, it was a miracle that he stayed conscious.

Ser Edmyn and his grim faced men laughed nastily at Arya’s joke. As Olyvar turned just as pale as Lothar. A smell assaulted Catelyn’s nose. It coming from Lothar and it left no doubt that he had done more than just pissed himself at Arya’s words. His eyes were filled with wide and filled with a scary amount of terror.

Sansa glared at her sister, while Gendry didn’t look amused.

Gendry grabbed Arya’s shoulder, stopping her from getting any closer, “I think he’s had enough.”

Arya stared up at him for a moment, before huffing unhappily, “Fine, spoil my fun.” She cast another glare at Lothar causing him to start struggling again, before she walked off.

Sansa jerked her head at her and gave Gendry a look, “Keep an eye on her…”

Gendry nodded cutting her off, “I know, I know... no pies.” He walked off after her.

Catelyn clenched her fists, fighting to control her emotions. *Pies! Pies! Pies every single time! What the in the name of the Seven was the issue with Pies!?*

Sansa had apparently come to a decision now, “Take them to the dungeons,” she commanded, “The King will decide their fate when he returns.” She nodded, to Ser Edmyn, “Come Ser Edmyn, I believe you will have more to tell us,” She turned and left the courtyard as the men began obeying her.
Later, Catelyn finally managed to corner Sansa in the great hall. She had been excluded from the meeting with Ser Edmyn, and dismissed back to her duties. But now, she had to have answers, she'd seen the sheer terror in Lothar Frey's eyes as he looked at Arya! It was too much, she needed answers! This couldn't continue! Whatever they were hiding from her she had to know!

“Sansa, we have to speak!” Catelyn declared angrily, as she approached.

Sansa had been speaking with Maester Luwin and Ser Rodrick as Catelyn approached. The conversation stopped and she turned to face her.

“Yes, mother?” Sansa asked, unmoved by Catelyn's sharp tone.

“We have to talk Sansa,” Catelyn repeated flustered, “It can't go on, I am still your mother and the Lady of Winterfell. I know you've been keeping things from me. It has to end...you have to tell me about Arya!”

Sansa held her gaze for a moment, before sighing unhappily, “It doesn't have to be today, mother.”

“No! Another day will not pass, I will know what is being kept from me,” Catelyn retorted.

Sansa held her gaze for a moment before sighing again, she gestured towards Maester Luwin and Ser Rodrick, “Both of you might as well join us, it's only a matter of time before this truth spreads. Best you all hear the truth from me- and not the rumors.” She turned sharply on her heel and left the great hall.

Catelyn cast a glance at Luwin and Ser Rodrick as they shared an unreadable look, before following Sansa.

In next to no time, they were gathered in Ned's solar.

As Sansa took a seat behind the desk, she raised her head defiantly, “What do you wish to discuss first, mother?” she asked in a cool tone.
Catelyn frowned at her tone, it far too arrogant for her liking. She mentally debated where to start, “Arya. And the Bastard.” She spat the word.

Sansa winced, “He's Arya’s.” she replied simply.

“He's a bastard, he can't be her's. Sansa, Arya is a lady of a Great House. How can be her's? There is no future for the two of them...unless you're going to tell me he's a hidden prince as well?” Catelyn finished snidely.

Sansa gave her a long look, “Since when has Arya been a lady? Do not lie to yourself mother, she was never like me. She was and has always been a wolf. She was never going to be a proper lady. And she does love him...much to everyone's surprise.” Sansa finished with a perplexed tone.

Catelyn coloured, Arya couldn't be in love! “He's still a bastard.”

“And that doesn't matter to Arya...or to Jon. Gendry is a good man. Loyal and trustworthy...not the smartest person around I'll give you, but unlike his father, he only has eyes for Arya. Gendry is not the type to stray. If he was, Jon would not welcome his attraction to Arya...”

Catelyn fumed, the bastard had the King's good opinion and permission?! Is this to be Jon's revenge on her for all she had done to him growing up? Letting Arya marry so far beneath her? Let her marry a bastard?!

“...and all of that doesn't matter. Arya is unmarriageable. No man will marry her if she doesn't approve. They would be too afraid...and she will never approve of anybody but Gendry. Not for you. Not for father and not even for Jon,” Sansa finished calmly.

There was a coldnes in her gut now, "Why is she unmarriageable? Why are the men so afraid of her?"

“Can't you not just accept my word that she is? I'm trying to spare you this. It will hurt,” Sansa explained, a mournful expression on her face. “Things will never be the same after you know the truth.”

“Enough Sansa! I am still your mother! You will tell me why the men are so afraid of Arya!”
Catelyn demanded angrily.

Sansa gave her a long, pained look, “You don't want to know.”

Catelyn gave her a withering look, “Of course I want to know! She's my daughter!” she retorted with a sharper tone than she intended.

Sansa shook her head, “Some things can't be taken back once said. Some things can't be unheard.”

The pit in her stomach collapsed in itself as her mind raced, trying to imagine what horrible thing Sansa was keeping from her. What could Arya have possibly done that was so horrible?

“Tell me,” she demanded again.

Sansa let out a sigh, her eyes unreadable, she spoke and irrevocably shattered Catelyn's world, “She's a *Faceless Man*.”

Catelyn's heart stopped and she swayed. She felt hands grab her and steady her. She felt herself being quickly guided to a chair. Her knees gave out and she collapsed into the chair. Maester Luwin was at her side, giving her a long evaluating look. She ignored him and stared at Sansa.

“How?” Catelyn managed to mutter the question, still numb with shock. How could little Arya be a....how was this possible? How could she be...she shuddered she couldn't even utter the name.

“With training, she met a Faceless Man while she was fleeing from King's Landing, they apparently became *friends*. Later she made her way to Braavos, to the House of Black and White,” Sansa gave her broad strokes but didn't clarify more, “later still, she returned to Westeros.”

Catelyn was starting to shake now, “Lothar was terrified of her...he knew? He knew she was...” her voice broke and she couldn't continue.

Sansa nodded, “After a fashion, she killed him the first time around,” she paused giving her a concerned look, “....you don't have to know the details.”
She rocked back in the chair...her Arya killed someone?! “Tell me! What did she do?” Catelyn hadn't intended to scream.

Sansa looked away for a moment. When she turned back, her eyes were disquieted and pitying.

Sansa explained precisely what Arya had done to Walder Frey and his sons.

Catelyn felt her gorge rise and bile filled her throat. Pies. Freys. Pies. Freys...Frey Pie.

Her eyes dimmed and the world swayed and then darkness claimed her as she finally understood why people kept saying 'no pies' to her little girl.

Sansa Stark

Sansa sat alone in father's solar, she was very unhappy, she'd be having words with Jon when he got back to Winterfell, for leaving her without explaining the truth about Arya...and other secrets. Mother had fainted but Maester Luwin had assured her she would be alright. He and Ser Rodrick had taken her to her chambers to rest.

But at least it was finally out there. One less secret. Well a couple less secrets. She understood why they'd kept it all secret for so long, mother and father could only take so many surprises at once.

Alright, maybe not so many words, it was understandable and she'd agreed with him at the time. She still agreed with him now. It was better that father and mother were separate when they found out everything.

She could only imagine just how father would react. He despised Jaime. Even before everything, she'd recognized that. And Arya...well he'd be beyond heartbroken when that was revealed to him.

She sighed unhappily, mother was resting, and Maester Luwin was with her. And Sansa had far too
much work to do to get distracted now.

But apparently it still wasn't time to get back to work.

Lady mewed unhappily from by her side dragging her away from her thoughts and work. She looked down by her chair, the direwolf was staring up her with unhappy eyes. She reached down and scratched behind the direwolf's ears.

“I'm sorry girl,” Sansa began, “I know I've been busy...but it's important.” She knew she'd been neglecting the direwolf. Unlike her first life, she hadn't been able to play with the direwolf as much, with most of her time taken up planning and dealing with her duties. They'd been back nearly a moon and the direwolf had grown as much as she remembered. The pup was nearly the size of a normal sized dog now.

Despite the size, she enticed Lady into her lap and cuddled with her. Soon enough Lady would be too big for such things, but she promised herself that she'd enjoy these little moments and take more time with Lady.

This time, Father would have no reason to harm Lady. No one would harm any of the direwolves this time. They were a pack and the pack always looked out for each other. That had been her mistake in the last life, siding with the Lannisters against Arya...then against Father.

She shuddered remembering Cersei's honeyed, lying words and the letter she'd written once upon a time.

Never again...she promised herself.

A knock came interrupting her self loathing. She huffed unamused, there had been far too many interruptions and visitors for one day. And she still hadn't told mother all Uncle Edmure had done to the Freys...never mind that he was going to remarry Roslin.

It was a good ploy to reunite the Riverlands after all the Freys had done, but she'd gotten to know her uncle enough to know that wasn't why he was marrying the girl again.

The knocking came again.
She shook herself and called out, “Come!”

The door opened and Davos stepped in.

“Lady Sansa,” he nodded in greeting.

She smiled and coyly said, “My Lord Hand.”

Davos huffed, “Not you too. I thought we in the North and not the South.”

Sansa laughed, “Have a seat, My lord Hand,” she continued.

He huffed again, and sat down with an amused smile, “I'm glad you find it so amusing.”

“And I'm glad you're here. You've rested?” Sansa said honestly.

“Well enough for now,” Davos stated evenly, a smile came to his lips, “Shireen's settling in nicely. I left her with Arya and Rickon and the boy's Wildling girl.”

“And where's Gendry? I asked him to keep an eye on Arya,” Sansa asked in confusion and concern.

Davos shrugged, “He made her promise not to do anything to the Freys, then he said he wouldn't give her his gift if she did anything.”

“Gift?” she asked with a raised eyebrow.

“He's in the forge. I can guess what he's making for her,” Davos said matter of factly, “But we've all promised him not to tell her where he is till he's finished.”
Sansa snorted, she could imagine what he was making, “Yes, I don’t think any other gift would do for my dear sister,” she agreed in amusement. She nodded once then changed the subject, “I’m surprised your son isn’t here with you. Where is he?” she asked curious.

Davos shrugged, “I left Matthos in White Harbor with my ship. Someone has to keep an eye on her...not that I don’t think the Manderlys are trustworthy- it’s more to keep an eye on my crew. It’s always best to keep a watch on them. And Ser Wylis said he’d keep an eye on Matthos for me, just in case anything happens.”

Sansa nodded before moving on, “Good, good...you heard about mother?”

Davos winced, “Aye, that little secret is making the rounds- it’s why Arya's with the Wildlings now. They don’t know what a Faceless man is. The Tully men have been proudly spouting her deeds in the Riverlands, they're proud of her. Your guardsmen are more than a little scared of her now. They remember the girl she was...it'll take a while before get used to the new Arya.”

Sansa winced, Maester Luwin, Ser Rodrick, Tomard, Alyn, Desmond, Mikken, Hullen, Old Nan, and so many others who remembered her as Arya Underfoot...gods...what was Jeyne thinking now?

Davos sighed and commiserated, “In this new mad world, what's one more insane thing?”

Sansa shook her head, “There has to be a limit...”

He looked thoughtful for a moment, “As long as Rhaegar Targaryen doesn't rise from his grave...I think we're good.”

“I think there’s little hope of that, even Thoros couldn't bring him back,” Sansa said mentioning the Red Priest. She didn't mention Melisandre. The Red Priestess was a touchy subject with Davos. She knew he hadn't even talked to her before fleeing Dragonstone, not that she blamed him, putting Melisandre and Shireen on the same boat with Davos was a recipe for disaster. He'd probably have thrown Melisandre into the Narrow Sea.

“Aye that's true...but there is one thing that is riling up the men more than Arya,” Davos paused, his lips thinning in concern, “Jaime Lannister.”

Sansa frowned, “He's an ally now.”
“I know that and you know that and the King knows that, but a lot of the men remember him and all his crimes. He even killed some of them. And they know he tried to kill Lord Stark. And he crippled Bran....and this isn't even touching on what the Tyrells will want to do to him.”

Sansa sighed, she knew this would be a sticking point for many people, “He's been punished more than others.” Living through Myrcella's death was not something that she'd wish on anybody...no, she'd wish it on Cersei, but not Jaime or Myrcella. The girl was as innocent as Rickon, but Cersei deserved that and much more, more than anybody else in Westeros. “And we'll deal with the Tyrells when it comes up- if Sam hasn't dealt with them already.”

Davos looked a little mollified, “And after the war? That's assuming we survive...” he prompted.

“He can disappear to Tarth,” Sansa declared simply.

“Many won't consider that a punishment,” he retorted unhappily.

“It's not,” Sansa clarified, “It a reward...just not for him. It's a reward for Brienne.” Brienne deserved happiness for her loyalty to House Stark.

Davos worked his jaw for a moment, “Put that way...it might placate some people...but not many.”

Sansa scrunched up her face, “I know....but he's always going to be a divisive issue. What is more important? His crimes? Or his services to the Kingdoms?”

“Most still don't know about his greatest service,” Davos pointed out. The words Wildfire and Aerys Targaryen went unsaid.

“And that's something we'll be rectifying,” Sansa declared, “Hopefully, that will be enough for most.”

Davos frowned, deep in thought, “Let's hope so,” he finally said.
Silence descended on them, as the both got lost in their thoughts. She looked down to see that Lady had fallen asleep on her lap. She gently stroked her fur and listened to her soft breathing.

Whatever happened, they would persevere. Winter was coming and they would be ready for it.

She would make sure of it!

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**Catelyn Stark**

Consciousness returned slowly for her. She blinked and lay there confused. She was in her bed, in her own chambers...what was she doing in her chambers, now? The day wasn't finished and there was work to be done!

She sat up suddenly, staring about. Luwin was sat by her side. Why was he here?

That second was when the whole horrific truth came back to her...she felt the blood draining from her face.

“My Lady? Please relax, you’re had a shock,” Luwin said coming to stand by her side and reaching out to physically support her, concern filling his voice.

She could feel herself swaying as she sat. Shock? Is that what this was called? She'd have thought apoplexy was a better description of this situation....

Arya was...

Arya was...

...
She still couldn't bring herself to say it even in the comfort of her own mind. If she said it than it was true. And if that was true then...Freys and Pies...

After a moment, she whispered, “My Little girl...she's...”

Luwin face contorted with multiple emotions, “I am aware, my Lady.”

She felt like weeping, was this her punishment? She'd thought that Bran being crippled was her punishment for breaking her promise. Ned's murder and all the bad things that had happened...it was all her punishment. She'd promised to love Jon if he survived the pox as a child...but she hadn't. So much had happened before she died in the last life...and so much more after the Red Wedding...first Rickon's murder, than Sansa and Ramsay and the dogs...and now Arya and...

She shuddered, she knew this curse was her fault.

Promises to the Seven were not to be forsworn without consequences...

So many consequences...

“It will be alright, my lady,” Luwin said giving her false assurances.

How would this be alright? Arya had...Sansa was...the bastard was the King! And the army of the Dead was coming to kill them all!

_Gods! Seven Hells! What was Ned going to say about this? Had they already told him? Is that why he was so grim ad short tempered before leaving Winterfell?_

She shuddered again, her whole body shaking with emotion.

“My Lady?” Luwin's voice was insistent now.

She lent on his supporting hands and twisted, putting her feet down on the ground.
“Please leave me alone,” Catelyn requested urgently.

Luwin looked upset and unmoved, “Lady Catelyn...it is best not to dwell. What happened, happened. We cannot change what was in the old life. All we can do to face the future and this new chance. This is a new life now.”

“Leave me!” she shouted angrily. She was losing control and a Lady was never supposed to lose control. Father would be so disappointed in her for her loss of control.

Luwin's face was stone now, “I will be by in a while, I will bring some dreamwine for you. This is a shock to all of us. I suggest you rest. Rest will do you good now.” He left without another word, shuffling and out closing the door quietly behind him.

Alone in her chambers now, she let herself weep. She wept inconsolably.

Her fault...it was all her fault.

Chapter End Notes

Hoped you all liked this dozy of a chapter! It didn't want to end! :D lol. Also I borrowed the Tully knight from Cymraeg and Robb Returns with permission. Anyway, as always, don't forget to review! :D
Chapter Notes

Author's Notes: Thank you all for the reviews! It's all much appreciated :) People have been waiting for a Reach POV for a while now. I hope it doesn't disappoint. This is also something I've been planning for a while now. Enjoy! And Don't forget to Review! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 30 Vigilance

Margaery Tyrell

The view from atop the battlements of Highgarden always took her breath away. The concentric arrangements of the various gardens could all be seen from there as well as the area around the castle for miles in each direction. Usually the view would give her a sense of peace whenever she came here...but not today. Or any other day since the tragic news had arrived.

Once upon a time, she used to stand here with Loras, this had been their place, to stand and watch as visitors came and left Highgarden...but now all it brought her was sorrow.

They would never stand here again...never again.

She'd tried so hard to protect him and then save him from Cersei...except Cersei had sunk to such low points, it that boggled the mind. She outplayed them all by having the audacity- no insanity, to burn the Sept of Baelor in Wildfire. It had been an act worthy of the Mad King- or rather Mad Queen in this case.

She shivered, the echoes of the moment of blinding pain washing over her.

But it was only an echo. She was safe and in Highgarden, enjoying this second life. And this second life was a gift. One unlooked for and impossible, and yet...here they were.

Getting her bearings after she'd awoken here had taken a long time for her, but she'd shaken with joy
once she'd realised that it also meant that Loras was alive again as well. That had been all that mattered to her, a second precious chance for them all.

And a chance for revenge on that murderous bitch, Cersei!

It had been a dream of the Seven Heavens, sent by the Father...to have this second chance, to make everything right...it was joy beyond imagining...right until Renly's raven came...and now Loras was gone again.

_Gone_...so early and so quickly.

She hadn't even been able to see him again this time. It was a cruel trick of the Gods to bring them all back and then take him away again. She'd tried so hard to save him, to protect him, the last time...and this time she didn't even have the comfort of trying!

She pushed the grief away. She had to focus on the future. She'd been speaking with grandmother. All the things she'd said, all the revelations and mistakes laid bare. More importantly, everyone's _secrets_. Cersei's, Grandmother's, Varys's and everyone else's. So much had changed...but more importantly, what to do now?

And most importantly, to be _Queen_ or not to be?

Grandmother was very adamant that _that_ was very much off the table...Daenerys Targaryen would not be welcoming of any such attempt, no matter what father said. Three very large dragons were not something House Tyrell could cross. Aegon the Conqueror's _lesson_ to House _Gardner_ and the Field of Fire were not something to be forgotten.

Especially not by House Tyrell.

The only certainty that they had now was that House Lannister had to pay for all of their crimes. The crimes of both, the old life and this new one. Though father for once was actually paying attention and doing the smart thing, even grandmother was somewhat satisfied with his actions.

She paused thoughtfully, or at least all of House Lannister except Tyrion Lannister. He had been Daenerys Targaryen's Hand...that had been very surprising piece of knowledge, though less so considering that he had killed his father. That had probably gone a long way to endear him to the
Dragon Queen. Though both her and grandmother had both agreed that his chances of him still being alive if his father remembered to be completely nonexistent.

He was probably very dead by now.

Movement on the horizon pulled her out of her revere, and she focused there. The whole reason that she was up her today was that Grandfather was expected to arrive sometime today. As she strained her eyes she could see movement at the edge of her sight.

She stood and waited leaning pensively against the battlements, as the men approached. As they neared, she squinted trying to make out heraldry of the men. After a moment of searching, she found a large flag waving in the air. She focused harder.

A tall tower was stitched prominently on the flag.

She smiled happily, it was the sigil of House Hightower. Grandfather had finally arrived. Perhaps now they could look outside the Reach and finally figure out what was really happening in the Seven Kingdoms. And where this second chance came from.

As she watched, the men dismounted and gathered in the courtyard of Highgarden. At the center of it all barking commands with a grim expression on his face stood Lord Leyton Hightower. Her grandfather and Lord of Oldtown, a man who hadn't left the Hightower in an age. And yet, here he was in Highgarden now, it was unexpected and held many possibilities. All had been troubling Grandmother since the raven had come to Highgarden from the Hightower.

She made her way forwards and the men parted before her as she moved towards her grandfather.

“Grandfather!” Margaery called out as she smiled widely and embraced him warmly. It had been a long time since she’d last seen him, not since her last visit to the Hightower.

Lord Leyton Hightower's grim expression lightened and he smiled broadly, “My dear girl! Margaery!” he exclaimed after he hugged her back and then broke the embrace, “It warms my heart to see you well my dear.”
She smiled back at him feeling a semblance of happiness, “I have missed you grandfather...and I'm happy you're here,” she said happily.

“I hope you've missed me as well, cousin,” cut in Lord Paxter Redwyne, as he stepped up to stand next to them.

She turned towards him and smiled, “Of course, my lord,” she moved to him and gave him a chaste kiss on the cheek, “we are always happy to see family here.”

Lord Paxter nodded gracefully and smiled, though there was a tightness to his eyes that was uncharacteristic of him, “I expect my dear aunt will be happy to see us as well.”

Margaery kept the smile on her face and nodded back without commenting. She cast a look around. She started, the smile on her face freezing as she took in the rest of the men that were with grandfather and recognized more of them. No one had been expecting these guests at all.

She hid her surprise as she recognized Lord Axell Florent...and he wasn't the only unexpected companion. Coming up to them now was Samwell Tarly. The fat son of Randyll Tarly looked different than she remembered. He was a quiet boy with a kind heart and not at all like his severe father. He'd changed physically as well, she could see his check bones, he was slimmer than she remembered and he was armed. She could see Heartsbane slung over his shoulder and he was striding over with more assurance in his stride than he usually did. There was a hardness in his previously kind eyes that made him look far too much like his father for her ease of mind.

She cast a questioning glance at her grandfather, before turning towards the unexpected guests and giving them both demure smiles, “Welcome to Highgarden, my lord,” she said curtsying to Lord Axell.

The big eared Lord nodded back agreeably, “Thank you Lady Margaery, I'm glad to be here.”

She turned to Samwell, “Sam, it's been too long.” She gave him a big endearing smile.

Sam didn't get flustered. He bowed, “Lady Margaery, it's good to see you too.” His voice was steady and unwavering, his tone even and warm.
She kept her smile in place but was very surprised. The Sam she knew always became flustered when she spoke to him. Obviously, he had changed in the future, and remembered that future, but she hadn't expected him to change this much.

“We need to speak to your father and Olenna,” her grandfather cut in and commanded, his expression becoming grimmer, “There is much that must be said...much more than Olenna realizes.”

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**Olenna Tyrell**

The meeting was as tense as she imagined. And far more complicated than even she'd envisioned.

“What is he doing here?” Olenna asked with venom in her voice, staring at Lord Axell Florent. “You stood with Stannis once, why are you here with us?”

Lord Axell sneered, “Stannis can fuck off. And my sister can burn with her damned fire god!” he spat angrily.

His reaction was to be expected, her spies had reported that his sister's Red Priestess had burned him in the last life, but it was reassuring to see him giving them proper respect and fealty now. One less grasping fool, one more loyal bannerman for Mace.

She sniffed haughtily, “Yes, I suppose she lost your loyalty, when she burned you,” she declared offhandedly.

Lord Axell reddened and ground his teeth noisily. She ignored his reaction and turned to the other unwanted guest.

“And you, Samwell Tarly! I'm surprised to see you standing here as well,” she said turning to the other unexpected guest, “Though if you're here then I suppose Randyll has been dealt with.” She leveled an acid glare at the weak fat boy.

Instead of recoiling at the acid glare, the fat boy stared back balefully. Olenna suddenly found herself
a little unnerved, his eyes held much too much hardness for her peace of mind. Samwell was always a timid and fat craven boy. He should not be staring back so balefully...yet more changes to the natural order of things, she mused in dismay. And one more thing to keep an eye on.

“Please Olenna, at least say hello before beginning,” Leyton chided her with a frown.

She snorted in an unladylike manner, “I'm too old to waste time. And with all the changes, there is even less of it to waste.”

“Then let us begin, Aunt,” Lord Paxter reproached her gruffly, “We have too much to speak of, and as you've said, too little time to waste,” his reproachful expression turned grim.

Mace stepped in nervously, “Forgive mother, goodfather, cousin Paxter. My lords, we are glad to have you all here,” he cast a prideful look at Lord Axell and Samwell, “Especially any who would renew their vows of fealty to Highgarden.”

The Lords cast Mace neutral expressions but neither agreed or disagreed with his oafish assessment.

She eyed them all warily, there was something off. Both Leyton and Paxter were far too much on edge for her ease.

And this was not a calm and good start to this meeting. And every instinct in her old bones screamed at her this meeting would be a delicate and complicated meeting. Leyton would not have left his Hightower for anything less.

She sat back and smiled, “then sit down and let us speak,” she said in a cool tone.

The Lords nodded and sat down at the meeting table.

They were gathered in a meeting hall, one of many in Highgarden. A large table was positioned in the center of it with wine and refreshments laid out for the visiting lords. Mace came to sit at the head of the table with her at his right hand. On his other side sat Maester Lomys, the elderly man had a guarded cautious expression on his face.
Mace looked constipated, he'd looked that way ever since Renly's raven had arrived. Her constantly smiling oafish son had rarely smiled since then. The lack of a proper male heir made their position in the Reach precarious. And a precarious position was not good, but now they could properly plan for the future. If Samwell was here with Leyton and Paxter than she could imagine that Randyll had already been dealt with. Samwell would be much easier to cow into submission and to control than Randyll had ever been—despite his newfound backbone.

At the far side of the table sat, Samwell with her nephew on his right and Axell on the left. They were quiet, with very grim expressions on their faces. Samwell cast a pointed look at Leyton.

Leyton, on the other hand, didn't sit down, he stood next to the table, on Lomys side of the table. She'd known Leyton for a long time now and she could rage, of all things, rising in him. She shifted uncomfortably in her chair. He looked very angry...very, very angry.

Mace began the meeting, not even noticing Leyton's anger, “So you have dealt with the traitors then, goodfather? Placing Randyll's head on a spike on the walls of Highgarden will look good.”

Leyton began pacing back and forth before turning sharply to them, “I didn't deal with Randyll. And he isn't dead. Lord Samwell locked him in his room like an errant child before I arrived.”

Olenna blinked in surprise, turning to give Samwell a long look, “You dealt with Randyll? How?”

Samwell gave her a saccharine smile, “Very easily,” he said smugly.

“Well done my boy!” Mace boomed happily, “I always knew you were a true and loyal son of the Reach. Your loyalty to House Tyrell will not be forgotten.”

Samwell cast an unreadable look at Mace but didn't otherwise react, much to Olenna's continuing disquiet.

Leyton's raven had mentioned traitors...if not Randyll...then, who? What else didn't she know? “Your raven spoke of traitors,” she stated leaning forward with narrowed suspicious eyes.

Leyton waved an irritable hand, “Aye, there are traitors...I left Baelor putting heads on spikes in the Citadel,” he spat angrily. He stepped towards Lomys and with a swift motion, unsheathed his blade and held it pointed at Maester Lomys's throat. It was not an ordinary blade, this was Vigilance, the
Valyrian steel ancestral blade of House Hightower.

Maester Lomys paled and stared fearfully at the blade pointed at him, “My...l...lord?” he trembled.

Leyton’s voice trembled with rage and emotion, “I know all about you and your masters, traitor!”

The Citadel?! The Maesters? Olenna’s hands curled into a fist under the table, as she kept her face blank at this perturbing surprise.

“Traitor? Lomys! What is he talking about?” Mace gaped in disbelief.

Lomys didn’t answer, he was rooted in his chair his eyes fearfully locked on Vigilance.

“How many times did you poison my Alerie?!” demanded Leyton angrily, his face red with rage, “How many children did she lose because of you, before she finally succumbed?”

Maester Lomys trembled but didn’t answer.

Olenna shook for the first time in a very long time, at a loss for words as her mind ground to a halt, trying to fathom what Leyton was saying. Alerie had lost so many children over the years...it was a natural part of child bearing. The risk always existed...though some women had an easier time than others.

“Alerie...poisoned?” blurted out Mace in disbelief, his face was turning white.

Leyton ignored Mace, “Get up, traitor!”

Lomys stumbled from his chair, trying to put some distance between him and Leyton, “I have done nothing, my lord!”

“You fucking liar! I have seen the records in the Citadel, I have seen your reports and the ways you helped destabilize the Tyrells’s hold on the Reach. Your masters are dead and the few Archmaesters left are appalled and ashamed of what your group have been up to!” Leyton exploded, his blade
shaking, as he shook in fury.

Mace stood up and stumbled away from the table in a daze much to Olenna's disgust. She rolled her eyes in annoyance at her son's lack of control and poise.

“Not to mention Luthor! He was a stupid man, but riding his horse off a cliff? That was a little much even for him!” Leyton snarled in derision. “You did that as well, didn't you?”

The magnitude of the betrayal shook her again as Leyton's revelations continued to rob her of her preconceptions...Luthor was taken from her?! All these years she'd bemoaned his stupidity and it been an assassination?!

Olenna looked to Maester Lomys and without blinking turned back to Leyton, “Kill him! Now!”

Lomys quailed and moaned trying to retreat from Leyton. He suddenly came to an abrupt stop and his face froze. His back arched and then he jerked several times before suddenly dropping to the ground...revealing Mace who had been behind him. Mace was standing there with a fierce- if somewhat surprised, look on his face. In his hand he held a bloodied dagger. In her anger and rage, she'd been so focused on Lomys she hadn't seen Mace came up behind the maester to stab him.

Leyton lowered his blade and stared with satisfaction at the dying maester. He looked up at Mace and then nodded once grimly.

She looked down at Lomys, he was gasping for breath as a pool of blood spread out from under him. Lomys's breathing was getting weaker and weaker, his eyes fluttering as he grew paler and paler from the loss of blood. A feeling of satisfaction spread through her and something else she couldn't identify for a moment...proud. She was proud.

It was a sense of pride.

A sense of pride in Mace.

It was an unexpected and exceedingly rare feeling for her.
She looked up from the dying maester and the pool of blood around him, to look at her son. Mace was standing there with a fierce expression on his face, uncaring of the blood that was on the front of his tunic, his knuckles were white as they clutched the bloodied dagger.

“Well done, Mace,” Olenna said with satisfaction and pride. This second life was truly a miracle, Mace was actually doing some things right.

Mace looked up at her in shock, “Uh...thank you, mother,” he stammered. He shook himself suddenly and called out, “Guards!”

The door to the meeting room opened and two guards stepped in. They took one look at the body of the dying maester, the pool of blood and the bloodied dagger in Mace's hand and Leyton standing with a drawn sword in his hand. They blanched in surprise.

“Put this traitor's head on a spike!” Mace commanded, his voice unsteady but adamant, pointing at Lomys, “And get someone to clean this up!”

The guards hurried to drag nearly dead Lomys from the meeting hall.

The meeting continued after the blood had been cleaned away, and Mace had changed his tunic. Leyton wasn't finished, there were still more surprises to be had, this group of traitorous maesters had been busy. Very busy...and their betrayal began so long ago...

Leyton was sitting down now, with Vigilance placed in front of him on the table, “Lomys and his masters...they had many goals. Foremost among their goals was the obliteration of all things related to magic,” Leyton explained as he sipped at a goblet of wine, he waved a hand all around, “And all of this is the result of magic. At the end of my life they were our ruin...but that is something I will get back to.” He finished cryptically.

She rolled her eyes in annoyance at him, of course this was second life was the result of magic...there was no other explanation. The Gods had certainly not taken pity on them for their mistakes.

He stared down into his goblet thinking quietly for moment, before continuing.
“...They were a small group, thankfully, but they have tried to control Westeros since before the Conquest. They have held back advances, sabotaged alliances and outright murdered any that opposed them. Murder was but one their many tools...an effective one and one they used often,”

Leyton paused and sneered angrily, “My Alerie was not the only Highborn lady that they murdered. The Maesters have commit so many things in their perverted plan for control. They were poisoning Rhaella and her children...they even let Joanna Lannister bleed to death,” he spat, filled with disgust, “All deaths that could be explained away for a variety of valid and acceptable reasons.”

She gaped just as much as Mace now...this was defying belief now. The breadth and degree of betrayal was unheard off...

“They murdered Joanna Lannister, as well?” asked Mace shaken by the audacity of the maester. The Rains of Castamere was not an idle threat. The Old Lion’s bite was worse than his roar as Robb Stark had come to understand.

“They had a reason for killing Joanna,” Leyton nodded in confirmation, “You have to understand, they despised magic. The Targaryens were Dragon Lords and their blood is magic. They have been plotting and acting against the Targaryens since the Conquest. Their invisible hand was there in Maegor’s reign, in the Dance of Dragons...and with Aerys as well. They have systematically sabotaged the Targaryens at every turn since the beginning. They’ve wanted them dead from the beginning...and they nearly succeeded with Aerys. There are many poisons that can drive a man mad, and Pycelle had access to many of them.”

Mace was blatantly aghast at Leyton's revelations. And she was right there with him, though she was hiding it better. The picture Leyton painted, was a degree of treachery and planning that was breathtaking in it's complexity and longevity.

“Pycelle is not working for the Lannisters?” she asked in surprise.

“Oh, he is...he's just this groups' servant first, he's a Lannister servant second,” Leyton expounded further, “Anyway, they killed Joanna, so that they could use Tywin as a weapon against Aerys. Between Joanna's death, his deformed son and Aerys's slights against the Lannisters...Tywin was ready to murder anyone in his path...which he did in the sack of King's Landing. Three centuries of planning nearly came to fruition then...but the Gods conspired against them, and eventually brought the truth to light.”

Olenna sat very quietly, the effectiveness of their plan was undeniable. Despicable and evil. Murderous to the extreme and unthinking of the cost of the wars they started.
“...I don't have any trustworthy messengers left in Oldtown, I used them all spreading word of this betrayal,” Leyton admitted in disgust, he laid a hand on Vigilance, “We Hightowers should have been more vigilant...we failed in this...but never again.” He paused for a moment before shaking himself from his foul mood, “Which reminds me, I brought you a loyal replacement for the traitor.”

Mace balked and found his voice, “How can we trust a maester again?!”

Olenna grimaced, “We can't not trust them, we depend on them far too much.” As usual Mace missed the obvious. The maesters had been an essential part of Westerosi society for millenia. All communication would break down without them.

“And that's the crux of the problem,” Leyton nodded, “I left Baelor working with the Archmaester of Magic to weed out all the conspirators...we're actually quite lucky. They were so arrogant that they'd never be discovered, they kept impeccably legible records,” he finished with an evil smile.

Olenna sniffed, “Good riddance then.” She nodded once, “How did you discover this?”

Leyton shared a long look with Samwell.

When he didn't answer, she gave them both scathing looks, “Well? I'm not getting any younger.”

“Before we get to that we have to speak of the future of the Reach. And the King we will be supporting,” Samwell stated evenly, speaking up for the first time in the meeting.

Olenna arched an eyebrow at Samwell, “King you say? And which King is that, exactly? There's been so many and I'm old. I'm sure I've forgotten a few of them,” she asked sarcastically, with a sardonic smile, “And last time I checked there was a Targaryen Queen...who may or may not have Dragons. One we should not make an enemy of.”

