**Red Rubies**

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**Red Rubies**

by [DancingSnowflakes23](http://archiveofourown.org)

**Summary**

Jon Arryn visits Ned and offers him to foster Jon in the Vale.
It was the first time in years that Jon Arryn laid eyes on his foster son. His face appeared harder and strands of grey littered both his hair and beard, but he was still Ned Stark, the boy he came to love like his own son.

Now he was also a father and the Lord of Winterfell. When the timid boy came to be fostered in the Eyrie there was little hope that he would inherit Winterfell, but in the end the gods decided as it pleased them. Both Brandon Stark and his father Lord Rickard Stark were murdered on the Mad King’s demand and his sister was carried off by the Dragon Prince, only to find her grave in a Tower in Dorne.

“It is good to see you again, Ned,” Jon Arryn dared to greet him with the familiarity that once reigned between them. “It has been too long since our last meeting.”

“It has been too long, my Lord,” Ned agreed and bowed his head in reverence. There was even a smile showing on his usual solemn face as he introduced his wife and children.

Catelyn Stark was still a beauty, but he could also see that she relished her role as mother. Jon knew the cubs only from Ned’s letters, but it warmed him to finally see them with his own eyes. For him they were like the grandchildren he will never meet. His son was still a young child in his mother’s arms and he doubted he would ever see him become a man or have a child of his own.

“It a great pleasure to see you again, Lady Stark,” he greeted her and placed a soft kiss on her cheek.

“It is an honor to have you here. Ned always talks so fondly of you, my Lord,” the Lady replied and granted him a bright smile, before turning to introduce each of her children.

The oldest Robb was graced with the red locks and the blue eyes of House Tully. The older girl shared her brother’s features, though she demure compared to the younger daughter Arya. This wild little girl was graced with the Stark coloring and had the famous Stark blood running through his veins. The youngest boy Bran was a mere babe and blabbered happily when he touched his soft red locks. It made him long for his young son back in the Vale, but it still felt good to be here.

The company of Ned and his family filled him with new vigor. Even the ale ordered from White Harbor tasted better than the sweet Arbor Gold Robert liked so much.

“Your visit is a pleasant surprise,” Ned remarked after his wife and children had left them. "But I think there is more to it. You look tired, my Lord.”

While he didn’t come here to burden Ned with his troublesome life at court, he also longed to confide into somebody he trusted. He loved Robert like his own son, but it was hard to reason with him these days. The crown changed him and the growing influence of the Lannisters didn’t help to soothe his worries.

“The truth is…I simply wanted to see a friendly face. Court is quite troublesome these days,” Jon Arryn admitted.

“What troubles you, my Lord?” Ned inquired and gave him with a questioning look. Robert?”
"Not only Robert, but also the Lannisters. The Queen suggested my retirement."

Shock washed over Ned’s face. "You are jesting. Robert would never dare to strip you off your office. He owes his crown to you, my Lord."

Jon smiled wryly.

"Only partly. It was Tywin Lannister who sacked the city and presented him with Prince Rhaegar’s butchered heir while I dared to beg for Princess Daenerys’ and Princess Rhaenys’ life. I think he never truly forgave me for my meddling and the Queen is now trying to make use of that."

"Then Robert is a fool. Sparing the children’s life brought us peace and the promise to wed Princess Rhaenys to his heir sealed it. What is there to be angered about?"

Jon sighed deeply. "His wrath for the Targaryens never left him. Even now he is wasting gold on spies to find Viserys Targaryen, though even the Spider believes him long dead."

"That sounds grim, but he wouldn’t dare to harm the girls, would he?" Ned inquired earnestly. This was one of the reasons he admired Eddard Stark. Both his father and brother were butchered by the Mad King and he harbored not even a hint of resentment for the two girls. Weaker men wouldn’t act like this.

"He could have their heads any day, but Dorne would rise in rebellion if he even dared to break the betrothal I brokered for Rhaenys and Prince Joffrey. And Princess Daenerys is quite safe in the Vale, but I can’t guarantee what will happen after my death. My wife dislikes her greatly. I have been trying to broker a betrothal for the girl and Lady Waynwood’s ward Harrold Hardyng, but I have yet to acquire the King’s permission."

Ned had listened quietly and drowned his goblet, before giving his opinion.

"It seems we both are experiencing domestic troubles," his foster son replied and Jon sensed that there was something weighing on his mind.

"What are yours?" he asked gently.

"My wife wants me to send my bastard son away. Jon is a good boy, but he is only ten. She never liked his presence, but now she is becoming more and more insistent on the matter."

Jon was baffled by his words. What did he expect? That Lady Stark would love the bastard boy like her own trueborn children?

Truly, the boy hasn’t changed one bit. He was too good for this world.

"The bastard boy of yours...he shares my name, doesn’t he?" he asked. "I don't think I saw him at the feast."

Ned paled a little and nodded his head in affirmation. "My wife believed his presence would insult you and ordered him to keep out of sight."

Jon winced at his sorrowful tone and wished to ease Ned’s burdens.

"That was very kind of her, but I have a King’s bastard and a Targaryen Princess as my wards. I am not insulted by the boy’s presence. In fact, I would be very pleased to meet him if you allow it."

Jon expected a smile, but not the shell-shocked expression displayed on Ned’s face.
After a brief moment he regained his composure and nodded his head in acceptance.

“Of course, my Lord.”

It was true what the rumors said. The boy looked more like a Stark than Ned’s other children. It was no wonder that Lady Catelyn disliked his presence when only one of her trueborn children inherited the Stark look. The fact that the boy was barely a year younger than Robb posed further problems.

Truly, Ned was demanding too much from his wife.

“It is a pleasure to meet you, my boy. I heard a lot about you and It seems we share a name,” he said and greeted the shy lad. His behavior was so reminiscent of Ned that he felt instant sympathy for the boy. While understood Lady Stark’s concerns he couldn’t help but to feel for the boy. Nobody asked him to be born on the wrong side of the sheets and being the sole stain on the white vest of the honorable Eddard Stark had to be a heavy burden.

“Is that really true?” the boy asked and looked baffled. ”I mean…I am pleased to meet you too, my Lord,” he added quickly and dipped his head in greeting.

“It is true. I asked for this meeting to speak with you about a delicate matter,” he explained gently and waved his hand towards the seat. ”Please sit down.”

“A delicate matter?” the boy asked and he spotted a hint of curiosity in his guarded face.

Seeing him this close he felt one of his long-held suspicions confirmed. The boy had the Stark coloring, but his features were softer and less sharp. There was something elegant about his straight nose and full lips. He was sure that the boy was Lady Ashara Dayne’s son. Granted Ned never admitted it openly, but knowing him he was still feeling shame and grief over the Lady’s sad passing.

“A delicate matter,” he confirmed and leaned closer. ”I am sure you are aware that Lady Stark is not very pleased with your presence here in Winterfell?”

The boy paled visibly, but nodded his head in affirmation.

”I know…if I was older…I would go to the Wall, but my Lord Father won’t allow it,” the boy stuttered.

Jon graced him with a warm smile, hoping it will help to soothe the boy’s fears.”That only shows that your Lord Father holds much love for you, my boy. The Wall is a hard place and taking the oath is a decision not hastily made. Besides, aren’t there other things you would like to do?”

The boy swallowed hard and Jon sensed that he was afraid to speak openly.

”I am a bastard…I can’t be a lord…I can’t marry a highborn lady…,” he stuttered and Lord Arryn nodded his head in affirmation.

“What about being a knight?” he prodded gently. “All boys want to be knights and your father told me that you are a capable swordsman.”

The boy’s eyes went so wide he feared they might drop out of his head.

”Of course…Robb and I often pretend to be knights. I would like to be Aemon the Dragonknight,” the boy admitted and flushed a little.
"Aemon the Dragonknight was a formidable member of the Kingsguard. Train hard and one day you will be able to rise a similar position."

"I am a bastard…!" he protested in disbelief.

"Ser Duncan the Tall was a commoner and was Lord Commander of the Kingsguard," he countered him. "My steward Lord Nestor Royce recently knighted his squire and he is in dire need of a replacement. Your father is very dear to me and I would be honored to foster you in the Vale."

The boy looked stunned and the silence that followed stretched one for such a long time that he started to worry.

"Truly?" the boy asked then, his eyes wide in disbelief. "And you are not doing this out of pity, my Lord?"

Lord Arryn shook his head and touched the boy’s shoulder.

"I am doing this, because I think it is in your best interest and that of your father," he explained. "What do you say?"

A moment of silence followed, a ghost of a smile tugging on the boy’s lips.

"I would be honored, my Lord."

…
Even now the Giant’s Lance was covered in a thicket of clouds. It had been raining all morning and so she and Randa had to remain inside to listen to the Septa’s rambling about the Faith. Septa Arlena was an elderly woman with the face of a ferret, but other than her sleep-inducing voice she was no unpleasant person. She was also a fierce believer, but never cruel towards them like the old Septa Lady Arryn employed for her when she was a young child. Septa Serra was a tyrant who had a worse temper than the Lady herself. Luckily, the Septa didn't remain long as Lady Arryn believed her to be another nebulous enemy that wants to harm her sweet babe of a son.

For Dany he wasn't so sweet. Robin Arryn was a spoiled child and often prone to temper tantrums that brought the servants to despair. Thinking back on it she was glad to reside here at the Gates of the Moon. At first Lord Arryn tried to reason with his wife, but in the end Randa's charm won him over and she was allowed to stay here.

"Dany!" Randa Royce whispered and leaned over to touch her shoulder. "The Septa is finally asleep."

Dany lifted her head and looked over to the woman seated before the rustling hearth. The Septa’s head was hanging to the side and the book in her hand covered by her limp hands. A bit of snot was running down her nose and she was also snoring. It was not the first time that the Septa fell asleep while reading them from the Seven-Pointed Star, but never did it happen so fast. It was a new record.

“It seems we are getting visitors,” Randa added and nodded her head to the open window panes.

“That has to be Lord Arryn. He announced his return in his last raven to Lord Nestor,” she whispered back and rose to her feet. Slowly she made her way to the window and poked her head outside. As always the Falcon Tower allowed a pleasant view over the landscape. There was the mighty Giant’s Lance touching the sky and a dense forest of pine and spruce spreading far and wide as the eye could see.

“It is true. Our Lord has returned,” Randa stated and moved to stand next to her.

Dany nodded her head and watched the blue banner of House Arryn fluttering in the wind. Riding under it were two dozen of knights in the service of Lord Arryn.

It had been nearly half a year that she last laid eyes upon the lord and thus welcomed his return. As a young child she often feared him, believing he might send her before the King, the man who killed her brother Rhaegar and was known to hold a dislike for everyone of Targaryen blood.

You ought to be thankful that you weren’t slain in your crib, Lady Arryn had told her often enough, but Dany never understood why the Lady thought she was ungrateful towards the old Lord. She always behaved herself and never once dared to speak a bad word against the King, even though she held little love for him.

She was more than aware what kind of a monster her father was, but she also knew that the King rejoiced over the butchery of her nephew Aegon. He was a mere babe in his mother’s arms and the Mountain butchered him like a pig before raping and brutally murdering his mother Princess Elia. For a long time Dany didn’t know these details, but even Lord Arryn was unable to hide the truth forever.
That day her heart hardened against the King and she knew that she will never be able to forgive him, no matter how much the old Lord praised him in front of her.

“Dany!” Randa called out to her again and tugged on the hem of her dress. “Don’t you think we should allow the Septa her well-deserving rest?” the girl asked mischievously as ever.

“I agree with you,” she replied with a smile and was promptly pulled along. Walking on their tiptoes they made their way out of the solar, before rushing down the steps and further along the corridors.

Arriving outside they were breathless from their fast-paced run.

Lord Nestor was already there and watched the knights climb from their horses. The High Steward of the Vale was a massive, barrel-chested man, but his bald head and grey beard made him look older than his age.

Always at his side was his son and Randa's older brother Ser Albar. He sported the same broad shoulders and had the same sharp face like his father.

“Shouldn’t you be with the Septa?” Ser Albar asked them, but the smile on his lips showed clear amusement. As a young man he was instructed by the same Septa and so he understood how boring her lessons could be.

“She fell asleep and we didn’t want to deprive the woman off her well-deserving rest,” Randa quipped back and straightened her dress and hair.

“I also want to greet Lord Arryn. It has been a while that I saw him,” Dany added with a hesitant smile.

Lord Nestor sighed.

“I will have to find another Septa. That woman is sleeping too much,” Lord Nestor added in a displeased tone. “How can you become pious followers of the Seven if you are not instructed properly?”

“Oh, I don’t think it is the Septa’s fault, father. The Seven-Pointed-Star is not really the most engaging literature. I don’t fault her for being bored to death,” Randa jested, despite her father’s gasp of disapproval. He liked to call himself ”a well-instructed follower of the Seven”, but Dany doubted he ever read the Seven-Pointed-Star himself.

Luckily, they were spared from Lord Nestor's scolding as Lord Arryn was gracing them with his presence.

“My Lord Arryn,” he greeted and dipped his head lower than necessary. “It is wonderful to have you back.”

Lord Arryn gave the man a crinkling smile and patted his shoulders. “My good Nestor, it is also a great pleasure to see you again.”

Then the old lord turned to take in the rest of the assembled attendance.

“Ser Albar,” he said and smiled at the young man. “I heard congratulations are in order. Lord Horton’s niece is a sweet girl. She will be a good wife to you.”

“I sure hope so, my Lord,” the young man replied and smiled, but Dany saw that it was forced.
Everybody knew that he hoped for a better match. Randa also informed her that he holds great admiration for Lord Belmore’s heir Beth Belmore, but that the proud lord refused the match.

“And is that really the little Lady Randa?” Jon Arryn asked and gave her friend a peck on the cheek, before appraising her from head to toe.”You are turning into quite the beauty.”

Dany heard Randa’s distant giggle and curtsied to the old Lord. “It is sweet to see you again, Lord Arryn.”

The old man gave her a gentle smile and patted her cheek.

“My, you have also grown half a head since I last laid eyes on you, sweet child. It seems as if time is flying too fast,” he remarked and a smile washed over his lined mouth. Yet there was a hint of sadness ringing in his voice. It was always like this when he looked at her. As a child she believed the reason lay with her father’s actions during the rebellion, but now she knew that it was merely worry. Most of the things they heard from court were merely rumors, but it seems Lord Arryn’s bond with the King was growing weaker with every passing year and the Queen was making use of this.

She wants her father to be Hand of the King, Randa had told her and made Dany shudder in fear. Tywin Lannister was a man as powerful as he was ruthless. While it was the Mountain who butchered Princess Elia and her nephew everybody knew that it was Tywin who gave the order. In hindsight it was quite ironic that his son the Kingslayer saved her niece’s life on that bloody day.

“Indeed, my Lord,” she replied and the old man turned backwards to his men-at-arms. Most of them were familiar faces, so the young boy not dressed in the blue cloak of Lord Arryn’s household guard looked quite out of place.

“Now, Jon. Come forward and let Lord Nestor take a look at you,” Lord Arryn prodded the boy. Dany turned back to Randa and gave her a questioning look. They didn’t expect that Lord Arryn would bring guests, especially not a boy who shared his name.

Who is he, she wondered, but kept her mouth shut.

Timidly the boy came forward and dipped his head in greeting to Lord Royce.

“My name is Jon Snow of Winterfell. I am son of Eddard Stark. It is a pleasure to meet you, my Lord.”

Dany was stunned. Her knowledge about the North was only sparse, but she knew that Lord Eddard Stark was once fostered in the Vale and that her mad father butchered two members of his family. The fact that he has a bastard named after Lord Arryn was unknown to her.

Probably to honor him, she guessed and eyed the boy critically. His face was long, but even. His hair was dark-brown and quite plain, but he had a fine-shaped nose and full lips. His wavy hair also had a pretty curl that softened his glum expression.

Lord Nestor wrinkled his brow and eyed the boy closely.

“You have much of your father,” Lord Nestor he said at last and turned back to Lord Arryn.”I was quite surprised when I received Lord Arryn’s wish to take you as a squire. You should be grateful for this honor.”

“I am…very grateful,” the boy stuttered and lowered his gaze.
Lord Arryn stepped forward and touched the boy’s shoulders.

"Jon is a good boy and very gifted with the blade. I am sure he will serve you well, Nestor,” he remarked and the boy swallowed hard.

“Oh, it seems you are finally getting competition, brother dear!” Randa jested and received a sour look from her brother.

It was hard to say how old this Jon Snow was, but she doubted he was much older than herself. He was also quite tall, but she doubted the boy was able to hold a candle against a mighty fighter like Ser Albar.

“We will see,” Ser Albar remarked and flashed the boy a curious look. “We will see.”

The boy looked even more uncomfortable as they sat down to sup. As it was the Lord Arryn’s first visit in nearly six moons and so Lord Nestor was beyond himself to please him. The finest Arbor was poured that night and they served Lord Arryn’s favorite dish. Honeyed-chicken served with wild vegetables growing only in the Mountain of the Vale.

It were Lord Nestor and Lord Arryn who dominated most of the conversations, while Randa added her usual saucy remarks to lighten the mood.

The glum boy from the North hardly ate anything and stared on the goblet of wine as if it was poisoned.

It was no surprise to her when Randa decided to break the boy's silence. She was not the kind of person who was able to tolerate silence for a long time.

“I heard interesting tales from the North, Lord Snow. I wonder if there is any truth to them?”

It took the boy a moment to realize that Randa was actually speaking to him.

When she started to giggle he grew only more embarrassed and redness showed on his cheeks.

“If you told me what you heard I might be able to tell you if it is true, my Lady,” he replied politely.

“Well, I heard you have giants and direwolves in the North.”

Jon Snow gave her queer look."I have never seen a giant, but they say they can be found among the Free folk. I am not so sure about direwolves, my Lady."

“The Free folk?” Randa asked in confusion.

“The Free folk is what the Wildlings call themselves. I am sorry for confusing you, my Lady.”

Yet Randa seemed more intrigued than before.

“So have you ever met any Wildlings?”

The boy nodded his head.

"I have. One of my father’s lord captured a dozen of them when they tried to steal barley from his stores and another one who tried to steal his daughter. My father sent the barely thieves to the Wall and beheaded the other one for trying to rape the lord's daughter.”
Other people might have found such a tale disturbing, but not Randa.

“How very fascinating!” her friend remarked and and continued sipping from her wine.

Dany felt a bit like a fool. She wasn’t usually tongue-tied, but the boy’s permanent glumness made her slightly uncomfortable.

Does the concept of a smile not exist for him?

"We have the Mountain Clans here, but I dare say those Wildlings sound even more daring,” she remarked awkwardly.”I mean they have to somehow cross the Wall to enter your lands, don’t they?” she asked, but was unable to say why she even asked such a silly question.

Strangely, the boy didn’t seem to mind and answered her question earnestly.

“Mors Crowfood once told me that they know ways to climb up the Wall.”

“Crowfood,” Randa repeated the name in amusement.”What kind of name is that?”

The boy blushed.

"His name is actually Mors Umber, but in the North he is known as Crowfood, because he had a strange encounter with a crow. I don’t think that is a story for the ears of ladies…,” the boy explained, but Randa cut him off.

“Well, an even better reason to tell us!” she insisted.

The boy swallowed and leaned closer.

“They say a crow mistook him for a dead man and pecked out his eye. He apparently grabbed the raven at its’ feet and bit the head off, which earned him the name Crowfood.”

Dany was torn between amusement and disgust.

Randa howled with laughter.

“Well, I think it won’t get boring with your presence here, Lord Snow.”

“I hope so,” the boy replied and smiled a little. It was the ghost of the smile, but softened his solemn features. Smiling like that he looked almost handsome.
The chinking of the steel made Jon’s ears rattle whenever he tried to parry one of Ser Albar’s blows. Right and left he stopped his assault with his shield and tried to find an opening. Grinding his teeth together he lifted his shield and slashed his blade forward, finally touching the man’s shoulder. The retort was merciless and Jon soon tired under the man’s barrage of slashes. One mindless moment was all the knight needed and the blunted sword touched Jon’s padded shoulder. It didn't hurt, but in a real battle he would have received a deep cut.

“It seems you are dead!,” Ser Albar teased.

He felt shame, but no surprise. Ser Albar has been a knight for several years and was a man grown while Jon was a lanky boy and had a hard time keeping up with the man’s never-ending energy.

“One more round!” he demanded stubbornly, sweat running down his temples. It was a warm day, but for Jon, born and bred in the North, the Vale felt like the air in the glass gardens. All too humid and warm for his taste.

Ser Albar disagreed with his request.

“You are sweating like a pig. I think it is time for a break. Later I want to see how well you can handle the lance. The girls will also be watching so I suggest giving your best performance.”

Jon groaned when he heard this. The lance was not really his greatest strength, but having the girls present would make it only worse.

“Alright,” he agreed unwillingly and went to undress. He was really sweating like a pig and smelled even worse, but that was not unusual. Hard training demanded this, or so Ser Roderik told him often enough.

Not wishing to be known as the stinking Northener he washed himself properly and put on a fresh tunic. It was blue as the summer sky and embellished with the white falcon of House Arryn.

Finally finished with his grooming he attended to his other not so glorious duties of a squire, which entailed caring for Lord Nestor’s horses and armor, even though the man hardly left the Mountains of the Gates. Most of his time was used up by listening to all kinds of petitions. This usually included fights about land, abducted daughters or the mere right to grass one’s pigs on a specific meadow.

“There you are, Jon!” Ser Albar called out to him when he entered the stables. Lord Nestor’s horse was a brown charger dubbed Griff, but it was a shame that the Lord hardly found time to use his horse. Yet Griff and Lord Nestor’s other horses still needed caring and so he did his best. His own horse was a grey palfrey named Greyling, but nothing compared to Lord Nestor's well-bred horses.

“Much better!” the knight remarked after seeing his fresh clothes. Then he pulled him aside to show him the amour used for jousting. In the North they usually wore mail, but here in the Vale the knights preferred plate, all polished like a looking glass.

“Come here and let me help you dress,” the knight offered not unkindly.”I assume you trained with the lance before?”

“I have,” Jon replied, but he never did so dressed in full amour. Yet he was too proud to admit it.
“Good,” Ser Albar replied and handed him a helmet. “Then let’s go. Red Jon is awaiting us.”

Jon Redfort or Red Jon as Ser Albar liked to call his squire derived his nickname from his bright curly red hair. Another feature of his was that he was always busy. Whether it was polishing armor, entertaining people with silly stories, he was always doing something. Even when sitting down his feet were always twitching. It was no wonder that Myranda Royce dubbed the young man twitchy Jon.