Samwell smiled, giving her a self assured smile that did not put her at ease, “You know him as Jon Snow, the King in the North. His true name is Jon Targaryen. The trueborn son of Rhaegar and Lyanna. He is the rightful king of Westeros...he also borrowed one of the Queen's dragons and he has a direwolf.”

The smile disappeared from Olenna's face as Samwell said the name. For a second time that day, the Queen of Thorns was at a complete loss of words for several moments.
The implications of Samwell's words were earth shattering, and her mind was reeling, trying to grasp just how this changed everything. The most obvious and blatant thing that suddenly came to mind was that Lord Eddard Stark had been lying...since the end of Robert's Rebellion.

After a moment, she threw back her head and laughed, “Gods! Who knew Eddard Stark was so duplicitous?!’’ she laughed again, “The honorable Lord Stark indeed! He's held a knife at Robert Baratheon's back since the Rebellion!’’ The sheer congruity of the image was laughable to imagine. “And Robert has no idea? And the boy is pressing his claim now?’’ She laughed again. She hadn't laughed like this so long...

Samwell nodded, “I don't know if Robert knows yet, but yes Jon will be pressing his claim with Lord Stark's support.”

She actually cackled now, “Oh...to see Robert when he finds out! It might just kill him...and won't that solve so many problems?”

Mace was gaping like a fish, “Lord Stark...is rising against King Robert?’’ his tone dripped disbelief and shock.

“That was the plan,’’ Samwell confirmed firmly.

Olenna controlled her mirth, and gave Samwell a sharp look, “But you haven't confirmed this yet?’’

“Winterfell is quite a distance away, it takes time for ravens to get there and back,’’ Samwell replied unhappily.

“Hmmm...and yet you're sure enough of this to come here? To speak his name and secret with impunity?’’ Olenna asked leaning forward to stare at him.

“Yes,’’ was Samwell's succinct reply.

She frowned, “Why?’’
“Because I know what's coming for us. I've seen the true threat to us all,” Samwell said his tone grave and face grimmer than she had ever seen before.

She was disquieted again, her mirth disappeared, “True threat? And what threat is that?”

Samwell shared a glance with the other Lords before answering, “The Others. The Army of the Dead is marching on the Wall...and it will be a second Long Night.”

Yes...because the meeting couldn't get any more absurd. First the maester conspiracy, then Lord Stark's lies and now monsters were coming to kill them. Maybe she was still sleeping? That would explain a lot...

“That's just a legend!” stammered Mace incredulous with denial. “It's Northern nonsense.”

“I wish it was,” Samwell shook his head unhappily, “I've seen the army of the Dead. I've killed wights and White Walkers. The Wall fell. The North fell...and then everything and anyone else. It is all very real, and they are coming for us. If we don't prepare we will fall...again.”

There was ice clutching her heart now. Dragons and a Targaryen restoration had been a forgone conclusion this morning. Leyton's surprises aside, that hadn't changed that, but this...fighting legends was not something she had prepared to do when she awoke this morning.

“This is the truth, the Army of the Dead is coming for us all,” her nephew chose that time to join the conversation, “I fortified the Arbor...the rest of the Reach had already fallen, the night before I awoke in the past, I was preparing for a siege, the Redwyne Straits were freezing over and it only a matter of time before the Dead walked across the ice to kill us all.” His face was deathly pale and he shuddered as he remembered his past, the possible future.

“I sent Baelor and all I could to the Arbor, before the Hightower fell. I died with a White Walker's blade in my chest as the Hightower was being swarmed over by our own dead risen from the graves we had dug for them.” If Paxter was deathly pale, then Leyton was death warmed over, “This is when I discovered the maester's conspiracy. Even with the dead knocking down our walls they denied the truth and hid their knowledge.”

Mace was staring between the two men, his mouth opening and closing but no sound was coming out as he shook in his seat.
Olenna's legendary resolve disappeared. This was...this was...well *insane* was one word for it. It also added an urgency to an already tense and unstable situation. She shivered, dealing with Cersei and the Baratheons was all she had expected to really need to do. Not this. Not fight legends made flesh.

She turned to Samwell, “And *you*? What do you *know*? Why are you so changed?”

“Lady Olenna, as a Brother of the Night's Watch, I became the first man in millenia to kill a White Walker. And I met Jon there...we became *brothers* then. By the end of it all...I died with *Heartsbane* in my hand crossing blades with the *Night's King* himself. I am not the fat craven boy you remember.” Samwell proclaimed proudly.

Olenna raised an eyebrow in surprise at the admission, his joining of the Night's Watch had been scandalous enough and her ears in Horn Hill had said it had *not* been a voluntary one; Randyll had pushed him into it. She knew the craven boy from before, but as she looked at Samwell now, she couldn't find any trace of him. More and more, he was looking like a true son of Randyll Tarly with every passing moment. She'd have to find some way to bind him to the Tyrells for her peace of mind.

Samwell wasn't finished, he raised his hands and gestured all around, “All of this, this second life. We did this. To undo history was *our* plan.”

Olenna's head came up sharply and she stared at Samwell, “You did this?”

“Well, not me personally, it was Brandon Stark,” admitted Samwell sheepishly.

She blinked, “I thought he died?”

Samwell shook his head, “Theon lied. Bran survived and used his magic to send us all back...though far more remember than are supposed to...I'm still waiting for an answer as to why.”

The Starks were looking more and more formidable as this meeting progressed. Lord Stark held a game changer in his nephew. The Young Wolf lived again. And Lord Stark's second son magic was so *powerful* he could bend time to his will. If circumstances were different, she might have looked for a Stark husband for Margaery...though Brandon was a second son, if a little young...actually it still might be workable.

That said...there was still one piece left unaccounted for.
“And what of Daenerys?” she asked, “Surly, she will not relinquish her throne to her nephew so easily? I have no desire to live through a second Dance of Dragons,” she finished dryly.

“Jon and Daenerys are Targaryens...what do you think?” Samwell retorted, giving her disappointed look.

She shook her head, “Of course they are...so now what?”

“The North will rally to Jon. With Lord Stark will come his goodfamily and the Riverlands. Lord Royce will depose Lysa Arryn and the Vale will bend the knee to Jon,” Samwell stated evenly.

Mace seemed to have lost the use of his tongue. He was gaping in the fashion of fish with every revelation.

“And how will Royce remove that shrew? He's much too honorable for anything properly underhanded,” Olenna asked with an annoyed flick of her hand.

Samwell shrugged, “He doesn't need to be underhanded, it was Lysa that poisoned Jon Arryn,” he stated simply, “At Baelish's behest. He provided her with the poison.”

Mace continued to gape, mute with shock.

Olenna arched an eyebrow in distaste and huffed in annoyance, “I should have had him killed when I had the chance,” she lamented, “I never trusted that upstarted whoremonger.”

“Don't worry he will be dealt with,” Samwell assured him, “Jon wants his head on a spike.”

She nodded mollified, “Good.”

Samwell gave her a look and seemed to be bracing himself now, “The Lannisters...”
Now Mace found his voice, “...will pay in blood! Loras's blood demands blood!”

Olenna looked at Samwell's demeanor, then at Leyton's. Paxter looked away from her and Axell snorted in contempt. This did not bode well.

“The Lannisters,” he repeated throwing a glare at Mace, “have already bent the knee to Jon. Tyrion Lannister has seized Casterly Rock and by extension the Westerlands.”

Olenna laughed at the unexpected good news, “Ha! And Tywin?”

“Like my father, a prisoner in his own castle,” Samwell rejoined with an amused smile

“So the Imp has taken his due. Impressive,” she nodded sagely...then grimaced. This meant Lord Rowan's raiding would be provoking the Westerlands needlessly. If Tyrion had Jaime, he would hand him over to maintain the peace.

Mace puffed up in rage, “And this means my boy will go unavenged?! Jaime Lannister must pay!”

It was Leyton that answered now, “Unlike you, my spies gave me the full story. Renly didn't tell you everything. Loras attacked Jaime Lannister...and Ser Barristan Selmy...at the same time,” Leyton stated gravely, “I loved my grandson and I mourn him...I have lost yet another precious piece of my Alerie...but he was complete and utter fool.”

Olenna held her head in her hand, absorbing the painful news, “Idiot boy...”

That put a much different story to Loras's fate. No Reacher Lord would be sympathetic to them after that truth came out. Loras would be hailed as the fool he was and no one would blame Jaime Lannister for his part in the act.

Mace was turning purple with indignation, “It doesn't matter! Lannister blood must pay for my poor boy!”

“Oh be quiet, Mace,” Olenna commanded, swatting her son on the arm, “Going against Jaime Lannister and the formidable Barristan Selmy at the same time would be considered a form of suicide
in most of the Kingdoms.”

Mace turned red and closed his mouth sharply. She held his gaze till she was sure he wouldn't say anything else on the matter.

Samwell cleared his throat and straightened his shoulders, his face turning stony, “There is one more thing we must speak of,” he turned to Mace, “I am sworn to House Targaryen and by the end I was the Warden of the South. With the White Walkers coming, by his Grace's command, I will be Warden of the South again.”

Mace turned white, “This is an outrage!” he screamed rising from his chair and banging his fists on the wooden meeting table.

Olenna's face went blank as she came to tried grips to with what Samwell had just said.

“I know what's coming and what needs to be done. You cannot be Warden of South now.” Samwell announced, his tone brooking no argument.

Mace began sputtering, “I am Warden of the South and Lord of the Reach! House Tyrell has ruled the Reach since Aegon the Conqueror wiped out the Gardner Kings!” He turned to the other lords for support against this upstart.

Unsurprisingly, Axell Florent was enjoying Mace's displacement with a smug grin on his face...

“House Redwyne will follow Samwell Tarly,” her nephew announced with a confirmatory nod, he wouldn't meet her eyes.

“As will House Hightower,” Leyton added with a hard look at her and Mace.

Dread gripped her guts as she suddenly realised that neither Leyton and Paxter were supporting Mace either...

The Hightowers and Redwynes were family. Close family...if not even they would support them...they would lose all credence in the eyes of the other Lords of the Reach. Again, Olenna found
herself out maneuvered. She hadn't imagined that such a situation would arise again! She really was getting old...this lack of imagination had to be dealt with. First Cersei...and now, Samwell Tarly?

Mace was looking back and forth between his goodfather and Paxter, unable to believe what he was hearing.

“Sit down Mace,” she commanded firmly.

He didn't move, he just continued to look back and forth between his two rebellious lords.

She reached out and pulled him down into his seat, before turning back to Samwell, “So House Tyrell are no longer Lords of the Reach?”

“Only until the Others have been defeated,” Samwell stated evenly, “After the war, all titles and rights will return to House Tyrell.”

Olenna was surprised at this, “Hmmm.” It was a better situation than she imagined, it gave her time to find Margaery a proper husband, and groom a proper heir for Highgarden.

“I will only agree to this on one condition! You must marry Margaery!” cut in Mace suddenly, “What better way to assure your rule then to join our houses through marriage?” he continued, trying to sound smart and insightful.

Olenna sighed and then pursed her lips as she glared at Mace. Apparently he'd missed the point where his grandchildren would still rule the Reach...though having Samwell as a permanent Warden of the South was attractive...if he was married to Margaery. Perhaps her great grandchildren would finally inherit enough smarts to override the oafishness of Mace and Luthor.

Samwell puffed up, his eyes filled with defiance, “No.”

“And why not, boy? You could be Lord of Highgarden and Horn Hill. What better way to consolidate your power?” Mace retorted fiercely.

“There's only one woman I will ever marry, Gilly. I will never marry Margaery,” he announced
adamantly.

Leyton and Paxter grimaced at Samwell's declaration. Axell looked away, disgusted.

She narrowed her eyes and glanced between them, “And which House does this Gilly belong to?”

She didn't miss it as Leyton and Paxter winced at her question, and as Axell ground his teeth. What is going on?

Samwell's self assurance faltered for a moment before he rallied again, “I met her in the last life, when I was a brother of the Night's Watch...I met her beyond the Wall.”

Olenna's mind reeled, He met her beyond the Wall? Wait...then that would make her...a Wildling? The boy will be Lord of the Reach...and he wanted to marry a Wildling?!

She stared at him for a moment suddenly seeing the boy's resemblance to Jaime Lannister, in tone and demeanor, “Gods...another romantic fool,” she said shaking her head in disappointment. First Jaime, and now Samwell Tarly?

Father protect me from these romantic fools!

Mace was sputtering at the boy's outright refusal now, “You would refuse the Rose of Highgarden...for a savage Wildling?”

Samwell glowered darkly at Mace, making him flinch back, “Yes.”

Mace looked back at him, appalled at the simple answer.

“...but I have a brother, Dickon, if you insist on a marriage to Margaery to secure this alliance...and your line...” Samwell began pointedly.

Olenna jumped at the chance, forgetting her plans for Brandon Stark. This was a better option, especially if Samwell was so adamant about marrying his Wildling lover, “That would be
Dickon Tarly was a proper knight of the Reach and it would finally bind the Tarlys, and through his mother; the Florents, to the Tyrells. Hightower, Tarly, Redwyne, Florent and Tyrell all bound together by marriage. That was a smart move in face of all the chaos in the Kingdoms.

Mace gave her an dismayed look.

“Also, if you think about it, who better to help strengthen Highgarden's defenses than someone who's seen and exploited all of your weaknesses?” Samwell asked smugly with a knowing smile.

Olenna looked at him idly, Why couldn't Mace have been this intelligent? And Randyll stupidly banished him to the Night's Watch? The more fool him! With a smart son like this, there was so much she could have done.

“Mother! You cannot accept this for me! Or us! Margaery deserves much more! She deserves to be a Queen!” Mace denied, his oafish nature reappearing again.

“Enough Mace! I watched our House destroyed once! I will not see it brought to ruin again!” Olenna raged, finally losing her temper. “They hold all the power now,” she pointed at Samwell and the other Reacher Lords. “Accept this and we can survive...more than survive actually. It's all we can do now...” She finished in defeat, “And really Queen? To which king exactly? Joffrey? Renly? This Jon was a possibility- but I know which side of Daenerys I wish to stay. And her Dragons.”

Mace stared at her in response to her tirade and ground his teeth unhappily.

She turned back to Samwell, “We will recognize you as the Warden of the South, on the condition that the title and all powers and responsibilities revert back to House Tyrell once we have dealt with...the Others,” she declared, shooting Mace a pointed glare. She jerked her head towards Samwell.

Mace's lips thinned, “As my mother says.” he managed to utter in disgust.

“I will gladly relinquish the title once the Others are defeated...and I will return to just being Lord of Horn Hill,” Samwell agreed with a confirmatory nod.
Olenna sat back, if not satisfied than at least mollified. It was the best deal to be had in the moment...now all they had to do was call back Lord Rowan before things got too out of hand in the Westerlands.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Notes: My hat is off to Syed at SB and Trivia Freak at AH, who pegged who I was pairing Margaery with way back when. Kudos! :) Anyway as always, don't forget to REVIEW! :D
Chapter 31 Awkward

Margaery Tyrell

She was walking as befit a lady, and the future Lady of Highgarden. The day was filled with strangeness...and alarm...mainly alarm. Alarm, most of all. And she hadn't been *this* alarmed since she'd realised that Cersei wasn't coming to her own trial.

Father and Grandmother had been locked in talks with Grandfather and Cousin Paxter since the moment they'd arrived and she had no idea what was happening.

Normally, she wouldn't be worried but having seen Maester Lomys head suddenly put on a spike...normal had gone out the window and she'd been sitting on her nerves since that development. As the meeting dragged on, it ate at her not knowing what was really going on. This second life had been filled to the brim with surprises and unexpected developments...Lomys's sudden execution and the length of the meeting was not filling her with any comfort.

Just as Grandmother had taught her, she'd been hiding it all day. She'd played the part of the dutiful lady, seeing to the guests and the men that come along with the Lords.

And even then she'd had to hide her surprise. She'd found among grandfather's men Dickon Tarly. She'd known him for years, Randyll Tarly's favourite son. He'd looked immensely uncomfortable and he kept his head down and tried to hide among the Hightower men.

She understood why he was so discomfited, in the other life he'd helped his father sack Highgarden. She hadn't missed the looks of hostility that were being shot at him by a great many of the Tyrell guardsmen. When he'd finally noticed her, he'd turned a very amusing shade of red and stammered a greeting, that had put a smile on her face at the sheer awkwardness of the greeting. He'd been evasive, though friendly as he'd then avoided answering any in depth questions she asked him.

It had been an amusing distraction for her, at least momentarily from her worries...but the day went on and Margaery's worries continued to plague her.
Thankfully, she'd have some answers soon. A servant had informed her that Grandmother was waiting for Margaery in Grandmother's special garden.

She entered the garden and looked around, grandmother's table was set, with wine and cheeses laid out, candles giving light illumination to the darkened garden. A couple of moderately distant torches gave the garden further light.

Wine and cheese? At this hour? Margaery thought in surprise. Grandmother never had neither this late, it was already almost sundown. She always complained that it gave her too much gas during the night.

The garden was deserted except for Grandmother's two distant guards, Left and Right as she called them. They stood at attention at the entrance of the garden. She passed them by and entered the garden. Her eyes quickly found Grandmother.

Grandmother was in her garden...but she wasn't sitting in her usual place. Or at the table waiting for her to join her. Grandmother was pacing back and forth.

Margaery's already intense worry grew worse.

Grandmother never paced.

She always said that pacing was a waste of time and effort- and it betrayed ones intentions. It was better to sit quietly and think. To stay in control and not give any watchers a clue about one's thoughts.

She approached quickly, “Grandmother?” she called out hesitantly.

Grandmother turned towards her voice, she looked strained, with an unreadable expression on her face. She gestured Margaery towards her as she stopped pacing and quietly took a seat at the prepared table.

Grandmother was uncharacteristically quiet as she sat, Margaery took the seat next to her. Grandmother gave her a searching look as her face remained unreadable. Margaery waiting for
“Grandmother...” Margaery prompted, “What's happened?”

Grandmother's face twisted, “My dear, sweet Margaery...for once in my life, I find that I don't know where to start,” she said with a deep sigh. Sitting with Grandmother now, Margaery could her face better now. Close up now, the unreadable expression was recognizable.

She looked scared.

Panic...that was what Margaery was leaning towards now. First, Grandmother was pacing and now she looked afraid? In the name of the Old Gods and the New! What was going on? What had happened?!

“Surly, it can't be that bad, Grandmother?” Margaery began urgently, “We know what is coming now. And neither of us will underestimate Cersei this time.”

Grandmother snorted with derision, “We have already underestimated several, most recently, Samwell.”

“Sam?” Margaery gave her a look of disbelief, “Sam's harmless. He wouldn't hurt a fly...”

“Samwell Tarly is the new Lord of the Reach and Warden of the South,” she retorted interrupting Margaery.

Margaery's mind came to an abrupt stop, “What?”

“The boy has become very good at playing the game of thrones,” Grandmother remarked in a very dry tone.

She gaped, her composure failing her, “And you agreed to this? Father agreed to this?” She didn't think that Father's ego could accept this...
Grandmother gave her a strained smile, “When not even your Grandfather or my nephew are willing to support your father, it doesn't become a choice...”

She felt lightheaded, Grandfather was...

“...We were lucky that they spoke privately with us, if they had spoken openly things would have gone much worse for our House,” Grandmother finished. Outright fear flashed across her face for a moment, “In light of what is happening...this is actually a good thing, your father cannot face what is coming. Samwell knows the threat that is facing us all- romantic fool that he is”

A threat. Yes, though more like threats, the Targaryens and the Lannisters. Both Houses would rip apart Westeros to claim the Iron Throne. And Jaime Lannister would pay dearly for taking Loras from her!

“So what will become of us then? Will father swear fealty to Sam?” she asked as her mind began working thought he implications of this upheaval in the Reach.

Grandmother shook her head, “No, he will not, the title of Lord of the Reach will revert back to House to Tyrell after the crisis has passed- but not to your father. Your husband will be the next Lord of the Reach.”

Margaery nodded once, “That will keep Father quiet...now all we have to do is find me a proper husband.”

Grandmother was giving her an amused smile, her eyes sparkled and she raised an eyebrow at her.

“Oh, so I already have a new betrothed already?” she asked amused at how some things didn't change.

“Clever girl,” Grandmother nodded, “Your grandfather arranged it, and it will help consolidate much of the Reach behind you and Samwell.”

She was a little dismayed as the obvious husband came to mind, “So I'm to marry Sam?” It wasn't that she disliked him, he was kind and gentle. Or at least he was. But he was fat, her previous husbands for all of Renly's lack desire for her, for Joffrey's cruelties, and Tommen's youth, they had all been handsome- or outright pretty at times.
Grandmother’s lips twisted into a grimace, “Unfortunately no. The Romantic fool already has a future intended despite the disapproval of the rest of us. No, you are going to marry Dickon.”

Margaery started, “Dickon?” she paused for moment as something occurred to her, “Sam refused to marry me? If not me, than who is he marrying?”

“He called her, Gilly, and she is a Wildling,” Grandmother said with exasperation, “The boy’s smart, but a romantic fool.”

For a moment she balked at the words, “A Wildling...instead of me?”

Grandmother shook her head, “As I said, a romantic fool,” she muttered in disgust, she waved her hand irritably, “his children could have ruled the Reach, but no- the boy’s in love.”

Margaery blinked and found herself rather insulted and bewildered at Sam’s refusal.

“Dickon was the second best option. By marrying him, we’ll have the backing of both the Tarly’s and the Florents. I imagined a grander marriage for you, but all things considered- and I considered many of the second sons of the other Great Houses, particularity the Starks, but this is a still a very good option,” Grandmother continued unabated, almost rambling, “Samwell is also ally and friend of the Starks and in light of the secrets he revealed, I have no desire to cross them. And Samwell is very close to them now.”

“And the Starks matter? The Starks were fools. They were mighty on the battlefield but weak at playing the game,” Margaery remarked confused by why, all of sudden the Starks mattered so much to Grandmother.

“Eddard Stark is cannier than I ever imagined- he is one more person that has managed to outplay us. House Stark has grown in strength beyond anything I, or you, could realistically imagine,” Grandmother admitted with a disbelieving laugh.

Margaery frowned, “You called him an honorable fool. Robb Stark as well.”

Grandmother nodded, “Aye, they are. Robb Stark is another romantic fool, but men like them do not
make the same mistakes twice. They have made terrible mistakes...and this makes them all the more
dangerous now,” she finished gravely, her eyes hard with emotion.

Margaery thought carefully, before pursing her lips and asked, “You said Eddard Stark was canny.
What did you mean?”

Grandmother gave her a wolfish and rueful smile, “His bastard son, Jon Snow...is no bastard. He is
Rhaegar Targaryen's trueborn heir. He is the King we are declaring for now. He is also as close to
Samwell as Eddard and Robert once were.”

And just like that she was beginning to see why grandmother was so out of sorts....and envious.

“A...Stark King,” Margaery sputtered.

Grandmother nodded, “Yes, for all intents and purposes, a Stark King. One wearing Targaryen
colors.”

This changed the entire political map of Westeros. This would shatter the Kingdoms, and cause even
more turmoil than the War of the Five Kings. The North and the Riverlands would stand behind that
King. The Stormlands would stand with Robert. The Westerlands would stand alone, as would
Dorne, the Iron Islands would attack everyone again...and the Vale would do whatever that
madwoman Lysa Arryn decided to do- or Baelish pushed her towards. It would be utter chaos. She
said as much to grandmother.

Grandmother snorted, “You would think so but Samwell has informed me that Tyrion Lannister is
now Lord of the West- and he is also apparently a friend of our new King. And Lord Royce is
apparently seizing power in the Vale and is bowing to the Stark King. So that's the North, the
Riverlands, the Vale, the Iron Islands and the Westerlands all bowing to Stark's hidden King.”
Grandmother looked impressed and disturbed at the same time, “And according to Samwell,
Daenerys will also support her nephew- in the Targaryen fashion,” she paused and held her hands
up, “And just like that, there is no war between the Kingdoms. There will be fighting but no war- not
against the living. Neither Dorne nor the Stormlands can stand against us all.”

Margaery sat back in shock, “This is...very well planned,” she managed to say. Yes, it was all a
masterful stroke. She paused and frowned, it was far beyond a masterful stroke, and yet... “You seem
afraid of the Starks now. Why? What else has happened?”
“Of course I am! With good reason!” exclaimed Grandmother, “Eddard Stark's nephew is going to be King! And Stark's youngest daughter is a Faceless Man! Arya Stark didn't die, she became a bloody Faceless Man!”

“A Faceless Man?” Margaery stuttered. *How in the name of the Old Gods and the new had something like that happened?!!*

“Yes! A damned Faceless Man, to cross the Starks now is death- and by extension both the King and House Tully,” Grandmother spat angrily, “She also happens to be the King's favourite sister. She even destroyed the Freys is a single night...and it is a dark tale. Very Dark...and even Sansa is to be feared! Cersei always called her a little dove. Well Cersei was wrong! Sansa is wolf and my...are her teeth sharp. We all underestimated Sansa,” she ranted unhappily.

Margaery hadn't even recovered from the first shock, she stared at her Grandmother and snorted in disbelief, “Sansa...the girl is as naive as they come!”

“Once perhaps, but not now,” she paused and pursed her lips unhappily, “You remember the rumors they told of Bolton's bastard?”

Margaery shifted uncomfortably, the rumors that reached King’s Landing had said that he practiced House Bolton's ancient and bloody legacy. She nodded unhappily.

“The weak little girl fed him to his own dogs,” Grandmother explained in fascinated exasperation.

Sansa...Sansa...now Margaery was feeling faint as she remembered the sweet and kind girl she'd met in King’s Landing. The world didn’t make any sense any more. Loras was gone and now Sansa was a fearsome woman not to be crossed...

Silence descended on them, as the two Ladies of House Tyrell became lost in thought.

“And Lomys? Why is his head on a spike?” she asked suddenly. What prompted the sudden execution of the loyal maester? Nothing grandmother had said yet, explained *that.*

Grandmother paled and then turned red, anger suddenly shining in her eyes, she took Margaery's hand into her own, “Because he's a traitor of the worst kind! Forgive me, my dear, there is no delicate way to say this.” Grandmother hesitated and sighed, “He murdered your mother.”
All sense fled her, and she felt faint. She couldn't believe grandmother's words, but this was not something she would jape about. Memories flashed by her mind's eye of how Lomys had always been there for them after mother was gone...for both her and Loras. And Father. He'd been so supportive and kind to them...but the truth was he'd murdered her mother!

“...your father acted rightly,” Grandmother continued with a proud tone, “He stabbed Lomys to death, before your Grandfather could...”

Because why not? Winter had finally come to the Seven Hells, if Grandmother was proud of how father was acting...not to mention father was now stabbing people to death...

“Why...why?” was all she managed to say.

Grandmother paused again before speaking of the how far Lomys and the Citadel's betrayal went. It was spread all across Westeros. It was incomprehensible...Unimaginable...And oh so true...

No wonder Grandfather had stirred from his Hightower, he'd come for vengeance for mother!

She felt a tear run down her face as she mourned her mother.

She shook herself before melancholy could seize her, as a fear gripped her instead, she sensed that Grandmother wasn't finished, “But that isn't all of it...is it?”

The fear returned to Grandmother's face, “There is one more...catastrophe. No one in Highgarden could have predicted this.”

She carefully explained Brandon Stark's part in it all...because the Starks actually needed to be even more powerful! Never mind the sheer gratitude so many in Westeros would feel towards the boy for this second chance!

And then grandmother spoke of the Others...and even mother's murder and Loras's death seemed insignificant next to that. A second Long Night was coming and Margaery wanted to scream in rage and frustration.
“...so monsters are coming to kill us all,” Grandmother spat in disgust and fear, finishing her horrifying tale, “If we survive, then we get back to consolidating our hold on the Reach...unopposed, this time.”

Margaery sat back deep in thought, terrified of all of Grandmother’s revelations. This wasn’t the world she remembered, the people she knew were all present but only their resemblance remained...and since when did the world contain monsters that were not men? First Dragons...and now White Walkers?

Men like Gregor Clegane and Tywin Lannister were facts of life, such men always existed but...the Others? Ancient legends should stay ancient legends! They should not become true! They most certainly should not be coming to kill them all!

She shuddered, ice eating at her innards, suddenly afraid of the coming future.

Now...now, she understood why her grandmother, the indomitable Queen of Thorns was so afraid.

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Time passed as they sat in the garden, the sun set and servants came and lit more torches as they sat silently. There were no more words to be had between them. Time was what she needed- what they both needed. Time to adjust to this new reality they were trapped in. Monsters, magic and conspiracies that spoke of unimaginable evil and harm.

They sat quietly together in contemplation, drinking the wine and nibbling at the cheese. A servant had brought sweets and they both devoured them quickly, neither paying attention to the proper manners of a lady. This was their spot now, to come to terms with all that had changed.

Their quiet place didn’t stay undisturbed. Visitors came to see them. Sam and Dickon entered the garden, Sam looking confidant and Dickon looking discomforted as Left and Right gave him acid looks as he passed between them.

“Lady Olenna, Lady Margaery,” Sam bowed deeply and smiled at the pair of them. Dickon followed his lead and bowed.
Grandmother nodded at Sam before turning piercing eyes at Dickon, “Ah, Lord Dickon come to see your betrothed, have you?”

“What?!” exclaimed Dickon, his head turning back and forth between Sam and her.

“Congratulations, brother, I've arranged a betrothal for you to the Lady Margaery, you will the next Lord of Highgarden,” Sam said innocently, with a satisfied smile on his face.

Dickon stared at Sam, his face turning pale, his mouth wide open with shock.

*Didn't Sam tell him?*

Dickon looked at Margaery and then back at Sam, “This your revenge for all I did to you growing up...isn't it?” he declared in a mournful tone.

“I have no idea what you're talking about brother,” Sam said with the same sweet innocence tone, “Perhaps you should have a walk with your betrothed, I have some things to discuss with Lady Olenna,” he suggested, just as sweetly, as he took a seat next to grandmother. The kind smile with the chubby cheeks and round face was just as she remembered it, unchanged by the madness of the new world. But, the cheeky tone and words, were far too bold for the old Sam.

Grandmother raised an eyebrow at the byplay, before waving them off, “Go, my dear I'm sure you much to discuss with Lord Dickon.”

Dickon nervously swallowed as he fearfully met grandmother’s eyes before turning to Margaery and bowing, he held out an arm for her to take, “It would be my honor to walk with you, my lady,” he said in a fairly steady tone.

She stood up and took his arm gracefully, “It has been a long time since we talked...and now we have wedding preparations to discuss.”

Dickon looked a more than a little pained now, but he didn't add anything more, he just guided her out of grandmother's garden, leaving Sam and Grandmother to their talk.
They walked arm in arm, even with all her training, she found she didn't know how to start speaking with him. She knew that he'd helped to sack Highgarden in the other life. Enough of the guards had cursed him for her to know how much he wouldn't be welcome as the next Lord of Highgarden, in spite of all Sam and Grandmother's schemes.

She'd have to deal with that...soon.

She led him to a bench gestured for him to sit with her. They sat down together.

The silence continued unabated.

Dickon cleared his throat and stuttered, “I'm...uh, sorry you died in the other life.”

She stared at him for a moment...he was beginning with that? She gave him a gracious smile, “Thank you, Dickon.” She pursed her lips, “What happened to you? I'm afraid I don't know much of what happened after Grandmother died.”

He winced and grimaced, “Daenerys Targaryen burned me and father with dragon fire.”

Her eyes widened in surprise, she stared for a moment before suddenly giggling.

He stared at her in surprise, “Uh...”

Suddenly, mirth overcame her, “So, I burned in Wildfire, and you burned in Dragon fire?!!”

Oh...the absurdity of it all! It wasn't funny, but still she laughed and giggled out loud, completely overcome with mirth. Dickon was startled but grinned back after a moment and then he too started to laugh as he realised just how absurd sharing that in common was.

The laughter subsided after a several long moments, leaving smiles on both their faces, and Margaery was reminded of all the good times they had once shared in their youth.

“This isn't something I thought we would share in common,” she commented on the irony, a smile
still on her face.

He shook his head, “Yes...uh, fire...bad...” he declared lamely.

She giggled, it was all so absurd! “Yes...Fire- bad. I think we can agree on that.”

He grinned back, starting to resemble the boy she'd known for so long, “Yes...that that is something we can both agree on!”

She returned the smile, No, this wasn't such a bad match...

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Yara Greyjoy

She glared at the man in front of her in what was once father's solar.

He shifted unhappily from foot to foot and looked back at her uneasily.

“You know, I should send you to meet the Drowned God again for what you did to Theon,” she snapped angrily.

Dagmer Cleftjaw winced as he stood at attention in front of her.

“Aye...mistakes were made,” the man who betrayed Theon to Ramsay Bolton admitted, “We shouldn't have tried to hold Winterfell.”

“Ya think?” she grumbled in disgust, “We are Ironborn, we reave and leave, we don't try to hold Greenlander lands...the last one to do that was Harren the Black and everyone knows what happened to him!”
Dagmer grimaced again. *Fire and Blood* had shown the folly of holding Greenlander lands nearly three centuries ago.

She took a step towards him and pushed him, “I'm fucking tempted to gut you here and now. And ain't a single man going to complain if I do,” she threatened darkly.

Dagmer took a step away from her, “Then why don't you?”

“I met that fucker Ramsay, and I saw what he did to Theon, I think you've had pain enough. You'll be smarter about things- and loyal to *me*.”

Dagmer puffed up and opened his mouth then abruptly closed it and then shuddered unhappily, “Gods damn fucking bastard. Perverted fucker, he flayed the lot of us just for *fun*. Laughed as we screamed.” His face was contorted with pain and anger, “Aye I'll not make the same mistake again. Me and mine are loyal to you.”

She sneered, “You betray me and I'll find something worse to do to you.”

Dagmer didn't respond he just a nodded his head in obedience.

Yara turned away from him and grabbed a goblet of wine from the table, she drained it quickly and then refilled it. She took another gulp and then sat at the table, thinking deeply. Things had changed on Pyke since the spell. Father was locked away and screaming his irate rage at any servants that entered. She didn't have the patience to deal with him now- knocking sense into him would be a long and arduous task, and she had much more important things to deal with. The rest of her preparations were ongoing, with the heads of any rebellious captain were currently being put on pikes at the docks, arrayed to show just how brutally she'd deal with any rebellion to her rule.

Unfortunately, there was no sign of Euron. Her Uncle was probably half way to Yi Ti, or in the Shivering Sea, or Slaver's Bay. He'd be a threat till she had his head on a spike. He was just far too dangerous to continue living...and too far from her grasp to do anything about it now.

The sound of a throat clearing itself interrupted her thoughts, she looked up and frowned, “What? Why are you still here?”

Dagmer frowned at her, “What's out next step? Who are we going to attack?”
“Right now? No one, you know what I've told you is coming. It's not the time to attack the Living,” Yara explained with a disgusted roll of her eyes.

“So for now we're just sitting on our thumbs, waiting?” Dagmer retorted in annoyance.

She snorted in derision, and gave him a scathing look, sitting up and slamming her goblet down in the table, wine sloshed on her hand, “You're sitting on your thumb, I'm consolidating my hold on the Iron Islands. And stopping moronic fools, like you and my father, from starting wars we can't afford now.”

Dagmer shut his trap and looked more annoyed, but he didn't dare say anything more to her. He knew just close she was to having his head join the other more vocal captains' heads.

A knocking came, interrupting her as she continued to stare balefully at Dagmer.

“What!” she called out irritably.

A muffled, hesitant voice came through the door, “Ya...Yara?”

Yara blinked and started, “Theon?” she called out her tone turning surprised. “Get you ass in here!”

The door opened and in walked her brother, he was finally home and Jon had kept his promise. Theon stood there, bedraggled and dirty, his eyes looked around with fear and confusion at everything, his face looked bruised but otherwise he looked unhurt. The bruises looked old and were almost healed, but he didn't look confidant or sure of anything, he looked more like the creature, Reek, than the Theon she'd known at the end. He looked at her with empty eyes. The despondent and defeated look in his eyes reminded her far- far too much of Reek. That creature hadn't been her brother. That creature had been Ramsay's dog. She'd worked hard to reclaim her brother before and it looked like she had to redo what had she'd worked hard to undo.

She walked towards him and he flinched as she approached. She ignored it and dragged him into a hug, “I've missed you, brother,” she whispered happily into his ear. She broke the embrace, but kept a hold of his arms and looked him in the eye.
He smiled miserably, “Yara.”

She gave him a happy smile, brushing her unease aside, “You're home, Theon.”

He blinked owlishly, almost in confusion.

“...I'm ruling the Iron Islands now,” she continued, “We'll do things right this time.”

Theon blinked again and then opened his mouth, for a moment nothing came out, “...it's like dream Yara. I saw...Robb again. And Lord Stark...they were...angry. Jon and Sansa were there as well. And Arya and Bran...even Rickon. Maester Luwin, he was there as well...he was so disappointed in me.”

She mentally winced, keeping her discomfort from her face and keeping her pleasant smile in place.

They stood there talking quietly for several moments, Theon's words remaining unsure and fearful as she tried to reassure him...but he opened up a bit...but he still stayed far too Reek-like for her peace of mind. Despite everything that Jon and Sansa had told him before leaving Winterfell, despite everything she said to him now, it all seemed like an impossible dream to him.

_Time for a different plan..._

She lifted his chin and looked him directly in the eye before smiling sweetly.

After several long moments, he returned the smile...which was when she then brought her knee up sharply into her brother's crotch.

Theon's smile froze and his eyes crossed as his face went white before his legs failed him, he collapsed at her feet, groaning in pain.

He lay there for a moment before looking up at her with betrayed eyes.

She gave him a pointed look before giving him a sharp smile, “You've got your balls back. Just had
to give you a friendly reminder...also try to keep a fucking hand on your balls...this time.”

He gave her a confused, pained look but didn't say anything in response.

She turned around and found Dagmer standing there with a surprised look on his face. He'd been silent as she initially dealt with Theon. He broke his silence now.

“You're not going to fucking kick me in the balls now are you?” he asked a little intimidated, his hands coming to cover his crotch.

She raised an eyebrow at him and sneered, “Maybe...” she pursed her lips and cast a look at Theon as he was sprawled on the ground. An idea occurred to her, “Pick him up and find him a proper whore- or a couple of them...if that doesn't snap him out of...” she waved her hand at her brother, “…of whatever he is in now, nothing will...” Her eyes hardened as she turned back to glare at Dagmer, “Fuck this up and...”

Dagmer held his hands up placatingly, “…my head goes on a spike.”

“It won't be your head that I take...” Yara retorted with a dark stare.

Dagmer gulped in fear and made to obey the true Queen of the Iron Islands.

Chapter End Notes

Author's Notes: He he, hoped you liked this. Awkwardness is the theme of the chapter obviously :D Special shout out to Ulmo80 for the idea of Dickon and Margaery's fire dialogue.
Chapter Notes

It didn't exactly turn out as planned but at least we're moving forward. Don't forget to comment! :)

Chapter 32 It's still Awkward

Daenerys Targaryen

She looked at the parchment in her hand and felt like crying. It was not sorrow that drove her to tears, but happiness now. The news from Slaver's Bay was so much better than she could have anticipated.

The letter was written in Missandei’s precise and neat handwriting. Astapor had fallen. A bloody battle with all the masters either put to the sword or crucified on the Walk of Punishment. She grimaced as Missandei mentioned how bloody the sack of the city had become. Many of the masters hadn't died clean deaths- not that she blamed the now, once more, former slaves for their bloodthirstiness. There had been far too much bad blood there for things to go any differently without her to act as a relatively calming influence.

Missandei and Grey Worm were ruling over the city now and the surrounding area. Dothraki from around Slaver's bay had joined them and had bowed to Grey Worm's authority as the general of her armies. So for the moment they were very secure there.

The slaves of Yunkai had also risen in a bloody rebellion. A coalition of former slaves and merchants had formed a council to rule in her name under the Targaryen standard.

As she pondered all the implications of her new inadvertent conquests- or should that be reconquests? It was confusing at times...

Her fingers itched to write back a reply commanding Missandei and Grey Worm to come to Pentos. She missed them both dearly, but the situation there would need to be stabilized more before she could command them to come to her with a clear conscious.
She forced herself to calm down and opened the second letter in front of her and read through it quickly. The letter was stamped with the sigil of House of Loraq, one of the Great Masters of Meereen.

She finished reading and stared at the words for a moment before laughing at the situation in Meereen now. Hizdahr and Daario alone and ruling Meereen without her. She'd have to send someone she trusted to keep Daario and Hizdahr from killing each other out of frustration. The question was who could she trust to keep the peace between them?

She paused as she thought of her former husband, at times he'd seemed politically smart, but at other times he'd seemed naive and foolish. He remembered where his plans had led him the last time, and this time she hoped that Hizdahr would be more sensible than before. His death in the fighting pits at the hands of the Sons of the Harpy should make him more cautious, and not as trusting.

So now she controlled Slaver's Bay again...even though communication with them would be hard, considering the distances involved. The messenger that had brought her the news was waiting to return with her orders. He was another Dothraki that had sworn himself to the Khaleesi of the Great Grass Sea.

Between this news and her consolidation of power her in Pentos, things were going well. The message she'd sent to Winterfell should have arrived, though any answers would take some time to get back to her. Things were proceeding very well on all fronts and she hoped the same was happening in Westeros as well...but that was something that was currently out of her control.

She focused back on what she did have a semblance of control over. She had a meeting with a representative from the Iron Bank and there was also an envoy from the Sealord of Braavos waiting for her.

Musing over the upcoming meeting led her thoughts to other things. Things that were so different now. Between having Drogo serving her, Viserys actually trying to be useful and the former Lady Stark serving her to was a lot to take in. Despite all these things she found that, each day, she had more time to sit and think. After the initial turmoil, peace had settled on Pentos and the surrounding areas. And consequentially, she had time to sit and contemplate all the changes.

She missed Tyrion's innate insights, he would have helped her to adapt to the changes that had happened. Why had Bran done this? This wasn't the plan. Why did so many remember but yet not Viserys? She'd thought long and hard on it and not reached any satisfying answers.
She sighed deeply, she sat back in her chair clutching at her midriff. Her thoughts coming back to one issue that had been plaguing her since the spell. The Lhazareen witch, Mirri Maz Duur, whatever she had done had been undone.

*Does that mean I will be able to have children?*

This question, most of all, haunted her more and more as the days passed by.

A knocking on her door interrupted her thoughts.

“Come!” she quickly called out.

One of Magister Illyrio’s former slaves entered and bowed deeply, the man had once served the Magister as assistant in his financial dealings.

“My Queen, forgive the interruption, but the representative of the Iron Bank has arrived,” the man informed her with a respectful tone.

She took a deep breath and stood up, steeling herself for whatever the Iron Bank would request...or demand from her.

“Show him in.”

The representative from the Iron Bank was a Braavosi named Fabian Nestoros. He was dressed in fine silks and leather in flamboyant Braavosi fashion, which was in contrast to the serious expression on his face. His request for a meeting had been adamant and forceful, but the reason behind it was unclear.

The man sat opposite of her her. He sat comfortably, his eyes scrutinizing her. He did not speak immediately.
She gazed back at him calmly, “You requested this meeting,” she began with a sure tone, not letting his unblinking gaze unsettle her.

He didn't answer for another moment, before nodding and speaking, “There have been many recent...upheavals.” He stated evenly.

She raised an eyebrow at him, “And?”

“This...remembering business. It has changed many things...but there are still debts owed to the Iron Bank. In light of your recent conquest, I felt it only prudent to come here and clarify what is owed by this city to the Iron Bank,” Fabian stated.

Daenerys nodded, “My advisers have mentioned this to me. Let me assure you, the Iron Bank will get its dues.”

“Perhaps...” Fabian began cryptically, “but your brother is not know as the Beggar King for nothing. And that is a name that does not fill me with ease.”

Her eyes narrowed but she kept her expression bland and unexpressive, “My brother does not rule here, I do. Do not think that Viserys and I are alike, I keep my promises and abide by my obligations.”

“That may be so...but these are not normal times. People remember the future- unfortunately I do not, but one of my companions did mention something about how efficient Cersei Lannister was in paying off her debts. War is likely coming and I believe it is obvious which side you will be on. I expect that only one of you will be able to settle the debts owed to us by the Iron Throne and Pentos,” Fabian mentioned in a light, but meaningful tone, “And since the larger debt is owed by the Iron Throne...” His words were light but the threat was easy to see and understand.

Daenerys’s placid expression turned dark and she glared at the Banker, “Perhaps...but did your man mention how reviled she was? By the end they were mentioning her in the same breath as my unlamented father.” The man lacked knowledge of what was truly coming and who the relevant players- but that was no excuse for his rash threat.

The expression on his face froze, he blinked and then slowly said in a pained tone, “No, he did not.”
“She became much worse than my father,” Daenerys stated evenly. “The Iron Bank always gets it's due. I am well aware of this. And I am aware of all that the Iron Throne owes you. There is much you do not know...I have ask, did your companion mention anything else?"

Fabian shook his head unhappily and gave her another searching look, “He did not, but I am the highest ranking official of the Iron Bank here, I felt that it was prudent to remind you of your new obligations in light of the sudden and unexpected changes here. I am sure that my counterpart in Westeros is reminding King Robert of the same.”

She nodded again, then smiled coyly, “Perhaps so, but you will find that in light of all these changes, you will soon find House Targaryen sitting the Iron Throne again,” Daenerys added emulating the banker's previous tone.

Fabian nodded expectantly with a smug smile, “An invasion then. Wars are expensive.”

“This one will be less so than you imagine, my nephew will most probably soon reclaim his throne,” Daenerys stated in the same tone.

Again, Fabian froze, “Nephew? Forgive me, but did not Elia Martell's children die at the end of Robert's Rebellion?” he asked with confusion coloring his tone.

“They did. Lyanna Stark's son did not. He is safe and well in Winterfell,” Daenerys stated with relish.

Fabian's confident and smug mask failed him completely now, “Lyanna...Stark's...son.”

“There is much that will surprise you and those of your superiors that do not remember...but let me put you at ease, neither I nor my nephew intend to forget our obligations to the Iron Bank, but...” Daenerys gave him a hard look, “The Others are coming. The Dead are rising in the frozen North- and they are coming to kill us all. That must come first for all our sakes,” she paused giving him time to absorb that shocking piece of news. A sudden thought occurred to her and she smiled sweetly at him, “Though afterwards it would be best if the Iron Bank began looking into other revenues of income in Essos other than the Slave Trade. That will change- providing we survive, and be sure to remind them what happened to the Sons of the Harpy if they chose to oppose me in Slaver's Bay...and elsewhere.”

Fabian gave her a stunned and uncertain look before he bowed his head, “Obviously I have been
operating under incomplete information...I do not understand...but I will relay the message to my superiors.”

The next meeting, with the Sealord's envoy, went by smoothly with little fanfare. An affirmation of friendship and her assurances of peaceful intent towards Braavos was given to the Sealord's envoy and a few quick revelations what exactly she and her new forces intended to do in Essos. The Others first and the Slavers next...if they survived this time. The meeting was over before it could truly begin and the envoy would return to Braavos to deliver her words in person. She expected that there would be no trouble coming from that direction. With the same trade agreements being kept, and her known antislavery tendencies this would be probably be the beginning of a advantageous relationship for both parties.

Which was far different than the situation she found herself in now...

She'd been summoned by a panicked servant to deal with a precarious situation that had been developing for a time now, in spite of her and Jorah's attempts to cool the situation down.

Irri stood silently by her side, as Jorah flanked her, silent and glowering. A pair of Unsullied guards stood behind Jorah, and in front of her was the tempestuous and delicate situation she'd been summoned to deal with.

The former Khal Drogo, stood with two of his men in the training yard. They were facing off with a dusty and flustered Viserys. Someone had awoken the Dragon and Viserys was blustering angrily.

Drogo stared at her brother with the same murderous look in his eyes he'd had that day Viserys had been given his golden crown. Drogo was listened to Viserys with rising ire.

“Perhaps the Beggar King needs his golden crown,” he stated menacingly at Viserys in dothraki.

Viserys's tirade stopped and he glared back at them without understanding. “What did you say?” he retorted angrily. “Speak common, barbarian! I am the Dragon's brother! You should know your betters!”
That was a step too much for Drogo, he stepped forward and grabbed Viserys by the neck, lifted him up, and bringing him close, “We are not in Vaes Dothrak now fool! Nothing to stop me from spilling your blood!” he smiled a toothy wolfish smile as Viserys suddenly began to understand the depth of his predicament. Viserys was pale and there was fear in his eyes now.

“Drogo! Put him down!” Daenerys glared at the former Khal, her eyes hardened chips of flint. This was what she had feared for some time, Viserys would anger Drogo, and Drogo would kill him again...except this time maybe she could save Viserys- despite his self destructive tendencies. He'd been so changed by events. He wasn't the same brother she'd feared and hated at the end.

Drogo looked to her, locking his eyes with hers. She gave no ground to him and slowly he lowered Viserys down before completely releasing him. Viserys sputtered, breathing deeply as he was let go and fell back from Drogo, quickly moving to Daenerys's side.

“That Barbarian attacked me!” he screeched, stating the obvious as he coughed, clearing his bruised throat.

She ignored the comment and glared up at the towering Drogo, not in the least intimidated by his large stature.

“Why do you protect him, Moon of my life?” Drogo demanded snidely.

Inwardly Daenerys winced at the name, “I am your Khaleesi! You will remember your place!” she retorted angrily, casting forth her displeasure at his familiarity.

Drogo's eyes burned and his jaw clenched at the reprimand. They stood there, their eyes locked in a battle of wills. The tension built as the others around them stood watching in trepidation.

She did not relent, Drogo relented.

He controlled his defiance and went down on one knee, “Forgive me Khaleesi.” He didn't bow his head and his eyes still smoldered but he was submissive now. Or at least what passed for submissive for Drogo.
She held in her sigh, “Viserys is my brother. You are not to touch him.” She glared at the rest of the riders with Drogo, “None of you! He is mine to deal with and punish...do you understand?” she glared pointedly at Drogo as she finished.

Slowly, Drogo nodded, “As the Khaleesi commands.”

Daenerys held his gaze for a moment, “Good! Now go, before you anger me further,” she commanded imperiously.

Drogo rose slowly, “Yes, Khaleesi.” He jerked his head away and the men with him followed him as he walked away.

Viserys had watched the whole tableau play out in silence, they'd spoken Dothraki and he had no idea what was said but as Drogo walked away, he snidely shouted out, “And don't you forget it! These barbarians sister, they never know their place.”

Daenerys ground her teeth and turned to glare at her brother in annoyance.

“...really Dany, we have to teach these barbarians proper manners before we return to Westeros,” Viserys continued oblivious to her rising ire.

She almost let out an exasperated sigh at the comment, but again held it in. This Viserys was new to her, she had to handle him with care...but apparently not everyone agreed with that assessment.

Next to her, Irri glared at him and told her, “Why save him, Khaleesi? You should have let him die again, Khaleesi. He is worthless worm,” she advised in the common tongue.

Daenerys gave her a pained look but the damage had been done.

Viserys looked confused for a moment before his rage returned, he turned on Irri, “Let me die again? What are you talking about you little whore!?” he stepped menacingly towards her and made to grab her but Jorah was there and stopped him.

Viserys glared at him but didn't say anything to him, he shook himself free from Jorah and turned
towards her, “Dany, what is this whore talking about?!” his tone as hard and as arrogant as it always was, the Dragon was well and truly awake now.

But he was no dragon. She was the Dragon and would not be cowed by him ever again. This was the Viserys she knew and had dreaded dealing with again.

“Do not insult my handmaiden,” she turned to Irri, glaring at her, “Do not overstep your place, he is still my brother.”

Irri blanched and bowed deeply, “Forgive me, Khaleesi.”

Partly mollified, she cast a glance at Jorah, who gave her a commiserating smile, before she turned to her brother.

He was staring at her abashed, his lips pressed together in a thin line.

“Come, it is best we speak somewhere more private,” she didn't give him time to react and instead turned on her heel and walked away.

They followed in her wake and as she led them back to her solar.

As the door closed, Daenerys turned to face them. Viserys was standing there with a closed angry expression on his face.

“What is this...girl talking about?” He asked irritably.

Daenerys didn't answer immediately, she didn't actually know how to start this conversation, she’d known that she’d have to tell Viserys the whole truth eventually, but she'd hoped that it would have been after a long time. After he'd had more time to change. This time she let her sigh come out.

She sighed deeply unhappily at the situation, “Do you remember what I told you?”

Viserys frowned for a moment, “About what?”
She braced herself, “You died. In the last life you died.”

Viserys froze his expression turning blank, “You didn't explain what happened.”

She paced for a moment before quickly explaining the circumstances and just what Drogo had done in response.

Viserys sank down to his knees, his mouth open in a wordless denial of her words. His lips began moving but no sound was coming out. He looked utterly devastated.

“...it's not possible,” he finally managed to say. “I...I...I...would never hurt you! I swore to mother I would always protect you!” he screamed the last part.

She stepped up to her kneeling brother, hardening her gaze and giving him no room to deny her words.

“You were drunk and you held your blade to my pregnant belly. You threatened to cut out out my unborn son if Drogo did not provide you with the army he promised you,” she repeated firmly.

Viserys stared at her despondently for a moment before breaking down into sobs, shaking his head, mumbling, trying to deny her words.

“It is the truth, both Irri and Ser Jorah were there. They saw it all happen. Jorah, he tried to stop you, to protect you but you ignored him...and Drogo killed you. And I didn't have a single reason to save you after what threatened to do.”

He cast wild looks at Irri and Jorah.

Irri nodded with derision and disapproval in her eyes.

Jorah was expressionless, “The Queen speaks the truth,” he said in a grave and dark voice.
He had been devastated before, but now he was truly despondent and shattered. He sobbed, shaking with emotion.

She stood there watching him at the lowest she had ever seen him, unhappy that she'd been forced into this but it had only been a matter of time till he'd found out anyway.

“Many remember the old Viserys. You have to guard your tongue, because some people may try to curry favor with me by killing you,” she warned him grimly.

He stared at her wide eyed, “Why are you protecting me? After what I did...why?”

The edges of her lips curled, “Because you're my brother. Family looks out for family...and once long ago you were different.” Once he had been a good brother. Back in the house with a big red door in Braavos, when Ser Willem Darry had still been alive. Even after that, he'd been good to her until...until he'd had to sell mother's crown.

Viserys nodded slowly. He was sitting back on his knees, heartbroken, his eyes red with tears still streaming down his cheeks, “You're a better sister than I deserve...” he mumbled.

She looked at him and declared dryly, “Yes I am...and I don't think you're going to find anyone that disputes that.” She paused and pursed her lips, “Brother, this is a second chance for you...do not disappoint me.”

Viserys's eyes lit up and he nodded quickly and manically, “I won't Dany...I promise you!”

She looked at him and wondered...he was earnest, and seemed honest in his desire...but was this just a different facet of his instability? Or did her brother truly have a chance to become something good? Or was he truly their father's son?

It was yet another issue she'd have to keep an eye on...

She turned around and stepped away from Viserys, beckoning Jorah close, she whispered as Viserys began wiping away the tears on his face, “Keep a close eye on him.”
Jorah nodded gravely, his eyes focused unhappily on Viserys, “Yes my Queen.”
and still Awkward

Chapter Notes

Ok this chapter was a pain to write. Hope you all enjoy it. Now onto the bad news :( I have a post grad exam in February so updates for this will be slow coming till then, but afterwards things will pick back up again :) Anyway, enjoy the chapter! And don't forget to comment! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 33 ….and still Awkward

Jon Targaryen

They were all tense and wary...but it was to be expected.

The Karhold and the Karstarks were assembled in force to *greet* their arrival. What little coherent and polite communication they'd had through ravens had at least ironed out an agreement to meet and discuss the future, even if they hadn't gone into specifics. The fact that Rickard Karstark remembered was more than a mild inconvenience, but he was willing to talk to Eddard Stark...for old times sake. And only for old times sake.

The coming meeting would be uncomfortable and the Karstarks would be difficult to deal with.

Jon put his worries aside and kept his eyes open and wary as they entered the courtyard of the Karhold. Lord Karstark's men were assembled in waiting lines with Lord Karstark and his sons standing at their head...but there was no sign of Alys.

Rickard Karstark stood there with disgust and anger in his eyes. The gruff and prickly lord of the Karhold, eyed them all. With him stood his sons, Harrion, Torrhen and Harald. The eldest, Harrion, stood next to his father with an unsure expression on his face while his two brothers were like copies of their father in their disgust and anger. He'd never met any of them, but he knew that Jaime had killed the eldest two and Harald had died during the battle of the Bastards. And he still couldn't see any sign of Alys Karstark anywhere.

This meeting was crucial to the restoration of the North...it was also probably going to be the most
The future meeting with the Umbers would be bad...but probably not as bad as this one.

He refocused on Rickard Karstark just in time to see him catch sight of the flying Targaryen banner. The Northern Lord's disgust disappeared for a moment, being replaced with shock and disbelief. The disgust returned just as quickly and his face turned darker than it had already been before.

They came to a stop and Jon and the others dismounted quickly, Stark men took the horses as others formed a wary honor guard around them. Father stepped forward the mask of Lord of Winterfell firmly in place as he stepped towards Lord Karstark.

“Rickard,” Father said in a grave tone.

Lord Karstark didn't answer him, instead he stared up at the flying sigils and pointed irately at the standard of House Targaryen, “What in the name of the Old Gods and the New, Ned?! We fought a fucking war to remove the damn dragons!”

Father sighed unhappily, at Lord Karstark's comment.

He watched as Father's shoulder's squared and he straightened up to his full height, “The world has changed and the North is in danger.”

“I don't fucking care!” retorted Rickard, “Those cunts burned Lord Rickard and strangled Lord Brandon! The fucking silver haired bastard kidnapped and raped your sister! How much can the world change to make that right?!”

Father's expression darkened and he looked to be steeling himself, “Lyanna was not raped. She was not kidnapped,” he sighed, “Rhaegar Targaryen did nothing to her that she did not welcome because they were married.”

He watched as Rickard's anger and contempt changed from into confusion with each of Father's revelations. His face turned a myriad of colors before it settled back into stone and outrage.

Ned didn't wait for Rickard to react more, he pointed gestured to Jon as he stepped up next to Ned, “I have sworn the North to the true king, my sister's trueborn son, Jon of Houses Targaryen and Stark.”
Rickard's attention turned towards him as the prickly lord gave him a hard scrutinizing stare.

“"You're Lyanna's son?"” Rickard asked in a sneering tone, and hard look.

Jon met his stare unflinching, and answered in the same disrespectful tone, “Aye, I am.” He only ever seen Lord Karstark before from afar not really dealing with him the few times that he'd come to Winterfell as he was growing up, but now up close and personal and with how Robb had described his actions in the War of Five Kings, Jon was seeing a lot of resemblance to a couple of the more obstinate and stubborn Free Folk leaders.

They stared at each other before Lord Karstark suddenly let out a hard laugh, ignoring Jon he turned back to Father and gave him a dubious look, “Well ain't that fucking convenient? Lyanna's son? By the silver prick? Are you that desperate to have a Stark King now, Ned? I didn't think you had such ambition! Or is this your southern wife's idea? Better your bastard than the Lannister bastard?”

Father bristled at the insult and stared back coldly. Robb stomped up to stand by them. Jon grabbed his shoulder to stop him from retorting rashly, and inflaming the situation even more. Lord Karstark locked eyes with Robb and he sneered.

A commotion from behind the assembled Karstark men, forestalled any action, and much to Jon's surprise a young red headed girl came running and pushing past the men, she looked about wildly before laying eyes on him. He saw relief there as she recognized him. He knew her as well, it was Alys Karstark. She was much younger than the first time he'd seen her at in the aftermath of the battle of the Bastards, and even more so than the attractive woman she'd grow to become during the war with the Others.

“You're finally here!” she cried out in relief.

The Karstark men tried to grab her, but she evaded them. She ran towards them, but her father Harald Karstark grabbed her and clamped a hand around her shoulder, his other hand covered her mouth as he made to carry her away with a cross expression on his face.

Alys bit her father's hand and then kicked him in the shins, then as he hobbled about on one leg while holding his abused hand, she used the distraction to escape from his grasp and ran to Jon’s side.

“Gods damn it all! You have to fucking listen to them! If you don't we're all going to fucking die!”
she screamed angrily as she glared at the rest of her family.

Rickard's face purpled and he stared at his granddaughter before turning to cast a baleful look at Jon.

Jon met Rickard's baleful stare unflinching again, “There is much you need to know, my Lord. Far more than you could possibly imagine,” he said gruffly.

Rickard just continued to stare for several long pregnant moments before he snarled in disgust. He gestured widely, “Bread and salt for Lord Stark and his nephew!”

Servants came forward bearing trays of bread and salt, Father hesitated to move, his face still stony and emotionless.

Lord Karstark's face darkened and he snarled with derision, “I ain't no fucking Frey to break guest rights, Ned. I'm angry, but I'm still of the North.”

Father nodded grimly and took the offered bread and salt. The rest of them followed suit and partook of the bread and salt and with many exchanged suspicious and angry looks; Robb and Rickard most of all.

Alys rolled her eyes in annoyance and called out, “This way. Let's speak inside.” She led the way inside as the Karstark men parted to let her through, with more suspicious looks Jon and the rest of the Karstarks followed her into the Karhold.

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The tenseness of the situation didn't abate inside. Alys had led them to Lord Karstark's solar. Inside it was another standoff, Jon stood with his Father and Robb. Opposite them sat, Rickard Karstark sat with his sons standing behind him, trying to look intimidating. Bran sat between the two groups with the same unconcerned look he always had now. Alys sat next to him, though she squirmed disquieted by her proximity to Bran. Not that Jon could blame her, most who'd encountered the Three Eyed Raven didn't enjoy the experience.

Lord Karstark broke the silence first.
“The Boltons?” he asked gruffly.

“Dead,” Father replied simply.

Lord Karstark smiled snidely, “Good riddance! The North’s better off without that pale fucker! And his bastard?”

Father nodded, “Dead.”

Lord Karstark cast a dark look at son, Harald before answering, “Even better. I’ve heard enough stories about that bastard to know he was a stain on the North's Honor more than your son's fuck ups. Even your wife's fuck ups!” he spat angrily, he cast another angry look at Harald, who shifted uncomfortably.

Robb bristled again at the insult, but Jon’s restraining hand, stopped him again. Instead Robb just glared daggers at Lord Karstark…and Lord Karstark return the glare.

Father's face was still frozen and icy, “Mistakes were made by all. And I have chastised them both…but what of your crimes?”

Lord Karstark bristled, “My crimes?! What crimes? It was justice! Justice for my murdered sons!”

“Justice? To murder two innocent squires for the crimes of their cousin?” Father retorted with icy derision. “They were valuable hostages, Tywin Lannister would have done much for the safe return of Kevan Lannister's sons.”

“Hostages didn't matter! We were winning! We would have crushed them all!” Lord Karstark jumped up in a rage. “What did it matter if we had two less hostages?! Better that the fucking Southerners knew loss! Let them know what it feels like to pay in blood!”

Alys was grimacing and sighing at her grandfather's obstinacy as Father's face darkened further at the remarks, “Nothing is sure in war till the end. You should know this, many battles have turned at a moment's notice…and your actions forced these changes on Robb. You weakened the North with your pride! If I had been in Robb's place, I would have executed you as well!” Father snarled back, rising from his chair to meet Lord Karstark's angry gaze.
Lord Karstark’s expression was unreadable for a moment before he bared his teeth and snarled, “This is what you wanted to tell me?!” he demanded, “To call me a fool and threaten me in my own castle?!”

Jon rose from his seat and stood next to Father, they shared a look before Jon answered him.

“No. We cam to warn you. The Others are coming.” Jon stated evenly.

Lord Karstark looked at them for a moment before throwing his head back and laughing, his anger disappearing, “Ha ha, the Others? And are the snarks and grumkins coming with them?” he smirked.

“You’re a damned fool! I told him already and he doesn't believe me. And he calls himself a Northerner,” Alys fearlessly retorted with a rude snort.

Lord Karstark’s smirk disappeared at his own granddaughter’s insult. He stepped towards her and raised his hand at her, “You shut your mouth, or I'll shut it for you! I'll have no lip from own flesh!”

Jon was there by side in an instant, grabbing Lord Karstark's hand. He stopped him from hitting her, their eyes met and they stared for a moment before Lord Karstark retched his hand free in a huff.

Alys was undaunted, she raised her hands and waved them all around, she shouted at her grandfather, “This was done with magic! How else do you think any of this was possible?! How else are you all back from the dead? After you all died, the Others and the army of dead came and killed us all!”

“First a hidden Targaryen King and then the Others?!” disdain coloured his every word, “And you expect me to believe you? You’re not the Ned I knew and swore fealty to, he would never be taken in by these stories! And he would never lie about something so important as a Stark King!” he spat in disbelief, he paused and gave Father a long look, “the Ned I knew would never have lied!”

“You knew what happened to Elia Martell and her children. What choice did I have but to hide Jon?” Father retorted urgently.

He waved the comment away, “The dragons are gone, name yourself King in the North and teach
proper manners to your stupid pup and I'll swear the Karhold and all our lands to you once more! Fuck the Southerners and their fucking Iron Throne!” Lord Karstark boomed, “The North is for Northerners!”

“And you're a damned fool!” Robb cried out finally having enough with Lord Karstark's insolent manner.

Lord Karstark sneered, “I'm the fool, you damned cunt? You fucking lost the North!” he shouted wrathfully.

Robb stepped forward towards him, but this time it was Father that grabbed Robb, “Sit down Robb.” he commanded.

Grudgingly, Robb swallowed his anger and sat back down.

Bran stood up suddenly, he walked up to Lord Karstark, “You are wrong. The Others are coming and Jon is the rightful King.” He stated in his emotionless tone.

Lord Karstark scoffed at Bran, “There more believable lies, boy.”

Bran was unmoved by Lord Karstark's denial, he began speaking quietly instead, his face as blank as it always was. Jon was listening but he didn't understand what Bran was saying, most of it didn't mean much to Jon. Lord Karstark was listening with a disdainful look. The disdain didn't stay there very long, suddenly he was frowning, a confused look coming to his eyes. Lord Karstark's sons, who had been quietly watching the confrontation seemed not to understand the words either at first either, but each stiffed as Bran began mentioning them as well.

Bran spoke about several situations involving Lord Karstark and his sons, and a after a few minutes he was finished.

Lord Karstark was pale and gaping at Bran, “How...how can you know all this?! How?”

Bran blinked slowly, “I am the Three Eyed Raven.”
Karstark was still pale, “What does that mean? I don't understand.”

Jon cut in, “It doesn't matter now, as we said, there is much to be said but we are telling you the truth about the Others and my heritage.”

Lord Karstark seemed uncertain now, his eyes didn't leave Bran as he asked, “The Others are truly coming?”

“Aye, they are. I have faced the Night's King and the army of the dead. The Wall fell. Then the North, then the rest of Westeros,” Jon stated gravely hoping that now Lord Karstark would be more reasonable.

Lord Karstark's eyes left Bran and he stared at Jon, “And you truly are Lyanna's son?”

Jon nodded grimly, “Aye...it was a surprise when I finally discovered the truth.”

Lord Karstark ran a hand over his face, as a harried expression came to his face, “Fuck me...fine then, you promise me Jaime Lannister's head and I'll swear fealty to you.”

Jon winced and grimaced, he couldn't promise Karstark that. “I cannot my Lord. You have your sons back, all that he did against you has been undone...and this is a new world we are trying to build. We are not here to repeat the mistakes of old.”

Lord Karstark ground his teeth angrily, “And why the hells can't I have the Kingslayer's head?!”

Father was looking at him strangely now and deep in his gut Jon knew this would not end well.

Jon sighed deeply, bracing himself, “Because Jaime Lannister is on our side now...and he is an ally now.”

Lord Karstark gaped for a moment.

“What?!” shouted Father, beating Lord Karstark to the punch.
Father was trembling and red with such rage. Jon had never seen him that angry before.

“Jaime Lannister...an ally?!” he demanded of Jon. “How in the name of the Old Gods and the New is he an ally?!” Father's tirade wasn't finished as he descended into an exceedingly unflattering tirade about Jaime and his perverted origins.

Jon kept his face blank, but he was shaken as he watched his Father suddenly let out his anger cursing out Jaime with crude and foul language he would have expected to come from the mouths of any of the Free Folk...not from the honorable Lord Eddard Stark, lord of Winterfell. Robb had shrunk back into his seat in shock as Father's tirade continued, he couldn't recognize his own father now either.

He was walking back and forth in the solar, everyone staying out of his path, he turned on Lord Karstark his eyes wild with rage, “...and I can't even trust my own godsdamned bannermen to keep their own words!” Father screamed with disgust, as he slammed his fist down on the nearest table. He lent heavily on the table for a moment before whirling around, he raised his hand and pointed at Lord Karstark's face as he stepped up to him, “...You will remember your oath to me and bend the knee to our rightful King! And if you don't I will have you and all your sons attained and give the Karhold to Alys! After I put all of your heads on spikes!” he roared in Lord Karstark's face.

Lord Karstark made to open his mouth in indignation, but Father cut him off again, “The only fucking words I will hear from you now is, yes Lord Stark! Do I make myself clear?” He roared as he grabbed him by the shoulder staring down the man, his eyes filled with a cold fury, cooler than the deepest depths of winter.

Lord Karstark's defiance had disappeared and he was staring up at Father now, as if he couldn't recognize his own liege lord now. His sons were frozen were they stood staring in disbelief at father. Even Alys looked disturbed now.

“Answer me Rickard! Or I will attain you and your sons and name Alys, the Lady of the Karhold!” Father roared again when Karstark didn't answer quickly enough.

Lord Karstark mumbled something.

“I didn't hear you! Speak louder!” Father commanded.
Lord Karstark swallowed fearfully, “The Karhold is...yours...my lord...I...ah...willingly submit to our new King...long may he live!” he babbled nervously, all trace of his previous defiance completely gone and vanished from him.