*I don’t want to know what she is calling me.*

True to his character the young man was already waiting for them near the shady pavilion the girls took as their refuge from the sun. Randa was dressed in a shock of red satin that fell around her like a waterfall. Like usual she was blabbering.

Jon didn’t know what to make of her. She certainly wasn’t malicious in her intend, but whenever she called him Lord Snow he had a hard time to keep a straight face. Her high-pitched giggle was even worse and gave him constant headaches.

Princess Daenerys or Dany was of a calmer disposition, but he had the feeling that she was holding herself back. Especially in presence of guests or Lord Nestor she was often stiff and full of awkward smiles. There was also something ghost-like about the Princess and that she was constantly dressed in pale colors only enhanced this impression.

Jon brushed those thoughts away and focused on the task ahead.

“Red Jon, did you get the quintains ready?” Ser Albar asked.

“Of course….Of course!” came the answer and the boy jumped to his feet.

“Well, then bring me a lance!” Ser Albar commanded and the young man rushed off to bring the demanded object.

“I thank you!” Ser Albar replied and turned back to Jon. “I guess it is watch and learn for you, Jon.”

Then he pulled his visor down and hurled his horse around, before rushing at one of the quintains. The knight hit right where the lance belonged and sent the it spinning like a wheel.

Riding his horse back to Jon, Ser Albar pulled his visor down and flashed him a triumphant smile.

“Your turn!”

Jon swallowed hard and grasped the lance from Red Jon's hand. In Winterfell the lances felt much lighter or maybe it was only the heavy armor that was weighing him down. The heat was even worse and he already felt the sweat blooming on his face.

Pulling himself together he urged the horse forward and tried to keep the lance straight. His arm felt heavy, but with a little effort and gritted teeth he was at least able to hit the target.

Yet the hit lacked strength and that amused Ser Albar greatly.

“In a real fight your enemy wouldn’t have even felt that hit,” he japed which made Jon’s blood boil. Yet the anger he felt was not directed towards the man, but himself. It was generous of Lord Arryn to allow him to stay here and he wanted nothing more than to prove himself worthy.

In Winterfell he was only the bastard meant for the Wall, but now he had hope for a different
future.

Whirling the horse around he tried again. This time it was even worse and he barely hit the stupid target, but that didn’t mean he wanted to give in.

Again and again the tried. He even improved a little, but in the end he was exhausted and frustrated.

Even Ser Albar seemed to sense his frustration and made an attempt to lighten the mood.

“I hope my jest didn’t insult you,” he said and patted his shoulder.”You are a good rider and you will soon get used to the weight,” he assured Jon, but he only managed an empty nod.

Tired he led his horse back to the stables and spent the next hours caring for it. It calmed him down and helped him to get a clearer head, before he joined the others for supper.

Lord Nestor was not joining them today, because he departed on important business.

So he, Red Jon and the girls were left to themselves, which meant that Randa was talking while the rest of them listened.

“So did my brother get under your skin, Lord Snow?” Randa Royce asked him at last. The question made him very uncomfortable, but he didn't wish to appear impolite.

“How did you notice it, my Lady?” he countered vaguely, but Randa inclined her head to the side and pointed at Dany.

“I noticed it,” the pale-haired girl remarked and gave him an appraising look.”You looked like you wanted to slap Ser Albar.”

“I didn’t mean…,” he apologized and the pale-haired girl winked with her hand as if to tell him that it is no bother.

“Why are you always apologizing?” she asked and sounded curious.

The whole question left him only more perplexed. Why did he always apologize? It was a good question he never asked himself until now, but thinking about it he realized it had to do with Lady Stark. Whatever he did displeased her and so it has become a habit for him to apologize to her and to every one around him, even if it was not strictly his fault. Yet he didn’t want to admit that to the girls in front of him.

“I don’t know…,” he admitted honestly which earned him a smile.

“Good, because you have nothing to apologize for. Don’t allow Ser Albar to annoy you. He is a bit of a braggart and thinks that he plopped out of his mother's womb with a lance in his hand.”

Randa nodded her head in agreement.

”I can attest to that. He kissed the dirt on his first tourney before his lance even touched his enemy. It was a horrible performance, but my brother is not the kind of person to dwell on his past failings. He got horrible drunk on that day and just forgot about it.”

Jon wished he had the same ability, but for him every failure cut deeper than for normal people. As a bastard he always felt as if he had to work harder than necessary. Maybe, maybe the girl was right and he was really overdoing it.
Thankful he granted each girl a smile.”I am thankful for your advice.”

In the following weeks he tried to keep to this determination. He stopped judging himself too hard and it truly helped. Over the passing weeks he was finally able to get accustomed to the heavy armor and finally showing progress.

Six moons into his training Ser Albar announced his intention to take part in a tourney hosted by Mace Tyrell in honor of his only daughter’s nameday. While Jon was to remain here it also meant more work than usual. Half of the time he spent drilling Ser Albar’s horses and the other half taking care of his weapons and armor. It was no bother to him, but he was actually Lord Nestor’s squire.

Thus the weeks passed and the preparations. Barely a week before the planned departure Red Jon started vomiting his guts out and Jon was asked to replace him. He was of course thrilled to go to Highgarden and even received a hearty congratulation from Randa, but the Princess gave him only a sour look. Her sudden coldness stunned him and for two days he fretted about it. At last he decided to ask for Randa's advice.

Having voiced his suspicions the girl patted his shoulder and granted him a soft smile.

“Oh, silly boy. Not everything has to do with you. It is the King’s fault,” she explained and he heard subtle anger ringing in her voice.

”The King?” he asked in confusion.

“Aye,” she confirmed.”The King is coming to the tourney, which means it is out of the question for Dany to attend. She hoped she would be able to meet her niece.”

*Her niece,* Jon realized and tried to recall what he knew about Rhaenys Targaryen. He knew that she was the only living child of Rhaegar Targaryen and betrothed to King Robert’s heir. What stunned him was that the Princess apparently never met her own niece or that is what he deduced from Randa’s explanation.

“I don’t understand,” he admitted.”Why can’t she see her niece because of the King?”

Randa sighed.

“It is actually quite simple. The King doesn’t want two Targaryens together. He fears they might plot treason against him.”

Jon was even more shocked, because it was hard for him believe that someone like the Princess might plot treason. She was only a little girl and he understood that she wanted to see her family. He missed his own siblings terribly.

“Can’t she at least write a letter?” he asked in return, but Randa’s sad smile gave him the answer he needed.

“No, nothing. The King forbids any contact between them.”

“That is horrible!” it escaped him unintentionally.”I mean… is there nothing that can be done about it?”

Randa’s dark eyes widened in realization of his words, but after a brief moment of silence a smile started to bloom on her rosy lips.
“Oh, I think you gave me an idea, Lord Snow!” she stated and rubbed her hands together.

“What idea would that be, my Lady?” he asked hesitatingly.

She grinned from one ear to the other. “You are going to the tourney, are you not?”

...
Rhaenys

Highgarden greeted them with splendor and the smell of spring. It was barely a year ago that she last visited the Reach in company of Renly Baratheon. Back then the King hoped to strike a betrothal between his brother Renly and Mace Tyrell's daughter Margaery Tyrell, but to those few who knew about Renly's inclinations it sounded like an absurd notion. Margaery would end up a withering maid if she were to wed Renly. Not that she had any right to judge the young man for his inclinations. The Faith might call it unnatural, but her own father was what the strict men of the Faith liked to call "an abomination of incest".

"Your mind is straying, sweet Rhaenys!" the amused laughter of Renly Baratheon called her back from her whirling thoughts.

"It seems so," she replied and tightened her grip on the reins of her horse, leading it through the bustling camp. Behind them fluttered the golden banner of House Baratheon and before her stretched the beauty of Highgarden.

It was a precious castle of unearthly beauty. High the pale walls and tower rose and were surrounded by three massive rings of equally white-washed marble. The pale morning light made the stone glitter like the polished surface of a sword.

"Highgarden will surely make you forget about the unpleasant events in the capital," Renly added and smiled over to Loras Tyrell.

"There is no better place to calm the mind than Highgarden, right?" he asked his young squire.

"I couldn't have said it better, my Lord," the boy replied and gave her a hesitant smile.

"My brother Willas will also be pleased to see you again, Princess."

She knew that the boy meant well, but Rhaeny's wanted to lean over and kick him for his mindless comment. It was enough that they were spreading nasty rumors about her supposed devotion for the heir to Highgarden, but that the boy was daring to voice it so openly made it only more dangerous.

"Your brother is a dear friend and nothing more, Loras," she told him with special emphasis on the word "friend"."Is that understood?"

The boy flinched and lowered his head in understanding.

"Of course, my Lady."

"Loras was trying to be kind. Your harsh rebuke was not necessary," Renly remarked later when he helped her from her horse. She understood that he felt the need to defend his squire, but she had no tolerance for such heedlessness. She learned early in her life that one word was enough to damn her forever. The last moons proved that.

"I had my virtue inspected in front of the whole court and this disgusting creature Pycelle touched me all over my body," she snapped back at him in hushed whispers."I won't allow this to happen again."

Not pleased with her answer, he pulled her aside into one of the half-erected pavilions.
"I know that you hold no love for Cersei, but there is no prove that it was her who spread the rumors or instigated this "inspection". Be careful who you accuse, Rhaenys."

His words made her blood boil. There was no proof for her accusations, but she knew that the Queen wanted her betrothal with Prince Joffrey broken. The King may dislike her, but he hardly concerned himself with her presence, which only left the Queen.

Luckily, the Queen's plan didn't quite play out as she expected. Lord Arryn's and her Uncle Doran's hard stance convinced the King to uphold the betrothal.

"Who else could have spread the rumors other than her?" she asked and couldn't help to hide her bitterness. "She doesn't want her precious boy to be married to a scarred girl like me."

Renly sighed and patted her right cheek. There, bright and red, sprawled the nasty scar Ser Armory Lorch left her before Ser Jaime Lannister cut him down.

"I hold no love for Cersei Lannister, but you have to be careful. She is more dangerous than you can think."

She knew that he meant well, but she hated it, living like this, always depending on other people.

"I will try," she assured him last and received a soft smile in return.

"Good," he said and let her go. "Now go and put on the pretty dress I ordered for you. Today is the perfect day to wear it."

Rhaenys nodded and joined her ladies to prepare for the upcoming feast with the King. It was not often that he tolerated her presence and she was sure that it was Lord Arryn who suggested for her to come here.

To show that the rumors are a thing of the past, she guessed, but doubted it will work. In King's Landing they still called her the whore of Highgarden.

Yet Renly was right. The dress was precious. It was made of golden brocade and soft yellow sleeves. It was a dress made for a Lady of House Baratheon.

One day I will dress in red and black, she told herself as she regarded her reflection in the looking glass. And I will braid rubies into my hair like my Lady mother used to do. One day they will all pay for their deeds.

It were these thoughts that allowed her to get through the following feast with the King.

He proved even fatter than the last time she saw him scarcely six moons ago.

One day he might just burst, she thought and dropped a curtsy to the King and his golden-haired Queen.

"It is a pleasure to be allowed in your presence, your Grace!" she greeted the King with false politeness.

Not that the King seemed to care. He looked displeased, almost bored.

"As you say, girl," he muttered and looked over to Prince Joffrey. "Greet your Lady!"

The Baratheon heir looked more like a Lannister than a Baratheon. Others might call him handsome, but his character was as black as the night. Rhaenys learned that on their first meeting.
It was a tourney held in honor of Prince Tommen's nameday. Weeks she tried to find a present for the young boy and ended up choosing a plump white cat that the boy loved from the moment he laid eyes on the gently creature. Only a few moons later she found out that the cat got disemboweled by her betrothed. It told her everything she needed to know about the future King of the Seven Kingdoms.

_He is a mad King in the making._

Unwillingly the boy rose from his gilded seat and kissed her hand.

"It pleases me to see you again, my Lady," he muttered through gritted teeth, before settling back into his seat.

"It pleases me to see again, my beloved Prince," she replied with a blazing smile, before turning to the Queen."And you, my gracious Queen. Your sight is always a wonder to behold."

She saw the unhappy smile on the Queen's lips and knew that she achieved what she wanted. _To make clear to her that the game between us has yet to be decided._

Thus she settled down next to her betrothed and smiled like it was demanded of her.

Lord Mace Tyrell didn't wait long to take his intended place on the High table. Behind closed doors he never failed to complain about the King, but now his words were full of honey and praise. What surprised her was that Willas didn't come to greet the King. Only Mace Tyrell, his wife Alerie, his son Garlan and his precious daughter Margaery came to feast with the King.

"If you are wondering about Willas...he is sick," Margaery informed her."He didn't wish to insult the King with his presence."

Rhaenys knew then that Loras took her warning to heart and informed Willas.

"I am sure the King appreciates the gesture, Lady Margeary," she replied calmly, but the soft squeeze on her arm told her that Margaery understood what she really meant to say.

Thus the feast continued. As usual the King laughed, drank and pulled half the servant girl into his lap.

_In nine moons Highgarden will be blessed with the first Baratheon bastard of it's own, she was sure._

Rhaenys hardly ate anything. The memories form the capital still haunted her and Joffrey's presence didn't help to soothe her mind.

Soon after the last course was served all kind of different people came to speak to the King. Some turned out to be bold friends from the war and others were relatives of people the King held in favor.

One smiling face after another followed, but it was a knight from the Vale and his long-faced squire that made the King smile like a star.

"Ser Albar!" the King exclaimed and patted his fat belly."How long has it been? Six years? Or was it seven? I only remember that you were a meager squire the last time I laid eyes on you."

The broad-shouldered knight laughed and smiled at the King."Well, time leaves it's mark on you,
"Indeed," the King agreed and laughed."Time is a bitch. In your case it worked wonders."

"I see that you are well, but how is your Lord father?" the King added and leaned forward, giving the long-faced squire a curious glance.

"He is well..." Ser Albar began, but the King cut him off. His was face suddenly alive with recognition and an expression that was seldom seen on his face. *Warmth and joy.*

"It is you, isn't it?" he asked the long-faced boy."You are Ned's boy?"

_Ned_, she repeated the name in her mind, trying to find the fitting piece, but it was the boy's reply that gave her the answer she was seeking.

"Yes, your Grace," the boy replied and dipped his head."I am Jon Snow of Winterfell, son Eddard Stark."

"Come here, my boy. I want to get a better look at you," the King demanded and the boy obeyed, although hesitatingly.

The King grasped his face and turned it left and right as if inspecting a stud, before patting the boy's head and grinning from one ear to the other.

"There is no doubt about it!" he exclaimed."You are all Ned's boy. I heard that Jon asked Ned to foster you in the Vale, but I didn't expect that you would come here all the way to Highgarden."

"Ser Albar's squire is sick and I am his replacement, your Grace," the boy replied and the King turned into a grinning fool.

"Now, tell me," the King prodded."Do you like being a squire?" Did you taste the wine here? It is the best one you can get. As a young boy I would have killed for it, but Jon always forbade it," the King told the boy, who appeared utterly perplexed by the attention the King was showering on him.

The boy nodded his head timidly."I had half a goblet, your Grace. It was very good."

"Gods, you are truly your father's son!" the King exclaimed and turned to Ser Albar.

"I thank you for giving me the joy of meeting Ned's boy," the King thanked Ser Albar, before turning his attention back to the boy."This joyous event demands a favor. Is there something I can give you, my boy?"

"Your Grace...I would never presume...," the boy protested, but the King didn't care.

"Oh, nonsense. There is no presumption to grant a favor to Ned's son. It is not like your father is giving me much of an opportunity, as he is hiding in his frozen home that is the North."

"Now tell me...there has to be something you want?"

A moment of silence followed and suddenly, very slowly she saw that the boy was glimpsing at her.

"I have a request...I request a dance...with the most precious Princess Rhaenys...if you might grant it, your Grace."
Any other King would have banished the boy for making this preposterous request, but Robert Baratheon howled with laughter.

"My, I think I misjudged you. You are a daring lad to make this request, but such boldness should be rewarded and I promised a favor," the King added and turned to look at her.

“Princess Rhaenys, would you bless Jon Snow with a brief dance?”

Rhaenys wanted to outright refuse the King's request, but she also recalled Renly's warning. Unwillingly she rose to her feet and took in Ser Albar's squire.

He was quite tall in stature and his long face framed by dark-brown locks. He was also dressed in blue and white, marking him as a member of Lord Arryn's household.

At her approach the boy dropped his head in reverence and gave her a shy smile.

"It is an honour, Princess Rhaenys," he added and offered his hand.

"As you say, Lord Snow," she replied and took the boy's hand, before the both of them moved on to share the promised dance.

All the while she tried to figure out why this hesitant boy made such a daring request.

"Jon is enough," the boy offered quietly.

It was a slow dance that demanded little talent, but the boy proved quite clumsy.

Now and then he even stepped on her toes. It made her roll her eyes, but when he gave her this apologetic smile of his she had a hard time to remain angry.

She didn't know why, but it was familiar. Like from a dream, or a blurred memory of the past.

"Lord Snow...I mean Jon...please allow me to lead," she told him at last and it surprised her that the boy didn't mind her request.

"Of course. Princess Rhaenys...I have something for you...a gift," the boy whispered to her. His anxiety and words confused her.

"What could that be?" she asked. "What could a bastard from the North have for me?"

He winced at the mentioning of "bastard", but no harsh was spoken. *The boy has self-control,* she realized.

The boy bit his lips and leaned closer, before clarifying his meaning.

"A letter...I have a letter from your Aunt Princess Daenerys."

*Her Aunt,* she repeated and tried to recall the babe King Robert sent away to be fostered in the Vale.

Stunned she regarded to boy closely. She searched for any sign of falsehood, but there was nothing to be found. His features appeared open, almost hopeful.

*He is not lying,* she realized. The boy was a member of Lord Arryn's household and thus it was quite possible that he met Daenerys, but the fact that he was Eddard Stark's bastard kept her
suspicious.

She knew that Eddard Stark disapproved of the butchery of her mother and little brother, but the King still called him his oldest friend. *Why would his bastard help a Targaryen? Why would her niece choose him as her confident?*

*But the boy is a bastard,* she reminded herself. *He and his family may not be close.*

*Yes, that has to be the answer.*

Yet her heart remained full of doubts.

*No,* she had to tread carefully.

"Princess!" the boy whispered to her and squeezed their joined hands."What is your answer?"

She sighed and leaned an inch closer.

"I don't even know if I can believe you, but that letter...do you have it here?"

“Aye,” he confirmed and patted the pocked sewn into his cloak.”I have the letter here, but it would be too dangerous….with the King observing us and all.”

*At least he is not stupid,* she thought and gave the boy a tentative nod.

“Indeed,” she confirmed and lowered her voice."I will send someone to contact you. Wait for a sign, but don’t speak to anyone about this."

“Of course…but...!” he began, but she cut him off.

“No buts!,” she insisted and flashed him a warning look."I am only doing this for my Aunt. I will have your head if you are lying to me, boy!"

The boy paled, but kept his composure.

"Of course. I thank you for the dance, Princess Rhaenys."

...
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Jon waited all night for someone to contact him. When morning dawned he grew impatient and made his way out of the tent.

Outside a rich velvet sky stretched over the rolling green hills of Highgarden. Now and then he was able to spot a small forest or a bird fluttering over the tree crowns. Here it it was even warmer than in the Vale. The days were full of golden sunshine and the smell of flowers filled every corner of the castle.

The rose of was indeed a fitting image to represent House Tyrell.

Slowly he walked through the camp, leaving behind the snoring Ser Albar. The knight drank more than was good for him. Before the tourney he even counseled Jon on self-restraint, but the pretty smile of one of the servant girls was enough to coax the knight into one goblet after another.

*I have to keep him away from the wine today,* Jon told himself and searched for the more elaborate tents.

At times he wondered if he couldn’t just go there and give Princess Rhaenys the letter. He doubted it held any sort of treasonous intend, but then he also recalled the suspicious looks the young woman gave him during their brief dance and conversation.

*The Princess looks bitter and sad.* That is the way he would describe her if he had put it into words.

She was also very different from her Aunt. Granted even Princess Daenerys didn't smile all day long, but she certainly never threatened him to have his head. While Jon was used to the glowering looks of nobility, it was different to receive such threats from a Princess.

*She may have her reasons,* he tried to reassure himself and went back to Ser Albar's tent to attend to his duties.

Like always he took care of Ser Albar’s sword and armor, polishing them until they glittered like glass. It was beautiful to behold and for a brief moment he found Sansa’s admiration for pretty knights less silly. Arya would probably roll her eyes, but still admire their valiant strength and fine horses.

Brushing those thoughts away he put the armor back were it belonged and went to wash himself properly, before dressing in the fine clothes Ser Albar wanted him to wear during the tourney.

“Are you Lord Snow?” the soft voice of a girl greeted him when he stepped back outside. She was clothed in a yellow dress and her hair was dark as the night.

*Finally,* he thought and gave her an affirming nod.”That is me. Did the Princess send you?”

The girl nodded her head, but also looked a little displeased.

“Yes, the Princess sent me, but you shouldn’t speak so openly. No come along quickly,” the girl explained to him and grabbed for his arm.
Confused by the girl’s actions he yanked his arm free. Half the night he has been waiting for a sign and now this girl commanded him around like some silly boy.

“Why can’t I just give you the letter and be done with it?”

Suddenly, the servant girl appeared almost fearful.

“Please…my mistress would be very angry with me. Come with me…she just wants to talk with you,” the girl explained more politely.

Jon sighed and realized that the girl was in the same boat as him. Both of them were “servants” and had to obey the command of the high lords.

“Alright, I am coming with you,” he confirmed and followed her through the camp. Hardly anybody of the ladies and lords could be seen at this early hour of the day. Now and then he saw a servant girl or a squire running errands, but he guessed that both the nobility and the knights were still trying to recover from their overindulgence in last night's wine.

At last they arrived at a small, but richly decorated tent. The outer surface was sewn out of a fine shining material he couldn’t name, but it looked both expensive and exquisite.

“Now go inside. The Princess is awaiting you,” the girl told him, but Jon was still hesitant. It was strange that there were no guards to be seen, but he guessed it was intentional.

Sighing deeply he pulled the cloth upwards and stepped into the tent. It was not very spacious, but equipped with fine carpets and elaborate furniture.

The Princess Rhaenys awaited him seated in a cushioned chair and clothed in a flowing dress of blue silk.

“There you are, Lord Snow.”

“Here I am, Princess Rhaenys,” he confirmed and dipped his head in greeting, before grabbing for the letter safely kept in the vest of his cloak.