Father released his hold on Lord Karstark and turned towards Jon and gave him a grave and disapproving look, “Tell me, Jon, in what world can Jaime Lannister possibly be considered an ally?!” Father's eyes shone with disappointment and rage now as he spat the last word, “Have you forgotten what he did to Bran? What of the good Northern men that died on his blade? He killed Jory! Never mind that he was fucking his own sister?! He is a perverted oathbreaker of the most foul kind!”

Jon squared his shoulders and faced his Father's piercing stare.

“It doesn't matter now,” Bran stated evenly before Jon could speak, “We must all stand together against the coming storm.”

Father's head twisted towards Bran in surprise, “He threw you from a window! He crippled you!”

Bran shrugged, “So?”

Father gaped at Bran, appalled by his words. Robb was just as aghast. Lord Karstark and his sons were equally bewildered and angry at this though Alys had recovered enough from her shock to just let out a long suffering sigh. She gave Jon an unhappy look as Bran continued to give Father the same emotionless stare that was so characteristic of him now.

“We must all look to our survival now, the grudges of old have no place now,” Jon quickly spoke firmly.

Father turned back to Jon, “How can you possibly trust him?” he asked again.

Jon sighed, mentally noting that Jaime would be upset that this was spreading, “Because I know why he slew the Mad King. The real reason...and it had nothing to do with Tywin Lannister's wishes or commands.”

Father frowned for a moment, uncertainty filling his eyes for a flicker of time before hardening again into icy grey flints, “And what possible reason could drive him to rightfully break his oath?”
Jon cast a look at Robb and Lord Karstark before answering, “The Mad King lived up to his name. His Hand at the end of the Rebellion was Rossart, the head of the Pyromancers' guild. He had him stockpile caches of Wildfire under the entirety of King's Landing. The Mad King intended for Robert Baratheon to be King of the Ashes. He would have seen all of King's Landing burn. Every man, woman and child- all five hundred thousand of them...” Jon trailed off letting that atrocity be absorbed by his father and the others present...but only for a moment.

As the words registered with them, he saw disgust and horror blossom on the faces of all assembled. Father's rage was still there but it was cooling. Robb was gaping at Jon now. The Karstark men were all pale and horrified. The only ones not shocked were Bran and Alys, they'd already known the truth of the matter.

“...Jaime killed the Pyromancer first, then the Mad King to stop him from giving the order to anyone else,” Jon continued, “Before you say anything else think about this, when the order was given the Lannister army was already sacking King's Landing,” he paused again and gave father a heavy look, “The Mad King's body was still warm when you found him, you were in the Red Keep. The rest of the Northern army was in the city as well...how long would it have taken for the Pyromancers to burn the city? And how many Lords of the North and the Westerlands would have burned with the city?”

As Jon finished, Father stared coolly at him, the rage had cooled considerably but it was still there simmering under the surface. Overshadowing it was the surprise and disquiet of the catastrophic and disturbing possible sequence of events that Jon had just described.

“Old Gods preserve us! That's...that's...he saved...us?” Lord Karstark was gaping now, right along with all of his sons.

“Yes, Lord Karstark, he even saved you,” Jon stated giving the man a hard look.

Lord Karstark looked away from the hard gaze and quickly sat down, and Jon turned back to Father.

Father's jaw was clenched, his nostrils flared as he let out a noise breath, “This isn't finished,” he stated unhappily.

“We can speak later...” Jon turned to back Lord Karstark, “Now we have preparations for winter we must begin.”
A dazed and much more plaint Lord Karstark nodded, “Of course, your Grace.”

A tense peace had settled in the Karhold, after Lord Karstark had renewed his fealty, albeit fearfully, to Father and then acknowledged Jon as the rightful King. The mess with Father over Jaime would be settled latter...somehow.

After the initial unpleasantness, even the knowledge of an alliance with the Wildlings was accepted with less cursing, and soon enough Lord Karstark would marshal his banners in his name to reinforce the Wall and the Night's Watch.

A tense dinner later and ravens had flown from the Karhold, to the other banners and back to Winterfell. Sansa would be relieved to now that the Karstarks were once more loyal to House Stark and had accepted him as their new king.

Jon sighed, Father, on the other hand had barely spoken three words to him that were not relevant to their plans. After dinner Jon had excused himself and left to see to Ghost. Which was why he was sitting out in the quiet courtyard of the Karhold with Ghost by his side.

Ghost- and Grey Wind were the size of large hounds now, they were growing well just as the first time around.

He was sitting on a bale of hey, brushing Ghost's fur when Robb found him, Grey Wind at his heels.

Robb came to stand by him, but he didn't immediately speak, Grey Wind yipped at Ghost and the two direwolves began to playfully wrestle ignoring their human companions.

Jon stood up gave Robb an inquiring look. Robb still looked a little shocked, but he wasn't as unsettled as before.

“You know, I was going to be mad at you for keeping the Kingslayer's true loyalty from us but I think father is mad enough for the entire North,” Robb began sheepishly, with a slightly stunned expression, “...probably for the whole of the North and the Riverlands...”
Jon winced but couldn't disagree. Father hadn't reacted to that revelation well. It had actually been much worse than he'd expected. It had reminded him of a time when Robb had thrown a tantrum back when they were still children. It was extremely uncharacteristic of the usually soft spoken Lord of Winterfell.

“Jaime Lannister crippled Bran...and yet he also saved father from the Mad King,” Robb's words were a statement and not a question.

Jon nodded anyway, “Aye. He saved Father as well as so many other that day...and father named him an oathbreaker and judged him for it.”

Robb winced, “But why didn't he say anything? Father would have understood. Gods! All of Westeros would have understood.” He said in exasperation.

“Because he's Jaime...and he's an idiot. He also a smug cunt, but that's just who is,” Jon replied dryly.

Robb stared for a moment before snorting, “Aye, even as a prisoner he was a smug cunt.” He admitted grudgingly.

Jon agreed with him, no one had believed Jaime when he shown up in Winterfell with news of Cersei's obvious- in hindsight, betrayal. He'd been as smug as usual, but he'd also been earnest in his desire to- finally, do the right thing.

“What about afterwards? Assuming we all survive?” Robb asked quickly. “Assuming we all survive the Others, what will you do about him? He still committed many crimes.”

“Assuming we survive...” Jon paused and gave Robb a speculative look before deciding to be brutally honest, might as well see how he would react to that, “He'll probably be exiled to Tarth.”

Confusion filled Robb's blue eyes, “Tarth? Why Tarth? Wait...so he'll be Lady Brienne's prisoner? I don't envy him.” He laughed haughtily at that jape.

“In a manner of speaking...” Jon stated and then he wagged his eyebrows suggestively and winked at
his cousin.

Robb frowned for a moment, before suddenly gaping, “You...you can't mean...”

“I don’t think anyone wasn’t surprised when that little piece of gossip spread,” Jon confirmed dryly, “Well except for Bronn and Podrick.”

Robb was just staring with his mouth open, “But...but...she's taller than him! And he's prettier than her!” he sputtered.

Jon shrugged, “It's a mad world we're living in now.”

Robb huffed and looked angry now, “So instead of being punished, he's to be rewarded?” he demanded angrily.

“It's more we're rewarding Brienne for saving Sansa than punishing Jaime,” Jon retorted pointedly.

Robb's anger cooled as his lips twisted, “Many still won't be happy with that...including father.”

“Unfortunately, I'm well aware of that,” lamented Jon, “But Brienne has served us faithfully and she even kept her vow to your mother- even after Lady Catelyn's death.”

Robb looked unconvinced but after a moment he nodded in acquiescence once and didn't anything further.

A thoughtful silence descended on them as thoughts of Jaime Lannister's possible fate. Robb was right many would be unhappy with that possibility. Exceedingly unhappy in some cases.

Robb's eyes focused on something behind him and he jerked his head for Jon to look, interrupting Jon's thoughts.

Jon turned and found Harrion Karstark cautiously approaching them, he eyed the direwolves at play warily as they played next to Robb and Jon. When he reached them, he cast an unsure look at Jon,
before turning to face Robb, “Your Grace...” he began hesitantly.

Robb's face twitched, “It's just Robb now.”

Harrion blinked as he reddened in embarrassment, he cast an apologetic look at Jon, “I'm sorry, your Grace...it's just...”

“It's disorienting.” Jon finished the sentence for him.

The red lessened and Harrion nodded, “Aye, disorienting...that's one word for it.” He paused for moment before continuing, “Mad is another.” he finished dryly.

Jon and Robb laughed and then shared a look.

“Aye. It's all mad.” Robb stated with commiserating smile. He pointed at Jon, “He knew what was coming and he was still surprised at how it all turned out.”

Jon frowned, “Not exactly,” he waved his hands around, “All of this wasn't a part of the plan.”

Robb snorted, “Wasn't part of the plan?” He looked to Harrion and complained, “One second I was in the Twins- the next I was in my own room in Winterfell! The last time my head spun that much was that time I fell hard off my horse and hit my head! And I was ten at the time!”

Harrion rubbed the back of his neck, “I know what you mean. One second I was dying on the Kingslayer's blade, then I was...” he trailed off and smiled sheepishly as his face turned red, “the next I, uh, I was in a brothel. I thought I was suffocating for a moment before I realised my head was being squeezed between a pair of tits.”

Robb looked at him for a moment before throwing back his head and laughing loudly. Jon grinned, glad to see Robb so mirthful.

Harrion just shrugged and continued to smile sheepishly, “It is what it is. Thought I was being rewarded for a good life for moment...then I saw her face,” he added quickly with a depreciating smile, “Buck teeth, splotched faced and crossed eyes...but she has such sweet tits,” he continued
Jon joined Robb as they descended into mirthful laughter, Harrion joined them this time. They continued to laugh for a short time.

The laughter subsided, and Jon asked him in an insightful tone, “Was there something you were trying to tell us? I don't think you came here to us about the Karhold's brothel, did you?”

The red returned to his face, Harrion looked a little more embarrassed now, “No...uh, what I wanted to say was...thank you. Thank you for this second chance. My father may not say it but I will. And you can depend on my loyalty in all that's coming.” He nodded at Robb and Jon, “Thank you, Lord Robb, your Grace.”

Jon and Robb shared a smile before Jon laid a hand on Harrion's shoulder, “We will not forget your words...but a word to the wise, listen to Alys, do not dismiss her just because she looks like the little girl you once knew.”

Harrion nodded once, looking chagrined, “Of course your Grace...and I'll try to keep my father in check, he won't dishonor himself like the last time.”

“Good man, Lord Harrion, too much depends on us all to let our pride get in the way.” Jon commended him.

Harrion stood taller now, and he just nodded in acknowledgment of the praise. He then bowed and excused himself leaving Jon and Robb alone again.

Jon turned and Robb a long look, “Well that makes two Karstarks that like you now.”

Robb gave him a pained look in response, “I'm not holding out hope that any more will like me.”

Jon gave him a hopeful smile, and put a reassuring arm around his cousin's shoulders, “In this new world...who knows?
Chapter End Notes

And now Ned needs blood pressure meds :D:D:D
Eddard Stark

The sun was setting as he stomped through the camp uncaring of those that fled from his path, and fled they did. There was no other word for it. Ever since the Karhold, his hackles had been raised and his humours ill....and no one had been safe from his temper. Even Jon and Robb had been tiptoeing around him ever since....he'd lost his temper. It was the first time that he'd truly lost his temper like that since he was a child. Not even his legendary row with Robert as they stood over the dead Targaryen children had he lost it like that. Back then, he'd had to remember that Robert was still the King they were placing on the Iron Throne.

Jon was his king now, but it hadn't mattered to him when he'd confronted him about Jaime Lannister. He hadn't kept a civil tongue in his mouth as he'd cursed the Kingslayer and all his dishonorable acts in words that would have had Cat red and angry with him for using inappropriate words in front of the children.

…and that was the crux of the matter. Less than two moons ago, they were his children, all he could see was Jon and Robb as children. Sansa, Arya and Bran were still all children in his eyes. Jon was the dour son, Robb the smiling heir. Sansa was his sweet kind girl. Arya his rebellious little she-wolf. And Bran was his energetic and smiling climbing son.

Except they weren't any more...

Jon was the King now, Robb, the Young Wolf. Sansa had enough ice in her veins to make any of the ancient Stark Kings of Winter proud. And Arya...she was changed as well.

He knew deep in his heart that Jon was still hiding something about Arya, but there was no part of
him that was in a hurry to find out just how bad it was...

And the less said about Bran- the Three Eyed Raven, the better.

He sighed deeply.

After the *incident*, Jon and Robb had looked at him and hadn't recognized the man standing in front of them after his tantrum. And it was a tantrum, it couldn't be named anything else. Everything had boiled out of him, all his anger at the injustices served to his family and all the changes had compressed into one single point of rage as he was forced to accept more changes to what he had been so sure was an *unchangeable* fact.

A part of him had taken more than a little satisfaction from threatening and scaring Rickard Karstark witless...and another part of him had been appalled at his lack of control. Jon Arryn would have been disappointed at his lack of control.

Afterwards and since, he knew he had acted like a sullen boy, retreating away from any conversation that was not relevant to the day to day matters at hand. Jon Arryn would be more disappointed with him.

But it still made his blood boil every time his thoughts strayed to Jaime Lannister and all he had done. He'd saved half a million souls in King's Landing by breaking his Kingsguard oaths. He'd cuckolded his King- with his own twin sister no less, and again broken his Kingsguard oaths. He'd come into Ned's home and tried to murder Bran, breaking guest rights this time. He'd turned against his sister and helped Jon and Daenerys by breaking his oath to his own sister.

The man was a damned oathbreaker of the worst kind and more infuriating than anything else Ned had ever had to deal with in his entire life!

*And now they were supposed to be allies*?!

He growled under his breath and pushed those thoughts aside, if he didn't he wouldn't be able to think straight again. As he walked a couple of men caught sight of him and without missing a beat, turned around and fled back the way they had come. Ned paid them no heed, it had become a common occurrence. His thoughts turned back to how they had gotten here in the first place...and where they were going next.
It was a long winding path from Winterfell to here and it still wasn't over yet. It wouldn't be over till they went south and faced Robert. But for now, here they were heading to the Last Hearth, with the Karstarks joining them, though the bulk of the Karstark men and their banners would follow after them, to join them at the Wall, at Castle Black.

There were already two days out from the Karhold and only now was his anger starting to cool. What little time he'd spent with Jon, their exchanges had been terse and to the point. He kept wanting to reprimand his son for trusting too easily...except now, his son was the King. It would be unseemly for the Lord of Winterfell to be seen trying to reprimand the King, no matter how much he wanted to and he had done so many times before...

His confrontation with Sansa after he found out about Ramsay had not gone how he envisaged it and he felt that confronting Jon about Jaime now, would be a rehash of that argument. And he hadn't won that argument by any measure imaginable.

He lost himself to his thoughts and found that his feet had a mind of their own. He found himself in front of the Reed encampment. He had been intending to return to his own tent, but his feet had brought here instead.

A very nervous Reed man came up to him, hesitant and stuttering, “Lo-lord St-Stark,” he bowed and swallowed nervously.

Ned eyed him for a moment, for a moment before speaking, “Where is Lord Reed?” he asked sharply.

The man swallowed nervously again, “H-he's by his be-bedroll, my Lo-lord.”

“What me there,” Ned commanded brusquely.

The man practically jumped as he nodded, “Yes, my Lo-lord.” He turned and walked quickly away, with Ned quickly matching the man's fast pace. The unseemly pace suited Ned fine now, he had no patience for delays these days.

Soon enough, they reached a small clearing. Howland didn't have a tent, he had a bedroll next a fire, out in the open, just like the rest of his men. The Crannogmen weren't much for standing on ceremony even by Northern standards.
Howland was sitting on a rock, he looked up as they approached. He frowned for a moment before he caught sight of Ned. He rose from where he was sitting, and bowed, “Lord Stark.”

Ned nodded back, his face still grim, “Howland.”

Howland waved the guard away and the man practically ran away, in haste to leave.

Howland cast a look at the retreating man, “I see you're still keeping everyone on their toes, Ned,” he said with a needling smile.

Ned Scowled.

He chuckled in response, “Sit down, Ned, let's talk.”

Ned didn't sit down or speak, instead he began pacing back and forth by the fire. Howland remained standing and watched him pace. After a short while he asked, “You wanted to talk to me?”

Ned stopped and turned back to him, “How can you stand it?”

“What?”

“The world's changed. This isn't the world I knew anymore.” Ned stated morosely, his shoulder's tensing.

Howland shrugged, “Considering the alternative? I'll take this one. I have Jojen back. You're alive. Your sons are alive, and a lot of people are going to be spared horrible pointless deaths. I'm not actually seeing a downside to this world...” he admitted candidly.

Ned stared for a moment before slumping in defeat, Howland was right, but it didn't make it any better. The alternative was horrible and maddening, but it didn't make it any less maddening dealing with all the changes. It all left him feeling like he was on a ship in the middle of storm, the deck constantly swaying uncontrollably under his feet. Every time he thought he had his footing, the deck would shift again under his feet and threaten to throw him from his feet.
“It's best just to remind yourself that there are more pressing matters we need to focus on, namely the Others.” Howland paused and gave him a cheeky grin, “As you're so fond of reminding me; Winter is coming...” He stressed the words of of House Stark giving them a more sinister ring even as his eyes danced with mirth.

Ned snorted. The irony of having his own words quoted back at him was not lost on him. Howland's simple words and simple answers were like a balm to his nerves, but still it felt like he was losing his children. He told Howland as much.

“You died and the world went on, they grew up. They changed. It's the way of the world. It would have happened even if you had lived,” Howland retorted evenly with another shrug.

Ned turned away in annoyance, again, his friend's words rang truthful in his ears, but it didn't make them or him feel any better. Or tell him how he was supposed to react...

Howland came to stand by him and put a hand on his shoulder, “It is what it is, Ned. You'll get used to it after a while... probably.... maybe....”

Ned turned and gave Howland a scathing look before snorting, “Now you're not putting me at ease,” he muttered in disgruntlement.

Howland shrugged and smiled toothily, ”And....what are you going to do about it? Is there something that can be done?” He asked with a raised eyebrow, “Because I think the only way forward is to make your peace with it and accept it. There isn't anything that can be done.” He went back and sat down on his rock, next to his bedroll.

Ned glared again, “Thank you so much for your insight,” he retorted dryly.

Howland gave him an irreverent smile and bowed his head, “Glad to be of help, my lord.” He grabbed a goblet and wineskin from next to his bedroll. He poured a cup and raised it up to Ned, “Now come join me and relax. Have a drink. You're still putting the men on edge.”

Ned sighed and reluctantly found a rock next to Howland, taking the goblet. It was a wineskin filled with ale and not wine as was the habit of Northerners. He downed the ale in a single deep gulp.
“Feel better?” asked Howland.

“No.” Ned growled back.

“Then have another...” he refilled the goblet and then grabbed one for himself.

They drank in silence for a moment, before Howland asked, “Did they at least tell you about the good things that happened?”

Ned snorted again, “There were good things?”

“Aye, not everything was bad,” suddenly, Howland seemed to turn morose, “That little she-wolf of yours, there are times I look at and all I see is Lyanna.”

The sudden change of topic and demeanor jarred Ned, though he quickly matched Howland’s dark mood, Arya...she was his constant living reminder of Lyanna...much more so than Jon ever was...especially with all of her rebellious antics, “Aye. Lya would loved her.” Why was Howland mentioning Arya now?

Howland shook off his dark mood as quickly as it appeared, as he quickly grinned, “They tell you she fell in love?”

Ned sputtered and choked on his ale, “What?” he cried when he finally caught his breath.

Howland nodded, enjoying Ned’s surprise, “Oh aye, she found herself a good man that loved her back. Honest and reliable, devil with a warhammer...if a little dim at times, but all things considered Gendry’s a good man.”

His thoughts ground to a halt, “Gendry? Robert’s bastard? That Gendry?! The Blacksmith boy?!” Ned asked in surprise. Gendry? Surly there were other Gendrys in the North? It couldn’t be that one...

Howland was taken aback for a moment before he nodding, “Forgot for a moment, he said he met you in King’s Landing.”
Ned stared at Howland, it was that Gendry! He continued staring for a long moment before grimacing, “Cat's going to have a fit when she finds out.” He remembered the boy on the cusp of manhood, who looked so much like Robert, but with none of the arrogance. He'd have offered him a place in Winterfell if the boy had wanted it...not his daughter!

“Then it's a good thing we're here and she's in Winterfell,” Howland retorted with a grin.

Ned groaned, “I'll still get more than an earful about it when we get back to Winterfell.” He could just imagine just how loud Cat would get when this was brought up for discussion.

Howland's grin grew larger and he refilled Ned's goblet, “Then it's best you enjoy the peace and quiet here while you can.”

Sarella Sand

Being back in Sunspear was disorienting for her. The suspicious looks from many of the guards wasn't helping either. They'd marched her unerringly towards her uncle's solar once she'd announced herself at the gates.

She'd noticed idly as she'd been marched to the solar that Sunspear had gained some new decorations. There were a lot of heads on spikes decorating the outer walls.

She'd known going into Sunspear the news of what had happened in the Water Gardens, the awful, heartbreaking news. Obara, Tyene, Nymeria and Trystane...Ellaria...

She'd been mad with rage when news of what they'd done in the past life first came to her in the Citadel. She'd refused to speak with them after what they'd done to Uncle Doran and Trystane. She had ignored all the messages they'd sent to her...and then it had been too late to write to them or speak with them at all.

When news of Euron Greyjoy's attack had come to the Citadel, it had been all she could do not to cry out in grief and reveal the truth about herself. By the time darker tales had reached her ears of
what Cersei had done to Ellaria and Tyene...it hadn't mattered anymore, she'd had other things to
scream about then. Legends made flesh coming to kill them all had been a surprising balm for her
grief. The need to focus on that had been all consuming. The truth of about the Maesters had only
added to that focus.

And the *Death of Oldtown* had been all that counted as it happened around her. Coldness and death
had come for and a part of her had looked forward to being reunited with Father and her sisters...

But then the surprise return to life had happened, bewildering her and everyone else, more so
especially when Leyton and Baelor Hightower came and sacked the Citadel around her. Revealing
herself had bought her an audience with the Lord of the Hightower and despite the Reach's prejudice
against bastards and Dorne, he'd welcomed her into his inner circle, he'd needed an emissary to
Dorne that would be listened to and trusted. She was the natural choice, considering the situation.
The Archmaester of Magic had agreed.

She mentally paused for moment, yes Marwyn was a sensible one, for all he'd been scorned for
being the Archmaester of Magic. Though the reason for the scorn was readily apparent in hindsight.

And now, here she was in Sunspear with news of treason and monsters on top of the dire, bloody
situation that had already developed here. She knew Father wasn't here, a small part of her was
thankful considering some of the news she was carrying. Better to deal with Uncle Doran's
calculating nature than her father's fiery temper. Another part of her ached to see him again, she'd lost
him the last time without being able to say goodbye.

She was led to Uncle Doran's solar and allowed to enter immediately. The guards escorting her came
in with her and what she found inside was unexpected.

It was very alarming to see her uncle pacing about his own solar...but most alarming of all, was Aro
Hotah's notable absence from her uncle's side. Uncle was dressed as he usually was but the
swordbelt he had around his waist was new. She'd never seen him armed before.

As he paced he cast a dismissive look towards her but didn't stop pacing. He ignored her, leaving her
there wondering just how much more had changed in Sunspear in her absence.

Suddenly, the pacing stopped and Uncle Doran turned to look at her with suspicion in his eyes, “Sit
and tell me Sarella, what important news do you bring me?” his voice sounded far too much like
father's on a bad day for her comfort now. He took his own seat, lounging there giving off the
appearance of ease, even though he looked like a viper waiting to strike.
Disquieted, she obediently sat opposite her uncle, meeting his gaze meekly in submission.

“...though I wonder why I should believe anything you say after your sisters' previous betrayals?” He added as she sat.

She'd expected something like this. Sarella met Doran's eyes, “It was father's bad example they followed...but vengeance must be tempered.” She shook her head, “I had nothing to do with their plans. I knew nothing till after they had already acted.”

Doran looked at her with suspicion for a moment before huffing, “You've always been a better thinker....and calmer as well. At times I wondered if you were truly my brother's daughter, but you are like him in many other ways,” he nodded then sighed, now he sounded more like the calculating man she knew him to be, though it had a hard edge she'd rarely heard before, “I do not hold any responsibility for your sisters' actions on you...but if you had been in Dorne, perhaps you could have knocked some sense into them...it doesn't matter any more now, House Martell cannot afford to be divided anymore,” he finished in exasperation.

“They rarely listened to me,” Sarella rejoined unhappily, “And I have always been loyal to House Martell; Unbowed, Unbent, Unbroken.”

Uncle made a noise with his throat and then irritably waved his hands at the guards, “Go leave us alone.” he commanded.

The guards hesitated for a moment before Doran's steely gaze reinforced his order. Sarella settled a little more in her seat, relief that uncle would hear her out properly now.

“Tell me your news,” he commanded.

“A couple of things uncle...” she paused for a moment, unsure of where to begin. She'd endlessly agonized and imagined how this conversation would go, but so far nothing was as she expected it.

“Then speak Sarella,” commanded Doran testily, some of the suspicious still in his eyes.

She'd rarely had to deal with her Uncle when he was this testy, mostly it had been father and her
sisters that had raised his ire such, as he'd said she was supposed to be the sensible one. She straightened her back and faced her uncle, banishing her fear, “There is a traitor here in Sunspear.”

Doran’s lip curled in disgust, “Who?”

“Maester Caleotte.”

His face went blank and the suspicion in his eyes disappeared and was replaced with surprise for moment before the suspicion returned and hardened into anger, “Explain.”

“Caleotte is a part of group of maesters that have been conspiring together for centuries,” she quickly answered.

Doran frowned, “To what end?”

“Simply put...they consider themselves the secret rulers of Westeros. The power behind each lord and the King. They believe themselves to know what is best for the people and have done their best to guide things towards what they believe is right and away from anything they do not approve of.”

Doran raised an eyebrow, “Audacious and arrogant of them, but you do have to admire the scope of their plans at least.”

She smiled nervously, “You're not going to say that by the time I'm finished.”

His eyes narrowed in response, “Then continue.”

She nodded, “Foremost among their beliefs, is that magic should be snuffed out and forbidden.”

“And yet here we are. Alive, as if someone turned back the sands of time as easily as overturning an hourglass,” he interrupted her with contempt.

Sarella nodded, “Well, no one could have expected what Brandon Stark did.”
Now Doran was truly surprised, “Brandon Stark?! He did this? How? He was long dead by the time I died?”

She shook her head, “He wasn't, but please uncle, let me finish. It's all linked and it's best to take it piece by piece.”

He didn't look mollified, he ground his teeth and gestured for her to continue.

She gave him a weak smile and continued, “You have to understand that this conspiracy predates the Targaryens. The divided nature of the Seven Kingdoms was to their advantage, it allowed them to push and pull the Kings towards their goals...but then the Doom happened and then Aegon came and changed everything,” she took a deep breath, “Aegon was a Dragonlord and Targaryen blood is filled with magic. Everything they did was anathema to them. They decided that they needed to exterminate them.”

She paused and looked at her uncle, his eyes were attentive, but there was no comment forthcoming, so she continued unabated.

“All through the years they pushed the Targaryens' to misstep after misstep. Oh, the dragons had their flaws and were quick to anger in many cases in their own right, but many times various maesters would push things from bad to catastrophic with a little manipulation. An ignored message here. A misquote here. An outright false message there. A poisoned heir here and there. Murder and kidnapping. Nothing was unthinkable to them and it all pushed the Targaryens towards their doom. Their anti-Targaryen campaign nearly succeeded at Summerhall. They murdered Aegon the Unlikely and Prince Duncan, but they were properly thwarted by Ser Duncan the Tall there. They betrayed and stabbed and burned him, and still he managed to save the then Princess Rhaella before dying. He has four pages in the white book of the Kingsguard. In three centuries, no knight has as many pages to his name as he does- and with what I know now, it's probably going to grow to five or six pages when someone finally writes out the truth about his part in the Tragedy at Summerhall.”

Uncle raised an eyebrow at this, though she could see his disquiet rising as well.

“...eventually by the time she was Queen, they were resorting to poisoning her, but Queen Rhaella was harder than expected, she still managed to have children despite Pycelle's efforts. When that didn't work, they manipulated Tywin Lannister against Aerys. They broke their friendship and step by step pushed Aerys from unstable to mad...”
Her uncle's eyes darkened as she mentioned the Old Lion, but she continued on unabated, her words gaining speed as she neared more recent events.

“...there was obstacles in this new plan. They knew that Joanna Lannister was reining in her husband in his dealings with Aerys...so they removed her. They secretly murdered her, for what is more natural then a woman die in childbirth? Especially when the child is malformed? Their maester let her bleed to death,” she explained.

“What?!”

Sarella jerked back in surprise at her uncle's outburst.

“They murdered her?” his eyes were filled with disbelief and shock.

Sarella silently nodded in affirmation.

Doran sat back in a pensive silence for moment before speaking, his voice was strangely quiet and without anger as he spoke, in a tone she'd never heard coming from her uncle, “I remember when news of her death came to Sunspear. Mother...mother was inconsolable for an entire day and night. The last time I'd ever seen her so shattered was the day that my father died....” He paused pensively before continuing, “Mother was the strongest woman I have ever known...seeing her like that was...painful.” She recognized the tone in the end, he sounded...mournful.

Sarella cleared her throat in discomfort at seeing this side of her uncle, “If it helps...that maester is still alive and at Casterly Rock,” she paused, “The truth will be known there soon enough.”

He stared at her in surprise, before huffing in annoyance, “At least there will be some justice in this world, Mother would be pleased that this maester will die screaming for his crime,” the word justice was stressed with angry irony. He shook his head as if clearing it, “Continue Sarella, I know there is much more that you have to speak of.”

She nodded, and gladly moved on, this was an unexpected side of her uncle that she'd never seen before, “Without Joanna there, Tywin was ready to be used against Aerys. They manipulated him to the point where he was looking at Aerys as he had once looked at the Tarbecks and the Reynes.” She braced herself for what was probably coming and shook her head sadly, “Prince Rhaegar's actions at Harrenhal didn't help. It was easy to manipulate things against him there. They intercepted messages from him, from Lyanna Stark and from...aunt Elia. They hid them all and let Brandon
Stark's fiery nature do the rest.”

She had her uncle's undivided attention now, the dangerous glint was back in his eyes.

“What messages?” his tone belied the murderous intent that she was reading in his eyes now.

She swallowed nervously, “There was one supposed to be sent to you. She...she spoke of some arrangement she'd come to with Rhaegar. She asked for you to support him when the time came.”

“And what was this arrangement?” he asked snidely.

Sarella shook her head, “I don't know, aunt Elia never wrote anything else about it. She wrote that she would explain in person when she returned to Sunspear.”

Doran drummed his fingers on the top of his desk, his expression unreadable for the most part, except for the fury, the fury was rising even as she was looking, “Continue.”

“The rest is pretty much known, the Stark's were executed and the rebellion happened, but Rhaegar...” she took a very deep breath and braced herself, silently thanking whatever gods were watching that her father wasn't here, “...had the High Septon annul his marriage to aunt Elia and married Lyanna Stark.” She tensed as she finished speaking.

…

The explosion didn't come. She frowned, her uncle didn't seem surprised about the hidden marriage.

He looked at her with veiled eyes, “I am aware of that part. I know of their son, Jon Targaryen and just where he's been hidden all these years.” he stated dryly with a wry smile on his lips.

It was her turn to be stunned. She stared at her uncle, how in the name of the Old Gods and the new did he know? Who had told him?

He saw her stunned surprise and explained, “Lord Dayne was kind enough to ask us to swear loyalty
to him soon after we all returned.”

“Lord Dayne?” she asked startled. What did he remember?

He waved her question off, the smile disappeared from his face, “That aside,” the fury had returned to Uncle’s demeanor, “Elia. Did they give no thought to her?” He demanded standing up and leaning menacingly forward on his desk, his eyes filled with unleashed fury.

She squirmed, “No. She was just in the way...” she faltered for a moment, she added softly, “...she didn't matter to them.”

“And the children?”

She squirmed more in her seat and swallowed, her own anger rising in her heart, “They wanted them dead.” she spat angrily.

Doran snarled and sat back down into his chair. Without warning, he slammed down on his desk, startling her.

“Damn them all! Damn them all to the Severn Hells!” he raged, sounding much too much like her father for her ease. “Those fucking rats!” His face was red with fury now, “Tell me. What exactly has Caleotte done here? What part did he play in Elia's death?” Doran asked through clenched teeth.

She swallowed, she knew this news would not be welcome either. *I don't actually have much good news*, a small piece of her mind noted woefully.

“None. He's been poisoning you.”

Her uncle froze, “Explain. Now.”

“Your gout. It shouldn't be this bad. The medicines he's been giving you have been making it worse...the damage has already been done, but with the remedies I have now we can at least stop it getting worse,” she finished.
Doran took several deep breaths and then bellowed, **“Guards!”**

The door of the solar opened with an alacrity that surprised her as two guards rushed in weapons at the ready, they looked at her first with anger and suspicion in their eyes. Seeing her sitting there sedately confused them. They looked to their Prince.

“**Seize Caleotte. Throw him in the dungeon and do not be gentle!”** he raged.

The guards were smart enough not to try to ask questions of their enraged Prince as they bowed hastily and rushed back out to obey.

The door closed behind them and he turned back to Sarella, “**Why?**”

“It was a part of their plan to control to Westeros. They want the lords too focused on their own concerns to wonder about other things. They try to keep a certain level of strife in each kingdom to more easily manipulate the various Lords. The Reach has felt this more than other places. The Tyrells have been sabotaged since the death of the Gardner Kings. The fractious nature of Reach politics has been because of the maesters...again they've lied, cheated and murdered to achieve their goals. Most recently, they poisoned Luther Tyrell's horse. They murdered Alerie Tyrell, she was strong, but ultimately weaker than Rhaella.”

Doran stared for a moment before slumping back into his chair, seemingly lost in thought, his expression unreadable.

“Uh..if it helps I did bring a proper replacement for Caleotte, a trustworthy one, he was appalled when the truth came out. At the Citadel, he was one of my teachers- though he didn't recognize that I was a woman, but I hope you won't hold that against him.”

Doran focused back on her, his eyes were still unreadable, “I won't hold it against him, but after all you've said I doubt I will truly trust another maester ever again.”

She winced, “Yes, that's probably going to be everyone's reactions...once the news truly spreads.”

He nodded back in agreement, “You have given me much to think of...”
Sarella started squirming again, she interrupted her uncle, “I'm not actually finished...” she admitted unhappily.

Doran glared, “You come to me speaking of treason and treachery of an unspeakable level and tell me there is more?”

She swallowed nervously, “Well...one more thing. It's...bad. Very bad.” she admitted lamely. There really wasn't a good way to speak of the Others to someone who hadn't seen them.

“Pray tell, what other dark tiding do you bring me, niece?” Doran spoke, his voice filled with caution and scorn.

Deep breath. “The Others are coming. The army of the Dead is marching on the Wall and it's going to be a second Long Night.” She blurted out hastily before she could freeze.

Doran looked confused, almost as if he could not understand the words she was saying. He sat there silent and staring in incomprehension. Silence stretched out between them.

She took advantage of his silence and continued speedily, speaking of just what she had seen at the end, “...I watched as they overran Oldtown. The dead risen from their graves. Slaughtering everything that moved. Above, the Night's King rode an undead dragon that breathed blue flames. He...he...he brought the Hightower down. It came crashing down...” she shuddered in terror, “It was....indescribable. To watch something like that....” she shuddered again. “I...died when it crashed onto the harbor.” she finished quietly.

For the first time in her memory, her uncle looked stunned and was at a loss for words. He was always planning and scheming, but how can one scheme against the Night's King? Only force of arms and a united Westeros could face him.

He sat back in his chair and rubbed at his brow, deep in thought. After several moments he muttered, “Gods! Madness! The world has gone mad. Snarks and Grumkins come to life...and Lord Dayne was warning me about this as well...” He shook himself and sat forward, a renewed urgency filling his tone, “Tell me everything. Quickly.”
Arya Stark

Arya walked down the hall leading to mother’s rooms. As she turned down the corridor, she met Ser Roderick moving towards her. The venerable master of arms of Winterfell was deep in thought as he strode purposely towards wherever he was going.

That actually wasn’t a strange thing these days. Ever since their rebirth, most people were deep in thought. To be dead and return unexpectedly was not the sort of thing that a person could take in stride- unless you were Beric Dondarrion, but that was the exception that proved the rule. Even the people who didn’t remember were just as disturbed when they were told just how bad things had gotten in the old future.

Ser Roderick caught sight of her and she gave him a genuine smile. In response, he nodded at her and gave her a guarded smile, “My Lady.” he slowed as he spoke and then sped up as he passed her. The smile may have been guarded and the words polite, but the flash of fear and suspicion had been there as well. She hid her frown inside, he’d been much warier of her after the revelations about her. The Riverlander knights and men at arms weren’t any help with their constant praising of her vengeance against the Frey’s.

Ser Roderick was family as far as she was concerned, and she loved him. The gruff old knight had always been a part of her dreams as she wished to be back in Winterfell during her travels, but ever since the truth had come out, nigh everyone in Winterfell had started to treat her differently. Septa Mordane and Jeyne were terrified of her now. She’d seen the Septa quivering in fear in front of her, though Jeyne was surprisingly starting to get better already. Even Ser Roderick treated her differently...and it broke a part of her heart every time she saw him so wary of her. She would never hurt him.

Except the Riverlanders. They were proud and boasting of her exploits to anyone who would listen. She pursed her lips as she walked, she really didn't know what to do about their adoration. And it could only be called adoration. Faceless Men were not really known or loved...and yet now she was both. She sighed, it was what it was.

On the other hand, there was also maester Luwin and Old Nan, of all people, who were treating her the same. Luwin was constantly asking about the secrets of the House of Black and White. Old Nan was asking for stories, their relationship had suffered a strange reversal of roles, but at least the old woman wasn’t afraid of her or treating her differently.

She held in another sigh that threatened to emerge. So much was changed. She had Gendry back, but that brought forth a slew of new problems. He was a bastard- and Robert Baratheon's bastard at that,
she didn't care about that, but she knew that others would...especially mother. Father might frown and disapprove or he might welcome it, after all, Gendry was still Robert's son....though the question of how Father would react the to the truth about her gnawed at her...when she let it. Would he be proud that she survived? Or would be ashamed of what she became to survive?

Her thoughts came to a halt as she reached the door to mother's rooms. She allowed herself a deep breath before knocking. Two quick raps on the door, “It's Arya, mother!” she called out.

A moment later, mother's voice came hesitantly, “C-come.”

Arya entered the room and memories began assailing her. These rooms had been a refuge when she was younger for her and her siblings. Mother used to bring them here to comfort them whenever they’d had a particularly bad day. These rooms were warmer than the rest of Winterfell. Father hadn't liked coming here much, he'd always been too warm and uncomfortable. So this place had always been mother's, and they's alone.

The familiar surroundings gave her comfort. The rooms were just as she remembered them, untouched by the ravages of the Ironborn and then the Boltons after them. The first room had a two simple chairs and a comfortable couch. It was here that mother was sitting. She occupied a corner of the couch, her sewing in hand. She looked less poised than she normally was and even appeared to be a little disheveled.

Catelyn Stark had always been the perfect picture of a Lady of a Great House...but after Sansa had revealed everything mother had retreated to her rooms, coming and going only to the Sept for prayers. She was either sewing or praying these days, withdrawing from from the daily business of ruling Winterfell. Leaving it all for Sansa; not that Sansa was complaining. Sansa had admitted that this actually made things easier for not having to deal with mother's preconceptions.

But here and now, Catelyn Stark sat stiff in front of Arya, clutching nervously at her sewing as if for comfort. She was pale and her eyes unsure as she looked at Arya. More of Arya's cracked now.

“Arya...was there something you wanted?” Mother asked in an unsure tone laced with fear.

The undercurrents of fear she heard were like a dagger in her heart. It perturbed her to see her mother afraid of her.

Arya nodded, “Yes, I wanted to talk, mother.” She took a seat next to mother on the couch. She
looked up at her and said plainly, “You don't have to be afraid of me.”

Mother's face became pinched, “I'm not afraid,” she denied weakly.

Arya raised an eyebrow, “Your body and face says otherwise,” she retorted.

Mother shook her head, “Everything is fine, Arya,” she denied again.

Arya gave her a dubious look, everything was definitely not fine, “So you're fine with me being a Faceless Man?” she asked with aplomb.

Mother jerked and nearly jumped out of her seat, dropping her sewing to the ground as her face turned white.

“I can see just how fine you are with it,” she continued dryly.

Mother clutched her hands together in her lap, trying to stay their trembling. Arya reached out a hand and stopped the shaking, “I'm still Arya, I'm still your daughter.” I'm not No One. “I would never hurt you or the family.”

Mother stared at her, her eyes troubled and fearful, “I...I...don't know what to say,” she admitted after a troubled moment, in a defeated tone.

Arya looked up sympathetically at her mother and admitted, “I don't know what to say either.”

Mother let out a very unladylike snort and stifled the guffaw that quickly followed it.

Arya looked at her mother for a moment before letting out a laugh, and giving her a wide amused smile. Mother started and then seemed to relax in response, the colour returning to her cheeks as an embarrassed look came to her face.

Arya snuggled close her mother's side and wrapped her arms around her middle. Being small again did have it's advantages here and now. She rested her head against her mother and let out a deep
sigh.

“I know that things have changed, I'm not the little girl you knew. I can never become her again, too much has happened, but...we can pretend, if only for a little while,” she stated evenly.

Mother didn't immediately react, but slowly Arya felt her shifting and her body relaxing more. Mother put her arm around Arya and gently starting stroking her hair.

“I remember you used to sing to us here. Can you sing me a song mommy?” Arya asked meekly.

She felt a shudder go through mother and then, slowly, mother began to sing.

Arya didn't pay attention to the words. So many emotions washed over her as she was nestled there cuddling with her mother. She'd dreamt of this for so many years, wished that mother could hold her just one more time after all the bad things had happened. She'd wished desperately for this so many times...to feel safe again. For the safety of mother's embrace...

It was all an illusion, there was no true safety to be found except in death's embrace...but here, now, at least for a while, she -they, could enjoy the illusion of peace for this moment.

And deep inside, a part of Arya reluctantly admitted that she didn't know who needed it more...her or mother...
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 35 Bad News

Maester Cressen

Cressen plodded along down the corridors of the Red Keep. Being Grand Maester was more tiring than he had imagined.

Oh to be young again and vigorous!

And this was just the regular duties of Grand Maester. This Return business was only making matters worse, along with the preparations for war. Although war against who first was the question. The Lannisters unquestionably had to be crushed. The Targaryens and the Tullys as well, but that matter was much more complicated than dealing with the Lannisters. The Tullys were still Ned Stark's goodfamily and any word from Winterfell had yet to come in answer to any of the ravens that had been sent.

The silence was ominous and worrying for Cressen. One or two ravens could go astray, but he'd sent far more than just one or two...

Robert had brushed off his misgivings, saying that Ned was just sulking after everything that had happened before. He was busy making plans to how he and Ned would crush the Lannisters and the Targaryens together. He was gleeful and happy as he made those plans despite Cressen's misgivings. Though with the arisen Targaryen issue, he had relaxed marginally; it lay beyond the realms of belief that Ned Stark or any Northern House would ever support a Targaryen after all that Aerys and Rhaegar had done. So there was that, despite the ominous silence from Winterfell.

With all of these uncertainties, Cressen was beginning to feel his years more and more with each passing day. He was lucky- and very glad, he had so many assistants to aid him. He sighed, there was so much to be done each day and not enough hours in the day to do everything.

He sighed again, at least the muster coming along nicely. The full might of the Stormlands was nearly assembled and much of the Crownlands had gathered as well.
The news from the Reach had also sparked envy from Robert. Mace Tyrell had sent Mathis Rowan to begin raiding the Reach border with the Westerlands. By all accounts, things were progressing well, though no major battles had been fought yet. And Tywin Lannister had yet to stir from his den or respond to the ravens they'd sent, but that was expected; at least to a point. His response would be calculated and hard, even with them holding Cersei as their hostage.

That was the extent of the good news.

The Iron Islands were silent, not that anything was expected from Balon Greyjoy, especially with his news of his planned second rebellion. He'd be dealt with permanently after the Lannisters and the Targaryens.

The Vale was still having problems, reeling from the news of Jon Arryn's true fate. Lord Royce was doing his best but things were slow going there.

On the other hand, the news from Dorne was appalling. Open fighting was ongoing and the Red Viper was cutting a brutal swath through the rebellious vassals of the Martells, after some sort of massacre at the Water Gardens. Recent reports placed him besieging the Yronwoods. The question at the forefront of Cressen's mind was whether or not Oberyn Martell would leave any alive, considering his history with that proud family. That relationship had been tenuous and terse at best during the good times. To make matters worse, Prince Doran's heir had been murdered and rumors of Kinslaying continued to come out of Sunspear.

Not that much had been expected of Dorne. That was the one mitigating factor among the bad news coming from the far south. At least this way they would be too busy to support Robert's enemies. Dornish support for this Jon Targaryen would have been a highly possible option otherwise.

Cressen sighed, ever since that night far too many things had changed, and still much was unexplained starting with just how all of this had happened. The High Septon—or rather the new replacement after what the Faith Militant had done, was still cloistered with the surviving Most Devout, trying to decide whether it was the Seven that had done this and why they would do this in the first place. What rumors he'd heard had spoken of a couple of particularly outrageous and dark theories. One Septon was even rumored to have mentioned the Others and the Long Night...though the High Septon had dismissed those claims along with the errant Septon.

Cressen scoffed mentally, the Others? Nonsense. Northern nonsense, ancient tribal legends of long winters that was all the Long Night had been. Nothing more. Nothing less.
He shook those musing off, there were more important things he had to focus on. Like the abysmal finances of the Crown, or the proper restoration of the the Goldcloaks honor. What Robert intended to do to the Lannisters would deal with half the problem with the former, while Ser Jacelyn was doing a marvelous job with the latter.

Cressen continued plodding onwards. He rounded a corner and stopped suddenly. He blinked in surprise.

“Lord Rosby?” he called out in concern.

The fragile lord was shaking where he stood, a hand on the wall to support him as he was walking forward. The Lord's eyes were wide and wild, his face pale with sweat dripping down his brow. The perpetual handkerchief he carried was damp as he continuously wiped the sweat away. The man trembled as he walked and looked about to fall over at any second.

“Lord Rosby?” Cressen called out again when the lord failed to respond.

The Lord looked towards him, his panicked eyes locking with Cressen's. Lord Rosby opened his mouth and his lips moved...but no words came out. He just continued to shake uncontrollably.

Was the man having a fit?

“Guards!” Cressen called out hastily. If the old Lord fell over, he wouldn't be able to carry him. He was too old for such things now, “Guards!”

Two men came running, hands on their swords as they approached looking for danger.

“Help Lord Rosby to my rooms!” Cressen commanded, “Quickly!”

The guards looked at Cressen and then to Lord Rosby. The men relaxed fractionally as they came to the Lords side and in next to no time, they more or less carried the shocked Lord to the maester's chambers as Cressen followed behind as fast as his old legs could move. Once there, the guards sat the Lord in a chair as Cressen hastily assembled a tonic to calm the Lord's nerves and help if the man truly was having a fit.
“My Lord, you have to drink this,” Cressen said as he held out a goblet filled with the tonic.

The Lord looked to Cressen and reached out a trembling hands. To Cressen's eyes they shook far too much properly hold the goblet. So he held the cup to Rosby's lips as the man drank hungrily.

The man coughed and Cressen stepped back, “Calm yourself, my Lord. Deep breaths. The tonic will steady you, but you must give it time to act.”

Lord Rosby's eyes were still wide and fearful, but the man's colour started to improve. He obeyed and focused on taking deep breaths. The shakes lessened but didn't disappear. Thankfully, the man didn't look like was going to keel over dead now. Proper colour was returning to his face.

Cressen turned to the waiting guards and dismissed them with a dismissive wave, “Wait outside, if I have need I will call you back in.”

The guards nodded and obeyed, closing the door behind them as they left.

Turning back to Rosby, he saw them man giving him a panicked look.

Cressen reassured the man, “It's alright, tell me, my lord, have you been having dizzy spells today or the last few days?”

Rosby shook his head fearfully, “No-no,” he began in a halting manner, “I..I..I am well. Th-the-the same cough as always.” He wiped at his brow with omnipresent handkerchief.

“Has something happened, today? Perhaps some bad news?” Cressen asked pointedly.

The man shuddered and shook in response, the fear in his eyes intensified and he mumbled something that Cressen couldn't make out.

“Please calm down, my lord. Whatever you have learned, surly it cannot be that bad,” Cressen said laying a reassuring hand on the lord's shoulder.
Rosby shot him a disbelieving look and shook his head. He mumbled again, the words were lost to Cressen.

“Please speak clearly, my lord. Perhaps, if you share whatever is troubling you, I can help?” Sharing whatever was troubling the Lord would only help calm the man, it couldn't be as bad as man was making it out to be. It was his experience that men often exaggerated their troubles.

Rosby shot him another disbelieving look and shook his head fearfully, “Dis-dis* disaster ma-maester,” the stuttering tone of the man was improving even as his shakes continued.

Cressen patted Rosby's shoulder and gestured for him to continue.

“Jo-n Tar...Targar-Targaryen.”

Perhaps he spoke too soon. “What have you found out, my lord?” Cressen's mood darkened, next to nothing had been discovered by Renly since Wode's heir had warned them of this Targaryen's existence.

“Jon-Jon Sn-Snow.”

Cressen frowned, a northern bastard? What did some northern bastard have to do with the mystery Targaryen?

“The Bastard of Winterfell is Jon Targaryen! Jon Snow is Lord Stark's nephew!” Rosby screamed in despair. “Lyanna Stark's son!”

And just like that, it all suddenly made horrifying sense...

Cressen stood for a moment not believing his ears, his mind reeling and numb from the shock, he staggered away from Rosby and fell down heavily into the nearest chair. His heart was beating like hammer against his chest, “No...no it cannot be...” he whispered in disbelief. If this was true...then Seven Kingdoms were fractured now beyond anything he could have conceived of...

Rosby's voice gained strength as he spoke, “…my meeting with the Iron Bank. Tycho Nesteros, we
spoke. He wasn't expecting us to repay King Robert's debts...he told me why! He told me the truth of it! Jon Targaryen! Jon Snow!” he screamed in the end in fearful shock. He shook again, he whispered in despair, “How am I to tell the King? How am I to tell him Lord Stark is...How maester?!” he screamed begging for a solution.

But Cressen's mind wasn't paying him any more attention, the implications of this fact were playing out in his mind as a nightmare. A son of Rhaegar Targaryen, born of the North and raised in Winterfell would be welcomed by the Lords of Westeros. He would be no outsider but a Westerosi raised by the honorable Lord Eddard Stark. Bastard or not it might not matter much. Some would have rejected the prince as false and possibly as mad as his father and grandfather...but not if Eddard Stark was backing him. They would say that the no-nonsense Stark blood would calm his hot dragon blood. And the same reasons that would lead some to reject Viserys Targaryen would endear Jon Targaryen to them. The Starks always stood by family. If Jon Targaryen was coming for the Iron Throne...then it was with his uncle's support! And they already had the Riverland's support!

The nightmarish scenario playing out in his mind was overpowering...

Lyanna Stark's son.

Rhaegar Targaryen's son.

Eddard Stark's nephew.

This was going to kill Robert...if it was true...

He came back to his senses and found Rosby was still staring at him waiting for an answer. Cressen didn't have one for him. This was just as the lord had said...a disaster.

No.

It was an utter debacle of unimaginable size.
Despite the Reach, everything was coming along swimmingly. Ravens from Daven spoke of a few minor skirmishes but nothing major, and soon enough he would parley with the commander of the Reach forces. Mathis Rowan was commanding the Reachers, which was to their advantage as the man was sensible and likely to hear them out. Though whether he remembers or not was another issue, he doubted the man would be marching to war against them if he knew the true stakes of what was coming for them all.

In the mean time, things were progressing well in the rest of the Westerlands. Men were assembling at the Rock and a second group at the Golden Tooth. As soon as word came from Winterfell, he and the might of the Westerlands would be able to move. Whatever happened with the Reach, Robert Baratheon would have to be dealt with, the increasingly angry Ravens from King's Landing were quite entertaining especially considering they were directed at his father.

His father would have been apoplectic with rage after reading how some them were phrased. Robert had, obviously, personally written some of them considering how coarse the language had been at times. Though his maester seemed to gained control after some time, not Pycelle of course, Tyrion doubted the old lecher was still alive by now.

And no matter how much his fingers itched to send them a cheeky reply, he wasn't going to send them anything till Winterfell answered him and he had a viable strategy.

On other matters, the Iron Islands had been surprisingly agreeable. Yara Greyjoy had seized command and the the Ironborn they’d seized in Lannisport and the rest of the Westerlands had been sorted out. Those loyal to Yara, had been sent back to Pyke, the rest...well fewer Ironborn were something to be celebrated no matter how good their relationship with them was now.

As for the Riverlands, Hoster and Edmure had been very threatening in their letters despite their vow of fealty to Jon. Edmure especially was turning out to be a changed man this time around. The news from the Twins was brutal and something he would have expected from his father...not the floppy fish.

Or not so floppy fish now.

The Legend of the Tully Rock of Doom...or Justice, depending on who you asked, was growing and spreading through the Riverlands and the Westerlands. The legend and stories grew more fanciful with every bard he heard it from...and dear uncle Emmon kept growing more and more white with every retelling of just what Edmure had done to his family in revenge for the Red Wedding. At this
rate, Tyrion expected that Emmon would keel over dead from fear sometime soon.

That aside, at least it was one border secure. The Tullys knew what was at stake.

The Vale was in much the same boat, Lord Royce was prepared to march for Jon, now that Lysa had been removed from power.

The Stormlands and Crownlands were Robert's as expected, though once the truth of Jon spread he expected there would be some defectors.

And he had no idea what the Narrow Sea Houses would do. He personally knew none of them. Or the state of Dragonstone. What was Stannis doing now? Actually, what was Davos doing now? Jon's Hand would be there and considering what Stannis had done at the end, he didn't expect that reunion to be happy, in any manner or form.

A quiet part of his mind, again silently marveled over the fact that he'd actually found a father that was worse than his. Poor Shireen. The little girl didn't deserve what had happened to her.

He sighed and then twinged in pain as his wounds moved. They were healing well but not fast enough for his tastes. It was a reminder of her. And he didn't need any reminders of her! The mental pain was worse than the physical pain...and he wanted to forget her as quickly as he could...but at least he was still alive. It was a rare thing that a man could undo one their greatest regrets...so there was that, at least.

He cast those unhelpful thoughts of her aside and focused back on the present.

He was sat in his solar, in his daily meeting with the rest of the Lannisters of the Rock. It was all to better keep them all apprised of the happenings as they waited for word from Winterfell. It was a new private ritual for the Lannisters in this new and changed world they found themselves in. Uncles Kevan and Stafford, Aunt Genna and Jaime were gathered here, each with their own reports of ongoings in the Rock. Daven would have been here but he was, hopefully, busy defusing the situation with Lord Rowan.

Jaime was sitting, just as smug and prideful as always. Well maybe a little less prideful, all things considered. But he was still smug. Uncle Kevan looked a little constipated. He had, ever since he'd had to turn against father...but that was to be expected after a lifetime of loyal service. He was with them now, but it still pained him. He knew what was at stake and was loyal to Tyrion now.
Uncle Stafford was a different situation, he didn't remember and was constantly surprised as revelations were thrown at him. He was still getting used to Tyrion's position as Lord of the Rock, but Cerenna and Daven, when he was here, were constantly assuring him that there was no other choice in the matter...not that he had the backbone to go against Kevan or Genna- never mind both of them at the same time. Uncle Stafford was many things, but bold was not one of them. Many accused Kevan of not having an original thought in his mind that Tywin didn't have, but the truth was, that was Stafford, not Kevan. Oh, he was a kindly man, and a proper Lannister when it mattered. Tyrion was reasonably fond of the man.

Genna was talking now, long suffering annoyance on her face, “...Well our shouting matches have stopped, and he's only been half listening to what I've been saying,” Aunt Genna said offhandedly, “his silence tells me he's beginning to understand that this is his new reality. From Lord to prisoner it's not something he can accept easily...and it shows.” she finished dryly.

Uncle Kevan shifted uncomfortably, discussing father would always be discomforting for him, no matter how much time passed. Jaime had an unreadable expression on his face. He hadn't talked to father since his return to the Rock.

“Yes, well I'm happy he's stopped shouting at you, dear aunt,” Tyrion replied, “You've always so...testy after your conversations with him.”

Genna gave him a sharp look, “Lord of the Rock you may be, but I can still take you across my knee for your cheek. None of these fools here could stop me.”

Tyrion and Jaime laughed as Kevan and Stafford gave her disapproving looks. Or at least tried to. The new dynamics at the Rock gave her much more power than under father and they knew it. Kevan didn't relent at her look, but Stafford folded and looked away like a tent without a tent-pole.

“Of course dear Aunt, I will endeavor to keep my cheek to a minimum, though I fear I shall fail miserably,” Tyrion lamented unabashed.

She huffed and sat back, “So what news?” she asked moving forward with the meeting.

“For now, the same,” Tyrion began seriously, his cheeky tone melting away, “We still have no word from Winterfell, though I expect that Ser Barristan will have reached them by now. Everything depends on what they plan.”
“And Daenerys?” asked Aunt Genna pointedly.

A pang of guilt stabbed at him, he had been trying not to think about just precarious Daenerys's position is Essos would be with this massive return of people. She had far too many enemies there...but there was nothing he could do from here in the Westerlands. Perhaps Bran was already doing something for her? Though, what could possibly be done, completely escaped him.

He answered gravely, “We pray for her. That is all we can do for her till we have dealt with Robert...”

A knocking interrupted him.

He frowned and called out, “Come!” His guards had orders not to interrupt unless it was important.

A Redcloak entered and bowed deeply, “I am sorry, my Lord. There is a messenger- a knight, from the Hightower demanding an audience. He is adamant that he speak only to you, my Lord.”

Tyrion was startled and looked to his family. They were equally startled, a Hightower knight here? He nodded back at the Redcloak and said neutrally, “let him come.”

As the guard left to obey, Uncle Kevan spoke up, “What does Lord Hightower want?”

Tyrion shrugged, but didn't say anything else, though he shared his uncle's question.

They didn't have to wait long, the messenger was a burly man wearing a heavy tabard. He had a bull's skull on a red background on his tabard, identifying him as a member of House Bulwer. A House sworn to the Hightowers, “I am Ser Walys Bulwer. Lord Leyton Hightower has personally charged me with delivering this letter to you, my lord. And only you.” the grim faced knight stated adamantly as he bowed, and then held out a thick sealed letter to Tyrion.

Tyrion's eyes narrowed as he shot the man a suspicious look, “Why would Leyton Hightower be sending me messages?” he asked out loud. It didn't make much sense, wouldn't Lord Hightower be more concerned with the happenings of the Reach, than the Westerlands? Why would he be speaking to them at all...especially considering that Jaime slew his grandson?
The messenger turned grimmer as he proclaimed, “There is a traitor in Casterly Rock. It is all in the letter, my lord.” He held out the letter closer to Tyrion.

Tyrion gave him a hard look, as he gingerly took the letter from the man’s outstretched hand. The rest of his family began mumbling amongst themselves. He paid, neither his family, nor the man any more attention as he tore open the letter and pulled out an alarming number of sheaves of parchment. Whatever the Lord of the Hightower wanted it appeared to be exceedingly complicated if he was writing so many pages and sending a cryptic courier.

He began reading. He read and read, as he blinked and balked as the sheer audacity of the maesters was explained. It was beyond even his own considerable imagination. He snorted in amusement as Leyton said they used his father, the great and powerful Tywin Lannister as a puppet against Aerys.

Then he came to the how of it and all thoughts of amusement fled from his as a maiden runs from the Mountain that rides.

His heart froze and he frowned, at first not understanding the words written in front of him. He reread it again and again. For someone who prides himself on his reading, that part of the message was read far too many times before he realised the full import of words.

Mother...

Creylen...

Mother...

Creylen...

His breathing became harsher.

Creylen...
He wanted to scream with rage. His mind raced even as he felt tears begin to flow down his cheeks.

“Tyrion?!” called out Jaime suddenly rising to his feet in alarm.

Tyrion ignored his brother. Jaime didn’t matter. All that mattered was that he hadn’t killed his mother.

*Creylen had murdered his mother!*

All the grief he had been given for it. By Cersei. By his father. And he had done nothing! *Nothing!* It was all Creylen!

That fucking traitor!

His mind went to a very dark place as he began to imagine just how he would pay back *this* debt.

All those years without her...she was stolen away from him! How might things have different if she had been here?! His mind was racing, he couldn't focus, he was experiencing so many emotions now...but most of all he felt...numb. The rage was there building, but it was a numbing rage.

“*Tyrion!*” Jaime repeated again, concern written across his face. This time, he standing by his side, he was reaching for the parchments in his hands, “What is going on?!”

He pulled the parchments away from Jaime's grasp and gaze before he could see the truth. His brother couldn't find out. *Not yet.* He held the parchments close to his chest, cradling them there.

“POD!” bellowed out Tyrion, causing Jaime to jump back in surprise.

The boy appeared with an alacrity, “My, Lord?” he asked in surprise and concern.

“*Get Bronn! NOW!*” he bellowed angrily.
Pod didn't even nod, before running off as fast as his feet could take him.

Jaime and the others were staring at him in disquiet now.

“Tyrion...what's happening?!” Jaime demanded, his expression dark and confused. “Who is this traitor Lord Hightower is warning about?”

Tyrion ignored him, he couldn't think straight, he didn't know how to react. He threw back his chair, the chair toppled and fell, but he ignored it. He began pacing back and forth in the solar, ignoring everyone, still clutching the parchments to his chest.

His chest ached. Rage and despair fought for supremacy in his soul as he tried to come to terms to this unexpected, impossible revelation.

This is how uncle Stafford feels all the time, isn't it? This is the difference between those who remember and those who don't, isn't it?

His mind was his weapon but he couldn't think clearly now. He needed to calm down and think.

He looked up suddenly, Ser Walys was still standing there at attention.

“Ser Walys, I must thank you for this service to House Lannister. We always pay our debts, consider yourself my personal guest for the time being. Rest and enjoy the hospitality of the Rock, we shall talk again once I have...dealt with the traitor.”

“I was only doing my duty, my Lord, and all traitors must be dealt with harshly,” the grim knight said with a deferential bow.

“Oh...harshly doesn't begin to approach what I'm going to do,” Tyrion promised darkly.

The knight nodded once, before leaving without further fanfare.

Tyrion resumed his harried pacing.

Tyrion cast her one look, “Once Bronn is here.” He ignored her as she again starting questioning him. Kevan and Jaime joined her, throwing questions and demands at him.

None of it mattered. All that mattered what was what he was going to do next.

Soon enough Pod returned with Bronn.

“Good. Pod go stand outside. On pain of death, tell the guards no one is allowed out before me or without my express permission,” Tyrion commanded.

Pod looked confused but he obeyed without hesitation.

He turned his attention to Bronn. Bronn had changed, gone were his old black leathers, he was wearing fine livery in the blue and gold of House Lefford, with their sigil decorating his fancy silk shirt. His recent wedding to Alysanne Lefford had been quick and small, despite the wealth of the Leffords...though he was making up for it with how he was dressing these days. As well as the more useful benefit of better armour and weapons. He still kept his prized curved dagger, but he'd replaced the handle with something more expensive.

“You called, my lord?” Bronn asked with his usual insolent tone.

Tyrion approached him and gestured him close. Bronn frowned and bent down.

“Be ready for anything and don't let anyone leave this room,” he whispered to Bronn.

Bرونn shot him a concerned look, but nodded curtly.

He turned back to his family, “Jaime...give Bronn your dagger,” Tyrion commanded firmly, “The same goes for you, Uncle Kevan, Uncle Stafford.”
Jaime and his uncles started at the unexpected command. Stafford frowned but didn’t hesitate though both Jaime and Kevan shot him suspicious looks.

“What is happening Tyrion, they- we cannot be traitors,” Genna cut in suddenly, her eyes shining with concern.

“It will all be explained in a moment, now obey me!” Tyrion shouted back loosing his temper.

Genna glared back and remained silent.

Bronn collected the daggers and then paused in front of Genna and gave her an expectant look.

“What?” she demanded irately.

He kept looking at her and then raised an eyebrow at her.

After a moment, she huffed and did something with her skirts, producing a dagger from somewhere.

Despite the situation, he found himself looking at his aunt in surprise. The rest of the Lannister men were giving her similar looks.

She cast them all dark looks and then turned back to Tyrion, “Get on with it.”

“Good, Bronn give them to the guards outside, then stand by the door.”

Again, Bronn didn’t say anything and just obeyed. It was another thing he liked about Bronn, he always knew when it was time for silent obedience. Once Bronn was finished and closed the door again, Tyrion turned back to his family.

His voice was dark and trembling as he began, “It is treachery. Foul treachery beyond bounds...”
He explained the depth and breadth of the maesters' conspiracy in small and halting words. Targaryens. Magic. Father's part in recent history.

Finally, he spoke the unspeakable words and named the traitor and his most heinous act.

Creylen...the murder of Joanna Lannister.

For a long moment, the room was frozen. He could see it on their faces. Just like him they couldn't come to terms with what he was saying. Not at first, it was too unthinkable.

But like a dam breaking, the words finally sank in.

With a yell, Jaime howled with inarticulate rage and upended Tyrion's expensive desk, scattering important missives and expensive trinkets across the floor of the solar. He kicked the desk twice cracking the wood with the strength of his rage. Tears were streaming down his face now, just as they had Tyrion's moments before. He stood over Tyrion's ruined desk and panted as he shook with rage.

Kevan was staring at Tyrion, his disbelieving look was rapidly being replaced with an enraged look that was more at home on Tywin's face than on the sedate and dependable Kevan. He stood and hurled his chair across the room, with a foul oath.

Stafford was shaking were he sat. His face turning redder than Tyrion had ever seen it. His placid uncle also had the first murderous look in eyes that he ever remembered seeing there. The hands of his chair suddenly splintered and Stafford looked down at them in surprise. He blinked not understanding what he had done.

But Genna...

There were tears in Aunt Genna's eyes. This was the first time he'd ever seen tears in his aunt's eyes. The indomitable Lady Genna was not like other women. She was a Lannister and prideful lion with a tongue to match that of the legendary Queen of Thorns....having them both in same room was a situation he never wanted to see.

She didn't cry.
She *never* cried.

Except she was *now*...

Oh, there was rage there as well. The look of unmitigated rage there was probably the same one that was currently occupying his own face.

And now Jaime...he'd never seen such rage in Jaime's face. He could see his brother's mind beginning to move. Jaime's face was frozen now and he stomped toward the door.

“*Get out of my way Bronn! I'm going to fucking kill him!*” Jaime screamed.

Bonn shook his head, “Can't do that.”

Jaime tried to push past him, but Bonn pushed him back.

Jaime's rage grew even more, “*I am going to fucking feed him his chain! One fucking link at a time!*”

“Still can't let you pass. Got orders,” Bonn retorted without budging an inch.

Jaime ground his teeth and turned around to face Tyrion, his face red he screamed, “*Get him out of my way!*”

Tyrion gave his brother a cool look, he'd expected the rashness of his brother, “Bonn...” he began, “...knock my brother out.”

Jaime's expression twisted into confusion and then disbelief as Bonn's arms were suddenly around his neck, choking him. Jaime fought uselessly, Bonn's grip was too great and he already had too much leverage. The element of surprise was too great here.

In next to no time, his brother went limp and Bonn gently lowered him to the ground. He looked up
at uncle Kevan, who was approaching him cautiously, “Don't even think about it.”

Kevan turned towards Tyrion, “Release us Tyrion. He must die.” There was more loathing in those last three words than Tyrion had ever heard from his uncle.

Tyrion nodded, “Oh, he will...but you and Jaime would kill him far too quickly.”

Kevan stared back at him coolly.

“What do you plan to do?” Stafford cut in, there was a coldness in his voice that Tyrion didn't recognize...though it was to be expected, Joanna had been his dearest sister.

“I thought that would be obvious, Creylen,” he spat the name, his tone filled with loathing, “will die a long, gruesome death. Something fitting to be a new verse for the Rains of Castamere.”

Uncle Stafford gave him wolfish smile at odds with his normal blundering manner, “Good.”

“What now?” Genna bite out, finally speaking through her ire.

“Now, Creylen goes to the dungeon while I think about something truly suitable for the magnitude of his crime...” he paused and cast a long hard look at each of them, “And each one of you is banned from the dungeons until further notice!”

Genna huffed angrily but didn't add anything. Kevan gave him an angry look.

“There is a debt owed me and he will pay it and all the accumulated interest it entails!” Tyrion crowed angrily.

“And Jaime?” Kevan asked.

“My brother will remain in his rooms until he calms down...however long that it.” Tyrion stated evenly.
“He won't like that,” Kevan retorted with a frown.

“Tough, I'm Lord of the Rock, not him. My orders will be obeyed.” Tyrion scoffed tersely. He turned to Bronn, “Come along, we have a maester to arrest.”

Bronn opened the door with a wary eye at the other Lannisters. Tyrion walked though the door and left his furious family behind, locked way in his half ruined solar.

Chapter End Notes

He he, lots of emotions here :DXD
Chapter Notes

As always, thank you all for the comments and interest! :) I was going to answer the comments from the last chapter, but I decided that you all would rather have the next chapter than responses to your comments :P I'll try and respond to the old comments over the coming few days.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 36 Paradigm shift

Renly Baratheon

He stomped to Cressen's rooms, a part of him felt like a little boy again, being unceremoniously summoned by Cressen, as if he was an errant boy in Storm's End again. But he was a grown man now and Cressen was old and grey now. He was Master of Laws now, and Cressen, Grand Maester. The entire world had changed, most recently in an *eyeblink*.