He held the letter out to her, but didn’t dare to move closer.

Her movements were accompanied by the rustling of silk and she picked the folded letter from his hands. Yet she made not attempt to read it and only settled back down in her cushioned chair.

“How is it that you became the confidant of my Aunt Princess Daenerys?” she asked then, her dark eyes fixed on him.

Jon was startled by the question, but it only confirmed his suspicions. She still mistrusts me, he realized and knew that he had to change that state of affairs.

“I wouldn’t call myself a confidant. It is merely a favor for a friend, nothing more.”

It was hard for him to describe the emotion displayed on her face. Was it displeasure or disbelief?

“A friend?” the Princess asked and seemed almost amused.”I didn’t think people like us could have many friends.”

The bitterness in her voice scared him a little.

"Why not?” he countered.”The Princess Daenerys is very well liked in the Vale.”
Princess Rhaenys wrinkled her brows.

"Very well liked?" she asked. "I am also very well liked as long as I am smiling and playing the role they decided for me."

Jon was confused. Why is she telling me this? It is clear that she mistrusts me and yet she reveals her mind to me…

“I don’t understand the meaning of your words, Princess Rhaenys,” he replied honestly.

Surprisingly, the young woman started to laugh.

“No, you don’t,” she remarked and rose from her seat, before making her way to a table littered with goblets and bottles. She grasped for a goblet and filled it up to the brim with wine.

Then she made her way back to the smaller table next to the cushioned seat and put it down.

“Please, Lord Snow. Sit down and let us continue our conversation. I am not your enemy, but I need to know if I can trust you.”

Jon wanted to refuse, but he didn’t wish to displease a Princess.

Settling down in a nearby chair he instinctively brought the goblet to his mouth, but stopped himself when he saw the curious look on her face. It made a scary thought bloom in his mind.

What if it is poisoned?

She has the letter and clearly mistrusts me. Nobody would cry after a bastard.

Overwhelmed by this thought he put the goblet down and granted the Princess an awkward smile.

“It seems my vigilance infected you, Lord Snow,” she remarked and leaned forward, her long raven hair falling into her oval face and covering the prominent scar showing on her cheek. It was like a burning wound in an otherwise very beautiful face.

When he didn’t speak the Princess started to laugh again.

“You don’t need to worry about the wine. I would never dare to kill the son of the King’s oldest friend. I am not mad, despite some people claiming the contrary.”

Her words confused him only more.

Was this another game of hers? Is she testing me?

“I didn’t think…,” he began, but she cut him off before he could voice his thoughts.

“Yes, you did. I could see it written all over our face. I know the expression of fear. I have lived with it all my life, but that is not why I wanted to talk with you. The letter is nice, but I want to know more about my Aunt Princess Daenerys. Tell me about her.”

“As I told you...I am not a close confidant of hers. If you wish to know her mind you have to speak to her friend. Myranda Royce.”

“Royce?” she asked and something like interest softened her features. “Is she perhaps the daughter of Yohn Royce? I forgot her name…maybe it was Myranda.”
“No, the daughter of Nestor Royce, High Steward of The Vale. I am here to accompany his son to the tourney. His squire grew sick and I am his replacement.”

“So you never intended to come here?” she asked and he nodded his head in affirmation.

“No, my coming here is more of a strike of luck. See, I haven no deeper motives. You have nothing to fret about, Princess.”

“Nothing to fret about?” she asked and laughed.”I can see that you don’t know much about the South. How long have you been residing in the Vale?”

“Half a year,” he answered and she gave him a knowing look.

“That explains it,” she stated and leaned forward to grasp his hand.”The South is not like the North. People may very well smile at you, but behind those masks they may also plot your death. And the further South you go the worse it gets. King’s Landing is a pit full of vipers. My vigilance is my only way for survival in such a world.”

Jon had nothing to offer against her arguments. His father didn’t hold much love for the South, but while residing in the North all of this had been nothing more than a distant world. Now it has become part of his reality and he had to learn to live with it.

“I understand,” he told her determinedly.

She sighed.

”No, you don’t,” she told him and patted his hand.”Only those who experience it know what they are talking about.”

Then she let go of his hand and leaned backwards.

“Now tell me more about my Aunt,” she prodded him.”Is she happy in the Vale? What does she know about me?”

Jon tried to recall everything Princess Daenerys ever spoke about her niece in his presence. It wasn’t much.

“She doesn’t like Lady Arryn, but that doesn’t mean much. Hardly anybody speaks well of Lord Arryn’s wife. She is said to be a very unhappy woman and her son is quite sick. Some say he won’t make it to his tenth year. In regards to you…she wants nothing more than to meet you. I think she also mentioned once that you are know to be gracious and that your abilities with the harp are renowned.”

Jon believed to see a sad smile tugging on the young woman’s lips, but all of it was neatly concealed behind the firm mask she was trying to show to the world.

“I wouldn’t call my harp play renowned. My father’s play was heavenly…I am nothing more than an amateur….,” she muttered before falling into a brief moment of silence.

Then her eyes widened in realization.

”Ah, you gave me an idea!”

Without further explanations she rose to her feet and made her way to a wooden box made of polished wood. Carefully she hoisted something out of the box, before uncovering the object from
its crimson cloth.

Jon was stunned. It was a beautiful harp carved from dark wood.

Almost lovingly she put the harp on the table and let her finger dance over the strings, bringing forth a sweet longing sound.

“I can’t play for my Aunt, but you can tell her about it,” she told him and he only managed an empty nod, so overwhelmed he was by the sudden change in her character.

Then she played. It was a song unknown to him, but both sad and beautiful to behold. He knew nothing about music or how to play a harp. That was all Sansa’s interest, but he recalled that even Arya and Bran liked to listen to their sister’s soft voice.

“What do you think, Lord Snow?” she asked of him at last and started to cover the harp, before putting it back where it belonged.

“It is very beautiful, but I don’t know the song you played,” he admitted honestly.

“It is not possible for you to know the song. I composed it,” she explained and roamed through the wooden box before her. At last she pulled out a stack of bound papers and handed it to him.

Jon looked through the papers and found them covered in the whirling notes that minstrels used to write down their music. He also recalled that Septa Mordane was trying to instill them into Sansa while teaching her the harp.

“What am I to do with this?”

“The notes capture the song I played for you. Call it a gift for my Aunt if it pleases you. I will also pen a letter for her, but thus she can will be able to hear my music.”

Jon was surprised by her gesture. It seems behind her cold mask Princess Rhaenys hid a good heart.

“I am sure she will be pleased,” Jon assured her. Suddenly he felt much more at ease in the young woman’s presence.

She nodded her head and settled back down in her chair.

“I am honest here. I have a hard time trusting people, but I am willing to try. So I am warning you again. Do not play me wrong or you will regret it,” she warned him again, but it was less severe than the last time.

Jon rose to his feet and dropped his head in acknowledgement.

“I assume one of your ladies will give me the letter you mentioned?” he asked and wanted to leave, but she grasped his arm and stopped him.

“No, you will stay. Sit down and let me write a few lines. I can’t trust such a letter to my servants.”

Jon sighed, ruffling through his hair in growing frustration. Will these complicated games ever end?

You are in the South now, the quiet voice in his mind reminded him then and he did what was asked of him.
Half an hour later he left the Princess and was relieved to return to Ser Albar.

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Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will probably be out on Tuesday.
Nearly two weeks have passed since Ser Albar announced his return from the tourney in Highgarden. Dany tried to banish it from her thoughts, but she couldn’t help but to agonize over this lost possibility of meeting her niece. Randa desperately tried to distract her mind, but there was little do other than their boring lessons. While she called the Vale her home she often felt like a prisoner.

She longed to see more of the world and often dreamed of far away places. All she knew of the world was gained through dusty books and the tales other relayed to her. Even Jon Snow, the bastard of Winterfell saw more of the world than her. And the reason for it was the Iron throne Aegon Targaryen once forged out of dragonfire. She knew the history of all his successors, but for her they were nothing more than stories. They were a thing of the past and not part of her reality.

The reality was the Vale, its inhabitants and the future marriage Lord Arryn was trying to broker for her. It was just another way to imprison her and something she wanted to avoid. Yet it was not much of a surprise to her that Lord Arryn is trying to gain the King’s permission for a marriage between her and Harry the Heir.

His son was still young and sickly. There was a good chance that he might die in infancy and Lady Arryn’s numerous miscarriages didn’t promise another child given Lord Arryn’s advanced age. Harry was not only one of his heirs, but also healthy and a capable fighter. Some of the the lords and ladies also liked to whisper that young Harry showed more resemblance to Lord Arryn than his own son. Dany only met him once, but her impression was not very positive. He was handsome for sure, but a self-indulging peacock.

However, that mattered little to Lord Arryn. More important was that Dany wed a man loyal to the crown and Harry was such a man given that he is of Arryn blood. In the end all her fetters can be traced back to the name “Targaryen”.

“Oh, stop that glowering of yours and come here!” Randa’s high-pitched voice snapped her out of her dreamy state of mind. She was seated at her usual place next to the window.

The top of the Giant’s Lance was visible today and a blue sky spread over the valley bellow. Green hills, forests and pastures stretched as far as her eye could see, but the saddest thing was that she never visited any of these places.

*No, Ser Albar and Jon Snow are allowed to behold such wonders and I have to remain here in this stupid tower.*

*I am jealous,* she realized then and felt a little silly. *I am a Princess and jealous of the bastard of Winterfell.*

Brushing those thoughts away she turned her attention to Randa. She was proudly parading the dress she has been working on in the last moons. It was a dream of pale silk and meant for her brother’s upcoming wedding with Lord Redfort’s niece.

It was a sour point between Ser Albar and his father, but that didn’t seem to disturb Randa’s enthusiasm. At times she even japed that her brother left to become a hedge knight to forget his
broken heart.

“What do you think?” Randa asked.

Dany gave her a small smile.”It suits you, but that is no surprise. You can wear everything.”

Randa sighed and changed back into her simple dress.

“Really, your brooding makes me all gloomy,” Randa remarked and made her way over to her.

Then she grasped her shoulder and granted her an encouraging smile.

“I am sure my brother will tell us everything when he returns. Maybe he even met the King or your niece?” Randa with a knowing smile.

Her friend’s words surprised her. In all her disappointment she didn’t even consider that Ser Albar might able to speak to the King.

Then she recalled the letter she gave to Randa and fresh hope bloomed in her heart.

“Truly, do you think it is possible?” she asked and Randa grinned from one ear to the other.

“The King spent his childhood in the Vale. He knows both my father and brother. I don’t think I have ever mentioned it, but I met the King when I was a little girl. I know that you don’t hold much love for him, but he is the kind of man you want to sit down with to share a drink. That is at least how my father likes to describe him. It is also the reason I am convinced that he will be pleased to see my brother’s face,” Randa explained and every word out her friend's mouth helped to nurse Dany’s hope.

“So you asked your brother to deliver the letter I gave you, didn’t you?” Dany asked.

“Something along the lines,” Randa confirmed and gave her a knowing smile.”I only hope my brother didn’t fuck it up.”

Dany didn’t care, but the fact that she was so considerate meant much to her.

“I am sure your brother will do his best,” she added and squeezed Randa’s hand.

“I hope so,” her friend added vaguely.

A few days later Ser Albar returned in company of the dozen men that accompanied him to Highgarden. He looked in high spirits and carried a smile on his lips when his father embraced him. As usual Lord Snow followed after him like his obedient shadow and like always he stood there in silence, no hint of emotion showing on his frozen face.

Sometimes she wondered if smiling was painful to him, but she also recalled what Randa told her not along ago.

_The life of a bastard is not easy_, Randa had told when Dany asked her opinion about the boy from the North. _The wife of Lord Stark didn’t like his presence and that was part of the reason Lord Arryn offered to foster him here in the Vale._

“No, tell us everything?” Randa prodded her brother.”Did you win or did you shame us all.”

Ser Albar rolled his eyes.
"I won a few rounds, but Ser Garlan Tyrell made me kiss the dirt. He is an excellent jouster," Ser Albar replied vaguely.

"Ser Garlan," Randa repeated his name and sighed. "I remember him. He is a joy for the eyes like all the Tyrell siblings. Even the oldest Willas is rather good-looking, despite his problem with his right foot."

"Willas Tyrell wasn’t even there," Ser Albar remarked. "I saw no sign of the heir of Highgarden."

This roused Lord Nestor’s interest.

"So there is truth to the rumors," the older man remarked and put his goblet down.

Randa gave her father a questioning look and Ser Albar frowned as if he knew quite well what Lord Nestor was referring too.

"What is true, father?" Randa asked full of curiosity.

Lord Nestor glimpsed over to Dany before giving his answer. She found that strange, but she didn't dare to ask.

"There was a scandal involving Princess Rhaenys and Willas Tyrell. Someone spread rumors that the Princess and the heir of Highgarden are lovers. The King nearly broke the betrothal between his son and the Princess, but Lord Arryn and Prince Doran Martell convinced him otherwise. In the end the Princess was forced to be inspected by the Grand Maester and two members of the Faith. It turned out that the Princess is still a maid, but the rumors are still circulating in the capital. It also explains why Willas Tyrell is trying to put distance between himself and Princess Rhaenys."

Dany was shocked by this revelation. Nobody took the time to tell her.

It also filled her with the familiar feeling of frustration, but she knew better than to show it openly.

*Well, I am a prisoner. They might feed me and smile at me, but they are not obligated to tell me anything.*

Ser Albar seemed to sense her despair and granted her an encouraging smile.

"Don’t fret, sweet Princess. As my father said: It all turned out to be a sham. Jon and I saw the Princess seated among the King’s family. There was hint of anger between them."

"That doesn’t mean anything, my son. If I wanted to alleviate the rumors I would make sure that she is there and seen in my company."

"If you say so, father," Ser Albar replied and bowed his head in understanding. "And I believe what my eyes tell me. The Princess was radiant as ever and even danced with Jon."

It was enough to shift all their attention on the solemn boy from the North.

"Danced with Jon?" Randa asked between amusement and awe. Then she patted Jon’s shoulder who gave her a bewildered look in return.

"Well, well I didn’t think you could be such a charmer!"

Lord Nestor seemed less approving of Jon’s actions.

"How did you come to dance with a Targaryen Princess, my boy?" the older man demanded to
“I asked her,” the boy replied honest as ever and Dany couldn't keep from laughing when she saw Lord Nestor's unbelieving face.

Randa only howled with laughter.

“Gods,” Lord Nestor gasped. “And why did you even make such a preposterous request? Did your father not teach you any manners?”

“It wasn’t a preposterous request,” Ser Albar came to Jon’s aide. “The King was in a good mood and wanted to grant Eddard Stark’s son a favor. Jon asked for a small dance and the Princess agreed. Besides, he was most gracious to her.”

In that moment Dany felt the familiar sting of jealousy.

She kept it to herself, but she was relieved when she was allowed to retreat to her rooms. She needed time to ponder over over these revelations.

She never considered what kind of life her niece was forced to live. She always thought it was similar to hers, but it seems she was very wrong.

_I know nothing of the world_, she thought and went to dim the candles, but she was interrupted by a knock on the door.

It was Randa.

“Good, you are still awake. I have something for you!” the girl announced and carried a bright smile on her full lips.

Dany’s heart sped up. Could it be that Ser Albar was successful in delivering her letter like Randa implied to her.

“Is that …,” she asked, her voice faltering a little as she took the folded piece of paper in her hands.

"It is a letter penned by Princess Rhaenys, but that is not all,” her friend explained and showed her another thin stack of bound paper.

Dany eyed it closely and found whirling notes covering the papers. Notes like the bards use to write down their songs.

“A song?” she asked and searched Randa's face.

“The Princess gifted it to you,” Randa confirmed and Dany felt like someone plunged a sword deep into her heart. It was both sweet and painful.

Her niece was known to be very capable with the harp, but that she composed songs for her touched her deeply.

Dany picked the bound stack of papers and settled back down. Tears burned in her eyes and Randa offered her one of her many embroidered handkerchiefs to brush them away.

“I don’t think the Princess intended to make you cry,” Randa remarked with a gentle smile.

“I don’t know how I can ever repay you or your brother…,” she began, but Randa cut her off.
“It wasn’t my brother who played the courier…it was someone else,” she explained to a perplexed Dany. “Why do you think did Lord Snow ask the Princess for a dance?”

To deliver my letter, she realized and felt very ashamed for her jealousy. He did it for me.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will be probably posted on Friday, but if I can I will post it earlier...
In the days before his wedding Ser Albar looked like he was preparing for a funeral. Naturally it was the chatty Myranda Royce who informed him about the reasons. Her brother's bad mood stemmed from the affection he held for Lady Beth Belmore and the fact that he was forced to wed Marissa Redfort.

The wedding preparations itself rested in Randa's hands. Her lady mother perished a few years ago and as Lord Nestor was still unwed most people considered her the Lady of the Gates of the Moon. Thus it surprised nobody when Lord Nestor left all the decisions to his daughter.

That the preparation of a wedding would turn the girl into a maniac was not something anybody could have ever foreseen. From the dresses to the food Jon and Red Jon observed with great fascination how she commanded the servants around until their head’s smoked from all her ever-changing ideas.

Ever at her side was Princess Daenerys who looked as equally overwhelmed as the servants. In all the on-going commotion she hasn’t even spoken to him about the letter he delivered to Princess Rhaenys. At first he thought it was because of her busy schedule, but now he was getting the feeling that she was intentionally avoiding him. He tried not to feel hurt by this, but it still nagged at his mind.

It helped that he was quite occupied himself. Lord Nestor didn’t really approve of his misplaced manners towards Princess Rhaenys and burdened him with more work than usual. So he spent most of the days at his side, pouring wine and running errands. It was not what most young boys would expect from the “glorious” life of a squire, but it was quite understandable as Ser Albar was not here to train him and had to attend to his bride.

Not that there was much time for training as Randa liked to employ them for all kind of “girl’s tasks” as Red Jon dubbed it. This usually included cleaning and helping with the flower arrangements. The only positive thing was that they got to taste the different pies Lord Nestor wanted for the wedding, but after eight different pies even Jon had enough and preferred to return to his own work.

Not that it bothered him as much as Red Jon. The other boy often groaned like a mule whenever he had to braid a simple flower bouquet. In truth Jon found all of this quite captivating. In Winterfell he had never seen a wedding. It was usual that his father went to attend the weddings of his lords, but then he was always accompanied by Robb, but never by the bastard of Winterfell.

Even here he sometimes received strange looks for his name, but as the moons passed by people seemed to grow more forgetful.

Myranda Royce never referred to it, nor did Ser Albar or Princess Daenerys. Lord Nestor might have been a bit skeptical about him at first, but was now slowly warming up to his presence. That Jon avoided complaining about the greater workload obviously helped.

A few days ago he even met Mya Stone who was apparently King Robert’s bastard. She was a cheerful girl and reminded him a little of Arya. Like his little sister she liked to keep her hair shorter than Sansa would dub “appropriate” for ladies. She was also a friend of the girls and asked
to join for an evening of flower braiding before she returned to her duties.

When Red Jon explained him what her work entailed he could only feel awed and was thankful that he didn’t have to make his way up to the Eyrie.

Not that he really wished for it. What he heard about Lady Arryn didn’t really paint her as a pleasant person. Not even Lord Nestor seemed to hold much affection for the Lady, which made his sheer disappointment about her refusal to attend his son’s wedding quite comical.

After “Randa’s terror” as Red Jon decided to dub the last two week turn’s the wedding day came with a blue sky full of sunshine.

Everything was perfect. The keep was polished to the last dish, Randa had all the girls dressed in pale colors fitting to the flower arrangements and the ten pies were perfectly ready to be devoured.

The only two participants who looked unhappy were the groom Ser Albar and his father Lord Nestor. Even with the bride’s sisters fluttering around him like birds he carried his “funeral face” while Lord Nestor appeared as if he was going to wed Lady Arryn himself.

The way Ser Albar behaved Jon expected Marrisa Redfort to be some heinous monster, but she turned out to be perfectly plain. She wasn’t too tall, not too thin, had light reddish-brown hair and a pleasant face. She was no great beauty, but when she smiled her plainness was easily forgotten.

The wedding ceremony was also quite curious to behold. While he has never attended an official wedding he knew that ceremonies in the North are usually celebrated under a weirwood tree and done without much pomp and fanfare.

The Southron wedding ceremony was much more sublime. It was conducted by a Septon all dressed in rich clothing and encompassed all kinds of different vows. At first he found it quite interesting, but after a while he was thankful that it was over.

What followed was more familiar. There was a grand feast with a roasted oxen, pies and of course plenty of music. The different guests proved equally interesting as they came from all over the Vale. Naturally the others provided him with the necessary information about the different lords and ladies.

He was unable to pinpoint it, but it was then that he started to feel a sense of belonging to the people here. He still longed for Winterfell and his siblings, but the fact that he found acceptance among the people here was equally important. To be an outsider was his greatest fear before coming here.

The rest of the night continued merrily with dance and music until the bedding was called. Sadly Lord Nestor found it inappropriate for “children” like him and the Princess and banished them from the hall.

The Princess didn’t seem to care, but Jon couldn’t help but to feel disappointed. He was eleven and knew what people did under the sheets. Theon never failed to inform him about it when he still resided in Winterfell. Once he even took him and Robb to the whores in Wintertown. They didn’t really do anything other than to stare at the girls, but Jon felt rather ashamed about it afterwards. Naturally Theon teased him mercilessly.

This made it only more satisfying when Lady Stark punished Theon for corrupting his brother Robb. That day Jon didn’t even mind his own punishment. Seeing Theon mucking the stables for nearly a moon was a pleasure to behold.
“Why the displeasure?” the soft voice of Princess Daenerys snapped him out of his thoughts. “Do you dislike weddings?”

“I have never been to a real wedding,” he admitted and understanding washed over her face. “It is actually quite entertaining.”

Princess Daenerys nodded in agreement.

“It is entertaining, but I am also happy that it is over. Randa was starting to scare me. One could have thought she is preparing the wedding for the King. Even the servants were starting to complain to Lord Nestor,” she remarked, but Jon deduced from her smile that it was only meant in a joking manner.

Jon returned her smile, though he felt a little awkward in her presence. The unspoken truth about the letter was always slipping back into his mind.

“Ser Albar is her only brother and I think Lord Nestor was still grieving over Lady Arryn’s lack of appearance at the wedding,” Jon remarked jestingly.

To his surprise he was able to coax a smile from her lips.