No, he wasn't being summoned to be reprimanded. If Cressen was summoning him, then he had news. The question was news about what? There were a great deal of things that they needed to know now. So what had the Grand Maester uncovered?

The world had changed around them and they were still trying to get to grips with with everything. Truths had been revealed and enemies were known to all now. And then more enemies had been revealed, some they hadn't even known existed before.

Whoever this Jon Targaryen was, wherever he'd been hiding. He'd find it all out and tell Robert. And then they'd deal with him *permanently*, just as Robert had done with Rhaegar. Then they'd put down the Lannisters and finally bring peace back to the the Seven Kingdoms.

It was a good plan...too bad things hadn't been going well, if Renly was truthful with himself. He'd found out nothing about this Targaryen or why the Tullys were suddenly turning traitor for him. The Lannisters had retreated to the Westerlands and the only words coming out of there were those that spoke of preparations for war and *winter*; all things. Winter was still years off, so why were they so enthusiastic in their preparations? It was one perplexing question on top another, in a heap of perplexing questions. In King’s Landing and the Stormlands, things were stabilizing a bit, but there were still far too many questions unanswered even after two moons.
He sighed heavily, too much uncertainty. That was the watchword of these turbulent times. He let his mind wander as he walked, and as usual his mind always came back to Stannis.

Stannis, of the unbreakable will. Dour and righteous. Diligent and harsh. Honorable but with too little sense when it came to charming people. The man who broke the Ironborn on the water, at their strongest. The man who defied the Tyrells and the full might of the Reach at the siege of Storm's End.

Except now...Stannis...Stannis was a broken man. The unbreakable was broken. Prim and rigid Stannis, had been drunker than Robert at a feast. He'd been insolent, cursing- though just as direct and blunt as he always was.

It had defied every possible possibility that Renly had ever had of their reunion, and yet it had happened. He'd seen it with his own two eyes. Cressen's remarks about Davos hadn't helped the situation. Robert had been amused by it all, but he hadn't known how to react.

What amusement Robert had had, died with Stannis's admission. It was madness. *Madness*. In the end, madness had consumed Stannis just as it had Aerys. Burning Shireen? It was rank madness of the worst kind.

He'd had so many questions...he'd wanted to demand of Stannis, *why*? Why had he resorted to blood magic? Why had he decided to kill his own brother?! But Stannis's admission had revealed the depth of his madness.

Their grandmother had been a Targaryen. Princess Rhaelle Targaryen, daughter of Aegon the Fifth. Had they inherited the Targaryen madness from her? Was the Baratheon line not as free from the Targaryen madness as was believed? That would explain much of how Stannis had been in life, the unbending rigidity...and the horrific things he had done in the end. Merely another facet of the Targaryen madness.

Stannis wasn't a problem now, well Dragonstone was more of a problem now...well half a problem, but they'd sent Lord Selwyn Tarth to take command and stock of the island and the Royal Fleet. Not that his first report from there was reassuring. It hadn't been just the garrison that had deserted Stannis. A number of ships of the Royal Fleet were gone..though he assured them that he had enough to maintain and guard their interests in the Narrow Sea, at least for now, but not much else. At least it was one more thing that they had control of now.
The biggest problem they had—other than the impending war, was the issue of a heir for Robert. Or it was one for Cressen. Renly smiled to himself, not that it was a real problem for him. With Stannis in the dungeons and Shireen missing, he was the heir.

Shireen...his wretched little niece had disappeared somewhere with Davos...

Though why the man hadn't come to King's Landing or gone to Storm's End was a mystery. Where else could she be properly protected? Did he know something they didn't? Considering everything else, it was a dark possibility.

He shook himself, dwelling too much among these dark thoughts was unproductive. He quicken his pace. Whatever Cressen had or required of him, this wasn't helping.

He finally reached Cressen's rooms and knocked briskly.

“Come!” was Cressen's almost immediate answer.

Renly entered with his head held high and with an unconcerned smile on his face, “Maester Cressen, you wanted to see me?” he asked amicably.

Cressen was sitting at a table with papers spread across the surface, he was sitting back and nursing a goblet of wine as Renly entered. He had a disturbed look that caused Renly to drop his carefree facade.

“Renly,” Cressen began gravely, “sit down please.”

Cautiously, Renly took the seat opposite Cressen. He'd rarely seen Cressen so disturbed. The last time he'd seen him like this was when he had to tell him about the beginning of the Greyjoy Rebellion. Considering that they were already technically at war, this did not bode well.

“You're not putting me at ease,” he said lightly as he sat, giving Cressen a concerned look.

Cressen's face darkened, “You should not be at ease. And you will not be at ease once I have finished.”
Renly’s shoulders tensed, he nodded and gestured for him to continue.

“Yesterday...” Cressen began haltingly, “…yesterday, Lord Rosby had a meeting with the Iron Bank. They were quite forthcoming on all they knew of the Targaryen.”

Renly’s face froze for a moment before turning grim, “Then we know who is? Where he’s been hiding?” he frowned, “And you've been sitting on this since yesterday?! You and Rosby?!”

Cressen gave him a withering look that Renly knew well, that caused him to squirm in his chair. Cressen continued on unabated, “I had to be sure before I could spread this any further...it is a disaster.”

“How disastrous?” Renly asked with dread in his gut. Cressen was not a man prone to excitement or exaggeration.

“What is it?” Renly pressed him.

Cressen told a great gulp of his wine, “Lord Eddard Stark is a traitor.”

Renly started and stared, “What are you talking about?!” he demanded fearfully.

Cressen’s face was like a grave as he explained, “Jon Targaryen is Jon Snow. Winterfell. All these years and he has been hidden in Winterfell.”

Renly gaped flabbergasted, “Why in the name of the Seven would Ned be protecting a Targaryen?!”

Cressen shook his head mournfully, “Simple. The boy is the last trueborn son of Rhaegar Targaryen...and Lyanna Stark.”

Renly jumped up from his seat in fright. Cressen had to be lying...or mistaken. “That is impossible. That...” he froze, “Wait! What do you mean trueborn?!” he thundered, “How in the Seven Hells could he be a trueborn son?! She was kidnapped and raped by Rhaegar!”
Renly didn't think that Cressen's face could get any darker, but it did, “They were married”

He collapsed bonelessly back into his chair, this was...this was... “We have to tell Robert.”

Cressen snorted, “Of course we do,” he said in disgust. He glared at Renly angrily, “But do you want to be the one to tell Robert, that Eddard Stark is rising up against him?”

Renly shrunk back, no he did want to do that! If words could kill Robert, than these probably would!

His mind reeled with endless possibilities- none of them good.

The Stormlands, the Reach and the Crownlands against the North and the Riverlands, while also fending off the Westerlands. With Lysa Arryn's actions, the Vale was a mess and could split between them and the Targaryen. The loyalty of the Narrow Sea houses would be suspect as would a number of the Crownlands and Reach Houses. The Tyrells themselves had been Targaryen loyalists and they had an eligible daughter. Mace might throw Margaery at Jon Targaryen...no that was not in question, he would do it.

Cressen was right...this was a disaster, an unmitigated disaster!

He sat there in a stupor, unable to escape from the nightmarish scenarios that continued to run through mind. Cressen sat opposite him in much the same state...even with a day's head start, Cressen looked like he was still trying to come to terms to this...this...disaster.

They sat there in silence, the only movement Cressen as he drank from his goblet, as lost as Renly.

There was one thing that he was certain of, in this new uncertain and mad world. Robert was not going to like this...at all...

xoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxox

Robert Baratheon
Robert dropped the log to the ground as he finished his final lap around the training yard of the Red Keep. Sweat dripped down his forehead, his arms and shoulders ached...but it was a good ache. The fat of his gut was shrinking, his muscles were getting harder. He wasn't the man he had been back at the Trident...not even the man who had crushed the Greyjoys at Pyke, but he wasn't the fat, wheezing, old fool he had allowed himself to become. There was a war coming, Lions and Dragons to be crushed...and maybe a couple of Trouts.

And he would be the one to do it!

A squire handed him a towel and he dried off. He threw it back and the boy dropped it.

He scowled at the boy, “You need better reflexes, boy!”

The boy hastily picked up the towel nodded nervously, “Yes, your Grace.”

So many weaklings. What where they teaching squires these days? In his day Jon had boxed his and Ned's ears when they weren't quick enough...but now? He shook his head angrily, so many damn weaklings.

He stomped off without another word. As he walked off, Ser Meryn fell in step behind him. The stupid fuck was even stupider these days. Nervous and wild eyed since their return. The man had developed a paranoid streak that would have made the Mad King proud, and it was down right annoying at times.

As for where the paranoid streak had come from, Meryn kept saying it had to do with him being ambushed and killed by a group of Bravos in Braavos that had been sent to assassinate Mace Tyrell as he dealt with the Iron Bank. Trant kept insisting that he killed them all before he died, but Robert doubted it.

He snorted and quickened his pace. He needed to change out of his sweaty clothes and prepare for the Small Council meeting. With only Renly with him, it fell to him to make most of the decisions. Jon would have laughed at the him if he could see him now.

He glanced up, Are you looking down at me now, old man? Are you laughing at me? Or are you proud that I’m finally ruling as you always nagged me to?
He paused for a moment in his thoughts.

*You're laughing at me. At the irony...*

He missed him so much these days. His hands clenched at his sides as he walked. *You didn't deserve your fate.* Betrayed and murdered by a faithless wife and an oath breaking bannerman. *And I can't even avenge you properly!* The damned Kingslayer stole that from me!

He seethed now. The golden prick, in his smugness and oath breaking had already killed Baelish. And according to Royce's ravens, Lysa was madder than the Mad King now. Totally and completely incoherent, dosed daily with dreamwine and milk of the poppy. What revenge could he take on a madwoman?

At least there were Lannisters to kill instead. They would pay for their lies. Cersei would pay for her perversions. Heh, she already was, he chuckled in amusement. Joffrey had already paid as well in a much more permanent manner for killing Ned. The time would come for the rest of them soon enough...

He paused in thought for a moment.

Well, maybe not Tyrion...good and proper drinking buddies were hard to find when you were king.

Yes, that would be fitting, giving the Westerlands to the Imp would be his final act of revenge on Tywin and his traitorous children. He laughed out loud. Tywin's precious legacy in the Imp's hands. Oh how the Old Lion would rage at that!

And Cersei! He'd seen the depth of her hatred for her brother before...and Ser Mandon's words proved that she hated him so much more than he ever imagined.

As for the Dragons, there would be no mercy for them!

Whoever this Jon Targaryen was, wherever he come from, he would be crushed! Just like he had crushed Rhaegar at the Trident. He remembered the satisfying sound his hammer made as it crushed the Prince's breastplate. Such a satisfying sound. The rubies flying off into the water and
the way he had folded into himself and fallen into the waters of the Trident.

*I avenged you Lyanna!*

*Lord Rickard...Brandon...I did right by you both!*

The Dragons can't do to anyone else what they did to you...I saw to that.

Except now one was trying to take back the Iron Throne. Where in the Seven Hells had this one been hiding?! Had he actually been hiding in the Seven Hells?!

It didn't matter! He would crush this one and make sure to deal with them all this time! After killing this Jon, he'd cross the Narrow bloody Sea and kill Viserys and Daenerys as well!

*No more Dragons!*

They would all die this time! There would be no more Dragonspawn when he was finished!

His anger dominated his mind as he reached his rooms and bellowed for a bath and clean clothes. He went through the motions of getting clean, even as he imagined just what he would do to the Dragonspawn.

The servants were hurrying about him, preparing everything. He spared little attention to anything else, as he prepared for the Small Council meeting. He finished dressing and stared at himself in the mirror. The clothes hung on him, his belly was flatter, his face leaner with trimmed and shortened beard. The *ghost* of the Demon of the Trident stared back at him.

He snorted in derision, “Too damn fat.” Lyanna would never have let him get so fat. *Damn you Cersei?* Lyanna would have smacked sense into him over the years, she'd have kept him on his toes. He ground his teeth, “Fucking Dragons.”

He left his rooms without looking back, striding confidently forward toward the Small Council room. Men and servants scurried out of his way, bowing as he passed by. Ser Meryn remained his silent and paranoid shadow.
And Gods! Ned! When he finally got over his sulk- Ned always became sulky and quiet when he was upset with him, they'd have a grand old time of it, crushing Dragons just like in the rebellion! And this time, he wouldn't let Ned go hide in the North once the Dragons were crushed. He'd name him his Hand again! Have to find some way to bind them together properly this time...maybe with one of my bastards and one of Ned's girls? No...Cat would strangle him with his own entrails if he tried that. He needed a proper heir.

Maybe Renly and Ned's girl?

OH!

Maybe his namesake and Shireen?

He paused and frowned, the boy wouldn't like having a scarred girl as a bride...but then again that was what whores were for. Though if he named Shireen his heir, the boy would become king eventually, that would make up for a lot of shortcomings.

As Robert thought about the idea, he began to like it more and more. Yes, I'll have Cressen pen the letter to Ned proposing this immediately, he thought happily. And Robb Stark had been a king. The Young Wolf, bad end aside, had been an impressive warrior king. The boy would be doubly careful now of treachery, he would be smart enough to avoid his old mistakes...yes this was an excellent idea!

Now all they had to do was find Davos and Shireen.

Buoyanted by this idea, he quickened his pace, he had a plan he needed to put into action and hopefully, Cressen or Renly would have more good news for him to go along with his good idea.

Finally, he reached the Small Council rooms and entered with little fanfare. He found his Small Council awaiting him patiently. They rose and genuflected as a chorus of subdued 'your Grace' greeted him.

He paused and then eyed them warily. They seemed unusually tense and wary. He gave each one of them a close look.
Renly was just as prim and overdressed as he always was, though he seemed a little pale and his eyes were a little wary. ...maybe even a bit fearful? Or was that grimness? Both were emotions he'd seldom seen in his brother's eyes before.

Cressen was more composed but the expression on his face was far grimmer than the usual. The grimness was a constant these days, but it was even more pronounced now.

And Rosby...the flighty, nervous bastard looked panicked. His eyes shone with unabashed terror as he looked at Robert.

Ser Jacelyn sat as unchanged and stiff as always. A good solid Stormlander that one.

Warily, he took his seat without a word. He gave them all hard looks, “What's happened?” he demanded gruffly.

“News, Robert...and not of the good kind,” retorted Renly gravely.

Renly shared a mysterious look with Cressen. Robert looked between them both, waiting for one of them to start speaking. Both took their time before speaking.

“We have some new information about Jon Targaryen,” Cressen began soberly.

The good humor his idea had given him evaporated as he scowled darkly, “Finally! Tell me you know where he is. Let's crush this last Dragonspawn and be done with it!” Robert commented savagely.

Cressen paled at his words, and their expressions turned even grimmer. Rosby, on the other hand, started to squirm uncomfortably, as Ser Jacelyn looked between them in confusion.

It was Cressen who spoke again, “It is not that simple, Robert-”

“Why not?” he cut in angrily, “Either you know where he is or you don't,” he retorted fuming at their evasiveness and delaying.
Cressen sighed unhappily, “I have spoken with the representative of the Iron Bank. He told, first Lord Rosby, then myself and Renly what he knew.”

“And?” Robert prompted angrily, gesturing for Cressen to get on with it.

Cressen and Renly shared a dire glance, as Rosby coughed and seemed to cower into his chair.

Cressen continued, “What he said, I—we could not bring it to you without confirming it. It was far too outlandish to be true...at least at first.” The old maester admitted with a mournful shake of his head.

“More outlandish than us coming back from the dead?” snorted Robert impatiently.

Cressen hemmed and hawed for a few moments before retorting, “To us- and especially to you...yes.”

Robert sat back greatly disturbed. What could be more outlandish than a magical resurrection? Concern grew in his belly as he studied the old man's expression and poise. Cressen had always been cautious when delivering bad news, but this seemed like an extreme reaction...what news could be so bad? He kept his silence but gestured for Cressen to continue.

Cressen nodded, he spoke clearly and sedately, “I spoke with members of the Faith, with Traders, merchants, ship captains, and many of the Smallfolk. Most were ignorant, while others, after much enticement, spoke of what they knew. Much of it was beyond outlandish and outright impossible...but enough admitted the truth of this Targaryen, confirming what the Iron Bank was telling us.” Cressen paused and took a gulp from the goblet that was in front of him. He shared a look with Renly, as they both seemed to be bracing themselves.

Was the news truly that bad?!

“Jon Targaryen is the son of...Rhaegar,” Cressen stated with aplomb.

Robert started for a moment before glaring at Cressen, “That's impossible!” The Silver prick has no more heirs! “All of his Dragonspawn are dead!” he exclaimed heatedly.
Cressen gave him a pitying look, “Jon Targaryen is...Lyanna Stark's son.”

Robert blinked, he heard Cressen’s words but...they didn't make sense. His precious Lyanna had no son. “She doesn't have a son. Rhaegar doesn't have any more sons!”

“It's true, Robert!” Renly added his voice to Cressen’s, “It's treason since the end of the Rebellion!”

Robert turned to glare at Renly, “This is madness! Madness! You're both speaking madness!” Robert exclaimed, they were saying words but they had no meaning! No meaning!

“Robert! Ned has been hiding him in Winterfell!” Renly shouted back in exasperation.

More words that had no meaning! What did Ned and Winterfell have to do with the Dragonspawn?!

“Robert, Lord Stark's bastard is not his son. He's Jon Targaryen...a trueborn son of Rhaegar and the Lady Lyanna,” Cressen explained slowly, “Jon Snow is Jon Targaryen,” he stated in simple words.

They still weren't making sense, what did Ned's bastard have to do with this?!

He shook his head, trying to understand what Cressen and his brother were trying to say. He just sat there in a stupor, the words repeating themselves in his mind, over and over again. Nothing was making any sense...Lyanna...Ned...Winterfell...Jon Snow...

He kept repeating the words of Maester Cressen and Renly. He knew what each word meant alone...but when he put them together...nothing.

He didn't understand...what were they trying to tell him?

He didn't know how long he sat there, trying to understand...

Suddenly, Renly slammed his hand down on the table, Robert looked up at him in surprise.
“Robert, Ned Stark! It's Ned! He's rising up in rebellion against you! Hoster Tully is supporting his grandson's cousin against you! He's standing with his goodson's nephew! Against you!”

Cressen glared at Renly before speaking, “Lord Stark...has named his nephew, King.”

“Oh...” Oh...

Suddenly, it was like a dam breaking.

Rhaegar and Lyanna.

His precious Lyanna and the damned Silver prick.

Jon Snow is Jon Targaryen.

And Ned was...Ned had...Ned is...

All at once, Cressen's misgivings over Winterfell's ominous silence came back to haunt him.

Ned; his brother, the one he loved more than his actual brothers, was conspiring against him. Him! The boy was...is Rhaegar's boy.

And suddenly he was rising from his chair. He felt like a passenger in his own body, indifferent as he saw himself unending the council table, sending goblets and papers flying. His Small Council jumping up in fright and reeling away from him and the overturned table. There was a loud wordless roaring in his ears. He realised that it was him. He was the one roaring in wordless rage. An incoherent bellow of all consuming fury.

He saw himself then kicking the overturned table, breaking off a leg. He then grabbed his chair and raised it above his head, before throwing it across the room with all of his might. Ser Meryn had just entered the room and didn't react fast enough. The chair smashed into his face, knocking him down, onto his back. Robert almost snorted in amusement at the ineptitude of Ser Meryn. Rosby's reaction
was just as amusing as he fled from the room. He watched as old and frail Rosby run from the room at a pace more suited for a *much* younger man.

Cressen and Renly were standing to the side with horrified expressions on their faces while Ser Jacelyn had moved to stand by the fallen Kingsguard. As he watched, Old Ironhand, knelt down and then started dragging Ser Meryn from the room.

He was still roaring and he were Cressen and Renly crying out to him, telling him to calm down...but his body ignored them.

He grabbed another chair and threw it as he had the first. He grabbed a third chair and smashed it against the nearest wall. Then another. And another. His path of destruction continued onwards, nothing was safe from him.

And still Cressen And Renly were calling to him, but to no avail. He continued on and eventually they fled from the room leaving him alone with his rage...

Chapter End Notes

So if anybody actually thought that Bobby B was going to take this any other way...then I think you all need to go back and rewatch season 1 again and pay attention to just what kind of man he is.

So now he knows...any guesses as to what he's going to do? ;p

As Always, don't forget to review! :D
Father's and Sons

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for the comments! It's all much appreciated :) Enjoy! And Don't forget to Comment! :D

Now that the fiasco that is Season 8 is over, back to something a little more sane...or at least as sane as Time Travel fics gets :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 37 Fathers and Sons

Robb Stark

The walls of the Last Hearth loomed up ahead. The approach was silent. The Greatjon's ominous silence did not help put the men at ease. The Smalljon had betrayed them once; had he convinced the Greatjon to turn against them as well? It was a doubtful outcome, but it still put Robb on edge that the possibility existed. A slim one, but one nonetheless.

Few could claim to be as outspoken as the Greatjon in their loyalty to House Stark...and yet here they were. In a way, he had dreaded this confrontation more than the one with the Karstarks. It had been the Greatjon that had named him King in the North. The Smalljon had been by his side until the end. They had been...friends.

And it was the Smalljon that had delivered Rickon to the Boltons to be murdered.

It was yet another betrayal in a long list of betrayals that tormented Robb's thoughts, when he let it. Theon Greyjoy, Roose Bolton, Walder Frey, Smalljon Umber, Rickard Karstark, even his own mother had betrayed him once in a rather spectacular fashion at that as well.

Was he that blind? Or just that unlucky? Would he continue to be betrayed? It was a question that haunted his mind and kept sleep from him, when he let it. Father's presence, even when he was mad, kept him sane. Jon's unflinching faith in him, in this new future that they were forging for themselves...these things were a balm to his tormented mind.
They passed the gates of the Last Hearth and entered the courtyard. The Stark guards were in front of them, followed by Jon and Father. He was behind them, while Lord Reed had elected to remain outside at the rear of their group with Rickard Karstark. Bran and Jojen were with them doing...doing whatever it was a Three Eyed Raven and a Greenseer did...

He shook his head. Their group had grown immense, the further north they went. They weren't a group now, they were an army, and eventually relief for the men of the Night's Watch. Men and supplies enough to man the Wall properly and prepare for the Others.

But that was something to focus on for later, Robb could see Greatjon now. He stood there amidst a group of Umber men awaiting them. The men were armed but didn't look like they were preparing for a fight. As for the Greatjon himself, he didn't look armed, he stood tall in the midst of his men, his face blank and his eyes flickering from father and to the Targaryen banner that flew next to the Stark direwolf.

Father and Jon dismounted, they shared a look and then Father stepped forward, his face stony and blank.

Greatjon stepped forward to meet them.

“Lord Umber,” father intoned gravely, when he was near enough.

“’The Last Hearth is yours, Lord Stark,’” the Greatjon said gravely, falling to his knees and bowing his head.

Father looked at the kneeling lord and nodded, “Thank you, my lord,” he answered graciously.

For Robb, it was a relief to hear the words spoken, but...the Greatjon remained down on both his knees, his shoulders were slumped. He looked...defeated. Robb had never seen him like this.

Father frowned at the submissiveness of the Greatjon, but he kept his face blank as he spoke, “Lord Umber....you were silent. We sent many ravens and yet you remained silent. Why were you silent?” he asked him gravely.

The Greatjon's face flushed with shame, and he remained kneeling as he answered, “My son...my son threw away thousands of years worth of loyalty...he did things...he stood with the fucking Boltons.
After that...what could I say to make it right?” he sighed deeply, “Better to be silent...I will accept whatever punishment you deem right and just, Lord Stark.” He bowed his head in complete defeat and submission.

It was painful for Robb to see the loud and bombastic Lord so reduced and quiet. Even as a child the times Greatjon had come to Winterfell, he'd been loud and rambunctious. Robb and his siblings had always loved his visits, as much as it had annoyed mother's sensibilities at times. He didn't hold Smalljon's actions against him, Greatjon was a loyal and good man...not like his son, who had proved himself false.

“Get up, Jon,” Father said in a sympathetic tone, his face warming, “We have much to talk about.”

“Aye, my Lord,” he intoned submissively, as he slowly rose to his feet. He cast a look at Jon and frowned, he gave him a long searching look, before finding his voice, “You're Lyanna's son? If she went willingly then why the fuck did Brandon go to King’s Landing in such a rage?” questioned the Greatjon, sounding somewhat more like himself now.

Jon shook his head, “Whatever my Uncle was thinking, there's no one left alive that can give us a proper answer...and there are much more pressing issues at hand.”

Greatjon's face tightened and then he fell back into the defeated look from before, “Aye...your Grace. Follow me then, my solar is this way,” he gestured forward, into the Last Hearth.

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In the Greatjon’s solar, there was a discomforted maid carrying a young boy waiting for them there. The boy could not have been more than two years old, if that, but his eyes held more focus than Robb had ever seen in someone so young.

“Welcome your Grace, we've been waiting for you,” the small boy spoke in high pitched, childish voice as they entered.

Robb goggled and gaped, at the very articulate small boy. Father seemed just as taken aback, while Greatjon looked discomforted now. Well, more discomforted than before.

Jon frowned and stared for a moment before saying, “Ned?”
So this was Ned Umber? Robb eyed the young boy unsure of what help such a young child could give them. Jon had been adamant that Ned could help them. Not that with the way things were going they needed much help. The Greatjon was being very reasonable and obedient.

“Yes, your Grace,” the small boy- Ned apparently, confirmed with a wobble of his head.

Jon raised an eyebrow at him, “You're very...young.”

Young Ned raised his hands and looked at them, “Aye, young. I was small before. I'm even younger- and smaller now...” he sighed unhappily.

“This seems very...strange?” Jon questioned warily.

Young Ned snorted, “I'm small, weak and my good days are the ones were I manage not to piss myself. My really good days are when I manage not to shit myself...” he retorted in exasperated disgust.

Jon coughed behind his hand, concealing a smile, “It's all part of the plan. We could have all stayed dead.”

Young Ned sighed and nodded, “Still better than being dead,” he paused and then cast a lecherous look at his nursemaid and then winked at Jon, “Though there are some advantages to being so small again.”

A child that young should not have been capable of such a lecherous look....

Jon guffawed, “Yes, apparently,” he said as the nursemaid turned an interesting shade of red.

“Also, I'm not the only one that’s so young again. Can you imagine Lyanna's reaction at being so small again?” Young Ned asked with trepidation.

Jon looked taken aback and then winced, “She's not going to be happy.”
Ned Umber snorted and then shook his head, “No offense....but better you than me, your Grace.”

Jon winced again and frowned, “Great...another thing to look forward to,” he stated dourly, sounding more like the old Jon, then their new King.

“Lyanna?” asked Greatjon in confusion.

“Lyanna Mormont, Lady of Bear Island- or former Lady. Her mother and sisters are alive again,” Jon explained offhandedly.

Jon waved away any more questions and turned back to the issues at hand, namely the Smalljon and the coming Winter.

The nursemaid placed young Ned on the table, next to his grandfather and left them to discuss the issues. Robb's disquiet at Greatjon's previous expressions and discomfort paled as they finally sat and he began speaking.

“...I beat him bloody...I almost made myself a Kinslayer. A Kinslayer and betrayer! My ancestors will beat me bloody when I die now, for how low I've allowed our House to fall...” the Greatjon shook his head, his voice sounded dismal and dismayed.

It was still jarring and unnatural to see how the Greatjon's great booming nature had been tempered so. Not that he could blame the Greatjon for his shame.

“But you didn't Jon,” Father cut in, trying to reassure the Greatjon.

He snorted angrily, “That damned boy! He came to me after we returned, he told me such things! When he told me what he did I was so angry! I raised him better than that! To break our vows to you? To stand with godsdamned fucking Boltons?!” he shook as he raged, “The next thing I know, five of my men were dragging me off of him. I beat him bloody- I broke his jaw...the maester had a hell of a time putting him back together. Afterwards...” he cast a glance at Jon, and then jerked a thumb at young Ned, “this one started talking about Dragons and White Walkers and the fucking Dead and I thought I was going mad...then I got your ravens and...well...” he shrugged, “I realised the world's gone mad.”
“I wouldn’t go that far….but it isn’t the world we thought it was,” Jon admitted grudgingly.

“Aye, that’s true,” added Father with a mournful nod of his head. Robb could only nod along with his father at that truth.

Things turned towards what was next and with a minimal effort and many ‘yes, my lord’ or ‘yes, your grace’ from the Greatjon, explanations were given, allies were named, a certain Lion was named and still there was little reaction from Greatjon, even though Father started twitching then. Peace with the Wildlings was mentioned and still Greatjon remained quiet and obedient, much to Robb's immense surprise. The bare bones of a plan were made for their travel to the Wall. As for the Smalljon's fate...

“…he can take the Black and that will be end of it,” Jon said cutting off the Greatjon's darker punishment options that he offered in shame and contrition.

Greatjon sat there for a minute, his face blank and unblinking, before turning to Jon and admitting gruffly, “You may be a fucking Targaryen but there's enough of the North in you for me to like you. You didn't have to give my Ned another chance- but you did!” he boomed, sounding more like himself. He shook his head disbelievingly, “You were betrayed. You could have attained me and mine, and not a Lord in the North or South would have called it unfair or unjust.” The Greatjon took a deep breath, “For that and that alone, you would have had my fealty...” he raised his hands gestured at them all all, “But we have this second chance as well because of you. We will be loyal. I will never let our fealty waver ever again. We stand with you till the end- no matter what happens next.”

Now this sounded more like the Greatjon that Robb knew. The sure and confident tone that brooked no argument had always been a part of the Greatjon.

Jon nodded, “And I accept your fealty, freely given, and I will make sure that you have no reason to question your fealty to me.”

And just like that the North was finally, and rightly, united once more behind Father and by consequence, behind Jon.

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Arya Stark
Arya was unhappy with how things had changed, she had become used to respect in the last life, and then they were back in Winterfell and she was Arya Underfoot again. That hadn’t actually been a bad thing. It had almost been idyllic, even with the threat of the Others hanging over them and need to rush to bring the Kingdoms together under Jon. The Stark men she’d always known had been clueless of the truth. Then Lord Manderly and Reed had come...and the Stark men had seen how they dealt with her with respect and wariness. Most had realised that something was different. They’d started to treat her with respect without knowing the truth.

But then came the Riverlanders.

They came to Winterfell, and the respect had turned to fear as the Riverlanders practically shouted out the truth from the top of the parapets. Uncle Edmure's new song, *the Rock of Doom*, hadn't helped considering it spoke of her actions at the Twins as well.

She still didn't know how to react to how much they were singing her praises. But she did know that she wasn't enjoying being so feared by those that she had considered near and dear to her. Every time she saw Fat Tom now, he seemed to be on the verge of swallowing his tongue in fear. Even mother was afraid of her now.

She sighed, it had been fun, pretending to be who she had been once. Little Arya Underfoot. To be young and carefree again...before all the bad things happened.

These days, for the most part, she didn't have anything to do in Winterfell. Sansa dealt with everything and instead Arya spent most of her time training, getting back into shape and teaching her young body all the tricks she'd known as a grown woman. But she was listless now and wandering aimlessly today. Gendry was making her gift, she was humoring him and pretending that she didn't know that he was reforging Needle for her. She had gotten bored sitting with Shireen. The scarred girl was enjoying her stay in Winterfell, usually spending her time either with Ser Davos or with Rickon and Osha. For some reason Rickon had taken a liking to her scars. Osha wasn't afraid of them, though the other Wildlings were terrified to approach her. They'd seen Greyscale beyond the Wall and weren't convinced that it wouldn't spread to them. Hot Pie was busy in the kitchens, and Lommy was busy being molded into a reasonably competent swordsman along with the rest of Ser Roderick’s recruits.

She paused, Lommy had been a pleasant surprise, even if he'd been nasty to her a lot the time, when she had been pretending to be a Night's Watch recruit. He'd still been a friend...sort of...she'd been angry with Pollivar when he murder Lommy- more so that he'd used Needle to do it as well! Well he’d gotten the pointy end, she could still kill him again now- that was something to look forward to...but Father probably wouldn't want to hear about it...

Lost in thoughts of revenge, she found herself coming to one of the sewing rooms in the castle. Or at
least that's what she'd always called them. She'd always hated these rooms growing up, sewing was boring and Septa Mordane had always picked on her while praising perfect Sansa. A small part of her had enjoyed seeing the Septa be disappointed with the new Sansa and then terrified of little Underfoot once the Riverlanders had told her all that she'd done at the Twins. At least in the beginning, now it just saddened her to see the Septa so terrified. She sighed and entered the room. Inside she found it almost empty, Old Nan was sitting alone on a chair sewing. Arya stood there for a few moments just watching the old woman sew.

Old Nan looked up and saw her, “Well come on, girl, bring a chair and come sit by me,” she ordered her without hesitation.

She pulled up a chair and sat next to the old woman, grateful for the unchanging manner that she was being treated. Old Nan had always and still treated her the same.

“I can see the worry in your face, Arya,” Old Nan said slowly putting aside her sewing.

Arya nodded solemnly.

“You're mother's still afraid, isn't she? They all are, aren't they,” Old Nan stated sympathetically.

“I can understand why they're afraid,” she admitted mournfully.

A very deep and dark part of her was fearful of how father would react. Would he be disappointed? Angry? Ashamed? She didn't think that she could deal with that. That would be too much for her. And Robb? She didn't know what he would do...would he be happy with what she did to the Freys?

Old Nan was staring at her now, “And you're more afraid of what my Ned will think as well,” she added evenly.

Arya started, before nodding slowly.

“He's your father. Ned can be thick skulled at times, but that's normal for him. As for the rest...they think that you would actually hurt them? The more fools them,” scoffed Old Nan in disgusted annoyance, “Especially that mother of your's, for thinking such absurd things. You are and will always be Arya Stark. My Ned taught you well, you're only dangerous to our enemies. You'd never hurt any of us.”
Arya gave her a small smile, of all the people to understand, it warmed her heart that Old Nan did.

“Don't you worry, your mother will come around eventually, best to give her time,” Old Nan continued unabated. “Now that Gendry of yours seems like a good lad,” she finished with aplomb.

Arya's face froze at the sudden change of topic, “He's...nice.”

Old Nan snorted, “Nice? Yes, because all men wish to known as 'nice',” she paused and gave Arya a mysterious smile, “Though I didn't take you to be the kind of girl that likes their men so solidly build. Blacksmith's apprentices always have such big hard muscles. I always thought you'd prefer someone that was more wiry.”

Arya felt her cheeks heating up, at Old Nan's sudden change of subject. Gendry was not something anyone had wanted to discuss with her these days. Mother had been avoiding the subject- the whole Faceless issue was more pressing, but she expected it was something that would be broached latter on...if mother ever managed to pull herself back together. Father would have words with her as well, once he returned.