“One could think him a scorned lover, though I doubt Lady Arryn would ever think of him like that. She always spoke rather unkindly of him when I still resided up in the Eyrie. While I pity the Lady for her unhappiness I am quite glad that she didn’t come to ruin Randa’s efforts to make this a special day,” she explained and Jon heard the subtle anger ringing in her voice.

Her words made him curious. He knew Lady Stark, but little about her sister.

“Is she really that bad?” he asked hesitatingly, but he regretted his question when he saw an uneasy expression taking hold of her face.

“It is a bit complicated,” she explained vaguely. “Do you know how Lady Arryn came to marry Lord Jon Arryn?”

“Of course,” he confirmed and nodded his head. “It was to win the alliance of the Riverlands against the Mad… I mean your Lord father King Aerys.”

“You don’t have to hide your dislike for my father. I know what kind of person he was. They never failed to inform me about his crimes. I would understand if you held dislike for my family… knowing what my brother Rhaegar did to your Aunt and my father to your Uncle and Grandfather. It was one of the reasons that I have avoided you until now… I didn’t know if I could trust you.”

Jon was surprised by her sudden openness, but he couldn’t help but pose the following question.

“Didn’t you trust me because I am a bastard or because I am Eddard Stark’s son?”

She shook her head, her silver hair fluttering around her like a veil.

“I don’t care that you are a bastard, but the fact that you are Eddard Stark’s son…I thought you might hold resentment against my family… many do. I expect your father does as well.”

Her belief that his father might hold resentment against her sounded silly, but it wasn’t like she ever met Eddard Stark personally.

“That couldn’t be further from the truth, Princess. My father is not the kind of man who blames
children for the actions of their parents. He never talks much about the Rebellion, though I think
the loss he experienced hurt him deeply.”

When her lips curled up into a smile he knew that she believed him.

“It is understandable, but I am thankful that you told me,” she replied and started to play
awkwardly with the ribbons of her dress.

“I am also thankful for what you did. I wanted to approach the topic, but I didn't know how. I don’t
like depending on other people, but I am still grateful that you delivered my letter to my niece,
though I suppose it caused you a few problems with Lord Nestor.”

“It was Randa’s idea,” he replied and felt a little flustered. It was not common that people thanked
him for his efforts, especially not a Princess.

“Still it was you who spoke to my niece,” she insisted.”Could you perhaps tell me about her? Was
she kind to you?”

Jon ruffled through his hair and tried to find an appropriate answer.

“She is quiet intense and fierce, but I think she has a good heart.”

Subtle sadness showed in her purple eyes, but that was to be expected.

“I see,” she said.”I am still thankful.”

“It is no bother, Princess Daenerys.”

“Good to hear, but please stop calling me Princess Daenerys. Even Mya Stone calls me Dany when
we are alone.”

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will probably be out on Tuesday. There will also be a bit of a time
jump.
The sky was blue and a soft sheen of sunshine played on the leaves of the trees. Dany was still able to wear her summer dresses, but the Maester mentioned more than once the coming of autumn and winter. Dany had never seen a winter, but Jon often talked about his home and how much he missed the summer snows, though she believed it were more his siblings who he missed.

Over the years she learned their names, even though she never laid eyes on them. There was Robb Stark, the heir and oldest son. Then came Sansa, the lady and of course his wild little sister Arya. Bran was the youngest of Jon's siblings when he left Winterfell, but a few years ago Lady Stark bore another son by the name of Rickon. She recalled how distraught Jon was when the raven came from Winterfell, but then he wasn't the kind of person to complain about such things.

And it wasn't like he never heard of his siblings. Especially, Robb and Arya wrote him letters and kept him informed him about the comings and goings in Winterfell. It certainly helped his mood, but she knew that it was not the same as if having his siblings close.

This was something Dany could understand better than anybody. She hasn't been able to contact her niece since that lone letter three years ago. All she knew about her were rumors through Randa who sometimes managed to give her details from her father's letters.

It was also through Randa that she found out about the upcoming wedding of her niece. She knew about her betrothal with the Crown Prince, but nobody told her that the wedding will be held in six moons. She expected an official invitation, but then it didn't surprise her that the King didn't want her to be there.

Knowing this viable information she gathered all her bravery and approached Lord Arryn on his last visit and broached the topic of attending the wedding of her niece.

Like always the old Lord gave her a grandfatherly smile, but his answer disappointed her. While he didn't outright refuse her wish, but didn't approve of it either.

*I will think about it my sweet child*, he had told her, but Dany didn't allow herself to feel too much hope. She has experienced too many disappointments in this matter.

"You are worse than me these days when it comes to brooding!" Jon told her and sounded quite amused. She also spotted a small smile on his lips as he drove his dark palfrey Gallifrey along the moody rode.

With his nearly one and five years Jon easily towered over Dany and Randa, though Ser Albar was still taller than him by half a head.

*There has to giant's blood in your family, my Lady*, Jon had told Randa when they were musing over the matter. All of this was sparked by a jesting comment of Lord Arryn who remarked that Jon was much taller than his Lord father when he was the same age.

*You probably have your height from your Lady mother*, the old man had added later and Dany observed how Jon's smile disappeared at the mention of his mother. Dany knew that Jon held utmost respect for his father, but the topic of his mother was something that stood between them or that was at least her impression of the situation. Whenever his mysterious mother was mentioned...
Jon grew tense and cold, yet never spoke a bad word about his Lord father. This behavior was something she was unable to grasp. If their roles were changed she would have bugged Lord Stark every single day until he told her the truth, but Jon accepted it like it was his father's right hide even his mother's name from him.

"I am not brooding!" she quipped back and lead her horse over a fallen tree to join his side. They weren't allowed to ride far from the Keep, but it was better to have this small freedom than none."I was just wondering if Lord Arryn will come to Randa's wedding to Lord Belmore. I hoped he would be able to give me an answer regarding my niece's wedding. It has been nearly two moons since I asked him."

"I don't know, but I hope Lord Arryn refuses to attend this farce of a wedding," Jon remarked, his disapproval shining through. Dany held the same opinion and so did Ser Albar, but Lord Nestor had his own mind on the matter.

"I would also refuse to attend, but if I do Lord Nester will never never squire me," Jon added and sounded a little frustrated Dany gave him an understanding nod."Don't fret about it. I am sure he will squire you in time. Besides, there are squires far older than you. Red Jon is still one and already one and seven. In regards to Randa...I don't think she minds that much anymore. She has been joking about it all week. She thinks that Lord Belmore won't make it for long given his age and that she might very well end up as a rich widow. Though I doubt it will happen like that, but I have to admire her ability to see the best in the worst."

"Even smiles can be false," Jon remarked an sighed."It is also not my age that bothers me. It has been three years that I saw my siblings. If I was a knight I could visit Winterfell."

"And what about your brother?" she asked then. She recalled that Robb Stark wrote to Jon informing him that he might come for Randa's wedding. She also recalled that Jon hoped his sisters might be allowed to join Robb on his travel."Won't he come like he promised you?"

Jon sighed again and made his horse gallop towards the glittering river snaking its way through the green landscape.

"Robb will probably come, but without Arya and Sansa. Lady Stark thinks they are too young to travel this far," Jon remarked and his words saddened her. She knew how much she missed his little sister Arya. Dany only knew her from her curious letter about the life in Winterfell, but even only these monthly lines scribbled on a raven scroll made her want to meet the girl. Here in the south most girls wanted to be prim and proper ladies. It would be quite refreshing to meet a girl who ran around in leathers. That Lord Nestor would probably have a fit would make it only more amusing to behold.

"Well, at least your brother will be coming," she said and tried to point out the positive among the negative."I heard that Yohn Royce is bringing his daughter to the wedding. Ysilla is said to be a beauty and Randa mentioned that he hopes to set him up with your brother Robb."

"My father's lords tried to do that all the time, but it never worked. Once Lord Karstark even sent his only daughter Alys to "seduce" my brother, but in the end Robb sent her to dance with me. Lord Karstark was not very pleased," Jon explained and a knowing smile hushed over his lips."Do you know how old Alys was?"

Dany was a bit confused by the question and decided to play along."How old?"
“Six,” Jon replied and the both of them broke out in laughter.

“And you are not jesting with me?” she asked and tried to imagine a six year old girl courting the heir to Winterfell. It was a ridiculous notion.

“Well, that won’t be a problem now, as Lady Ysilla is older than your brother. I am sure she knows how to “seduce” a lord.”

“I am sure Lady Stark would be pleased. Lord Royce is a mighty lord,” Jon explained and she heard resentment ringing in his voice.

*Did I say something wrong,* she wondered, but then it was not the first time that something like this happened. Jon has been living with them for nearly three years and lost quite a bit of his “melancholic nature”, but sometimes it was still hard to read his thoughts. He will never be like Randa who spoke her mind openly.

“I don’t think that it matters that Lady Stark is pleased with the match. Your brother has to like her,” she added hoping she would be able to coax out his true thoughts. She only knew that Lady Stark disliked Jon’s presence in Winterfell, but he himself hardly ever openly showed his anger towards said Lady.

"Lady Stark is a Tully. She wed my father, because it was her duty to do so. I doubt your words wouldn't have much an effect on her," he countered."Besides, isn’t Lord Arryn still trying to cook up a betrothal for you and this Harrold Hardyng?"

Dany felt liked slapped. Harry the Ass was the last thing she wanted to think about when her niece was going to wed the crown Prince Joffrey. Why did he have to bring it up?

“Harry the Ass can hump a horse!” Dany told him and didn’t hide her true feelings on the matter."Why do I have to wed in the first place? My niece will be the Queen and once she bears the lion prince a few cubs the conflict between the Targaryen dynasty and the Baratheon dynasty will finally be resolved. At least there won’t be another war and my niece will be the Queen as my brother’s oldest heir.”

Her rash words seemed to amuse Jon and brought back his smile.

"You are sounding like Arya these days. She and Bran are planning to run off to the Wall to live among the Wildlings. It seems the Septa is pestering her with her stitching lessons and Bran is unhappy about learning his sums. Truly, the lord who gets to wed my sister will need strong nerves."

"Maybe I will join them on their travel to the Wall,” she told him determinedly."Maybe the Wildlings will appreciate a Princess."

Jon laughed."I don’t think the Wildlings have Princesses, but I will ask my Uncle Benjen when I ever get to see him again.”

“I am sure you will once you are able to visit Winterfell,” she assured."And then we will got to the Wall like you promised me.”

Jon’s grey eyes widened in surprise."I didn’t promise any such thing. I also wonder how you will be able to leave the Eyrie?”

Dany straightened herself on her horse and gave him a cheeky smile.
“I doubt the King would mind a visit to Winterfell or the Wall. It would be hard to plot treason or whatever he thinks I am doing all day long under the eyes of his most loyal friend, Lord Eddard Stark.”

Jon rolled his eyes.

“I wonder what the King would say if he found out that half your days are spent with boring lessons with the Septa. I think he would be quite disappointed,” Jon added jokingly.

Dany grinned and lunged forward in her seat.”Well, that only supports my case. Once you are knighted I will accompany you and then you will show me the snow you like so much,” she said and stretched out her hand.”Promise?”

Jon sighed, but smiled when he shook her hand.

“I promise.”

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will probably posted tomorrow or on Thursday.
“Oi! Ponys are coming!” little Bryce Royce cried out in joy and pulled on Ser Albar’s whiskers. Besides throwing food around pulling on people's hair was his favorite pastime these days. Jon himself had his hair trimmed to escape the boy’s quick fingers while the Ladies started to favor braided hair.

“Those are horses, my boy!” Ser Albar corrected and winced, but the boy ignored him and clapped his hands together as he continued his chanting. Jon couldn’t help, but to smile when he spotted fluttering banner of House Stark. The grey direwolf racing across a white field rose proudly before the group of riders.

It has been only three years that he last saw his brother, but to him it felt almost like an eternity. He also couldn’t help to feel a little bit of anxiety. He expected Robb to be a grown man now and not the young boy he left back in Winterfell. What if he has changed?

Yet all of those fears turned out to be unfounded when he found a familiar smile meeting his across the distance. As the heir to Winterfell Robb led caravan of riders, but Jon would have recognized him anyway. He was still the brother he knew, though his face was more mature and he grew certainly taller.

“Jon!” he exclaimed when he spotted him among the group of people. There were Lord Nestor, Lady Randa, Princess Daenerys and of course little Bryce Royce who seemed more fascinated with the horses than the people riding on them.

Jon received a thigh hug and the hoarse laughter of his brother confirmed to him again that his brother was happy to see him.

“Let me take a look at you brother!” Robb said as he pulled away and eyed Jon from head to toe.

“You have grown,” he added and grinned, before patting Jon's shoulder.”You have grown quite a bit.”

Jon couldn’t help, but to laugh. When they were boys they always made bets who would end up to be the taller of the two.

“I seems I won,” Jon replied and Robb’s smile only brightened. It was the kind of charming smile that made people love him and that Jon always envied him for.

“Well, you can’t win every battle,” Robb countered and shifted his attention to the other people.

Lord Royce kept it polite and formal.

“It is a pleasure to greet you here in the Vale, Lord Stark,” the older man said and dipped his head in greeting.”Your father was a good friend. I hope your visit here will be pleasant.”

Robb returned the man's greeting by dropping his head and flashed the man a brilliant smile.”I thank you, Lord Nestor. Jon told us in his many letters how well you are treating him. My father sends his hearty greetings to you,” he replied before turning to Daenerys and Randa.
Lady Randa was dressed in a dark blue dress and had white flowers woven into her wavy brown hair. She smiled was brilliant as always, but Jon couldn’t believe that she approved of her father’s insistence for he match with Lord Belmore.

Jon met him briefly on Ser Albar’s wedding and wasn’t impressed. He was nothing but a proud, fat, grey-bearded man who should have found himself an elderly widow and not a young girl like Randa. Jon knew of course that it was part of Lord Nestor’s wish to elevate his family beyond its current station. Royce was an old and proud name, but he was only the cousin of the Lord of Runestone. He has also served Lord Arryn for many years and hoped that this will make him more eligible to receive the Lordship of the Gates of the Moon. Of course the man never told anything of this to Jon’s face, but Dany remarked on it several times.

“And this has to be the radiant bride!” Robb added and kissed Randa’s hand. The girl’s face lightened up like a candle at the sight of his brother.”It is a pleasure, Lady Myranda.”

“It is,” she confirmed and a seductive smile curled on her lips. Then she leaned a little forward and pulled her blue silk shawl away to show off her bosom.”It truly is a pleasure to have you here, Lord Stark.”

Jon saw how his brother's cheeks flushed as he moved on to greet Daenerys. She was also dressed in blue, though the flowers in her hair were yellowish instead of blue.

“It is a pleasure, Lord Stark. Jon always speaks spoke very fondly of you and your letters are also quite entertaining, though not as entertaining as the letters of your sister.”

Jon wanted to chide her for mentioning the letters, but when he saw Robb’s soft smile he knew that his brother didn’t mind that he read his letters to Daenerys.

“Well, I would never dare to compete with Arya,” he remarked and placed a soft kiss on her hands before turning his attention back to Lord Nestor.

“I know we are a bit late, but our travel was delayed by the terrible weather!” Robb explained, but Jon doubted it was much of a problem for the Lord as the the groom was also still missing and so were half of the other guests. Lord Belmore was supposed to arrive yesterday, but nothing came of it. They didn't even receive a raven. Naturally, Lord Nestor was fretting all day long over the matter while both Dany and Jon hoped for Randa’s sake that he man found himself another bride on the way.

“It is no bother, Lord Stark. You are not the last…we are still waiting for the groom,” Lady Randa provided bluntly as ever.

A startled expression crossed over’s his brother's face, but then he smiled before delivering one of his charming remarks.”Well, then he should hurry or you might be gone before the wedding day is over!”

A gasp of horror escaped Lord Nestor, but Robb flashed him an appeasing look.”I was merely joking, my Lord.”

And while Jon believed his brother, he sensed that Randa wouldn’t mind if it were to happen.

“That is not something you should be making fun of, Lord Stark,” Lord Nestor chided Robb, but it only earned him more laughter from the others.

“Oh, father. You are being overdramatic,” Randa remarked and gave her father a sweet smile.”While I doubt my groom will be coming today we should at least see that Lord Stark and his men
are fed and rested.”

“Of course,” the old Lord remarked and even his brother’s ill-placed jape was soon forgotten.

It wasn’t a great feast that was held for his brother, as the good food was reserved for the wedding, but Jon doubted Robb cared. He drank and laughed all night while he listened to Randa’s usual blabbering.

It was a joyous reunion, but only later when all the others had departed did Jon pull Robb aside to speak alone with him.

“It seems you are happy here,” Robb remarked and settled down next to him.”Do you even miss Winterfell?

Jon rolled his eyes and flashed him an unbelieving look.”Of course…I wish I could visit, but I doubt it would please your Lady mother.”

Robb’s smile was instantly washed away from his lips.”My Lady mother never liked your presence. I always knew that, but I doubt she would mind a brief visit.”

Jon gave his brother another unbelieving look.”Robb, I think we shouldn’t lie to each other about such things. Let us be honest about it. I don’t hold any grudge against you and I can even understand why she wants me gone. It hurts, but I understand.”

Robb patted his shoulder and gave him a sad smile.

“One day I will be Lord of Winterfell. My mother may dislike it, but I will make sure that you have a place in your old home. Besides, Arya would kill me otherwise.”

Jon felt touched beyond words, but he wasn’t sure if he could live with Lady Stark’s glowering looks to the end of his life. If he ever were to marry it would only increase her dislike for him. She would always see his children as a potential threat for Robb’s claim to Winterfell.

Yet he didn’t voice these thoughts to Robb. He didn’t wish to taint their meeting with ill-placed words.

Instead he smiled and squeezed Robb’s hand.”I think that has time.”

On the following day their waiting continued. Lord Nestor even sent out riders and asked the Maester to pen several letters to Strongsong. Yet all they received as an answer was that the Lord and his retinue left on time.

What happened to the old Lord?

That was the question occupying all their minds for the whole next day until the groom was finally found. Yet he didn’t come in pomp and splendor, but riding on a borrowed horse, his fine clothes disheveled.

There was nothing left of the proud man Jon met on Ser Albar's wedding. Only grief was edged was into his weary features.

Upon his arrival there was not much time wasted and the Lord was quickly ushered inside to be cared for by the Maester.

Not even Randa was informed what befell her husband to be and thus they spent half the day
speculating about it. Randa believed he was attacked by a wild bear while Lord Albar’s wife speculated that he might have been attacked by highwaymen. The ideas grew only more ridiculous as time passed by until Lord Nestor came to give them the truth.

“What happened, father?” Ser Albar was the first one to ask. “And where is Lady Belmore? Shouldn’t she be in his company?”

Jon sensed the accusing look Randa threw at her brother, given that his wife was present, but in that moment Ser Albar seemed to care little about propriety.

“Lord Belmore was attacked by highwaymen. They wore the painting of one of the Mountain Clans and ambushed his men. They killed most of his men, took Lady Belmore and all other valuables they could find.”

Jon saw the anger washing over Ser Albar’s face and felt pity for the man.

“Then we have to ride out and save her!” he declared determinedly. The shock on his father’s face was visibly and the disapproval even more so.

“You will do no such thing. There is no reason for you to get involved into this,” his father replied firmly, but Jon deduced from Ser Albar’s hardened face that he had no intention to obey his Lord father’s commands.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will be out on Monday or Tuesday.
The ten of them set out at dusk. There was Ser Albar, Red Jon, Robb, Jon, one guard of Lord Belmore’s household and five men loyal to Ser Albar. They all had horses, swords, shields and a few of the riders carried bows.

It was a chilly night, the sky velvet and a few stars flickering on the distant horizon. For Jon and Robb it was a pleasant climate, but the others hid under their cloaks as they made their way through the rocky narrow paths littering the Mountain’s of the Vale.

The man leading them was a knight named Ser Ralen, one of Lord Belmore’s guardsmen who survived the ambush. When Ser Albar went to ask him to join them Jon expected him to betray their plans, but the man turned out more enthusiastic than expected. Now It appeared to Jon that he considered this adventure a possibility to take revenge against the barbarians who took their lady.

Ser Albar was just as enthusiastic. He drove them forward like madman until the first red streaks of morning greeted them. Only at dawn they finally stopped and made camp near a rocky path leading further up to a steep pass. Yet they got no rest. Jon and Robb went to gather wood for the fire while Red Jon went to water their horses. Ser Albar didn't take time to rest either and went to scout the surroundings in company of Ser Ralen and his loyal men.

Jon heard stories that it wasn't unusual for the Mountain clans to fall upon their enemies while they think themselves safe in their camps, but then he also had the feeling that Ser Albar was hoping for this to happen. He appeared almost anxious to meet the enemy, which wasn't helped by the fact that Robb insisted to accompany them.

*Lady Stark will have a fit*, he was sure, but then he was unable to hide anything from his brother. Ser Albar refused at first, but then he could need every sword and unwillingly accepted his brother's aid.

A few hours later they found themselves huddling around a bustling fire and slurring soup from wooden cups. They were all hungry since they haven't eaten since their departure from the Gates of the Moon.

Around midday Ser Albar returned with his men, his face grim and pale like it has been throughout the whole journey.

"Did you find any sign of the enemy, good Sir?" Robb was the first one to speak.

"Aye, we did. We found trails of animals leading up the steep pass. They belong to the small horses these Mountain people like to ride. Ser Ralen recognized them and thinks they belong to at least thirty horses. It would also fit the size of the group that ambushed Lord Belmore."

"Thirty?" Red Jon asked."How many men are those?

"Hard to say. Maybe twenty people. They will need horses to transport the loot they stole. It is hard to determine the exact number, but they aren't that numerous. The attack was only effective, because they caught us off guard. Though they are quite scary, even the women," Ser Ralen replied.
"Women?" Red Jon asked, his eyes widening in shock.

The young man's perplexed look made the elderly knight laugh in amusement."Aye, ugly hags with scraggy hair. They like using axes and spears. Some of them also carry arrows, but if we are careful I am sure we will be able to deal with them. Yet we shouldn't underestimate them either. Those who attacked us probably belonged to the fearsome Black Ears Clan."

"Black Ears?" Jon asked full of curiosity."Why do they call themselves like that?"

"They liked to cut off the ears of their victims and keep them as trophies. Old Ser Marlen, who is serving as Lord Arryn's household guard faced them when he was barely older than you, my boy. Now there is nothing left of his right ear other than a black stump," Ser Albar added, grim as ever.

Jon felt Red Jon shudder next to him. He himself felt both anxious and excited, but this was what he has been training for the last three years.