“...But I'm woman enough to admit that even I enjoy big muscles on my men as well,” Old Nan admitted with a soft cackle.

Arya's face reddened, as her thoughts were brought back to the present. Speaking about such matters with Old Nan was not something she had ever imagined she would ever do.

“You know, there was this knight that I knew...so many years ago. He was built like a tower, square hard shoulders and such big arms. A southerner true, but never had I met such a humble, kind hearted man- then or now,” she gave Arya a mischievous wink, as Arya turned an even deeper shade of red.

Old Nan laughed at her discomfort, “Oh my...” she paused as the smile disappeared and she gave Arya a deep thoughtful look, “I was going to say, my sweet summer child...but you're not a summer child any more...are you?”

The heat in her cheeks lessened as she shook her head mournfully.
Old Nan looked at her gravely, “No, you've seen the worst of Winter. Moreso than even I, with all my years, have seen, haven't you?”

Arya shrugged, “Jon and Sansa saw worse.”

Old Nan nodded, “That's true, doesn't make my words wrong though.”

Arya didn’t answer, she just nodded in agreement.

Silence settled on them as they both become lost in their thoughts. It was broken eventually by Old Nan.

“What happened to Willas? I know I died here, so did so many others, but what happened to my Willas?” Old Nan asked with thinned lips, “What happened after the Ironborn came?”

Arya took a deep breath, “Bran and Rickon escaped with Hodor and Osha and the Reeds. They made their way north. Hodor went with Bran beyond the Wall...”

Old Nan looked stricken now at the thought of Hodor beyond the Wall.

“...He carried Bran to the lair of the Three Eyed Raven and the Children of the Forest-”

“The Children? They were with the Children of the Forest?” Old Nan grinned, interrupting her. The thought of the Children momentarily overrode the darkness of the topic.

Arya nodded, yes that would catch her attention, she'd spoken so many times about them, the woman would finally be vindicated that she was right about them still being around.

She continued the tale that Bran had told her, “They were hidden away for a while in cave as Bran learned from the old Three Eyed Raven, then...Bran says it was his fault. The Night King personally came for him.” she said gravely.

Old Nan's excitement over the revelation of the Children of the Forest disappeared and she came to
sit at the edge of chair, her hands clenched together in trepidation.

“There was a fight. The Children died protecting them...so did Summer, but there was a passage out of the cave with a single door. Hodor dragged him out and then held the door long enough for Bran and Meera to escape.”

Old Nan looked aghast, sorrow aging her already old features. She was silent for a long time before finally speaking. “Old Gods protect us...I always knew that the boy was just like his great grandfather. I could always see it. Dying for his friends just he did,” she lamented sadly, shaking her head, “I always knew he'd have a bad end. I tried to protect him so much...I wouldn't even let him pick up a sword and shield...and it still didn't work.”

Now Arya was confused, bad end? She gave Old Nan a searching look, “Didn't your husband die of a chill? In his bed?”

Old Nan looked a little chagrined, before admitting, “Yes, he did.”

Arya frowned, “Then what bad end are you talking about?” she asked in confusion.

Old Nan squirmed more in her chair and then sighed, she shrugged, as if coming to a decision, “My husband wasn't Willas's great grandfather.”

Arya started and gaped at her in surprise, “What?”

“I've never told anyone this before. My first born son, wasn't my husband's,” she explained in a tone that belied how shocking the words were to Arya.

Old Nan had cuckolded her husband? Old Nan?! This...this...was...disappointing...what happened to all her tales of loyalty?

Arya's disappointment must have showed on her face because, Old Nan scowled at her, she reached forward and cuffed Arya lightly on the ear, “And before you start getting all high and mighty with me, I broke no vows to my husband. He knew that my son was never his and he loved me enough to marry me still. I was never going to marry my knight, I was never going to leave Winterfell,” she huffed unhappily.
Leave Winterfell?! She tried to imagine growing up without Old Nan and her tales and couldn't. Arya bit her lip, “Then who was he? What happened?”

Old Nan's cheeks grew red as she admitted sheepishly, “It was that strong knight I was telling you about. He was only visiting Winterfell.”

Arya's mind went to a dark place, she'd seen the darkness of men's souls after escaping from King's Landing. A knight's vows were only words, “Did he... did he...”

Old Nan understood Arya's hesitation and her eyes hardened and anger flashed in them, “Never. He was the very best of men.”

And again Arya was confused, “If he was a good man, then why'd he dishonor you and leave?”

“Simple. I never told him I was with child,” she answered with a simple shrug.

“Why?”

“He was leaving Winterfell, I was never going to leave my home. Bran the Builder may have been the one to have built Winterfell, but my kin were right by his side as he did it. We've been here as long as you Starks. We've always served your house and your kin have always done right by us. I wasn't about to throw that away- not even for love.”

Arya was impressed, “I didn't know that.”

“Home is home, child, High born or Smallfolk, we all have our duties, and the Starks have always kept their word. Southern Kings come and go and the Starks endure. And we stand with you.” Old Nan finished vehemently.

Arya blinked, she'd never heard it put this way. Back to the issue at hand, “Oh, alright. So who was he?”
A bright smile came to her old face, “Oh, he was from King’s Landing. Born and raised in Flea Bottom. He rose up and became a knight thanks to a kind old knight that made him his squire. When he became a knight, traveled all across Westeros with his squire, from Dorne to the Wall,” she paused and chuckled, “they actually made it all the way from Dorne to Wall. They’d seen Starfall and Sunspear and they made it all the way to Castle Black.”

“That’s impressive,” Arya said with an envious edge.

Old Nan nodded, “Aye it is, a part of me wanted to join them, but the road was no place for an expectant mother, and if I’d left I’d never have come back. It was a hard choice, but I’ve never really regretted it...anyway, my knight was such a kind hearted and honest man, I’d not expected a Southerner to be like that. Honest to a fault, and a man that went out of his way to keep his vows, no matter what it cost him. He was more dour than I expected when I first met him, he was trying to forget a woman, when he came here,” she sighed heavily then snorted, “his strange little squire didn’t help my expectations either...a strange, strange boy that shaved his head. What kind of boy chooses to shave their own head?”

Arya shrugged, disquieted by Old Nan's descriptions. Though it all sounded somewhat familiar for some reason.

“His squire truly was a strange one, much too cheeky for such a small and lithe boy. He got into more than his fair share of scraps because of it, and never once did his Ser clout his ears or give him the back of his hand. Even with me, he took several liberties. So one day, I took him across my knee and I tanned his hide just as I’d seen my mother do to my brothers, when they misbehaved. The boy couldn’t sit still for a whole day afterwards...but at least he learned to keep his tongue stilled. Got into less fights after that as well,” Old Nan admitted with an amused and musing tone.

“Everyone always wants to hit Squires,” Arya stated with an amused grin.

Old Nan frowned, “They do? Well that explains a lot...” she finished thoughtfully.

“At least that’s what I’ve been told,” she answered with a shrug. Pod had told her that. And Bronn had told him that- after hitting him. “So what was his name?” Arya asked, and how hadn’t she heard of him before?

Old Nan gave her a very long look, “He was a very tall knight with a strange bald squire. I thought I was rather obvious in my descriptions of them,” she huffed in annoyance.
Arya looked at her blankly, and shook her head, who was she talking about?

When she didn't answer, Old Nan gave her another disappointed look, “I’d have expected a Faceless Man to be more intelligent than this. How many famous knights have come to Winterfell? And how many stayed for any amount of time?”

Arya frowned, the only knight that came to mind was the Kingslayer, and he was much too young to be Hodor's great grandfather.

Old Nan gave an exasperated shake of her head, “Perhaps you still are a summer child.”

Arya gave her an offended look at that.

“But Duncan. It was Duncan the Tall. My dear, kind, and sweet Duncan,” Old Nan admitted with a heartfelt sigh, “He had such broad and strong shoulders- I couldn't resist him.”

Arya's mind came to a crashing halt at the admission. What the actual fuck....Old Nan and Ser Duncan the Tall?! Lord Commander of the Kingsguard Duncan?! That Duncan? The greatest knight in the Seven Kingdoms?

Her face must have betrayed her questions, because Old Nan nodded her head, “Yes, the Duncan the Tall. The knight who never forgot his vows. Why do you think that I repeated his stories so many times to all of you? He deserves to be remembered, him more than most men.” She stopped and a stricken look came to her face, “When news of Summerhall came, it had been so many years since I’d seen him last...yet I was inconsolable, I cried myself to sleep for an entire moon. It was as honorable an end as all knights want...but Duncan didn't deserve that. He should have died in his sleep, at peace and surrounded by all those that loved him.”

Arya was at a loss for words, Old Nan's tales of Ser Duncan had always been one of their favorites, especially Bran's. At least before he became the Three Eyed Raven. And now she was telling her that Ser Duncan the Tall was Hodor's great grandfather?!

“When I first saw Willas, I realised he had the same gentle heart that Duncan had had. That was what I loved most about Duncan, his gentle heart,” Old Nan sighed mournfully.

“Gentle? He was Lord Commander of the Kingsguard...I don't think gentle was something anyone
would say to describe him,” Arya questioned baffled at Old Nan’s description.

“So? All men fight. Not all men like it. Duncan was good at it, but he didn't enjoy it.”

Arya sat back in her chair, Jon had said the same thing. It seemed the best ones never liked to fight. She was overwhelmed by all that she'd heard now. Old Nan and Duncan the Tall. That had come out of nowhere to hit her. The stories of Ser Duncan the Tall and Aegon-

She froze, running through all that Old Nan had told her. She didn't...

She gave Old Nan a gaping look, “You tanned the hide of his squire?! His squire? Aegon Targaryen?!”

Old Nan shrugged nonchalantly, “I didn't know that at the time- but I'll admit that when the truth came out that his squire had been a Royal Prince, I was more than a little discomforted. Then he went and became King. Yes...those were some interesting days. Wasn't really sure what to do about it at the time. Oh, I knew that Duncan wouldn't have let Egg do anything to me, and he'd been a young boy at the time, still made for some disquieting moments at the time,” she admitted simply.

Arya now gaped in awe of Old Nan, “Wow.”

Old Nan grinned at her, “You're the first person I've ever told this story to.”

Arya closed her mouth and said, “Thank you.”

“It's easy to get lost in old memories when you're my age- and it's good to share them with someone,” Old Nan admitted, and then she gave Arya deep look, “But you shouldn't be worrying so at your age,” Old Nan reassuringly patted her hand, “And don't you worry about my Ned, if he has a problem with you, I'll knock some sense into that thick skull of his. Just like I did to Aegon Targaryen.”

Arya giggled, just imagining the Lord of Winterfell being taken to task by Old Nan.

Old Nan gave her a dry look, “Don't think I won't do it.”
“I know you would,” Arya retorted, with a pleased smile, “Not even Kings are safe from you,” she finished cheekily.

Old Nan chuckled and nodded, “Good. Now get off with you, I'm sure you have more important things to do than sit and gossip with an old woman lost in old memories...unless you're finally going to tell me about this House of Black and White that Luwin's been going on and on about?”

Arya shook her head ruefully, “Still not going to tell you- or Maester Luwin about that.”

“Then get going,” Old Nan shooed her, “I'm sure that muscled man of your's wouldn't mind spending more time with you.”

Arya blushed and didn't answer her, she just bowed her head and left the old women to her sewing and her memories.

Chapter End Notes

So yeah I decided to use Dunk and Egg :D I love the series and even before the disastrous S8 finale I've been more excited for their tales than the main canon story. So I just had to use it here :D I hope you all enjoyed this surprise! :D Don't forget to comment! :D
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 38 Clearing up misconceptions

Mathis Rowan

_At least this is a distraction from finding a husband for my slut of a daughter..._

Or at least that's what Mathis kept telling himself ever since he'd been tasked by Mace Tyrell to raid the Westerlands. This...'return' business was disturbing to the extreme. Magic was a dark thing and for it to be so wide spread, disturbed him greatly.

The changes wrought by it were even more so...some people barely resembled who he once knew. The news from across Westeros deified understanding. Each raven he received made his heart beat faster in trepidation of what new calamity was being declared.

Those first few weeks had been uncertain and off putting. Goldengrove had been relatively untouched. Only a few of the smallfolk had been affected and brave enough to speak up. Brave to the extreme considering that they spoke of the Queen's treason. And Renly's. And Robb Stark's. And the Tullys'.

He paused, _bravery or stupidity?_ He asked himself.

He nodded, _Stupidity._ Stupidity to accuse so many of the Lords of Great Houses of treason. That farmer spent the night in Goldengrove's dungeons for his admission. The raven from Highgarden confirming everything and adding Dragons to the mix had come the next day.

He shook his head, the Kingdoms were shattering as he sat there idle in his castle. Such strange and disturbing tidings. The news of Loras Tyrell's death had not been well received, that was one less possible suitor for his girl; and considering the boy's true proclivities, his girl's failing could have been easily overlooked with a favorable arrangement between them. The dornish managed such things, it should have been easier for him to arrange something similar...but alas it was not to be.
The Dornish and Dorne.

Even this far north, the dark rumors that were reaching him were startlingly bad. Civil war running rampant and the sands of Dorne running red with dornish blood. He snorted, the gods willing they'd finally manage to wipe themselves out and then they could go and claim their lands for themselves. The Seven Kingdoms would be better off without the Dornish.

But all this brought him back to the here and now. He sat in his tent, his battle plans laid out in front of him as he decided where the first real assault would take place. A quick and sudden strike would have been preferable, but the Lords of West had been uncharacteristically reluctant to engage in battle. Normally, just like their liege, they were not shy about protecting themselves...so why were they avoiding his forces?

The Old Lion would have met his first raid with overwhelming force, followed by sending the Mountain into the Reach to sow chaos and suffering where ever he rode.

And yet none of this had happened.

The Westerlands' patrols had gone out of their way to avoid any bloodshed. Even their smallfolk had been uncharacteristically cooperative. Most still fled, but those that couldn't, had been very forthcoming with minimal to no threats. All of which added up to...well he didn't know what it all added up to. The only thing he was sure of now was that the Tyrells were swearing fealty to the Targaryens again and Robert Baratheon had just lost the two most powerful and rich kingdoms without noticing.

Of course, that still left Robert with the Riverlands, Crownlands, Stormlands, the Vale and the North. The Tyrells would have to be clever about this, Robert still had the numerical superiority. Oh, there would be other Houses in the Crownlands and Stormlands who would side with the Targaryens. Darry would join from the Riverlands, this would be their one chance to regain all that they had lost in the Rebellion, but no one else there would join them. To say nothing of the North. The North Remembers, they would never support the Targaryens again. The Vale—perhaps some would, but again most likely none. It was all a prickly position to be in.

Perhaps he should rethink his loyalty to the Tyrells?

For now, Robert was in the stronger position...but if this Daenerys Targaryen had truly hatched dragons...then no matter how strong Robert was, he would never win against that.
So many possibilities, so many options and none of them that explained this return business.

He let out a disgusted noise, filled with his displeasure.

*Focus on the Lannisters now, I'll let things settle more before deciding my next move.*

This mental decision settled his humors some, as he turned back to the map of the Westerlands spread out in front of him on his table.

Perhaps a thrust at Cornfield and the Swyfts. Cornfield would a be a good staging area for further assaults into the Westerlands. The fact that Kevan Lannister's wife was also a Swyft by birth would add weight and urgency to their need to relieve the castle if attacked. There would also be many paths forward from there, but it would also leave them exposed to many avenues of counterattacks. The position of the castle was both an advantage and a disadvantage.

Mayhaps, Crakehall would be a better? Somewhere more defensible. And also more famous. That would make a strong statement of power to the Lords of the West. Not to mention the humiliation having the Crakehalls defeated. He smiled ruefully. Yes, that would be a better option than Cornfield despite their close ties to the Lannisters. That was an act that Casterly Rock could not ignore. This would force their hand.

Finding Tyrion Lannister was another option, if a much more difficult one. If not out right unfeasible and impossible. He had been Daenerys's Hand, much to his surprise, but if they could install him as Lord of Westerlands, then with the combined might of the Reach and the Westerlands, things would be much more different...of course Tyrion would have to surrender his brother to appease the Tyrells but the Imp, for all his perversions, was a sensible fellow.

Mathis's musing was interrupted as one of his men entered his tent unannounced.

The man held a serious expression on his face as he bowed and genuflected, “My Lord, forgive the intrusion, but we have sighted Lannister banners.”

Mathis rose from his chair in alarm, “An attack?” he interrupted the man in concern.

The guard shook his head, “No my lord, the Lannister men approach under a flag of parley.”
Mathis raised an eyebrow in surprise, as his alarm lessened and his confusion returned in force. Where they going to be reasonable? Since when were Lannisters reasonable when threatened?

He nodded, “Fine, gather the Lords. Let us meet them in force and see what they want.”

The Lords were assembled in a large tent to meet the Lannister emissary. A great gathering to intimidate the Lannister emissary. The Reach would not be denied. Lady Arwyn Oakheart of Old Oak, sat to his right, composed and suspicious while Lord Lorent Caswell of Bitterbridge sat at his left, his face impassive with the scowling, the red apple Fossoway of Cider Hall sitting as at his other side. These were the major lords- and Lady that had marched with him into the Westerlands.

The rest of the lords were minor ones, most sworn to one of those three or directly to Goldengrove. And all had been sent to avenge Loras Tyrell's tragic death. The might of the Reach was being mustered and this was only the vanguard, soon the Lannisters would pay in blood.

And afterwards...afterwards the real conflict would begin; to restore House Targaryen to it's rightful place- something which Mathis still had doubts about. So here they were, taking the first step towards this strange new future.

He sat in the midst of the Lords and Lady waiting for the Lannister emissary. His guards entered the tent first, ahead of the Lannisters. A pair of Redcloaks came in behind them. Then the Lannister emissary entered, his armour similar to his guards but even from where he sat he could see that it as of better quality than his men. He had the standard Lannister features the golden hair and green eyes along with the smug arrogance. The man walked in assured of his power and followed by two more Redcloaks.

The Lannister looked over the assembled Reach Lords and stepped forward and bowed, “My Lords,” he eyed Lady Oakheart, “My Lady. I am Ser Daven Lannister. I believe there is much we need to speak of.”

Mathis eyed Daven warily, so this was Stafford Lannister's son? Stafford was not the most competent of men, but it was said his son was a better man, “Welcome Ser Daven, I am Lord Mathis Rowan,” he gestured to the assembled Lords, “I speak on behalf of the lords here, and my liege Mace Tyrell, Lord Paramount of the Reach. He is understandably wroth after recent events.” He stood up and stared at Ser Daven with stony eyes. He stood there staring down Daven. His fellow
lords joined him in trying to intimidate Daven.

Ser Daven smirked and nodded, his voice oozed arrogance, unmoved by the steely silence and glares of the amassed Lords and Lady, “That is understandable. It is good that you speak for your liege. I speak on behalf of the Lord Paramount of the Westerlands, Shield of Lannisport, Lord of Casterly Rock, and Warden of the West...Lord Tyrion Lannister.”

And just like that the world was turned upside down.

Again.

The other Lords were murmuring around him as the implications of Ser Daven's unexpected revelation changed his carefully laid, almost finished, plans. He fought off a sigh at his wasted effort.

He cast quick glances at Lady Oakheart, who's face had gone blank, and Lord Caswell, who was too stunned to hide his true feelings. Not that he could blame either one, Tywin's sudden death would change things greatly. And it made his job immensely more easy.

Mathis cleared his throat, “Well then, you have my condolences for the loss of Lord Tywin, he was a...mighty Lord.”

Daven nodded, “Ah, forgive me but Lord Tywin is not dead, he has been removed as Lord of Casterly Rock. He is Lord Tyrion's guest now.”

Mathis started, Guest? Prisoner more like it. A coup in Casterly Rock and Tywin deposed, a prisoner in his own castle. If the Imp was sending emissaries in his name, then his position must be secure, though that begged the question of what happened with Ser Kevan? Probably caged like his brother. Mathis fought of the urge to laugh at the Old Lion caged like that. A degree of seriousness was expected of him...he would laugh later.

He cleared his throat again as the Lords' murmuring continued, even louder, “Indeed. So is Lord Tyrion aware of why we are here?” he asked getting right down to the matter at hand.

Daven cast an wary eye at the assembled lords and nodded, “He is aware. Ser Jaime is in Casterly Rock and has told him what happened in King's Landing.”
The murmurs of the Lords took on an angry tone.

Mathis nodded gravely, “Then he is aware that debts must be paid for peace.”

“We are both aware of Loras Tyrell's death...but I believe that you may be unaware of all the circumstances surrounding it,” Daven replied dryly, “Ser Jaime had much to say about it-”

Lord Caswell scoffed and interrupted, “As if we'd believe anything that the Kingslayer has to say. He was always a treacherous knight. This is but more lies on his part.” He glared at Daven

Daven met he glare unflinching, and continued as he wasn't interrupted, in a light even tone, “...As did Ser Barristan Selmy.”

The Lords' murmuring took a confused edge.

Mathis blinked once, “Ser Barristan?” his eyes narrowed, “What does Ser Barristan have to do with this matter?” he asked the question that on all their minds.

Daven pulled out a letter from under his tabard, “I have a sighed letter from Ser Barristan Selmy attesting to what happened in King’s Landing. After this return or awakening- whatever you’re calling it, fighting broke out. During the fighting, Ser Loras, while outmanned and losing, chose to attack both Ser Jaime and Ser Barristan,” he paused dramatically, “At the same time.”

Silence met Daven's words and Mathis fought to keep the pained expression from his face. This felt like he kept walking into walls every time he opened his mouth to speak. Idiot boy, there are quicker ways to kill yourself than facing those two together, that don't try and drag the kingdoms to an unnecessary war. Whatever sense of justice for Loras Tyrell had dispersed with Daven's words, just as the smug Lannister knew it would...and now Mathis had even more questions than before. Why the in the Seven Hells would Ser Barristan join with the Lannisters?!

“...Lord Tyrion had Ser Barristan write out several copies attesting to the truth of this matter.” Daven finished. The smug Lannister's smile was back.
After a while, Lady Oakheart sat forward in her chair and broke the silence, “And yet Ser Barristan is not here to swear to this?” she cut in testily, “I find this highly suspicious.”

Daven's smug smile grew broader- and smugger, and Mathis felt a noose closing around them.

“You are correct Lady Oakheart, but he felt a pressing need to present him to the rightful King and swear his fealty to him,” Daven stated with a knowing smile.

“Which rightful King?” she asked haughtily and cast an unreadable look around them, “There seems to be no shortage of Kings these days...and even whispers of a powerful Queen.”

Daven nodded in agreement, “You mean Daenerys Targaryen. Yes, she is the King's Queen-though it is more complicated than that, from what I've been told. And yes, Lord Tyrion is her Hand.”

The name reverberated around the tent causing trepidation in the expressions of the Lords, but Lady Oakheart was undaunted, “Who is this King?” she asked with narrowed eyes.

“Jon of the Houses Targaryen...and Stark. The last trueborn son of Prince Rhaegar Targaryen and the Princess, Lyanna Stark.”

This time Mathis couldn't keep the shock from his face, “Jon Targaryen? Of Houses Stark and Targaryen?!” he stammered in disbelief.

“Yes, though most of you would know him better as the Bastard of Winterfell; Jon Snow,” Daven added with the flourish of someone who had just made the winning move in cyvasse.

The tent exploded with noise as the Lords began shouting and arguing with one another. As they, just like Mathis, suddenly realised that Robert had just now lost the Vale, the Riverlands and the fucking NORTH without a single battle being waged.

He stared at Ser Daven blinking rapidly, the enormity of Ned Stark's betrayal stunned him. Mathis had been preparing for war and yet suddenly there wasn't going to be one. The Reach along with the Westerlands, the Vale, the Riverlands and the North were declaring for the Targaryens. This wasn't numerical superiority...this was a decisive, unbeatable advantage. A Targaryen victory was a forgone conclusion now.
Just like that, the Targaryens had \textit{won} back the Iron Throne while no one was looking...

Neither Dorne (if there was anyone still left alive there by the time their civil war was finished) nor the Stormlands could stand against the rest of the Kingdoms united. And those two would \textit{never} stand together, the manner of Elia Martell's death and Robert's subsequent inaction made that a certainty.

The Lords were still going on strong when Mathis finally regained his wits, “Enough!” he roared out, silencing them. He turned to Daven, “It seems you have us at a great disadvantage. And even if we are now all sworn to the Targaryens, Mace Tyrell will want blood for his son's loss.” \textit{And Olenna}, he added silently. This wasn't the sort of thing that could be passed over quickly or easily, “But that will sorted out once I send word back to Highgarden...in the meantime, I offer bread and salt. It seems we have much to talk about.” He gestured waiting servants forward.

Daven and his men accepted the offering graciously, as seats were brought for them.

They sat together for a while and spoke of several things, including the history of the last life and how disastrous the wars were for the Seven Kingdoms; which incidentally was the reason for the initial fighting in King's Landing. Namely, the fact that the distasteful rumors about Cersei and Jaime Lannister...and the children were \textit{true}. And that the Lannisters, including Jaime were admitting the truth so easily and blatantly. That had a lot the people giving Daven hard hostile looks. The recognition and legitimization of the children as full Lannisters was a trifling footnote in comparison to that. But that was balanced when Daven explained the real reason that Jaime killed Aerys.

Mathis had been a Targaryen loyalist in the Rebellion, despite Aerys's known madness, and even he had broken out into a cold sweat at the perversity of Aerys's final command.

It was a while before most could speak after \textit{that} little piece of information.

Which brought them back to sending word to Highgarden, because under the circumstances, he wasn't sure that raiding the Westerlands was- no he \textit{knew} that it was the wrong choice here. The next step, whatever it was, was something he did not know or could take without word from his liege. It all depended on what Mace, or rather Olenna decided.

He held back his sigh, “You have given us much to consider,” Mathis began, giving Lady Oakheart, Lord Fossoway and Lord Caswell long looks, “For the moment, I ask that you enjoy our hospitality—\textit{as guests, actual} guests, till I get word back from Highgarden,” he paused and let out a deep sigh, “I
would greatly like to avoid any further missteps, in light of everything that changed.”

“That is acceptable,” Daven began, “But there is one more thing that you should know, Lord Tyrion believes that Highgarden should already know by now or have had some word about it from another party,” Daven began, his smug look disappearing and being replaced with apprehension.

“And what is that?” questioned Lady Oakheart before he could ask.

“Lord Tyrion took part in the spell that caused all of this,” Daven revealed gravely.

Again the Lords of the Reach were silent. Mathis sat up straighter, an explanation for the magic in the air was something that he had never imagined getting any time soon.

“...and you can thank Brandon Stark for this second chance,” he stated, “As well the King and Queen. They all played a part in this.”

Lord Fossoway spoke up, “It's good that we finally known, but—”

“Why?” Mathis was succinct and tense as he cut off Lord Fossoway.

Daven looked discomforted and even scared now, much to Mathis's own disquiet, “Simple. The army of the Dead is marching on the Wall. The Others came and it will be a second Long Night. They faced the Night King and lost. This is why they have done this.”

And now, they were living in a nightmare. Because only nightmares were filled with such impossibilities.

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Robb Stark

The only thing they were waiting for now, was the first mustering of an initial force from the Umber lands to gather. Only a few short days of rest in the Last Hearth before they finally reached the Wall.
As the former King in the North, it was disturbing to Robb that he’d never visited the Wall. He'd spent the entirety of his reign in the south. Dealing with Southern problems and Southern Lords. It had been needed, but it still rankled with him, especially after the Ironborn attacked the North. Pulled in too many directions and few true options that led to anything other than defeat. Then the Red Wedding happened and it had no longer mattered.

He'd failed.

But now they were alive again and things were different. He'd been spending so much time just doubting and rethinking all of his past decisions. All his past interactions with the Northern and Southern Lords, trying to come up with better decisions that the ones he took. Not marrying immediately marrying the Frey girl at the Twins was very high on his list. It had been inevitable, but he’d still put it off, thinking that there was some way he could avoid it. He'd avoided it but in the wrong way.

Which led him to today, as he went to confront one more betrayal.

He walked restlessly towards were they were holding Smalljon Umber. The maester had only recently pronounced him well enough for travel. He'd be coming with them when they left the Last Hearth, so he could take the Black.

Smalljon Umber had been his friend, a confidant and someone he had trusted to protect his back in the thick of battle. He'd survived the Red Wedding, and had turned his back on all that he done, siding with the Boltons and giving Ramsay Rickon to be murdered.

He was in the dungeons now, the evening coldness seeped through the walls, making it colder than the rest of the castle. The guard on duty nodded at him once with respect as he passed him by without a word. The cells were all unoccupied, except for one.

At the end of corridor was a dimly lit cell, with one occupant. Smalljon was sitting with thin straw bed, his back pressed up against the wall, with a scowl on his face. He was staring off in the distance, not focusing on anything.

The sound of Robb's feet scuffing across the floor, made him look up. His scowl deepened as he saw Robb coming to stand by the bars of his cell.
“So the fucking King in the North has come to see the prisoner then,” spat Smalljon snidely, without getting up.

Robb felt his anger rising, he was his friend once! The shed blood together!

“Nothing to say then, fool?” Smalljon continued in the same mocking, abusive tone, “Fool of a King that lost the godsdamned North, all for some southern cunt.”

Robb's face darkened, “And yet, I'm not the one in a cell now.”

Smalljon bared his teeth as his face flushed, but he didn't say anything. He just glared at Robb. Robb returned the glare and didn't say anything else. They stood there glaring angrily at each other. Silence dominating the space between them.

The silence seemed to go on forever, before Robb finally asked him, “Why?”

Smalljon's glare didn't abate, “Why what?” he demanded.

“You were my friend...why did you do it? Why did you betray us?”

“Betray you?” Smalljon snorted with derision, “Fuck all you damn Starks. You failed. You lost the damn North. You'd have us stand with Southerners-in the fucking South! While leaving good Northmen and woman to die at Ironborn hands. Then your fucking bastard brother wants us to join forces with fucking Wildlings against Northerners? Ramsay was a beast, but at least he was of the North!” he replied in a rage, his eyes wide with passionate emotion, “You were always with the fucking foreigners!”

Robb's was taken back by just how narrow minded and short sighted Smalljon sounded, “Didn't you listen to a thing I said then?” he retorted in outrage, “We couldn't stand alone. We still needed allies in the south. And what did you expect me to do? Try to take Moat Cailin from the south?! Something that's never been done in all history?!”

Smalljon didn't reply, he kept on staring balefully at Robb.
“And as for Ramsay, you would let a beast be Lord of the North? Jon and Sansa were putting the North to rights and they had good reason for joining with the Wildlings. Didn't you even stop to ask why they were joining with the Wildlings?!”

Smalljon was beyond any rational arguments, he rose from the bed and came to the bars of his cell, “There's no good reason to stand with the Wildlings. They're mindless beasts to be slain. And you speak too many damn words! Fuck you and all the damn Starks to the damned Seven Hells! The time comes, the Old Gods won't have you! You're no true northerner, your fucking mother saw to that!” he screamed at him, ignoring all of Robb's words.

Robb shook his head, he hadn't know him at all, “You're an idiot,” he walked away, repeating to himself, “You know nothing.” It was useless to try and reason with him. The Last Hearth and the North would be better off without the Smalljon's brand of shortsightedness.

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Much to his surprise, he found the Greatjon waiting for him as he left the dungeons of the Last Hearth.

Robb paused as he came face to face with the dominating Lord of the Last Hearth. They'd barely said anything to each other in his time around. The Greatjon had been too damn quiet for his tastes, and Robb had been too...embarrassed, to speak to the man that had named him King in the North. He was just a boy now, heir to Winterfell. He wasn't Greatjon's liege lord now...at least not yet, and hopefully, not for a long, long time before that happened again.

Their eyes met and the Greatjon nodded and gave him a wry smile, “Your Grace,” he said in quiet voice.

Robb returned the wry smile, “Just my lord now- actually not even a Lord now, just heir of Winterfell.”

Greatjon shook his ruefully, he snorted, “Aye, I know, damned strange all this, but I'm glad that Ned's back with us. He's a good man, didn't deserve that fate,” now he sounded more like the boisterous lord he knew.

Robb gave a heartfelt nod back, “Can't disagree there.”
Greatjon's momentary good cheer disappeared, “You talked to that fool of a boy?” he grunted tersely.

Robb frowned, “Aye,” he began cautiously.

“Damned fool,” he shook his head mournfully, “I raised a damn fool. That's what I did. Doesn't respect his oaths or the sacrifices of his ancestors. We swore an oath to you Starks and we take our oaths seriously here, we ain't fucking Freys,” Greatjon finished in derision.

Robb's frown disappeared, whatever was going on with Greatjon he didn't seem to be holding a grudge or any animosity to Robb, “As Jon said, it's done and over with now. We have more important things to do than obsessing over what was.”

“Aye, you can say that, doesn't mean it won't haunt me for the rest of my days,” Greatjon shook his head, nearly despondent.

“All our mistakes will haunt us,” Robb admitted humbly, “We all made mistakes,” he paused and took a deep heartfelt sigh, “I shouldn't have married Talisa for one.”

Greatjon let out a strangled grunt, “That wasn't a mistake, Robb. A fucking Frey as Queen in the North?! Fuck no! Better Lady Talisa than that,” he retorted gruffly.

Robb blinked, taken aback, “What?”

“Aye, that woman of yours may have been more of Southerner than the Freys- and a foreigner to boot, but at least she wasn't a useless flighty woman. Now there was a woman that wasn't afraid to get her hands dirty, her hands were stained with the blood of the good Northern men that she saved. When was the last time a Southern Lady did that? Or a Southern Queen?!” He shook his head mournfully, “Aye mistakes were made...but not that, and not her. I was proud to call her our Queen!” Greatjon exclaimed emphatically.

“Uh...” Robb stared at him bewildered by the strength of the Greatjon's reaction, he was at a loss for how to react, Lord Karstark and a number of other Northerners and River Lords had expressed rather negative opinions of the marriage. He'd never heard the Greatjon's opinion in the first life.

The Greatjon wasn't finished, “…I know that obstinate fool Karstark didn't like her, but I did. And I
wasn't the only one. She was a good woman,” he finished adamantly.

Robb regained control of his stunned tongue, “I didn't know you felt that way about her,” he manged to say in surprise.

He shrugged, “Aye I do...even if it doesn't matter anymore, she's not here anymore...anyway, come on Robb, it's time to eat,” Greatjon said grabbing Robb around the shoulders in a gruff friendly manner and pulling him along. “Tomorrow, we leave for the Wall. Time enough to think more when we're on the road...”

The meal was more subdued than was usual for the Last Hearth. Any meal that included the Greatjon should have been much more...louder, for one. And cruder for another. Most Northmen weren't know for their manners, especially the Umber men. The boisterous nature of the men of the Last Hearth was a staple of the North.

Except tonight.

The subdued nature of the meal was unnerving for Robb, he remembered the meals they'd had during the war. Even on the eve of battle, the men had been in high spirits.

Not tonight.