Yet first they rested for a few hours, before making their way up the steep path leading up to the pass. It was a narrow path full of sharp edges and fallen trees. The underwood wasn't much better. It was thick, green and full of scratchy twigs hindering their movement.

It was the perfect place for an ambush, but that is why Ser Albar and his men had been scouting the woods all morning. Though that he hardly slept a handful of hours didn't seem to bother the knight.

At dusk they finally reached the edge of the steep pass and made camp near a clearing, surrounded by a ring of trees with thick crowns of sparkling green. This day was kinder than the one before and they were spoiled with hours of pleasant sunshine.

It was the perfect weather to be outside, but when Ser Ralen returned with his scouts Jon knew that things were finally getting serious.

"Did you find them?" Jon asked immediately and rose to his feet.

"Aye, we did. They are camping not far from here near a small brook. We saw fires, horses and about twenty people, both men and women. We also saw them wearing cloaks which once belonged to Lord Belmore's guards," Ser Ralen offered.

"And did you see any hostages?" Ser Albar asked.

"We did, good Sir. We saw one of Lady Belmore's ladies. I assume they keep them near their loot somewhere in their camp. I suggest waiting for the night. This time the element of surprise will be on our side," Ser Ralen provided.

"Indeed," Ser Albar agreed, his face sharp and determined to face the enemy."Indeed."

Several hours later they were staggering through the darkness, the twigs and leaves whispering as they went. On the horizon they saw a slim silver moon covered by clouds. While the scarce moonlight made it hard for them to make out their surroundings, it also helped to shadow their movements.

It also slowed them down and thus it took them several hours until they arrived at the camp.

It was nothing more than a few tents and scraggy horses, but Jon still felt relieved that the enemy seemed unaware of their lingering presence.
"They are celebrating," Ser Ralen whispered."And horribly drunk."

"That is good. It will make it easier for us," Ser Albar remarked, but Ser Ralen gave him a funny look."You are wrong, Sir. Most of them are drunk before and after battle. I don't think it will make much of a difference. Your advantage will be the ambush. We have better weapons, but they are madman that will rush at you like wild animals. They don't fear death or fighting."

"Well, then let them come," Ser Albar added."How will we go about it, then?"

Ser Ralen turned back towards the camp, leaning against a tree trunk and pointed ahead at a group of bound horses."The hostages are bound and gagged. As I said...we spotted one of Lady Belmore's ladies, all tattered and weepy. We will have to cross through the whole camp to get there. I suggest littering them with a few arrows before raiding the camp. It has to be quick and precise. Those creatures know no mercy," he explained, giving Robb, Red Jon and Jon a warning look.

He thinks us green boys, Jon knew, but it wasn't far from the truth. All they knew were tourneys or the practice yard. Killing a breathing man was a different matter. Both Jon and Robb have never killed a man, but then they saw men getting executed by their father's hand.

A man who passes the sentence should swing the sword, he had told them more than once. These people pillaged, robbed and murdered innocents. They deserved punishment, but it couldn't still his fast beating heart threatening to burst out of his chest.

“We understand, good Sir,” Jon confirmed to Ser Ralen, who granted them a shadowed smile in return.

Yet his heart still hammered away in his chest when Ser Albar's men nocked their arrows and sent them flying over the creek. They didn't hit any of them, but it was enough to alarm the camp.

Jon heard shouts, curses and saw shadowed figures trying to grab for their weapons, but it was already too late.

They fell upon them quickly, their blades singing with the sound of steel. The first men that came rushing towards Jon was a big man, his face hidden behind a barred half-helm and armed with an ugly ax. Jon moved quickly, searching for an opening, before bringing down his blade. The boiled leather gave away to the steel and a growl of pain escaped him. In a fit of anger he swung the ax one more time, but Jon twirled around and buried the blade to the hilt. Pulling it free he moved on the next man, armed with a spiked club. This one died even faster, stumbling like a man too deep in his cups. He growled and slashed the club towards Jon's head, but again the blade found it's target.

Thus it continued, the shrieks of men filling the camp. Half the time Jon was unable to differentiate between men and women. To him the enemies were shadows armed with glinting weapons. Only when they died they returned to their human form.

It was a terrifying thought that came to him later when he stumbled through the camp, dragging the dead to bury them properly. One of them cut his arm above the shoulder and another time he stumbled, twisting his ankle, but he fared better than the others. Robb received a nasty cut to his face which will probably give him a lasting scar, but Red Jon received the worst wound. His left eye was cut open by a dagger.

"I want to go home," the slightly older boy whimpered and shuddered. Again fresh blood was soaking through the cloth that Robb was pressing to the boy's eye.
"Soon," Robb told him, his own wound bleeding, but otherwise harmless.

Jon settled down next to him and patted the older boy's shoulder. "You just have to hold out a bit longer. You will have the best scar. All the girls will be swooning over you."

A smile twisted his pale lips, but Jon knew that they needed to make haste.

Luckily, Ser Albar was eager enough to depart after they gathered all the stolen belongings of Lord Belmore's retinue.

All in all they should count themselves lucky. They found three of the hostages alive, among them Lady Belmore and one of her ladies, but their mood was dimmed when they laid eyes upon the poor lady herself.

Her hair was wild, her clothes tattered and her gaze empty.

Jon doubted that the death of the men who harmed her will be enough to wash away her dark memories.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will probably be out on Thursday or Friday, but I can't guarantee it, because I will come home late on both days.
Dany found Jon tending to the horses. That there will be a wedding held tonight didn't seem to interest him all that much. Randa seemed more enthusiastic, but Dany was sure that it was more of an act than real happiness about her approaching wedding. Even Ser Albar was hard pressed to attend after the sharp argument with his father upon his return from his adventure.

Dany understood Lord Nestor's anger about his son's disobedience, but saving Lady Belmore was a kind and noble thing. Besides, Ser Albar is a knight and aren't knights supposed to help the weak and fair?

And there wasn't any really harm done. "The brave fools" as Randa dubbed them returned unharmed and victorious, safe for Red Jon, who nearly got his eye poked out by a dagger. At times even the Maester feared that he will loose the eye, but now he was finally on his way to recovery.

"There you are," she greeted Jon with a smile. She was already clad in the dress Randa chose for her maid-in-honors. It was a pale blue dress and fitting to the dark midnight flowers Randa chose for her flower arrangements."Why are you hiding here with the horses? Even Red Jon is preparing for the wedding, though his eye patch makes him look like a pirate."

Jon chuckled and stopped his work."I doubt that the life of a pirate would please Lord Redfort. I heard he has other plans for him now that Ser Albar is going to knight him. I think a betrothal with a Lady in Gulltown is awaiting him in the future. I am honest...I am going to miss him."

The news didn't surprise her. Red Jon nearly lost his eye and she doubted that Lord Redfort was pleased about the incident. Now that his son is finally going to be knighted his father will be pressed to to forget about the past incident. Almost all his sons, excluding the youngest Mychel, were knights.

"A lady of House Grafton perhaps?" Dany offered. Then she pulled her cloak from her shoulders and spread it on the ground to sit down.

"Perhaps," Jon replied and threw the brush aside, before sitting down next to her. He was dressed in a dirty tunic, dark boots and dark breeches. All his clothing was dusty, soiled and he smelled like a horse. He was in bad need of a bath.

"And what about you?" she asked curiously."Will you finally become Ser Albar's squire?"

A bright smile crossed his lips, softening up his futures. He leaned backwards and balanced himself on his hands.

"Not a squire...a knight," he replied quietly. The way he announced it made it sound like nothing, but she knew how much it meant to him. Happiness bloomed in heart, but there was was also sadness. As a knight he will be able to enter a Lord's service and given how fond he was of his brother Robb it wouldn't surprise her if he returned to the North.

"That is wonderful," she remarked and smiled openly."When will be your vigil?"

"Ser Albar assured me it will take place sometime after he wedding," he replied."I told Robb about it and he assured me that he will remain here. It only saddens me that Arya can't be here. She
would love it."

She nodded her head in understanding and squeezed his shoulder."But it also means that you will finally be able to visit your home. I doubt Lady Stark will be able to refuse a visit."

"As a knight I will be even more of a danger to her trueborn children. I miss Arya, but I will let it think in for a while before paying a visit. It will give her enough time to make peace with it."

Dany sighed. She didn't know many highborn bastards, but Jon Snow was not someone capable of stealing his brother's lordship. Now that she saw him and her brother together she found the notion almost ridiculous. There was no way that Jon would ever dare to harm Robb.

"Well, it is not her decision, is it?" she remarked."Your father is the Lord of Winterfell."

"I don't want to be a burden to my father," he countered quietly."He did enough when he allowed me to grow up in Winterfell. Other bastards are not allowed such luxuries."

Dany knew all this, but couldn't help but to feel angry about it. She herself knew how it feels to be separated from family due to "blood reasons."

"Yet he allowed you to grow up in Winterfell and Robb will be Lord of Winterfell after him," she insisted."He will surely offer you a place in his service."

A sad smile tugged on Jon's lips.

"He already did. Or he assured me to speak to my father about the matter. I refused him though," Jon explained."The best I could hope for would be to wed Beth Cassel, but I have no interest to endure Lady Stark's icy looks for the rest of my life. I want to have something own my own. I am thinking about entering into Lord Arryn's service. Several of his guards are retiring. I asked Ser Albar to write to Lord Arryn on the matter."

Her heart filled with relief. As Lord Arryn's guard she would at least be able to see him now and then. It was better than nothing.

"I am sure Lord Arryn will agree," she assured him softly."Then you will be able to see King's Landing."

He swallowed and a moment of silence followed, his hand resting on hers longer than intended.

"I heard the Queen doesn't like bastards," Jon remarked, his voiced sounding slightly strained.

"I doubt the Queen will pay you much attention. I heard she is very proud," Dany explained and pulled her hand away. She saw the disappointment crossing over his even-shaped face and wanted to add something to soothe him, but she was unable to find the right words.

"Of course she is," Jon replied in a lower voice and rose back to his feet."She is Tywin Lannister's only daughter. My father always disliked him. He is a man more feared than respected."

"And rightfully so," she added, hoping she didn't say too much on the matter."Even Lord Arryn fears him. It was him who won the Rebellion by sacking the Capital and ordering his henchmen to murder my brother's son. That is why you should be careful."

Jon's features softened."I will, but first I will have to endure this ridiculous wedding. I am surprised old Lord Belmore didn't call off the wedding given the state of his daughter."
Dany nodded. Nobody safe the Maester was allowed to see Beth Belmore before she was sent back to Strongsong, but everybody knew that the incident meant. There will be no great match waiting for the Lady in the future like her proud father once hoped for.

"I am sure she will get better," Dany offered, though the contrary was more likely. Once one of the maids was raped by a knight in Lord Nestor's household and only a week later the poor girl was found hanging from a tree. Such damage to the mind is not easily mended.

"I hope so...for Ser Albar's sake," he added and gave her a fleeting smile. "You should go now. I will see you later at the wedding. I think I am in need of a proper bath."

Dany returned his smile and went to prepare for the wedding.

The wedding was a happy affair. There was music, dancing and song to be had, though Lord Nestor and his son were still throwing glowering looks at each other. The groom himself looked older than his years, though Randa didn't allow it to take away her joy. She danced until her feet were swollen and bruised.

Dany herself was not much of a dancer and preferred to sit on the sidelines to observe the coming and going of the guests. On the other side of the room she spotted Red Jon joking with a lady from House Hunter. Lady Marissa Royce, Ser Albar's wife held her boy in her lap and clapped along with the happy music produced by one of the lute players. Especially, the fool with the blue-green motley amused young Bryce Royce whenever he juggled his colorful balls.

Robb Stark was also well-liked by the ladies and they were fluttering around him like a swarm of bees around a pot of honey. Not that it surprised her. He was the heir to Winterfell and she was quite surprised when Jon told her that he wasn't even betrothed at his age. Sweetrobin received his first offer of marriage when he was barely out of his swaddling.

Jon spent most of his time attending to Ser Nestor's needs. Ser Albar may have agreed to knight him soon, but for tonight he was still a squire and had to do as asked of him.

Only later when Lord Nestor was occupied with drinking the Bronze Yohn under the table Jon was finally able to join her.

She had to smile when she saw his prim and proper appearance and his blue-white garb. It made him look like a page boy. It amused her even more, because she knew how much Jon disliked the scratchy silken material. She learned soon that the Northern people preferred leather and fur over lace and silk.

"Do you care for wine, my Lady?" he asked with a lopsided smile curling on his lips and held up the pot of wine.

She grinned and lifted her goblet.

"I seems you got a bath after all," she replied and he filled her goblet to the brim.

"I seems so," he confirmed and glimpsed over to Lord Nestor, before shifting his attention back to her.

"Do you think Lord Nestor can spare your presence for a while?" she inquired.

"I think he can," Jon told her and put the pot down on the table, before settling down next to her. Most of the table was empty as the people were either dancing or strolling out in the gardens to enjoy the last days of summer.
"So have you been dancing?" he asked and poured himself a goblet of wine.

"A little," she confirmed. "Ser Donnel Wallace Waynwood danced with me, but I was barely able to understand him. He was stuttering and his face was red like a lobster. Then there were Ser Albar and Red Jon. I am not much of a dancer."

Jon nodded and sipped from his wine. "Me neither. Robb always hated it when his mother forced her dancing lessons upon him. It was the only time I was happy to be excluded from something."

"Robb has been dancing all night. He shared three dances with Lady Ysilla Royce and four with Randa. I seems your brother has changed over the last three years and now he is sharing a cup with Lady Ysilla."

Jon looked startled and let his gaze sweep over the room to come to rest at his brother and Lady Ysilla. Dany recalled her as young girl with pigtails, but the years have changed her into a beauty. That she was very tall and graceful made her stand out against the other ladies.

The smile on Jon's lips told her that he was pleased. "Well, my brother could do worse and my father would surely approve. The Bronze Yohn is an old friend."

"Well, your brother looks like a bear near a honey pot," she joked and Jon chuckled.

"You say that you are not much of a dancer," she added and smiled. "But you danced with my niece, didn't you?"

He choked on his wine and pounded his chest to ease his coughing.

"Aye, I did and I nearly broke her toes. No wonder she gave me these glowering looks," he replied.

"Well, I won't mind if you break my toes," she offered with a cheeky smile.

He gave her a strange look, as if he didn’t quite believe her.

"I am really horrible at this!" he warned, but she was already on her feet and pulling on his sky blue cloak.

"That is no excuse!" she chided him and grasped his arm. "I am just as worse and if you don’t believe… ask Ser Wallace."

When he smiled back at her she knew that she won him over and soon they were twirling and trying to follow the music. They probably looked ridiculous, but it didn’t really matter to her when Jon when she was able to coax a full smile from Jon's lips. It was like the spring sunshine shining true the trees, all warm and pleasant yet seldom seen in the dreary North.

"Now was that so bad?" she asked him later when they returned to their seats. and Jon went to pick up his pot of wine to rejoin Lord Nestor, who looked quite sickly around the face.

"Not bad, but I saw a flock of ladies giggling when you stumbled over my feet," he remarked and picked up the pot of wine to rejoin Lord Nestor, who looked quite sickly around the face.

Not long after this the bedding was called and Dany followed after the flock of other ladies, while Randa was carried by the eager manfolk. As a child she always longed to take part in this spectacle, but now she couldn’t help but to feel uncomfortable. Randa could be the Lord’s daughter, but the same could be said about Lady Lysa and Lord Arryn and many other lords and ladies in the realm.
It only strengthened her own determination.

*I won’t end up like this.*

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the delay. I was really busy. Next chapter will have Rhaenys pov.
Rhaenys

The last year has not been kind to Lord Arryn. He looked weary, haggard and his hair was now completely grey. It seems his high office was beginning to leave it’s mark on the man and thus it was no surprise to her that Tywin Lannister offered to ease his burdens. Jon Arryn refused or so she heard, but it was quite clear to her that his time as Hand was limited. The day will come when Tywin Lannister will to return to the position he once held during her grandfather’s reign.

“It is a pleasure to have you here in Storm’s End, my Lord Arryn,” she greeted him and forced a smile on her lips. As Renly had no wife he gladly left the role of the hostess to him. Even when he went to travel Renly often allowed her to rule Storm’s End in his stead and thus it was no surprise that most of the Stormlords called her the Lady of Storm’s End.

“Oh, it really is,” the elderly man agreed and a smile crinkled on his lips.”Though the weather was quite stormy, but that is to be expected.”

“Indeed,” Renly agreed and poured wine into his goblet. Then he offered the same to Lord Arryn, but the old man lifted his hand and shook his head.

“Not at this late hour,” he excused himself.”The wine makes me anxious.”

“As you say, my Lord,” Renly returned and lifted the goblet to his lips. Rhaenys did the same and savored the sweet taste of the Arbor. The wine was a gift of Lord Mace Tyrell and it filled her with happy memories of spring sunshine and the smell of flowers. It has been three years that she last visited the Reach and she doubted that she will be able to do so after her wedding.

If Robert Baratheon has his wishes then I will spent the rest of my life in this nest of vipers that his King’s Landing, she knew, but she had no intention to allow this to happen. I will find a way.

“Well, wine or not, your visit was quite a surprise,” Renly remarked and gave the old man a curious look.”Why brings you here to the Stormlands?”

Lord Arryn gave her a brief glance before giving his answer.

“In truth it was a rather spontaneous decision,” he explained and smiled.”It has been nearly six years that I have visted the Stormlands. I have no intention to burden you for long. I will stay for a few days and then I will pay a visit, before returning to King’s Landing for the wedding.”

This roused her curiosity.

“That is quite a tight schedule,” she remarked and played with the cake on her plate.”But it is only understandable. It is your home and the King is keeping you busy, isn’t he?”

“The King shows me much trust by allowing me to ease his burdens,” Lord Arryn replied diplomatically, but his weary expression showed his true thoughts.

His brought a smile to from Renly’s lips.

“Ease his burdens?” he asked and gave Lord Arryn a disbelieving look.”Pray tell me of my brother’s burdens? All he is doing is whoring and drinking himself into an early grave while the Realm’s debts are growing.”
Rhaenys gave Lord Arryn a curious glance, anticipating his reaction to Renly’s harsh words. It was not often that he spoke so openly, but maybe it was only the Arbor speaking.

Lord Arryn sighed deeply.

“You are not wrong, my Lord,” he admitted and brushed his beard.”The growing debts are a serious problem, but it is hard to reason with your brother the King. He cares little for such things and that the Lannisters are encouraging him in his wastefulness is not helping either. That is why I hoped to convince you to reconsider a match with Lady Margaery Tyrell.”

“I see,” Renly said and an amused smile crossed over his lips.”It seems your visit isn’t as spontaneous as you are making it out to be, eh?”

“Aye,” Lord Arryn replied and nodded his head in affirmation.”You got me, my Lord. I came here in hopes of changing your mind. Mace Tyrell is a rich man and an allegiance would help to ease the burdens of the Realm.”

“Ease the burdens of the Realm?” Renly asked and wrinkled his brows. Then he emptied his goblet and gave his answer.”I understand your reasoning, but I have no intention to marry Margaery Tyrell. If my brother likes her so much he is welcomed to wed her himself.”

Rhaenys had to cover her mouth to stifle her laughter. She had no doubt that it was meant as a jest, but Lord Arryn’s face showed disapproval.

“Life is not a joke, my boy,” Lord Arryn remarked in a strangely serious tone.”You rightfully mentioned your brother’s failures, but you are not helping him either. You are a man grown and in the right age to wed.”

Renly scowled.

“Instead of forcing me into a marriage my brother the King could just stop wasting gold and act a King,” Renly replied more sharply and rose to his feet.”Forgive me, but I am quite tired and will retire.”

Then he jerked his head towards Rhaenys and smiled.”I am sure the Princess will be pleased to keep you company and show you to your accommodations, my Lord.”

Lord Arryn looked disappointed, but remained polite as ever.”Do as you must, my Lord.”

Thus Renly left them alone and Rhaenys wanted to curse him for his cowardice. She may not harbor the same hatred for the old man as she did for the Lannisters, but it didn’t change the fact that he was part of the reason Robert Baratheon sat upon the Iron Throne.

Taking a deep breath she forced a polite smile over her lips.

“Is there something else I can do for you, my Lord?” she asked, hopeful that he will allow her to retire.”I am quite tired.”

“I know it is quite late, but there is indeed something we should talk about, Princess,” he explained and Rhaenys knew that she had no other choice, but to follow the Lord’s wishes.

“Of course, my Lord,” she replied politely and settled back down.”What do you wish to speak about?”

Lord Arryn pursed his lips and leaned backwards, eyeing her closely.
“I don’t know if you heard, but there was an incident with Princess Arianne Martell and Garlan Tyrell that is concerning to me. The Princess apparently tried to wed Ser Garlan, but Prince Doran found out just in time to prevent the marriage,” he explained calmly and Rhaenys had a hard time to hide her knowledge.

“I don’t know anything about this matter, my Lord,” she told him and tried to sound as innocent as possible.

Lord Arryn chuckled and clasped his hands together.”I am an old man, but I am not stupid. I have no proof for your meddling in this matter, but let me give you some advice: The game you are playing is more dangerous than you can know.”

Calm yourself, she told herself and smiled. It was her natural reaction to everything in this world, but she deduced from the old man’s expression that he didn’t believe her.

“I don’t know what you are talking about, my Lord,” she replied softly and put a piece of cake into her mouth. She needed to find a way to change the topic.”But I might be able to help you in the matter of Margaery Tyrell and Renly, though I would expect something in return…a small favor if you like.”

“You truly are your mother’s daughter,” he remarked quietly and laughed. It was laugh both sad and full of amusement.

“My mother is dead, my Lord” it escaped her then in an almost icy voice. There was much she was able to endure, but her mother was not a topic to laugh about even if it was meant as a compliment. He helped murdering her and thus he had no right to speak about her.

“She is and….,” he added and she heard the sadness in his voice, but she had no interest to hear his false excuses and interrupted him.

“And what?” she asked and was unable to keep her anger at bay.”Noting you say will bring her back, my Lord. She was raped and murdered. I am thankful for your help, but I have no need of your pity. My favor was a simple one and could have been easily granted, but it seems my grief means nothing to you.”

I am an utter fool, she thought then and felt tears burning in her eyes. She rose to her feet, but the old man grasped her arm and kept her in place.

“Your grief is not without worth, my child,” he told her then, his voice almost gentle.”I wish I could have punished Tywin Lannister for his actions, but I was not strong enough to speak out against Robert. You lost much, but so did I. My nephew was murdered by the hands of your grandfather.”

She exhaled deeply and settled back in her chair.

Then she pulled her hand free and met Lord Arryn’s gaze.

“My mother had nothing to do with my grandfather’s actions nor did my brother!” she threw back.”You are accusing me of meddling, but it is you who is meddling in my personal affairs.”

“Aye,” Lord Arryn granted her.”They were innocent, but it will not serve you to cling to your anger. You will be Queen…your children will continue the Targaryen line, even if they no longer carry the name. Does that not help to soothe your heart, Princess?”

My anger is the only thing keeping me alive, she wanted to tell him, but forced herself to regain her
"My lord," she said and winced at the weakness in her voice."It would soothe my heart to see my Aunt. She is now almost a woman grown and I have never been able to meet her. Convince the King to invite her to the wedding and I will convince Renly to wed Margaery Tyrell."

A long moment of silence passed between them before he gave his answer.

"Very well," he agreed."A favour for a favour. Convince Renly and I will convince the King."

Rhaenys couldn’t believe her ears, but couldn’t help but to remain suspicious.

"A favor for a favor, my Lord."

...
To Jon the city of King’s Landing appeared like a maze of walls, narrow streets and towers sprawling over the glittering waters of the Blackwater. The biggest city of the North was White Harbour, but it was nothing compared to the capital of the Seven Kingdoms. The Wolf’s Den and New Castle seemed like small huts compared to the splendor of the Sept of Baelor or the roughness of the Dragonpit. Even the pale red walls of the Red Keep had something kingly and ancient to it that was only rivaled by the great walls of Winterfell.

“I carried the same look when I first came here, my boy,” the amused voice of Jon Arryn, Lord of the Vale coaxed Jon out of his dreamy state.”You will get used to it.”

“I can’t believe that. There is so much to see,” Daenerys added happily. Like the rest of Lord Arryn’s retinue she was clad in a dark blue dressed and a fitting white cape. Jon himself was dressed in the sky-blue garb of Lord Arryn’s personal guard. Only the silver wolf pin keeping his cloak from falling apart reminded him of his old life in Winterfell. Like his new sword it was a gift from Robb and meant to remind him of his promise.

I will see you soon, Robb made him swear, though Jon believed that he and his brother will see each other sooner than expected. Robb and Lady Ysilla Royce shared several dances on Myranda Royce’s wedding and Jon heard from Robb that the Lady invited him to Runestone. Whether his brother will take the offer was another matter, but Jon recalled that he appeared more than eager to comply with the Lady’s wish.

“Do you think the King will allow me to visit the Dragonpit, my Lord?” Daenerys asked Lord Arryn, her lively face brimming with hope.

Lord Arryn nodded, his lined lips forming into a tired smile. It was not the first time that Jon noticed his weariness.

“I will ask for the King's approval,” he promised Daenerys.”Yet I doubt you will find there more than a few bones. The real dragon skulls are kept in the cellar of the Red Keep.”

“That would be wonderful,” she replied and beamed.”I will ask my niece to show me…she must be well-acquainted with the Red Keep,” she blabbered on like a waterfall, before turning back to Jon.

“Will you come too, Jon?” she asked and sounded very excited.”Then you can write Arya about Balerion the Dread and all the other dragons.”

Jon couldn’t help but to smile when he saw smiling like this. For moons she had hoped to allowed to attend her niece’s wedding and now her dream was coming true. No wonder she was smiling so much, though Jon felt a hint of anxiety when he thought of the meeting with Princess Rhaenys.

She once threatened to take my head.

“Arya will like that for sure. I hope the dragon Vhagar is down there as well. Arya always liked Princess Visenya the best, because she carried a sword and dressed up like a knight.”

Daenerys chuckled, her laughter light like the sound of bells.”I am sure we will be able find Vhagar.”

“We will,” Jon confirmed, before they continued to ride on towards Aegon’s Hill. There awaited the Red Keep with it's pale red walls.
Daenery’s smile only brightened at the sight, but Jon felt a hint of anxiety when they led their horses through the gates. He heard numerous times that this city was no kind place to bastards like him, but then he was a knight. A knight without lands, but a knight nonetheless.

“Are you feeling sick, my boy?” Lord Arryn inquired after Jon allowed one of the stable boys to lead his horse away. “You look a bit pale around the face.”

Jon swallowed hard, feeling a little embarrassed. He was nearly a man grown, but even the elderly Lord noticed his anxiety.

Jon smiled at the Lord, trying to give a self-confident impression.

“All is well,” he assured the Lord, who gave him a knowing smile and squeezed his shoulder.

“I you are part of my retinue. All will be well as long as you stay away from the Lannisters,” he explained and jerked his head over to Daenerys, an amused smile crossing over his lips.”

She was already engrossed in a conversation with one of the stable boys and asking him kinds of questions. The young boy, not more than a eleven, looked utterly stunned and in need of saving.

“Princess,” he called out to her.”Leave the poor boy be and come here.”

Daenerys sighed and and looked slightly disappointed, but returned quickly to the Lord’s side.

“I apologize, my Lord” she relied and folded her hands in front of her.”All of this is a little overwhelming.”

Lord Arryn nodded his head.

“I understand, but King’s Landing is not the Vale, my child. Don’t trust the servants. Half of them are in the pocket of the Queen. Don’t reveal your true thoughts to them. Do you understand?”

Then Daenerys’ smile faded from her lips and a more serious expression took hold over her features.

“I understand,” she replied.”I will heed your advice.”

Lord seemed satisfied with that answer and leaned down to put a kiss on her cheek, before patting her shoulder.

“Good and now you should go and inspect your chambers. I will see you later at supper. The small council expects me,” Lord Arryn added, before turning to Jon.” Ser Jon and Ser Marwyn will make sure that you are properly settled.”

“And my niece?” she asked.”When will I be able to meet her?”

Lord Arryn squeezed her shoulder.

“Tonight at supper. I made sure to invite her,” he replied and gave Jon a knowing smile, before departing in company of Ser Vardis Aegon, the captain of the guards and several other guards.

“Do you know why it is called the Maidenvault?” Daenerys asked Jon and Ser Marwyn later as they stepped through one of the two narrow doors leading into the Maidenvault. It was a slate-roofed building located behind right behind the royal sept.

Jon knew the answer, but Ser Marwyn Belmore seemed to hold little interest in the history of the
Dragon King’s.

He gave a dumfounded smile and ruffled through his brown untidy hair.

“I don’t know, Princess,” he replied.”Would you tell us?”

Daenerys smiled and let her gaze sweep over the long narrow corridor.

"It was here that King Baelor imprisoned his three beautiful sisters to protect himself from his carnal urges, though it was not much use in the end. They say that his sisters were able to leave the vault through secret passages and went to meet their lovers in secret.”

“Sounds like nonsense to me,” Ser Marwyn remarked serious as ever, which made Daenerys chuckle.

“Forgive me, good Sir,” she added.”It seems you are no lover of such frivolous tales.”

“Certainly not, Princess,” the man answered glumly and continued to lead them down another dark corridor. He was a man of two and four, but all too serious and pious, which often earned him strange looks from the other guards. Jon often saw him praying in the sept and or speaking to the Septon. It was also no surprise to him that Lord Arryn appointed him as one of Daenerys’ guards. He is here to make sure that the Princess' behaves herself like a proper lady, though Jon doubted that Daenerys would ever dare act out of place. It meant too much for her to be here.

There at the end of the corridor they found a gilded door that was soon opened by a young servant girl, graced with copper skin and green eyes. Lady Lyrah Longwaters, Lord Arryn had called her. She was a granddaughter of Rennifer Longwaters, the chief undergoaler of the dungeons and a trusted friend of Lord Arryn. The girl was also meant to serve as Daenerys’ companion as Randa Royce has yet to wait out the mourning period for her late husband, Lord Belmore. His dead was sudden and happened shortly after the wedding, though Jon doubted that Randa was shedding tears for the elderly man. He had a weak heart, Randa had informed her Lord Father upon her return.

“I thank you for your service, Ser Marwyn,” Daenerys told the serious knight after inspecting the chambers.”I am well-settled and you may leave tonight’s duty to Jon. I want him to accompany me to the planned supper with Princess’ Rhaenys.”

Jon saw the disapproval on the man’s face and his objections followed quickly.

“I don’t think it is appropriate to take a ba…,” he began, but Daenerys cut him off before he was able to speak his mind.

“Jon is a knight now and thus worthy enough,” she insisted, her voice taking a sharper tone.”Besides, Princess Rhaenys knows Jon. She will be pleased to see him again. Lord Arryn approves of my decision.”

Ser Marwyn wrinkled his brows, but he accepted the Princess’ command.”As you wish, Princess. I will be on my way. The sept is quite close.”

Then he turned to Jon.”I will come and relieve you of your duty after supper, my boy. Take good care or I will have a word with Lord Arryn.”

“Well Jon,” Jon correctly politely, but Jon had no doubt that the man took it as an insult.”I am a knight like you, even if I am born on the wrong side of the sheet.”

The man’s eyes narrowed in anger, but kept his thoughts to himself, before leaving them to
themselves. Well, there was Lyrah Longwaters, but she was all too shy and tongue-tied to open her mouth until Daenerys pulled her aside and asked her kindly to draw a bath for her.

“Of course,” she replied and Daenerys turned back to Jon.

Then she sighed and stepped the windows. Then she stepped on her tiptoes and opened the pained window panes, before winking at him to join her.

“Jon Arryn made sure that I have a good sight over the Blackwater,” she explained and leaned forward, her silver spilling over her shoulder.

It was a beautiful sight, but Jon brushed those dangerous thoughts away before they could hold of his mind.

“That was very kind of him,” Jon replied instead and moved towards the window. It was true, there not far in the distance was the Blackwater, glittering in the last rays of sunlight. It was a few hours before sunset and the first streaks of lilac were already visible on the distant horizon.

“It is,” she confirmed and sounded strangely sad. Then she leaned over and squeezed his hand.”I am also thankful that he allowed me to meet my niece, but there is something wrong with him these days. He seems too sad as if something is weighing on his mind.”

“Aye,” Jon confirmed and enclosed her hand briefly, before moving away.”I think it is partly his age and I heard young Lord Arryn had another fever.”

Daenerys nodded her head and gave him a mild smile.”I am sure you are right.”

...
Rhaenys

Grandmother, that was the first thought fluttering through her mind when she laid eyes on her
Aunt’s face. She was graced with the same full features, long silver locks and short built like her
mother the late Queen Rhaella. Only the eyes were different. Daenerys’ eyes were a deep purple,
but Queen Rhaella had dark indigo eyes like her son Prince Rhaegar. No, those eyes were her
father’s eyes. The Mad King’s eyes, though hers were shining with tears instead of madness.

“May I present Princess Rhaenys Targaryen, ward of Renly Baratheon,” Lord Arryn introduced
Rhaenys, who was rather unsure how to behave. Years she spent honing her mask of indifference,
but how to speak to her last family member was not something they taught her.

All her life she had been alone, enduring and biding her time, but now she lacked the words.
Thus she dropped a curt bow and smiled down at the slightly shorter girl.

“A pleasure to meet you, Aunt Daenerys,” she replied formally, no matter how silly it sounded. Her
Aunt was a girl several years her younger than her. Cousin would be a better title for her than Aunt.

She expected a similar curt reply, but then the girl started to grin and bridged the distance,
enclosing her into a hug.

Rhaenys was caught completely off guard and squeezed the other girl’s shoulder.

“Forgive me, I am not used to this formal behavior here at court…and we are family after all,” her
Aunt replied almost shyly, although her smile was as bright as a star.

“No need to apologize,” Rhaenys replied, her voice trembling. She leaned down and placed a kiss
at the girl’s cheek, before looking up to Lord Arryn.”We are family after all.”

Lord Arryn carried a warm smile and was accompanied by a young man. In all the excitement she
didn’t even notice his presence.

He was quite tall, but his face told her who he was. It was the pale-faced squire that danced with
her on a tourney in Highgarden, Eddard Stark’s son.

What is he doing here, was the first thought that came to her mind, but then she realized that he
was dressed in the blue and white livery like the rest of the men belonging to Lord Arryn’s
household guard.

Daenerys’s smile brightened even more when she noticed Rhaenys’ staring.

“Oh, I forgot to mention,” Daenerys added and jerked her head at Jon.”It has been three years, but I
can see that you remember Jon Snow, Lord Eddard Stark’s son. He shared a dance with you or so I
heard.”

Rhaenys, still a bit stunned by this surprise, tried to muster a smile for the young man. The pale-
faced squire has changed into a handsome young man. There was more color in his cheeks and his
dark curled hair helped to soften the sharp features of his long face. It will not be hard for him to
endear the ladies, bastard or not.
“Lord Snow,” she greeted and moved towards him.”It is a pleasant surprise to see you again after all this time.”

The young man gave a formal bow and a hesitant smile crossed over his lips.

“It is a pleasant surprise to see you again, Princess,” he replied.”Though I am no longer Lord Snow, but Ser Jon.”

_A knight_, she thought and couldn’t help to feel an ounce of happiness for the young man.

“Ser Jon,” she corrected herself and smiled.”My belated congratulations.”

“I thank you,” Ser Jon replied and wanted to leave, but Daenerys grasped his arm and flashed Lord Arryn a pleading look.

“Would it be a problem if Jon stayed to eat with us?” she asked.”I think we have a lot to talk about and it is only a private supper. I am well aware that it wouldn’t be appropriate for an official meeting.”

Surprise washed over Jon Arryn’s face, but her niece’s words seemed to hold a certain sway over him. This surprised Rhaenys a little, but it seemed Lord Arryn holds a certain liking for Daenerys.

Rhaenys didn’t mind, though all of this was a bit absurd to her. Queen Cersei would have had her Aunt’s head if she asked to bring a bastard to her table. Maybe it was just a result from her time at court that she was harboring such cynical thoughts when her Aunt was obviously trying to be kind to the young man, but it was a habit she was unable to drop.

Besides, what right did she have to question Daenerys’ confidants? They all had their own secrets locked away in their hearts.

Thus she nodded her head and smiled.”No, Ser Jon may stay. As I said...his presence is a pleasant surprise.”

Lord Arryn nodded his head and smiled.”Well, then we should sit down and sup. The day was too long and I am quite hungry.”

“Indeed,” Rhaenys replied, though she didn’t agree. Her appetite has decreased immensely since coming to this cursed city.”Let us eat.”

Knowing Lord Arryn’s simple taste it was no surprise to her that he supper turned out to be quite plain. Not that it bothered her. It was a nice change from the King’s over-indulgent feasts. Rhaenys had tasted enough roasted boar to last until the end of her days, but it was hard to escape the dish when the King went hunting almost every moon.

No, it was a simple dish appropriate to Lord Arryn’s sensible stomach. It was a simple Lamprey pie served with turnips, carrots and onions accompanied by Dornish wine Rhaenys received as a gift from her Uncle Doran.

“I heard you are very talented with the harp,” Daenerys remarked when the dessert was being served. It were sweet Dornish Plums, Rhaenys’ favorite dish.”I hoped you might be able to grace us with a song.”

Rhaenys didn’t want to refuse, but it has been quite some time that she last touched her harp. The King didn’t like it when she played and thus she avoided playing and even left her harp in Storm’s End, where it was safe from Prince Joffrey. He killed Tommen’s cat and she wanted to avoid
finding out what he would do with her precious harp.

“I fear my harp remained in Storm’s End,” Rhaenys explained and felt sadness washing over her. The mention of her harp filled her with a deep longing.”Yet I might be able to borrow a harp from one of the minstrels attending the tourney. Then I will gladly play for you, Aunt.”

Her Aunt grinned from one ear to the other and clapped her hands together.

“There will be a tourney?”

Rhaenys nodded her head in confirmation and took a sip from the wine.

“Indeed,” she confirmed and glimpsed over to Jon and Lord Arryn.”What would be a wedding without a few thousand wasted gold dragons?”

Lord Arryn sighed and put his goblet away.

“I told the King that a simpler affair would be more appropriate given the realm’s growing financial obligations with the Iron Bank. Yet the Queen approached Lord Tywin and he granted her free reign in the preparations. It will be no Tourney of Harrenhall, but quite the affair. It seems even your Uncle Prince Oberyn intends to grace us with his presence. I never thought he would set a foot into the same place as Tywin Lannister.”

Careful now, Rhaenys reminded herself and tried appear surprised. It was after all her who asked her Uncle to come. She knew from her informant that her Uncle Doran didn’t approve of her wish, but then she knew her Uncle Oberyn would never refuse her.

“Is that really true?” she asked and feigned a smile.”I will be pleased to see him again.”

Lord Arryn frowned and poured himself fresh wine.”I can only imagine your happiness, Princess Rhaenys.”

Then a strange silence settled between her and Lord Arryn. Daenerys seemed mildly irritated and Ser Jon made an attempt to bridge the silence.

“Prince Oberyn, the Viper of Dorne?” he asked and sounded slightly awed.”I assume he will also take part in this planned tourney.”

Not with Mace Tyrell’s son riding in the joust, she wanted to correct him, but she doubted he knew about the strange feud between the Tyrell’s and the Martell’s. Well, it was mostly a feud kept alive by Mace Tyrell and his damn pride.

Thus she decided to soften the truth.

“My Uncle is growing old,” she replied softly.”I don’t think he intends to partake in the tourney, but there are plenty of other capable young knights riding in the joust. Even my beloved Prince Joffrey is taking part in this spectacle.”

Rhaenys had to stifle a laugh when Lord Arryn started to choke on his wine. It seemed the Prince’s ambitions surprised him just as much as Rhaenys when he announced them. His mother was furious, but the King allowed it anyway and was very pleased to hear of his son's intentions.

“Forgive me,” Lord Arryn apologized then and paled a little.”I think I misheard you. The Prince intends to ride in the tourney?”
Rhaenys nodded, deciding she would enjoy every moment of Joffrey kissing the dirt.

“It is true,” she confirmed full of glee.”My beloved Prince wants to prove his mettle and the King agreed to his wishes. The Queen was no pleased, but you know her…she is always fretting about her son.”

Lord Arryn brushed the wine from his arm.”This is all quite surprising.”

“Surprising indeed,” Daenerys added full of excitement and smiled over to Jon.”You will also take part, won’t you?”

Jon paled a little and embarrassment crossed over his face.

“That would be a bit difficult. I have no squire…or proper armor,” he explained and Rhaenys saw the disappointment written on Daenerys’ face.

It was a selfish thought that took hold of her mind then, but it was too good of an opportunity to pass. She wanted to see the Queen's face when the bastard of Eddard Stark sends her precious son kissing the dirt.

“If it is a squire or armor that you need…I can sponsor that for you,” Rhaenys declared after a moment of silence.”I hardly ever use my gold and this would be a pleasant opportunity to show my generosity…if you are inclined to accept.”

The young man paled even more, now more resembling the young boy she met three years ago.

“That would be too presumptuous of me,” he replied, but Rhaenys cut him off.

“Nonsense,” she replied and gave him an encouraging smile.”Not more presumptuous than to ask me for a dance. Do you remember, good Sir?”

This time a full smile showed on his lips and lightened up his entire face.

“You are right.” he replied and dropped his head in acceptance.”Forgive me, I will gladly take your offer, Princess.”
Jon blocked the next blow, his hand aching under the blunt force. The blades parted quickly and they exchanged another round of slashes. Left and right, the ringing of steel made his ears rattle. It was a familiar song, but comforting nonetheless. He was sweating like a pig beneath his heavy armor, but it didn’t take away from the thrill of battle. Again the blades kissed and parted, before Jon blocked another blow, using the moment to kick his enemy and send him rolling in the dust.

Jon didn’t take time to savor his victory. He pulled off his helmet and moved towards Red Jon, still sprawled on the ground. He looked like a turtle lying on his back and wiggling with his arms and hands.

“Let me help you,” he told Red Jon and pulled him up, before aiding him in removing his helmet.

“Thank you,” Red Jon replied and grinned, his sweaty hair sticking to his face.”It felt as if someone dropped a load of stones on my body.”

Jon couldn’t help but to smile.”That is just the exhaustion speaking. We should rest a little and help ourselves to some fresh water.”

Red Jon nodded his head, brushing his hand through his red locks.

“Aye, water would be good,” he replied and Jon helped him along towards the edge of the court yard, where a row of trees provided them with a comfortable shade. Several other young men sat there, engrossed in conversation or observing the others. Most of them were the offspring of high lords hailing from all over the Seven Kingdoms. Just as numerous were the colors they wore. Some sigils were more familiar than others, but to know all was impossible. Even his sister Sansa, who likes to pride herself on knowing all of the important sigils, would have a hard time in recognizing all of them.

“Here is a good place,” Jon added then and helped Red Jon to settle down. Then he called for one of he page boys, rushing around and offering fresh water or fruits to the young lords.

One of the boy’s was quickly at their side and handed each of them a cup of fresh water, before rushing off to his next task.

The cool water was more than pleasant and Jon sprinkled half of it on his face.

Then he put the cup away and decided to appraise Red Jon’s leg. He was barely able to get here without uttering a gasp of pain.

“What are you doing?” the older boy asked him when Jon attempted to pull of his boots.

“I want to see if it is sprained,” Jon explained quickly and continued, but the older boy brushed Jon’s hand away.

“You don’t need to worry about me,” he explained.”Sprained or not I can’t take part in the. My right eyesight is too bad.”

Jon pulled his hand away and nodded his head, before trying to find an encouraging answer, but someone interrupted them.

“Jon!” a youthful voice exclaimed and addressed Red Jon.”Jon Redfort, is that you?”
Jon lifted his head and found a young man approaching them. Seeing him up close Jon was stunned how beautiful he was. His even-shaped face, framed by a mass of lazy brown curls and ringlets was a maiden’s dream and his golden-green armor every knight’s envy.

Red Jon seemed to recognize the young man, his face lightened up by a smile.

“It is me, my Lord Tyrell,” Red Jon replied politely, baring his white teeth.”How long has it been that we last saw each other? Two or three years?”

“Two years,” Lord Tyrell answered, but given his youth Jon guessed it was the youngest son, Loras.”It seems an eternity ago. Back then I was still a squire, but now I am a knight.”

“Me too, my Lord,” Red Jon replied proudly.

“It seems the last years were kind to us,” Lord Tyrell added and smiled.”But please don’t call me Lord Tyrell. That is my father’s title and one day my brother’s if he succeeds him. I am just Ser Loras.”

Then he inclined his head to appraise Jon, who had been observing their exchange in silence.

“And who is your friend?” Ser Loras asked, his honey-colored eyes filled with curiosity.”You failed to introduce us.”