Jon sat at the head table on Greatjon's right, with father on the left. Robb himself was sitting on the other side of Jon. Lord Reed was father's other side while Ned Umber was propped up next to him with an absurd number of pillows under him to let him reach the table. Much further down the table, Lord Karstark, Harrion and Torrhen were sat together. Lord Karstark still had the same shocked expression on his face he'd had since they'd left the Karhold. The rest of the room was occupied by various lesser lords and sworn Umber men.

The men engaged short hushed talks, there was no great japing shared here, men that knew what was coming shared their dark stories with others that knew nothing of the true threat. The Last Hearth was among the closest, if not closest of the great strongholds of the North to the Wall. Everything that happened there was sure to spread here first. Just as it had the first time. Jon and Sansa had said that the Last Hearth had fallen first after Eastwatch. Some men had fallen here but most had been already been evacuated by the time the Night King crossed the Wall. Ned Umber and his men had
been garrisoned in Winterfell at the time, consolidating the strength of the North.

Robb took a drink of his wine and turned back to his meal, a simple broth of meats and carrots. It was a bland and simple, if filling meal. The high table was also quiet. Occasionally, Father would make a small observation, and Greatjon would mumble a reply.

Father cast a speculative look down the table at Rickard Karstark, “Rickard has been very...quiet as we traveled.” He stated evenly.

This made Greatjon act more like himself, “Aye, Rickard's deathly afraid of you now, Ned, all that shouting you did, made you look uncomfortably like Brandon,” Greatjon explained as he guffawed, the shadow of his old self reasserting itself, “Brandon would have killed him without a second's hesitation for giving him lip like he gave you- never mind daring to stand with Boltons against you.”

Father frowned, no one ever mentioned his Uncle Brandon lightly. Father then shifted uneasily in his chair, “Yes, well, Brandon was my brother, it's normal for there to be some similarities...”

Greatjon laughed, interrupting father, “Ned, more than half the lords of the North have said you only shared Brandon's looks and nothing else.”

Father looked nonplussed before looking to Lord Reed, who gave him an amused look, “He's right and you know it Ned, you're the calm and collected one,” Howland agreed with a light mirthful tone.

Father looked annoyed as Robb and Jon hid identical smiles in their cups as they watched father being needled. Eventually Father huffed and gave a Howland and Greatjon withering stares. In response both lords just laughed again.

“You Starks always have terrible barks and even sharper teeth,” Howland teased with a wry smile, “Especially your she-wolves, no one was ever safe from your Lyanna when she was mad,” he finished with a wistful sigh.

And now they were mentioning aunt Lyanna? Robb was surprised, but after the truth about Jon was revealed, he understood why Father never mentioned her. But now, the need to hide was no longer there, even though the torn expression on father's face showed Robb just how much it still affected him. The torn expression disappeared and was replaced with a small smile and a thoughtful look.
“Aye, she always did have sharp teeth...and Sansa inherited them from her,” Father replied dryly.

Robb snorted, and Jon guffawed. They shared a fondly exasperated look, everyone had felt the new Sansa’s teeth at one time or another now.

“No one is safe from her when she’s mad now,” Jon added with an amused smile.

Greatjon chuckled, “Maybe, but I’ve heard what your littlest she wolf did to the Freys. It was bloody well deserved. Brutal as fuck, but still well deserved,” Greatjon stated with satisfaction and a little uneasiness.

Father was nodding along with the Greatjon at first as he raised his cup to his lips before then freezing with it on his lips. Robb stared at Greatjon in confusion, what was he talking about? He cast a glance at Jon, who seemed to have frozen where he was sitting, his face going blank.

Slowly father's cup came down and he placed it on the table giving Greatjon his complete attention, “My littlest she wolf? Did to the Freys?” he repeated in short and simple words, his tone empty.

The Greatjon answered idly, “Your Arya was fucking brutal Ned, that's what it was.”

Father remained unreadable, his face as icy as winter itself now, “And what exactly did she do?” his tone reminded Robb too much of the times he'd seen father truly upset.

Robb cast a side look at Jon. Jon was staring into his cup, shoulders hunched as if trying to disappear. Lord Reed was looking back and forth between Jon and Father with concern.

Greatjon seemed oblivious to father's changing mood, “Taught that southern old bag of piss Walder Frey just what happens to those that break guest rights. Walder was just like that Andal king in the tale of the Rat Cook...Frey Pies.” He laughed nastily.

Robb jerked and paled, not trusting his understanding of Greatjon's words.

Greatjon nodded at Robb, “She killed Black Walder and Lame Lothar. Used their flesh for her pies. Then the old piss bad had a nice big meal before she killed him. The next night she killed the rest of
“the Freys.” he laughed again nastily.

Robb felt his stomach lurch in protest, even as his blood escaped from his face as he tried accept what Greatjon was saying.

Father's face was a sculpture of ice and stone now, “Which Freys did she kill?” he asked carefully.

“All of them,” Greatjon stated as he took another satisfied gulp of his ale.

Robb blinked, all of them? Walder Frey was one the few men that could claim to have fielded an army from his own bitches. And Arya- his little sister, Little Underfoot, had killed them all?!

Even when they were loyal Robb hadn't been able to keep track of them all. He’d known the old surprisingly honorable heir Stevron. The nasty and vile Black Walder was unmistakable for anyone not to forget him. Perwyn had been surprising honorable, despite his weaselly appearance and his younger brother, Olyvar had been beyond helpful when Robb had needed the name of whichever other Frey had appeared in front of him.

A pang of anger and betrayal ran though him as he remembered Olyvar and Perwyn. Some betrayals hurt more than others. He cast those useless thoughts away as he turned back to the here and now.

It didn’t matter anyway...apparently Arya had killed them all, much to his dumbfoundment and horror.

“They did tell you about Arya? Didn't they?” Howland started slowly, cutting in.

No they didn't, Robb thought unhappily as he turned to look at Jon, who was pale and blank faced as he met father's gaze.

Father turned and stared at Jon, ignoring everyone else. After a moment, Jon rose from his seat, not breaking his stare down with father.

Robb blinked and missed it.

Suddenly father was dragging Jon, by the scruff of his neck, out of the dining hall as if he was an
Errant child...

Robb got up in a hurry and went running after them as the Greatjon and Howland gaped in shock. Father was ahead of him, servants and men scattering out of his path as he continued to drag Jon behind him. They reached an empty corridor and father whorled Jon around to face him. Robb could see that Jon was shocked and dismayed at father's reaction though he also seemed defiant as father stared down at him, just as he when they were errant children.

Robb put himself half between the two afraid of his father's anger.

“You kept this from me? From us?” Father demanded angrily after a long moment of silence.

Jon was unfazed but father's ire, “Yes.”

“Why?”

Jon gave him an incredulous look, “If we had told you all that happened that first night, what would you have done? And we didn't want to you keel over in shock...we lost once, we didn't want to lose you again.”

Father looked away unhappy, “Tell me the rest. How could she do this? Who helped her kill them all?”

Jon was stone faced as he shook his head, “She was alone. She didn't need anyone's help...because she's a Faceless Man,” he admitted with a deep mournful sigh.

“Arya is what?!” Father demanded, his eyes suddenly aflame with emotion.

Jon winced and sighed, “A Faceless Man.”

The Faceless Men of Braavos were known the world over. And not in a good sense. Fear was what they traded in. Fear and Death. He tried to reconcile Arya's face and what they were known to have done...but he couldn't.
Arya was hotblooded, the wolf’s blood was strong in her and the Faceless Men were said to be practical and calm. Things his little sister had never been.

It was impossible. It had to be.

Robb looked back at Jon. The same serious expression that Jon always wore was there staring back at them and it chilled Robb to his bones as he realised just how much their little sister had changed. Jon would never jape about something like this.

He cast a look at Father. He looked like he was going to cry. Not that he felt any better. His little sister was an unstoppable assassin. How the fuck was he supposed to feel about that?! In a flicker of motion the sad expression on father's face disappeared and was replaced with anger.

Father was glaring at Jon now, “Is there anything else you want to share with us?!” The want meaning, is there anything else you're hiding from me?!

Jon looked deep in thought before looking a little stricken, “Jorah Mormont.”

Father's face darkened even more, “Jorah Mormont?” he repeated the name, the venom filling his tone putting Robb ill at ease, “what about him?” he spat angrily.

“He's Daenerys's most trusted and loyal adviser,” Jon said bracing himself.

“Him?!” exclaimed Father angrily, “He's a slaver...and he was Robert's spy!”

Jon rallied and stood unflinching in the face of Father's anger as Robb remembered what Jorah's crimes had been. Selling a pair of poachers to Slavers, “I know what he has done and Daenerys knows what he has done. And apart from his lack of tact in picking women to fall in love with, he is an honorable man. He has regained the honor that he lost. He saved Daenerys many times and he helped her free tens of thousands- millions even, of Slaves in Slaver's Bay. Men and women that had no hope of ever being free, were freed by his hand. He will be welcomed back to the North- though he will not be reclaiming his place as Lord of Bear Island.” He finished adamantly, staring down father's wrath.
Robb stared at the two with trepidation, as Jon and Father continued to stare at each other.

Father broke the stand off with a noisy sigh, “Every time, Jon. Every time I think I know what this new world holds...something else happens.” His voice was unreadable. And Robb agree with him, “Howland said to me, you died and the world went on...and it did and you keep proving this to me every day.”

Robb nodded in agreement, “Aye it did,” he added cutting in between them, he laid a hand on his father’s shoulder, “It's mad...but we're here together, father,” he finished with a smile. They wouldn't part again, they'd be stronger together now, “Whatever comes we will deal with it.”

Father looked at him and then looked to Jon, he grasped Robb's shoulder with one hand then grasped Jon's with the other hand, he gave them both long lingering looks, “Yes we are together. Both my sons are men now...neither of you are the men I expected you to become...but it doesn't matter. I...am proud of the men you have become.”

Robb felt his throat closing, and he couldn't reply, he could only nod his head. Jon appeared to be just as choked up in that moment.

After a moment, Jon cleared his throat, “I think that we should get back to the meal, I'm sure everyone is wondering why the Lord of Winterfell dragged his King bodily away from his meal...”

Robb let out a loud laugh as father's face turned red, realizing just what he'd done.

“...but I will let it pass this time,” Jon said mock seriously with a wide cheeky smile.

Father gave him a dry look, and retorted in a deadpan, “Thank you, your Grace for your understanding and mercy.”

Jon laughed again and this time Robb joined him.

Chapter End Notes
Poor Ned! D: Well at least he knows pretty much everything now. So some people may say that the first part is repetitive, but please bare in mind that in a post classical society like Westeros, it takes forever by our standards for news to get around. This has to be shown to get a feel of how the various parts of Westeros are developing.

Anyway, don't forget to Comment! :D
Chapter Notes

I just want to say thank you for all the feedback! :D

I'm glad so many of you are enjoying the story!

Hope you all like this chapter! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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Chapter 39 Unexpected Happenings

Sansa Stark

Since their return there had truly been few things that really surprised her. Westeros had been totally and irrevocably changed beyond any resemblance to the original plan. That she had taken in stride and they'd forged ahead with nary a misstep. And things had been going along splendidly so far. Sansa didn't deceive herself, something had to go wrong...somewhere. The only real surprise she'd had was Barristan the Bold showing up and pledging his allegiance to Jon instead of Daenerys. A small part of Sansa, was gleefully waiting to rub that fact into her face...whenever Daenerys returned to Westeros.

Which made the scene in front of her even more and all the more surprising. She'd decided to go and check up on Mother. Mother hadn't taken all the revelations thrown at her well in a rather spectacular fashion, but she was getting better. There was decidedly more colour in her cheeks these days than before.

“Are you sitting and sewing with mother?!” Sansa asked in surprise at the scene in front of her.

In mother's rooms, mother held her sewing in hand. Sitting next to her was Arya...her sewing in hand as well. Arya's face were harder to read these days- for obvious reasons, but here and now Arya was smiling serenely.

Arya looked up at her question and shrugged nonchalantly, “Yes.”
“Sitting happily and sewing?” Sansa repeated pointedly, still trying to come to terms with the scene in front of her.

Arya gave her a dry look, “Yes,” she repeated through clenched teeth.

Sansa stared for a moment before, letting out a bark of laughter and smiling at the irony of the moment.

Arya’s eyes narrowed and she glared at her.

“And what is wrong with sitting and sewing?” Mother asked in an annoyed tone.

Sansa shook her slowly, “Nothing at all mother…it’s Arya sitting and sewing happily that I have a hard time believing,” she finished giving Arya a long searching look.

Arya returned the look with a withering glare of her own.

“And what is so wrong with a mother and daughter sitting and sewing together?” Mother retorted crossly, sounding more like herself than she had in a long while.

Sansa looked between them and held her hands up in surrender, “Nothing at all.”

Mother nodded, “Good,” she said gruffly.

“I might even join you...there’s nothing really pressing that I have to do for the next few hours,” Sansa quickly added.

Mother’s face softened and Arya’s glare disappeared as Sansa went to the door and called out for a servant to bring her own materials from her rooms. Soon enough Sansa was sitting down next to mother, with Arya on the other side. It was a very quiet situation Sansa found herself in. They sat quietly, the only thing they talked about were their stitches. There was no mention of war, or dragons, or the Others, or Gendry or Faceless Men. It was only a mother sitting and sewing with her
two daughters. Most of the time, it was just Arya asking about a certain way to sew with mother patiently explaining what she was doing wrong.

As they sat Sansa realised just how much she had been running around doing things since the spell. The constant tension was ebbing out of her as she continued to sew quietly with them. And she realised now just how much all three of them needed this moment of quiet. Maybe they could make a habit of it? Set aside an hour or two to just sit together and forget the turmoil that had engulfed the Seven Kingdoms.

She suggested this to them and the first genuine smile she'd seen in a long time appeared on her mother's face. Arya looked just as happy. Sansa knew that Arya was just humoring their mother, her sister's dislike of sewing had never changed...but she wasn't going to say anything to mother. Mother needed this quiet time more than they did.

Time passed and all was calm.

Their idyllic peace was broken when someone knocked on the door.

Sansa looked up from her sewing and exchanged glances with mother and Arya.

“Come,” called out mother sounding much more commanding, the old tones of authority returning to her in this moment.

The door opened and in walked Ser Roderick, he bowed to them.

“Forgive the intrusion my Ladies, there is a visitor at the gates requesting an audience. The Manderly men are refusing his admittance without a command from Lady Sansa or Lord Davos,” he stated in confusion as he scratched at his chin.

Sansa frowned, *what now?*

As Sansa walked out to the courtyard she could feel the tension in the air. The men were on edge.
The Stark men had their hands on their weapons, but the Manderly men had drawn their swords and stood at the ready, their eyes not leaving the old man and his wagon.

The man stood there unafraid of the swords drawn around him. He wore simple robes, almost like a maester but he had no chain around his neck. He was balding with grey hair and was wiry thin. He did not look at all threatening.

So why were the Manderly men afraid enough of him to draw their swords?

Mother and Arya had come along with her. As the approached, mother began frowning...and there was recognition in her eyes.

“I know you,” mother stated in confusion. “You were at Harrenhal. You survived when everyone else died.”

The man bowed, he gave mother a wide smile, “I am honored that you remember me, my lady.” He turned to Sansa, “It is a great honor to finally meet you, Lady Sansa, I have heard a great deal about you.” His gaze flickered to Arya, “And I have heard even more of the dreaded Lady Arya.” He bowed deeply, “I mean no harm, I am merely here to offer my services to you.”

Sansa nodded back him suspiciously, he seemed very aware of who they were, but she didn't know him. And neither it seemed did Arya. Mother's words didn't make much sense, a survivor of Harrenhal? She tried to remember when or if Harrenhal had been sacked during one of the many battles in the Riverlands, but none came to mind. Especially any sacks that had occurred before the Red Wedding.

As Sansa tried to remember, Davos arrived. Lady Shireen came with him, he looked wary for a moment as he took in the drawn swords, keeping Shireen by his side as they approached. He took one look at the man and then blanched in recognition. He shoved Shireen behind him and drew his sword. He stepped up the man and placed the blade at the man's neck.

“Qyburn,” Davos spat in anger.

The blood drained from Sansa's face. *Qyburn? Cersei's Qyburn?! Why was he here?*

Mother paled, she knew they name. They'd spoken at length about this monster. Arya had pushed
her back and pulled a dagger out from somewhere, brandishing it menacingly in Qyburn's direction. Shireen was looking on on shock at Davos. Sansa didn't know if Davos had explained to her exactly who Qyburn was. While Ser Roderick had stepped up and placed himself protectively next to Sansa, though his sword remained undrawn.

“Ser Davos,” Qyburn stated unmoved by the sword now held at his neck, even as his face remained placid and unworried, “an honor to see you again,” he stated evenly without a hint of hostility.

“All I ask is that you hear me out...before taking any drastic measures,” he said unhurried with a kind smile on his face, “I am not your enemy...and I can prove it.”

Davos scoffed, “Why the fuck would we do that?! And there's nothing you could do to prove it!” he shot back seething with anger.

“My Lord, who is he?” Ser Roderick asked, eyeing Qyburn suspiciously.

Davos shot a look at Roderick, and then at the confused Stark guards before answering, “He's a necromancer,” stated Davos angrily. Not that she could blame him. Qyburn's creations had wreaked havoc in King's Landing when Cersei had released them, “And he was Cersei Lannister's Hand. He can't be trusted.”

Now the Stark men drew their swords, horror written on their faces after Davos's announcement. Ser Roderick's face turned red as he scowled darkly at Qyburn, his sword now drawn and at the ready.

Qyburn was undaunted, “I am many things, the necromancy was a just an unexpected discovery. There are many things that I am capable of. I started out as a healer and my skills are quite remarkable now. But I assure you I am not your enemy, here and now. I even come bearing a very significant gift to prove my intentions...and it one our new King will welcome greatly.”

The gall of the man was astounding, with so many swords pointed him, nevertheless, to Sansa, his words were...intriguing.

With narrowed and suspicious eyes, she stepped forward, past Ser Roderick and placed a hand on
Davos’s, slowly pushing it- and his sword, down and away from Qyburn’s neck.

“Let us see this gift,” she stated evenly.

“My Lady! He's too dangerous-” Davos began sputtering in anger.

Sansa cut him off, “We can take his head later,” she gestured around at the numerous armed and watchful guards, “He's still only one man.”

Davos frowned, but after another unhappy look at her, he reluctantly acquiesced.

Qyburn's smile widened and he bowed deeply, “Thank you, my Lady, I assure you, you will not be disappointed.”

Sansa gave him a dubious look, “We'll see.”

His smile didn't change as he turned and walked back to his waiting wagon under their watchful eyes. It took him a small while, as he manhandled a small barrel out of his wagon. Under the suspicious eyes of the Stark guards, he placed it on the ground. He knelt down and opened it. Setting the cover aside carefully, he rolled up his sleeves before reaching in and pulling out a large round something. He turned around and revealed that the large round something was a head.

A very recognizable head.

The guards murmured at this and Mother and Shireen turned pale.

With a very calm and smug tone he turned to Sansa and Davos as he smugly said, “I believe that you recognize who this is?”

Davos, slowly and reluctantly answered him, “Aye.”

Sansa could only stare at the head, before a wolfish smile came to her lips, Sandor would be disappointed, but better that he was never named a Kinslayer, “It's the Mountain.”
Mother gasped in surprise, “The Mountain?!”

Qyburn nodded, “Indeed, my Lady,” he paused for a second and gave both Davos and Sansa pointed looks, “I believe in terms of gifts, this speaks well of my intentions.”

“It is an...impressive gift,” Sansa admitted with a nod of agreement.

“Why...why did you do this?” Davos asked in confusion, cutting to the heart of the matter.

“Simple, he nodded at Mother, “Lady Stark remembered what he tried to do to me. He didn't. He forgot that he nearly murdered me at Harrenhal. He left me to die there- he did succeed in killing everyone else there. What I did to him the first time around was exceedingly painful. And he did deserve every moment of it,” Qyburn explained with smugness, “After this return...he came to me, he wished to become as powerful as I had made him before- though obviously without the loss of his free will...well I could hardly let this opportunity pass me by? I am well aware of what is coming and this time I will not be caught on the wrong side of matters. So I dealt with him. And his men. I may have served Cersei once, but that is a path to ruin now. You know my skill, Lady Sansa, it is at your disposal,” Qyburn stated without any fear in his voice and a small courteous bow.

Sansa stared at him. She kept her face blank as she imagined the uses they could get from him, if he was truly honest now. And truthfully, from what she'd heard from Jaime, Qyburn seemed a man of his word...despite his perversions. His skills as a healer was unparalleled and without equal. Again, Jaime could personally attest to them.

Davos was still glaring at the man, “Well I thank you for Clegane's head. I'll be sure to put it on a spike next to yours.”

Sansa kept herself from panicking, she could talk Davos away from this course of action.

Qyburn's face tightened and his eyes narrowed, “I am more than willing to prove my value to you as many times as needed. My intentions are honorable here,” he raised a hand and pointed it behind them.

Sansa and Davos turned to look at what he was pointing at. Davos turned back to him an enraged look, bringing his sword back up to Qyburn’s neck as they both realised he was pointing at Shireen.
“...I have quite an experience with dealing with scars...the lady need not remain the way she is. It would not be a painless or perfect process- but there is much I can do to mitigate the pain with what I now know,” Qyburn explained encouragingly as he tempted Davos, “And I have nothing to gain from hurting her.”

Davos's face froze and his sword wavered as Sansa saw her opportunity.

She pushed down Davos's sword for second time, she gave Davos a hard look as she spoke, “This merits some discussion. Much discussion indeed.”

Davos looked at her torn, his eyes flickering back and forth between Shireen and Qyburn.

“...don't you agree, Ser Davos?” she said dragging Davos's attention back to her.

Their eyes locked and she could see how Davos was torn. He wanted to help Shireen...but to do that he'd have to trust Qyburn.

“At the very least, we should speak to Jon before doing any rash,” Sansa put forth shrewdly.

Davos's face squirmed uncomfortably, “Fine. He can rot in a cell till the King decides what to do with him.”

“You are most wise and merciful, my lord,” Qyburn bowed humbly.

Davos looked away in disgust, “Get him out of my sight and put him in the dungeon,” he commanded brusquely.

The guards obeyed, grabbing Qyburn and pulling him away from the gates of Winterfell and his wagon.

As they walked away, Qyburn called back loudly, “There are many books in my wagon, please feel free to have your maester look though them all. I have nothing to hide there and much knowledge to
Davos was scowling darkly, Ser Roderick shared his expression and Arya had put away her dagger but held a guarded expression on her face. Shireen had a stunned expression, that final offer of Qyburn had come out of nowhere to surprise them all, most of all the girl with the Greyscale scars.

Mother was still pale and shocked, “He seemed like such...such a humble man when I first met him,” she stammered.

Sansa didn't have an answer or retort for her, the only thing she was sure of was that now, more than anything else, after this unexpected development, she appreciated the need for some more quiet time.

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Jon Targaryen

His stomach was bouncing around like an acrobat in a mummer's troupe. The Last Hearth had been so much more easily dealt with than anyone had expected. Greatjon had been much more accommodating than the gruff and loud lord was known to be...though Jon knew it mostly had to do with the sheer disappointment and shame Greatjon had felt over his son's actions than anything they had actually done.

But that had been days ago, and the road to the Wall stood in front of them. A consolidated North stood with him, more than enough to reinforce the Wall and between that, the Night's Watch, and the Free Folk. It would be enough to properly man the Wall as they dealt with Robert before turning back to deal with the Night King.

And of course, it was more than enough time for father to cool off, the Greatjon's inadvertent revelation had caught everyone off guard and father's reaction hadn't been any less than Jon had expected. Jon was the King but in that moment he'd felt like a child again, being called to task by his father. Though the scene of having the Lord of Winterfell dragging the King of the Seven Kingdoms out of the main hall of the Last Hearth by the scruff of his neck like an errant pup had also cemented father's new reputation for rashness and unexpected actions. The lack of reprimand from Jon had also shown the other Lords just how much power the Lord of Winterfell had in this new world.

Overall, not an unwanted outcome, better that father be respected and feared now. It would make any grumblings about unpopular decisions much quieter that way.
Which brought him back to the reason that he was so nervous now. As father had confronted him in the face of the truth about Arya, his demands for all the truth had shaken him, and Jon blurted out the first thing that came to mind. The truth of Jorah Mormont had been grudgingly accepted. Of course that wasn't everything, there was the several rather glaring omissions he'd been dancing around...most importantly what really happened during the mutiny at Castle Black. There were other less painful truths but it was *that* that preyed on Jon's mind.

Afterwards, he'd know that father had to be told everything and that was what he was dreading.

Robb was another, though lesser issue. His brother was starting to accept everything and Jon had on occasion glimpsed the old cocky Robb from time to time. There had been a shift away from his melancholy since they'd left the Last Hearth. So thankfully that was one less thing that perturbed Jon. It was good to *truly* have his brother back.

The past nights had seen father with Lord Reed- something that Jon was very thankful for. Howland Reed had a calming effect on father...though quite a bit of drinking was involved as well. The Greatjon had joined them after they left the Last Hearth. Rickard Karstark was still too afraid of father to join them, not that he was truly welcome after everything that had happened.

And that was where Jon was heading now, with Ghost following dutifully behind him.

The Reed encampment was about as northern as you could get, in terms of simplicity and functionality. As Jon walked though it, the men would bow and smile at him. A chorus of 'your grace', following behind him. He was getting used to it, but at times it still jarred him and he had to remind himself that yes, he was the King. It was a necessity in these times and not something he had aspired to...but this was the new truth of his world.

He fought off a sigh as he approached Howland Reed's campfire. Ghost suddenly bounded ahead of him. Ghost silently ambushed his brother. Grey Wind started and yipped as he started to wrestle with Ghost.

Jon smiled, the antics of the direwolves were always amusing- at least outside of battle.

As Jon approached, he saw that the others there were just as startled as Grey Wind. Father and Howland were nursing cups of ale as they settled back down, while the Greatjon was eyeing the two direwolves warily as he rubbed his right hand. Robb sat opposite them and had a smile on his face as he watched the direwolves wrestle playfully.
Robb saw him first and he grabbed another goblet and offered it up to Jon, “Come on Jon, there’s enough here for all of us, even with the Greatjon here.”

Greatjon turned to Robb and gave him a piercing look, “Sure we do...if you give me your share,” he retorted mockingly.

Robb laughed and shook the goblet at Jon again.

Jon approached and accepted the cup as he sat down on a rock next to Robb, “Thank you.” He held out the cup and Robb filled it for him.

Jon took a sip and nodded at the others.

Greatjon bowed his head and said, “Your Grace.”

Father and Howland just smiled and nodded at him. Father was looking better now, there was an ease to his features that had been missing for a while now.

“Nice of you to join us,” Robb started cheerfully, “Glad to see you're not too busy being king to find time to spend with your lowly subjects,” he added cheekily.

Jon grinned back at Robb, “For Father, I always have the time, as for you...it depends on how annoying you're acting.”

Robb laughed and grinned at the jape. The others joined him, though Father only smiled with amusement. It warmed Jon to see them all so at ease. None of which helped his still queasy stomach, considering all the things he'd decided to finally share with him. With them all.

The grin disappeared from his face, he squared his shoulders and cleared his throat loudly. They looked up at him expectantly in response.

He took a deep breath, “I actually came here to talk, there's a few things I need to say.”
Father's face became guarded, his smile disappearing. Robb gave him a long look, but remained silent.

Greatjon rose from his seat, “Not for my ears, I'm guessing,” as he made to leave.

“Stay Lord Umber, you should hear this as well,” Jon said, gesturing for the big man to sit back down.

Greatjon had a wary expression on his face as he sat back down. Howland Reed was sitting forward now, looking between them all with a confused expression on his face.

Jon took another deep breath, “There are...some things you should all be made aware of,” he began, he looked to father, “I know I said that I told you everything- and that is true...for the most part.”

Father's face was darkening even more and he had a hard upset look in his eyes now, with a deep breath he plunged in, “When I was Lord Commander of the Night's Watch, there was a mutiny.”

Father and Robb nodded at that, he'd told them, but without many details. Greatjon looked angry and disgusted now at the mention of a mutiny.

Howland on the other looked surprised and incredulous, “You haven't told Ned that, yet?!” he cut in. He paused for a moment and then gave Jon a long searching look, “And now, I really see the resemblance to your mother,” he said with a rueful shake of his head.

Jon wasn't sure if that was compliment or not, but he let it pass as father's stare bored into him.

“You told us about this already,” Robb stated in confusion.

“I did,” Jon admitted, “we're going to the Wall and this will probably be mentioned there. What I didn't tell you is that Thorne and the other mutineers...they...sorta...killed me,” Jon stated evenly, bracing himself.
Robb blinked several times, confusion on his face as he stared at Jon. Greatjon's reaction was much the same, but he could see Father's a myriad of emotions rising in face. The foremost of which were rage and despair.

Jon quickly continued, “I didn't stay dead. It was Stannis's Red Witch. She raised me from the dead,” Jon blurted out quickly before father could explode.

The stunned expressions were exactly like he expected them, though Howland had a firm grip on father now, keeping him seated.

“You were dead...and then you weren't?” Robb spoke carefully, seemingly not believing his own words.

Jon nodded, “Aye.”

Robb gave him an unreadable look and then drained his cup quickly. He refilled it and then drained it again as quickly. He wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and then looked to Jon, “She's on our side now, right?”

Again, Jon nodded, “Aye.”

Robb's expression didn't really change at his answer, though he remained looking at Jon.

Through clenched teeth, father spoke up, “Is there anything else you want to tell us?” he demanded, upset but with a firm hold on his temper.

“There is a couple more things that I want to mention...but now you know pretty much everything relevant that happened to me,” Jon admitted with a wince.
Father took a very deep breath, “Everything that happened to you...but not everything that happened to Sansa...or Arya?” he asked, grinding his teeth in obvious frustration.

Robb shot father a concerned look and then looked back to Jon alarmed at the notion.

“No, you know all the bad things that happened to them,” he reassured father and Robb as Greatjon and Howland looked on, “What I have to tell you is mainly little things that would surprise you and some would come up in conversations when we eventually head back south.”

Father didn't say anything else, but after a long look at Jon he silently gestured for Jon to continue.

Jon nodded, “Beric Dondarrion.”

Father frowned in confusion, “Lord Dondarrion? What about him?”

“He died...seven times,” Jon stated evenly.

Next to him Robb jerked and gaped at him, the Greatjon held a near identical expression and father was blinking rapidly.

“...Thoros. Thoros raised him from the dead six times. The seventh death was right before Bran cast his spell,” Jon continued.

“Thoros?! Thoros of Myr?! That Thoros?!” Greatjon thundered in surprise.

Jon nodded, “He is a Red Priest, just like the Red Witch.”

Greatjon scoffed, “I know he's a priest! But even I know he's a really bad Red Priest...”

“And yet he raised Beric Dondarrion six times...trust me, no one was more surprised than Thoros was when it first happened,” Jon admitted.
Father was silent and looking a little disturbed now, “I...” father suddenly threw up his hands as if in surrender, “I don't know how to react to this,” he admitted. He stopped and cast another look at Jon, “I'm assuming there is more?” he finished dryly.

Jon reluctantly nodded, “The rest is more...it's more...” he stumbled over his words, unsure of how to say what he wanted to say.

“Just get on with it Jon, we don't have all night,” Father commanded unhappily, “just tell us everything and be done with it,” he finished in exasperation.


Jon grimaced, he decided to just blurt out the next issue, “While Sansa was a hostage in King's Landing...you know how Joffrey treated her...”

Father and Robb's faces darkened as he began.

“...she had no friends and no one to help her...except-”

“Except who?” demanded father unhappily.

“Except Sandor Clegane.”

Father and Robb's faces transformed into expressions of bewilderment.

“The Hound?!” Father intoned, incredulous.

“And Tyrion Lannister...but Sansa has already told you how he protected her. Sandor...Sandor is not his brother. He may have done evil things, but deep down he is a good man,” explained Jon.

Their bewilderment grew, he could see them trying to come to grips with what he was saying and
trying to question it.

“He protected Sansa from everyone- as much as he could. Even from herself. Sansa admitted this to me,” he nodded at father, “Right after you were executed, there was this moment were she almost tried to kill Joffrey-”

“Sansa tried to kill Joffrey?!” Robb blurted out in shock, as father looked stricken at that admission.

Jon nodded, “She was going to push him off a walkway on the battlements of the Red Keep...and it would probably have cost her her life in the process. Sandor saw it and got between them, stopping her. And saving her.”

Father was working his jaw silently, while Robb was still stunned.

“He deserted Joffrey after the battle of Blackwater bay and later on he also protected Arya for a time,” Jon paused and looked at them. Father and Robb were shocked, and so was Greatjon. The Cleganes' reputation was well know, and this didn't sound the least bit like either of the brothers. “Both Arya and Sansa are fond of him now...”

Father was rubbing at his forehead, as Greatjon gave him a concerned look. Robb was drinking again. Howland had been silent for while now, but he was still giving Jon that same unreadable expression from before.

Jon was silent for a while before clearing his throat.

Father looked at him, “More?! You still have more?!”

“Well...one more thing, though this is more a...funny thing. Well, a funny thing looking back. It was rather nerve wracking for Arya at the time,” Jon finished lamely.

He had their undivided attention now, as Howland's eyes brightened before chuckling, realizing what Jon was going to say.

The others cast Howland look before turning back to Jon.
He cleared his throat again and began, “After Arya escaped from King’s Landing with Yoren and his Night’s Watch recruits...she eventually ended in Harrenhal...where Tywin Lannister unknowingly made her his cup bearer.”

Father and Robb blinked and stared at Jon. The continued to stare at him blinking in confusion and disbelief. Greatjon’s sudden laughter caused them to jerk in surprise. They stared at him for a moment before Robb began grinning. Then he joined Greatjon, laughing at the absurdity of Arya's situation. Father looked at them in confusion. Then he snorted. His lips parted and then he joined them, chuckling as well.

Jon smiled at their mirth, everyone needed a good laugh and it was good to see father laughing like this.

Robb was laughing so hard now, tears were streaming down his cheeks, “Ha ha...ha...they were...tearing...ha ha...King's Landing...apart looking for her...and she...ha ha...was right under Tywin's nose?!” he managed to say between laughs.

“That's that Stark wolfsblood for you,” Howland added with a wide smile and chuckle.

Jon grinned, “Apparently Tywin actually liked her...he even smiled at her a couple of times.”

That set off the Greatjon and Robb again, the idea of Tywin actually liking her and smiling. They howled with laughter. Father's mirth didn't reach their heights, he was still chuckling happily along with them at Tywin's cluelessness.

Jon, as he sat with them nursing his drink, and watching them laugh themselves out, was just glad that Father hadn't lost his temper again tonight.

Now all they had to do was get to Wall. Then get south again and deal with Robert. Then deal with the bickering Kingdoms of Westeros. Then head North again and deal with the Others.

A pained smile came to Jon's face. He took a long drink from his cup. So much fun to look forward to...

Chapter End Notes
He he lots of surprises here. I'm betting a lot of you forgot that Qyburn was at Harrenhal :D

As Always, don't forget to comment! :D

Works inspired by this one: [In the North the Kings hide in the Snow](#) by Lovxx31

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