“That’s Jon…Ser Jon…of the Vale,” Red Jon provided, voicing his answer carefully. Jon was moved by his tactfulness, but there was no need for it and thus he decided to take the matter into his own hands.

“I am Ser Jon, but in the North people know me as Jon Snow. I am Eddard Stark’s natural son,” he explained plainly which earned him a laugh from Ser Loras.

Yet there was no mockery to it. It seemed the young man was merely amused by his forwardness.

“My, it is true what they say about the Northmen,” Ser Loras remarked and showed his pearl teeth. Straight to the point, is it?”

“Straight to the point,” Jon confirmed and returned his smile. There was something charming about the young man that made it easy for Jon to open up.”I hope you don’t mind?”

“Not at all,” Ser Loras replied.”I am not much of a bleeding poet myself. That is more my sister’s talent, something she inherited from our Lady Mother. You will never see anyone trade sweeter insults than my sister.”

“Speaking of Lady Margaery,” Red Jon added.”I haven’t seen her with the ladies. Is she perhaps indisposed?”

“Not at all. My family is due to arrive in a few days. There is no chance that my sweet sister wouldn’t come to watch me ride in the lists. Besides, she is one of Princess Rhaenys’ maids-of-honour and my father is insistent that she becomes one of her ladies-in-waiting.”

Red Jon grinned.

”Well, knowing you it doesn’t surprise me that you are riding in the list, though wouldn’t you rather prefer to ride against the grown knights instead of younglings like us?”

Ser Loras smiled and leaned closer.
“Well, the age limitation was Queen Cersei’s idea,” he whispered in a low voice. “She can’t have her precious lion cub joust against grown men, can she?”

Red Jon paled a little while Jon stifled a laugh. He had seen the Crown Prince only once and what he saw didn’t impress him very much. Granted he was the very image of a Lannister, all golden-haired and graceful in built, but that smug smile he carries around all day long didn’t promise anything good. Jon had the impression that he was the kind of person who liked his own image far too much.

“Ser Loras…I don’t think you speak so lowly about our Queen,” Red Jon replied, but Loras seemed unaffected by his words of caution.

“It is the truth though,” Loras replied. “I heard the Queen has been trying to bribe all the favorites. Sadly, I am not one of those who is in need of gold and money. I will no show any consideration to that stuck-up lion boy.”

Jon was stunned, but then this was no the first time that he heard worrying rumors about the Queen.

“And your Lord Father won’t mind that?” Red Jon asked. “He always seems so eager to please the King.”

Loras nodded his head in confirmation, but the smile on his full lips didn’t waver.

“My sister is going to marry Lord Renly in a year’s time and my father promised the King to pay off half his debts to the Iron Bank. I think the King will be able to forgive me if I send his son tumbling into the dirt as long as my Lord Father pays the promised gold dragons. Besides, the Lannisters have been overplaying their hand for years. They can use a bit humiliation.”

“Well, you seem pretty confident that you are going to win,” Jon remarked calmly. “Are there other favourites?”

“Well, there are Ser Ronald Waynwood and his grandmother’s ward Harrold Hardyng. The both of them are good jousters. Ser Cletus Yronwood is not bad either, but he is more of a favorite for the Melee Competition…I am not good at remembering all those names. If you care you should ask my sister. She attends tourneys all the time and makes whole lists of her favorites to bet on them. It is part of a silly game shared between her and my brother Willas.”

“We will do that,” Red Jon confirmed and gave Jon a knowing smile, „but maybe we are in for a big surprise. There are a lot fresh faces partaking in the tourney. Jon here is one of them.”

There was a hint of surprise on Ser Loras’ face, but he was nothing but polite.

“That is quite a surprise,” the young man replied, before turning back to Red Jon. “And you are not taking part, young Ser Redfort?”

Red Jon pointed at his scarred eye.

“A warrior of the Mountain Clans nearly cut out my eye. Well, I still have my eye, but my eyesight suffered. Half the time I see the world in blurred shapes and half the time I am weeping like a forlorn maid. My brother Mychel even dubbed me The Weeping Knight.”

Ser Loras’ face lightened up in amusement.

“Well, it could be worse. My brother Garlan likes to call me Ser Daisy…because of my cloak, but
then he knows bloody well that my mother had that silly cloak made for me. It is hard to refuse ones’ mother, don’t you agree, my friends?”

Red Jon nodded in agreement.”It is indeed hard to argue with mothers.”

Jon swallowed hard, not knowing what to say. He had no mother who could force him to wear silly cloaks or to embarrass him.

“Well, I think I need to attend to my duties…,” Jon excused himself and rose to his feet.”I hope you have a pleasant evening, Ser Loras…and you Jon.”

Ser Loras dropped his head in acceptance and smiled.”Of course.”
Daenerys

The flickering flames of the torchlight made the shadows dance along the stone walls as they descended down the steps. Every rough movement of their footfalls on the ground and every hushed whisper was echoed back at them through the shifting darkness.

Dany felt her heartbeat speed up as she heard the flapping of wings.

“What was that?” she asked, tightening her grip on the torch.

“Probably a bat,” Jon added, his voice rumbling with laughter.”I am sure that there are thousands of those animals hiding down here in these crypts.”

Dany rolled her eyes and waved her torch at him in some sort of threatening gesture that only earned her another half-shadowed smile.

Jon was walking behind her, but even with the torch in front of her she was barely able to make out of face in the darkness. Now and then she saw the silver wolfpin on his cloak glittering in the darkness, before changing back to one of the shifting shadows.

“We should hurry or you will be late for the King's feast,” Jon added gently and gave her a gentle shove in the back.

Dany couldn't help but to laugh.”It isn’t my fault that this place lacks proper light and that these steps are endless.”

“It was your idea to come down here and take,” he added and grabbed for the torch.”Let me, or we will die down here with nothing left of us other than the rats picking on our bones.”

Dany slapped his shoulder for that comment, before letting go of the torch.

Jon was much taller than her and thus the light had more room to spread down over the floor. Suddenly the path before them was much clearer and she was even able to see Jon’s full face.

“Now let’s hurry up,” Jon added and offered his hand to her. Dany clasped his hand then they continued to descend down the whirling stone steps. After a while they reached a door and it took them much effort to pull it open, before they stepped into long airy room filled with dark shapes that had to be the infamous dragon bones.

There lined along the walls they stood assembled like gigantic statues. There were heads with long sharp fangs, maws big enough to eat a human alive, but the biggest of them all was placed in the middle of the room, the polished surface of the bones glimmering in the darkness as Jon pulled her along, ever towards the dragon’s head.

“That is Balerion the Dread,” Daenerys offered in a hushed whisper, trembling as she eyed the empty sockets where once the eyes of the dragon sat.”It has to be Aegon’s dragon. It is the biggest skull.”

“It seems so,” Jon whispered, before leading her hand towards the skull.

Dany felt like an ant as she touched the creature’s jaw. What surprised her was how warm the
bones felt. It was as if there was still some life stirring in those old bones, even hundreds of years after the dragon’s death.

“They are so warm.”

Jon chuckled.

“Careful or he will come back to life;” Jon added and squeezed her shoulder.”One bite and you would be gone.”

Dany chuckled, though the thought was both frightening and exciting. She tried to imagine it a thousand times before. Hundreds of years ago, those dragons ruled over this city, maybe even more so than the Kings themselves. If she had been born at the right time, maybe before the Dance or earlier, then she would have been able to ride a gracious beast like that. What would it have felt like?

“Dany,” Jon’s voice silenced her thoughts.”We should move on though.”

Dany nodded her head and a mischievous smile crossed her lips.”Aye, we do, but first we need to find Vhagar or Arya will be disappointed.”

Jon sighed softly and pulled on her arm, before waving his torch as if to chase away a swarm of flies.

Dany chuckled and pointed ahead.”I am no expert, but I know that Vhagar grew nearly as big as Balerion.

“That should help I guess,” Jon added with a smile and pointed a head.”Over there.”

And his guess turned out to be right. The other skull, placed nearly at the farthest end of the wall reached nearly the same high as Balerion's skull, though even after a while Jon and Dany were still unsure if it wasn't really Meraxes' head.

“Well, it is close enough?” Jon asked her and broke the comfortable silence that had settled over them.

”Arya will have to be satisfied… Maybe you can embellish the story a little,” she replied as they climbed up the stairs. The way seemed even longer and soon enough her face was drenched in sweat.

“What shall I write her?” he asked teasingly.”That we found a living dragon?”

”Well, we could tell her that we found an dragon egg,” Dany suggested jokingly.

”Gods beware,” Jon remarked and chuckled softly.”Arya would demand one for her nameday and Lady Stark would kill me for trying to instill such nonsense into her daughter's head.”

“Well, we could just paint a stone and tell her that is a dragon egg,” she added and continued to spin her silly idea as they stepped out into the daylight.

For a brief moment the brightness was almost blinding, but after a while Dany was able to make out the blurred shapes of of light in front of her.

Moving forward she nearly stumbled, but Jon caught her before she landed in the dirt.

“Thank you,” she replied shyly. She was nearly one and five, but all of this was still new to her.
This feeling of warmth stirring inside her chest whenever she was too close to Jon. Randa would have laughed at her or teased her endlessly, but she was more than aware people like Lord Arryn might not approve of such thoughts. For them Jon was a bastard and nothing more.

"I doubt Lady Longwaters would be happy to wash the dirt out of the dress," she added awkwardly and stretched herself. "It is new…Lord Arryn made me buy a dozen of them before coming here, though I have hardly need of them…anyway…"

Jon let go off her arm and brushed the dust from her cloak.

“That way,” he added after he was finished and pointed a head. There at the other side of the courtyard was a muddy way leading back to the royal sept.

“Aye,” she added in a breathless whisper and followed after Jon. There at the entrance of the Maidenvault awaited them Ser Marwyn, his sky-blue cloak fluttering after him like the colorful plumage of a bird.

“It is nearly dusk,” the man grumbled and pointed at the velvet sky.”You should get ready. Lord Arryn is awaiting you.”

Dany gave the man a knowing smile and slipped away. Inside her chambers, the ever nervous Lady Longwaters was awaiting her.

“Princess…,” the girl greeted and bowed her head.”Will you take a bath?”

“No, I will get a quick wash and then I will need your help with my dress. I don’t think Lord Arryn would appreciate it if I keep dallying like this,” she explained and was not surprised when the girl obeyed without questions. Lady Longwaters was rather shy.

Moments later Lyrah returned with a bowl of tepid water and a small bottle of lavender essence. Dany quickly washed the dust from her skin, before brushing her hair and slipping into green dress.

At least it was made of a thin garment, which will suit her well in the stifling heat of his city.

Outside Lord Arryn was already awaiting her in company of the elder member of his personal guard, all of them sporting their finest clothing. Even Lord Arryn had shaved beforehand and the shining silk-cloak engulfing his shoulders seemed almost out of place on the usually austere Lord.

Not much to her surprise the Lord made her use a litter with proper silk curtains, as if she needed to be hidden away from the prying looks of the passing people.

Yet Dany didn’t dare to complain when Lord Arryn proved so generous to her. In the Vale she never felt much like a Princess, but here she did, though she would have gladly changed this litter for her horse. The thought still counted and thus she thanked him kindly, before eying the tourney grounds with wide eyes.

There beyond the city walls a hundred pavilions had been raised beside the glittering river snaking through the green landscape and disappearing in the distant Kingswood.

The King’s pavilion was the most precious, but its splendor didn’t take away from the beauty of the others. Each looked different, as if they wanted to outdo each other.

It was very much the same for the ladies, fluttering around in their summer dresses like a swarm of butterflies. Here and there she spotted a flock of them, eying one of the passing knights perched or
engrossed in hushed gossip.

Randa would have loved it here, but Dany determined to write her a detailed letter about everything she saw.

The feast for the high-ranking guests was of course held in the King’s pavilion. The smells of roasted meat and the bright laughter of the guests followed them at every step and Dany tried to sort all these new impressions. She had never seen so many people in one place.

“Are you well?” Lord Arryn asked as they stopped upon the entrance.”You look lost, Princess?”

She straightened herself and put a smile on her lips, before taking his offered arm.

“I am well, my Lord. It is all just a bit too much.”

The man laughed.”Aye, that is no surprise to me, but believe me you will get used to it.”

I hope so, she thought as Lord Arryn led her along. Dany quickly let her gaze sweep along the room and found several rows of trestle tables decked with an immensity of food and people fluttering around it from all directions. At the very end of the tent was an elevated dais, where she spotted the King seated with what she assumed was the royal family. It has been nearly six years, but not much had changed. He was still fat, if not fatter and barely able to fit into that cushioned chair.

Next to him was a stunning woman, graced with golden locks and eyes of jade, though she looked rather bored and sipped wine from a gilded goblet. Not far from her were two young children, a boy and a girl, both golden haired and as sweet as summer.

The Queen and her younger children, Dany guessed and was happy to spot her niece in company of two other girls. One was dressed in a dream of white-green samite, her lazy brown locks falling around a pretty heart-shaped face. The other girl was darker skinned and clad in a flowing dress of orange and yellow. Rhaenys sat perched between them in a shock of a golden dress that made Dany’s eyes burn.

“You can join them soon,” Lord Arryn assured her gently and pulled her along towards the King’s seat.”Yet first you need to greet the King. Mind your manners and all will be well, child.”

Dany swallowed hard and gathered all her bravery. The last time she was barely able to force a word out of her mouth, but back then she was a little girl and the King had looked like a mighty bear ready to pounce on her.

“You been keeping me waiting, Jon,” the King called out to Jon, though it sounded more like banter than a real complaint.”What have you been doing all morning?”

“There was correspondence that needed my full attention, your Grace,” Lord Arryn apologized with a smile and jerked his head towards Dany.

“It might have escaped your attention, but here is my ward, Princess Daenerys,” he introduced her while Dany forced herself to look at the King.

The King’s smile was now gone and a grimmer expression took hold of his features as he appraised her.

Dany felt like frozen to the ground but it was a gentle shove by Lord Arryn that reminded her of her manners.
She quickly dropped a curtsy and tried to smile, no matter how hard it was.

“Your Grace, it is an honor to be here.”

The King waved his hand and wrinkled his brows.

“How old are you again, my girl?” he asked her then.”You seem so small.”

“Ten and four,” she replied and the King looked if he didn’t quite believe her. Even the Queen had now dropped her bored look and commented on the King’s reaction.

“The late Queen Rhaella was a fragile woman,” the Queen added and leaned forward, baring her white teeth like a lioness.”You will have a hard time birthing children with hips like those, little dove.”

Dany felt like slapped. She didn’t know what to make of the woman’s words. Was it honest concern? Or a threat?

Thus she tried to follow Rhaenys’ advice. Smile and all will be well. Don’t let them know how uncomfortable you are.

“I thank you for your kind concern, your Grace,” she replied sweetly and felt a hint of triumph when she noticed the Queen’s look of displeasure.

“Indeed,” Lord Arryn added and patted Dany’s arm.”Your concern is appreciated, but Princess Rhaenys expects Princess Daenerys.”

The King seemed even more bored and waved his hand as if to dismiss her.

“Of course,” the King confirmed and Dany was more than pleased to slip away from the fat King and his displeased wife.

“Daenerys,” Rhaenys’ laughter greeted her half the way and was soon accompanied by the soft giggling of the girl with the golden-brown hair.”Come here and meet my friends.”

“Lady Margaery Tyrell,” she said and pointed at the girl with the golden-brown hair before jerking her head at the copper-skinned girl.”Princess Arianne Martell.”

Arianne Martell? Now that was quite a surprise.

“You seem surprised,” Rhaenys remarked with a gentle smile and smoothed her dark hair over her shoulder.”My Uncle decided to surprise me as well.”

Arianne grinned and nodded her head in agreement.

”It was a rather adventurous idea if you care to know. My Lord Father didn’t quite approve and thus my Uncle had to smuggle me away like in one of those exciting tales ladies shouldn't read.”

“That sounds really quite daring,” Dany agreed and Rhaenys patted on the seat next to her. Margaery was kind to move aside and so Dany was seated between the Maid of Highgarden and the future Queen of the Seven Kingdoms herself.”I hope I get to meet your Uncle soon?”

“Of course,” Arianne confirmed, „but that will have to to wait until the wedding. My Uncle holds no love for such feasts and he decided to spend the evening in a more pleasant place.”

This roused Dany’s curiosity.”And what kind of place could that be?”
Arianne giggled, waving her fan before her face.

“I think the place is called Chataya’s, one of King’s Landing finest brothels or so we heard from the King himself,” the girl answered and Dany realized now why they young woman had giggled.

Her cheeks warmed, but she tried to keep a straight face. Imagining the King tumbling pretty girls was not something she wanted to think about.

“Now tell us, Princess Daenerys,” Lady Margaery asked.”Do you like it here? I heard this is your first tourney?”

“It is all a bit overwhelming,” she admitted and let her gaze sweep back to the King and his family. Jon Arryn was now seated next to the King, but one of the seats was still empty. Dany guessed it was the seat of the Prince, but she hasn’t seen him so far.

“Well, that is no surprise,” Arianne added quickly.”Rhaenys told us that they keep you locked up in the Eyrie with only Lord Arryn’s shrieking wife and a Septa to attend to you. I imagine that is quite uneventful.”

“I don’t reside with Lady Arryn,” she explained honestly.”She doesn’t like my presence and thus I resided with Lord Nestor Royce. It is quite pleasant there and I don’t mind the Septa that much.”

“Well, that is fortunate for you,” Rhaenys remarked and Dany a goblet of wine.”I don’t think Lady Arryn ever had a single kind word for me or anyone else in this place. Even the Queen fears her sharp tongue.”

Dany nodded and sipped from her wine and intended to still her curiosity about the Prince’s whereabouts. So far she had only seen him once when Dany went to watch Jon sparring with the other boys. He trained with his servants and didn't make much of an impression on Dany. Then one of the servants accidentally spilled wine over his crimson cloak and ended up whipped on the same day. That sealed her opinion on the lion Prince.

A spoiled little Prince without any regard for others.

“I don’t know if it is my place to ask, but where is your betrothed?” Daenerys asked in a low whisper.

Rhaenys’ stifled a laugh, but she answered nonetheless.

“I heard he is training, though I think it is a way to cover up his wounded pride. I heard he fell from his horse and sprained his ankle.”

Dany didn’t know what to make of that, but she was not surprised when she saw a smile crossing over Rhaenys’ lips. Dany might not know much about the world, but it was not hard to see that there reigns little love between Rhaenys and the Prince.

…
Jon

Jon

Jon was not surprised to see Loras Tyrell preparing for his first tilt before the sun was barely up in the sky. He seemed very eager, though Jon understood why. He heard much about the young man. Common opinion was that he will win this tourney.

“Ser Jon of the Vale,” Ser Loras greeted him with his brilliant smile. He was dressed in golden-green armor, his infamous cloak of flowers feasted around his shoulders.”Are you perhaps inspecting the field of battle?”

With “field of battle” Jon assumed he meant the long tilt-yard stretching before them, but for Jon that was no field of battle. He saw a real field of battle in the Vale when they went to save Lady Belmore. This was only a stage, meant to entertain the Lords and Ladies of Westeros. Some of the boys riding in the tilt might never see a real battle field. They will send their smallfolk and servants to fight for them when it comes to war.

“It seems so,” he replied and returned the smile.”Ser Albar always took a good look at the tilt-yard. He said one needs to know the ground.”

Ser Loras smiled and handed the reins of his horse to one of his many squires, all of them dressed in a rich green silk capes emblazoned with a golden rose.

“Ser Albar has a point,” Ser Loras agreed and walked with him along the tilt-yard, „but is also important to have the right horse and to find the weakness of ones’ opponent. Do you know your first opponent?”

Jon knew, but he was unsure if he wanted to tell the young man. He hardly knew him.

“A certain Ser Hobber Redwyne…I have yet to meet him,” Jon replied hesitatingly.”Do you know him well?”

Ser Loras only laughed and patted his shoulder.

“Oh, I doubt Slobber…I mean Ser Hobber will be much of a challenge…I know him and his brother. They have nothing to offer other than a big mouth.”

Jon wrinkled his brows.”Slobber?”

“Aye, that is how they are known in the Reach. Slobber and Horror…the terrible twins,” Ser Loras explained.”As I said…not much of challenge, but there will be others.”

Jon nodded his head and was slightly relieved by the young man’s encouraging words, but that didn’t mean he intended to be careless.

“Who is your first opponent, My Lord?”

Loras grinned.

"Lord Grafton’s son. I heard he is a good rider, but that doesn’t mean anything,” he replied full of enthusiasm. To Jon he made the appearance of a lively young boy, instead of a grown man two years Jon’s senior.”Do you know him, Ser Jon?”
Jon knew old Lord Grafton and Red Jon was betrothed to his only daughter, but he never met one of his sons. He had three sons and Jon was sure that at least two of them were knights.

“Sadly not, my Lord,” Jon replied and felt a little bit out of place, but Ser Loras’ warm smile washed away the discomfort.

“Well, I think I will manage on my own!” Ser Loras declared confidently and smiled mischievously.”Would you care to see my horses?”

Jon wanted to refuse, but he was also very curious.

“Aye, I would like that, my Lord,” Jon replied and was soon pulled along and towards the stables. There more than hundreds different horses were kept for the competitors of the tourney. Even more stable boys flurried around them like busy bees, cleaning, brushing and feeding the horses. Among them were also squires, but the high-ranking Lords had their own stable boys meant for the heavy tasks while their squires were occupied with more pleasant activities.

Several of the squires eyed them with curiosity while others whispered to each other in low voices. Jon didn’t know if it was awe or just their way to tax the other opponents. *Or maybe the reason is Ser Loras ridiculous flower cloak. Arya would have howled with laughter if anyone of his father’s men would don such a garment.*

They passed several boxes, each marked with the banner of the owner’s house, before they found the golden rose of House Tyrell.

There they also found a boy, attending to one of the horses. It was a fine black steed named *Chivalry*.

“My Lord Tyrell,” the boy greeted quickly and dipped his head when he noticed Ser Loras’ approach. Yet that wasn’t the strangest about him. He was probably the fattest boy Jon has ever seen. Even his face was round like the moon.”

“Samwell,” Ser Loras greeted the boy and jerked his head towards Jon.”May I introduce my friend Ser Jon of the Vale, Eddard Stark’s natural son.”

The boy eyed Jon with his pale eyes and dipped his head in greeting.

“Well met, Ser Jon. I am Samwell Tarly, Lord Randyll Tarly’s son.”

“And my page boy,” Ser Loras added gently.”You are always forgetting about that.”

Sam flushed.

“Ah, yes,” he stuttered and smiled in embarrassment.”I am Ser Loras’ page, a great honor.”

“Indeed,” Loras added in a joking manner and moved closer to touch Chivalry’s head.”How is he doing today?”

This question seemed to wash away the other boy’s shyness and he answered quickly.

“Very well, my Lord,” Samwell Tarly explained and put the brush away.”He is healthy as one can be and the new food becomes him well. I think he is very pleased.”

Loras smoothed his hand through the horses’ dark mane of hair and smiled lovingly.”That is good. I thank you for your hard work. I will make sure that your father hears about it too.”
Sam flushed again and bobbed his head.”I thank you…Is there more I can do?”

“You don’t need to thank me,” Loras replied and jerked his head towards Jon.”But would you be so kind and bring us some wine? You will take one cup, won’t you Jon?”

Jon didn’t want to decline, but he didn’t want to appear impolite.

“I had a cup during breakfast,” Jon lied.”I think that is enough.”

“I see,” Loras said.”Then one cup for me and for yourself, Sam.”

“You are kind, my Lord.” Sam replied and dipped his head as if he was a common servant, before rushing off to complete his task.

Loras sighed and shook his head, before leading Jon out into the fresh air. The sun stood now high on the soft blue sky, burning down with a familiar heat. It will be another stifling day, Jon was sure but that was soon forgotten when they sat down in Ser Loras’ private pavilion.

“I am sure you are wondering why a boy that age is serving as my page?” he asked and Jon nodded his head, though he didn’t want to appear too curious. Jon always listened eagerly to his father’s recounts of the Rebellion and thus he was quite familiar with Lord Randyll Tarly’s exploits. His father once called him one of the finest battle commanders in Westeros.

“A little, my Lord,” he replied honestly.

“His father is a hard man. I am sure you have already heard of Lord Randyll Tarly. Well, his son Samwell is not exactly what the Lord of Hornhill wants in a son and heir. He even wanted to force him to join the Night’s Watch in order to remove him from succession, but luckily Lady Tarly found out about his plans and prevented it. It was a big scandal, but one has to respect her for her determination. She took her children and left her home while her husband went hunting. When he found out and demanded her return she told him that she will only return if he changes his attitude towards his heir. Yet Lord Tarly proved as stubborn as ever and nearly started a brawl with Lord Alester Florent, Lady Tarly’s father. Even my father had to get involved, but it was my mother who found a solution to the problem and asked me to take the boy as my page to ease Lord Tarly’s fears that nothing will become of his son.”

The story made Jon glad that he was blessed with a father like Eddard Stark, but also a little jealous of Samwell Tarly that he could name such a fierce mother his own.

“And do you think you will be able to turn him into a knight?” Jon asked.

Loras shrugged his shoulders.

"Samwell Tarly is a lost cause when it comes to sword fighting and anything martial in general, but he knows how to take care of horses. He is better than any of my father’s grooms, but I doubt that it would please Lord Tarly if I told him that.”

“I agree…,” Jon agreed and wanted to add something, but then Samwell Tarly himself returned and brought the wine. He quickly poured one cup for Loras and then another cup for himself, before settling down with a shy smile.

“I am apologize for the long wait,” he added then and sipped from the wine.

"Ser Loras sighed.”You don’t need to apologize for everything.”
“I know,” Samwell Tarly replied and looked rather flustered. “I apologize…no…I know, my Lord.”

“Ser Loras is fine,” Ser Loras corrected him and jerked his head towards Jon. “Jon is a good friend of Ser Jon Redfort…I think you remember him…red hair and scarred eye.”

Sam nodded his head and glimpsed over to Jon. “I do remember him…but did I hear wrong….You are from the North, Ser Jon? How come you are serving the Lord Hand?”

Jon was stunned.

“How do you know that I am serving Lord Arryn?”

Samwell Tarly chuckled.

“Oh, I ….your blue cloak…only the Lord Hand’s guards are wearing this kind of cloak. That is how I know."

“I see,” Jon remarked and smiled. “To answer your question…Lord Arryn was kind enough to foster me. Before I was knighted I served as Lord Nestor Royce’s squire.”

Samwell Tarly’s eyes widened in fascination.

"Then you got to see the pretty Princess, didn’t you?” he asked and put the goblet away. “My brother saw her once and he told me she is the prettiest girl he ever laid eyes on…Is it true?”

Jon didn’t know what to answer to that. He didn’t want to give the wrong impression, but he couldn’t deny it either.

“She is very pretty,” he replied vaguely, “but I can’t say if she is the prettiest. There are many girls in the world and I guess it depends on the person. My brother Robb for example prefers dark-haired girls.”

Sam nodded his head enthusiastically.

“Well, I don’t care about that, but red-haired girls are quite pretty. Not that I get to see that many girls. Most of them ignore me or laugh at me,” he explained and sounded quite depressed as he regarded Ser Loras. “I am sure you never had that problem. You probably had a thousands, isn’t that right Ser Loras?”

Ser Loras seemed confused by Samwell Tarly’s question.

“Thousands…,” he repeated and wrinkled his brows. “Thousands what?”

“Girls of course,” Samwell explained and Ser Loras’ face grew slightly guarded, though Jon also believed to see a hint of embarrassment in his features.

“Certainly not a thousand…,” Ser Loras trailed off.

“How many exactly?” Samwell Tarly asked and Jon had to stifle a laugh. Little was now left of the shy boy and seeing Ser Loras embarrassed like this was quite amusing. Jon liked him well enough, but it was hard to deny that the youngest Tyrell son had a vain streak.

“Gods, Samwell!” he exclaimed after a while of silence, the tone of his voice rising. “I didn’t count them. Please stop asking these questions.”

Sam flushed a deep shade of red.
“I think what Samwell Tarly means to ask is if you have a Lady’s favor,” Jon added in an attempt to lighten the situation.

A strange, almost sad smile crossed over Ser Loras’ lips.

“I do have someone to call my own.”

...
Daenerys

The air was heavy with anticipation as the first two opponents rode out onto the grounds. It was also no surprise that the Crown Prince opened the tourney against a young knight named Ser Horas Redwyne.

The Crown Princes' garb spoke of the wealth of House Lannister. He wore gilded armor and a cloak of crimson. Only his helmet betrayed something of the Baratheon legacy as it was adorned with the horns of a stag. Even his shield showed both the lion and the stag in equal size.

Compared to the Crown Prince Ser Horas looked almost like a beggar, though his father was a rich Lord in his own right. He was dressed in polished silver armor and a dark azure cloak emblazoned with the sigil of House Redwyne, a lilac grape with green vines twirling around each other.

"That is not much of a challenge," Dany heard Lady Margaery's whispering to Rhaenys."Ser Horas is not even passable. His brother would be a better enemy if the Prince wants to earn himself renown."

Rhaenys smiled and patted Margaerys' hand."I am sure my beloved Prince will soon find himself worthier opponents."

She sounded so bitter, even though she was smiling all the time. Dany wanted to add something, but then the horn blew, announcing the beginning of the first tilt. Then the flags waved and both riders urged their horses forward, leaving only plumes of red dust behind them.

The tip of Prince Joffrey's lance easily forced it's way into the other knight's chest and sent him flying backwards into the dust.

There were cheers to be heard from the Lannister entourage, but not much more than unhappy grumbling from the smallfolk. The match was to easy to garner any applause and Dany found herself agreeing with Lady Margaery's assessment. Ser Horas proved not much of a challenge.

"How boring," Princess Arianne added and yawned."This Ser Horas barely lifted that lance of his...What was he doing? Sleeping?"

Several other matches followed, each more exciting than the first one. There was Ser Ronald Waynwood riding against the only son of Ser Mathis Rowan. It was a heated match, with two broken lances and a close win by Ser Ronald in the third round. Several other matches followed, consisting mostly of unknown faces until Ser Loras, Margaery Tyrell's brother rode against a young knight from House Fassoway. Followed by this was a match between the son of House Vaith and Ser Creighton Redfort, Red Jon's older brother. Dany has never personally met Ser Creighton, but she cheered for him out of loyalty to Red Jon.

Yet it was no use. Three lances were broken, but in the end it was the knight from House Vaith who won this match.

"Ser Parros is an excellent rider and Ser Redfort did well," Princess Arianne added gently and patted Dany's shoulder."You seem to know him, Princess?"

Dany shook her head.
"I know his younger brother Ser Jon Redfort. He served as Ser Albar's squire and can't ride in the tilt due to his bad eyesight. Ser Creighton swore to win a few matches for his brother's sake."

“Oh, that is very noble of him,” Lady Margaery remarked and smiled warmly.”Now I am sad that he lost.”

"Noble or not...now it is Jon's turn," Rhaenys whispered into her hear and squeezed her hand."He rides in the eleventh match."

Dany smiled and straightened herself, trying to spot Jon and his opponent. It was Ser Hobber Redwyne, dressed in the same polished armor and azure cloak like his brother, but seeing Jon's new armor was much more interesting. He was clad in silver armor, all polished like a looking glass and a black cloak emblazoned with a white wolf. It was the banner of a bastard knight from the North and earned him both curious looks and whispers.

Dany held her breath as the horn sounded and the two riders stormed at each other in a rush of thunder. Then the lances shattered in a rain of wooden shards, but both riders remained seated. It seemed Lady Margaery's was again correct. Ser Hobber knew at least how to lift a lance.

A moment of tense silence followed until the riders prepared themselves' again.

Her heart was fluttering and Dany tried not to flinch when the two riders met with an even louder crack. The lances splintered again, but this time the tip of Jon's lance found it's target. Ser Horas Redwyne was thrown back, his ankles still caught in the reins of his horse as he was dragged all the way to the other side of the tilt-yard.

That hurt, Dany thought but Ser Horas' servants were soon at his side and helped him up. Stumbling along he was led from the field while Jon claimed his first victory.

"Not bad," Margaery added with a smile that was both directed at Rhaenys and Daenerys."Seeing your smiles I assume you two know this knight from the North?"

"And a bastard too, " Arianne remarked."Or am I wrong? The Stark colors are swapped."

"Indeed," Rhaenys confirmed."He is Lord Eddard Stark's natural son. Daenerys knows him well. He served as Ser Lord Nestor Royce's squire."

"Knows him well?" Princess Arianne asked and flashed Dany a knowing smile."Is he pretty to look upon? It is hard to tell with that helmet on his head."

Dany swallowed, but did not know what to say. The question caught her completely off guard.

"Ah...he has pretty hair," Dany answered quickly, but she was sure that Princess Arianne would have continued littering her with questions, if Rhaenys didn't interrupt them.

"Pretty hair indeed," Rhaenys added with amusement and pointed ahead as the horn sounded."The next round is beginning and it seems my beloved Prince is riding against his next opponent."

It was another Dornish knight, but not of House Vaith but of House Wyl. He wore very simple armor, a yellow cloak bouncing from his shoulders as he rode out onto the field.

"Oh, that is Ser Wyllard," Arianne remarked, her eyes alight with recognition."Lord Wyl's third son. He is a good rider...that will be more interesting I hope."

Again the horn sounded and the opponents urged their horses forward, but the match didn't prove
much more interesting than the very first one. Ser Wyllard rode like an old woman and the way he lifted his lance to meet the enemy was very half-halfheartedly. Dany hoped it would get better once they exchanged the lances for new ones, but this time Ser Wyllard missed and was sent kissing the dirt.

Even Princess Arianne seemed stunned."What was that? Was he drunk?"

"Not drunk," Lady Margaery added, her face taking a more guarded expression."It seems what my brother told me is true. The Queen is bribing the Prince's opponents."

Bribed?

Dany was shocked, but kept her comment to herself. She didn’t want to appear like a fool.

"That would make sense," Princess Arianne replied and nodded her head in understanding."The Wyls have indeed incurred a high amount of debt. Maybe the Queen offered to lighten the debts?"

“Maybe you are right,” her Rhaenys agreed quietly."But keep your thoughts to yourself, cousin. This is not the place make such accusations."

Princess Arianne nodded her head and glimpsed over to the Queen, seated next to the King. She was dressed in a shock of red silk, her hair covered in a net of gold and red rubies woven into her golden locks. Her smile was even more sparkling, as if she herself won this victory and not her son.

“You are right, sweet cousin,” Arianne replied and shifted her attention back to the match. Margaery smiled too and patted Rhaenys' hand to get her attention.

“My brother is riding,” she announced happily and pointed ahead. His first opponent was a son of Lord Fassoway, but the match didn’t last long. It took only one broken lance until boy ended up sprawled on the ground. Not only was Ser Loras an excellent rider, but well-beloved by the crowd. When he was riding forward in his cloak of flowers one could have thought that he was the real Crown Prince.

His opponent was Ser Cletus Yronwood, a man of ten and nine and only one year below the age limit the Queen imposed.

“Stop that twitching of yours, Margaery,” Rhaenys remarked with a hint of amusement."Knowing your brother he will surely defeat him."

“I hope so...,” the Maid of Highgarden replied, before her words were drowned out by the thunder of horse hooves that made the entire gallery tremble.

Ser Loras leaned forward, his lance stock steady as he drove it's tip into his opponent's chest, but the other knight was not so easily defeated. He kept seated even as the lance shattered, but Dany also noticed Ser Cletus' stance. He was barely able to sit upright.

*He hurt himself,* she guessed and her prediction turned out to be true when was sent flying out of his saddle in the next round. Yet that didn't diminish the cheers both he and Ser Loras received as they made room for the next competitors.

Several others followed, among them Harrold Hardyng, the heir to the Vale who won a quick victory against a young knight from the Riverlands. Then it was Jon's turn to meet Ser Ronald Waynwood, one of the favorites or so Margaery explained to her.

"Now that is going to be interesting," she heard Princess Arianne's soft-spoken voice, but her gaze
was fixed at Jon and his dark cloak fluttering behind him as he drove his horse forward to meet his next challenge.

When he came to the Vale he always complained how bad he was with the lance, but Ser Albar trained him properly and his progress was showing. The lance stood straight and his stance was firm.

Dany didn't know much about sword fighting or war, but she knew how to ride a horse and that is how it needed to look.

Yet Jon’s enemy proved half a horsebeat quicker than him. Ser Ronald thrusted his lance forward and slammed it firmly into Jon’s chest.

An audible gasp rumbled through the audience, but Jon kept seated and earned himself around of cheers as he trotted his horse back to the other end of the tilt-yard. He seemed unharmed and very eager to meet his opponent again.

Again the thunder of hooves rolled over the tilt-yard, but this time Jon proved quicker than his opponent. He thrust his lance so swiftly and with so much force and that Ser Ronald was barely able to react. He was thrown out of his seat, lying in the dirt and red dust covering his armor.

Quickly his squires came forward to aid him, but he didn't move.

“That doesn’t look good,” Margaery remarked fearfully as she observed the proceedings. Even Jon was joining their side, his sweaty hair clinging to his face.

He seemed quite pale and worried. Jon knew Ser Ronald of course. He and his grandmother were often guests in Lord Nestor’s halls and thus it was no surprise that Jon appeared worried.

Let him be well, she hoped and felt relief washing over her when she saw that Ser Ronald Waynwood was finally moving. Then quickly both Jon and two of Ser Ronald's attendance helped to lead him away.

"Well, pretty hair indeed," Princess Arianne remarked and clucked her tongue, before patting Dany's arm.

...
Rhaenys

The second day of the tourney was opened by Loras Tyrell riding against Ser Domeric Bolton, a young man hailing from the North, who bested most of his opponents by the third round, though Margaery remarked repeatedly that most of his opponents were merely passable.

Rhaenys herself held not much interest in jousting. She didn’t understand the appeal of men throwing each other from horses and only the idea of seeing Joffrey fail was what kept her interested in the on-going competition. That and the surprising performance of Eddard Stark’s bastard son. She only sponsored him as a favor to her Aunt, but never expected him to do so well.

Not that she thinks it possible for him to win, but the fact that he made it into the quarter final was impressive enough. Yet she doubted that he will be able to hold a candle against Ser Loras, who made quick work with all his opponents. Ser Domeric stood not much of a chance and was unhorsed in the second round, which earned Ser Loras a place in the semi-finals.

“It seems our White Wolf is riding again,” Margaery remarked with a smile and roused Rhaenys out of her whirl of thoughts. Daenerys in her pale blue dress was hovering next to her and leaning against the railing of the balustrade. It was like observing two giddy children at play. Not that she begrudged them for their joy, but the fact that her wedding day was looming upon her darkened her mood.

Let my beloved Prince at least kiss the dirt, she thought as she watched the two opponents ride unto the ground on each side of the tilt-yard. Ser Jon’s next opponent was Harrold Hardyng, the heir to the Vale or so Daenerys informed her before the match. Rhaenys didn't know him personally, but she knew from Renly’s mouth that Jon Arryn once tried to arrange a match between Daenerys and the this young man, but that the King rebuffed his efforts repeatedly. To Rhaenys’ plans this match was not without merit. If she ever wanted to crown herself Queen she would have need of the Vale, but then that was only a flimsy dream considering that Lord Arryn would never abandon his beloved King Robert. Beside, she noticed the clear dislike ringing in her Aunt's voice when she spoke of the young man. Rhaenys for all her ambitions was not the kind of person to force someone into a loveless marriage. She herself held no interest in ending up like that, though the way will be hard and perilous. So much she knew.

Yet even those thoughts were soon washed away by the sounding horn. Eagerly the two riders stormed at each other, Ser Jon in his subtle black and white cloak and Ser Harrold in his painted red armor littered with white diamonds, signifying the banner of his house.

The sound of cheers rang in the air when the lances broke and both riders remained seated. The next round was much the same, but when they came around for the third round, Jon spurred his horse even faster than in the last round, before shattering his lance against Ser Harrold and nearly knocking him out of the saddle. It was close, but not close enough and thus they came around for the fourth round, a tense silence settling over the crowd.

Again the horn sounded and the flags waved. Both opponents spurred their horses forward, Ser Jon a horsebeat quicker than before. It was subtle, but even Rhaenys believed to see it. Then as if in anticipation of the impact, he dug his boots into the stirrups and slammed his lance forward in a hard motion, knocking Ser Harrold from his horse. He rolled on the ground, but at least he seemed unharmed, throwing curses at one of his squires.
“Seems a bit of a sour loser, don’t you think, sweet cousin?” Arianne asked from her seat next to her.

“Well, it has to be a hard hit to Ser Harrold’s ego that he lost against a bastard and a newcomer,” Rhaenys gave her opinion and smiled.”It seems it will come down to Ser Jon and Ser Loras. That will be interesting to see.”

Arianne chuckled lightly.

“It seems you don’t hold much trust in your beloved Prince to win against Lady Margaerys’ brother.”

Rhaenys nodded her head and felt anticipation stirring inside her.

“Trust has nothing to do with it, but compared to the Prince’s other opponents Ser Loras has no need of gold dragons,” Rhaenys whispered to Arianne as Margaery’s brother appeared to stage his usual mummer’s show that never failed to amaze the crowd and his sister.

Ser Loras rode forward in his precious silver armor encrusted with flowers and a cloak that looked more than a flower arrangement than a garment of clothing. Even from here she heard the maiden’s sighs and couldn’t help but to roll her eyes when he rode before the King’s box and threw a flower to the young Princess Myrcella. The girl grinned from one ear to the other while her mother the Queen carried a strange smile.

Rhaenys knew this smile and it alarmed her more than she wanted to admit. What is the lioness planning, she wondered and kept her eyes fixed at Ser Loras as he rode back to the other side of the tilt-yard where two of his squires were awaiting him, one carrying the lance and the other a goblet of jade. It was another one of his habits to take a cup of wine before riding in the tilt. The Drunken Knight, Renly dubbed him jokingly, but nobody could deny his success.

Thus he leaned down and emptied the cup, before the other squire handed him the lance. By then even her beloved Prince had led his horse unto the grounds. As expected he was dressed in his gilded armor, his crimson cloak fluttering behind him like a batch of blood.

Yet the cheers he received were limited to the Lannister retinue and soon drowned out by the sounding horn.

Then the riders kicked their horses into motion and the rolling thunder of the hooves made the gallery tremble in anticipation.

Rhaenys held her breath, hoping and praying, but both Joff and Loras remained seated, their lances missing their intended target. Rhaenys blinked, not believing what she saw. Loras never missed, she knew and read the same surprise written on Margaery’s pale face.

“What is going on?” Daenerys asked, her purple eyes full of confusion. Yet Rhaenys had no time to answer, as her attention was now fully resting on Ser Loras’s swaying figure.

He was still seated in his horse, but his stance was worrying. It lacked its usual firmness and the way he held his lance spoke of weakness.

Again the horns sounded and the riders kicked their horses into motion, but it seemed the speed was not helping at all. Ser Loras’ lance was whipping like a twig caught in a bad storm and when the riders met the tip of Joff’s lance hit straight where it belonged.

Rhaenys winced and Margaery’s cry filled the air as her brother hit the ground. Yet there were no
cheers to be heard, only gasps of surprise and quiet muttering.

How is *that* possible, was the question everybody was asking in that moment, but Rhaenys knew the answer when she saw the Queen’s triumphant smile. Whatever she did, it earned her son the victory over the famous flower knight.

“Loras…I have to go,” she heard Margaery’s fearful gasp and excuse, before she rushed away to join her brother’s side. Several of his servants were already hovering over the young man, but to no avail. He remained unconscious and soon they carried him off, Margaery following after them in a flutter of green silk. Yet she was not the only one. She also spotted his brother Garlan and Renly Baratheon among the crowd gathering around the young man.

“What just happened?” Arianne asked then, snapping Rhaenys out of her haze.”Was that some sort of nightmare?”

“No, nightmare…only the Queen’s work…” she whispered to Arianne and Daenerys, who seemed even more confused than Arianne.

“The Queen’s work?” Daenerys asked, her purple eyes wide.”This is just a tourney…and Ser Loras is a highborn lord…I cannot believe that the Queen would dare something like…”

Rhaenys balled her fists, hot anger stirring inside her, but this was not the moment to loose one’s composure.

Thus she grasped Daenerys’ hand and pulled firmly.

“Queen Cersei would dare something like that,” Rhaenys explained to her Aunt in a hushed whisper and pulled on her arm, urging her to sit down next to her.”Yet we have to keep calm…sit down and keep smiling.”

Her Aunt seemed to disagree and pulled her hand free.

“We can’t just…Jon is going to ride against the Prince,” she stuttered, but Rhaenys had no patience for this and grasped her arm, before she able to run off.

“What do you want to do? Run down and accuse the Queen?” she asked and flashed her a warning look.”That would be suicide. Do you understand?”

Daenerys seemed torn, but gave in and settled down next to Rhaenys. Rhaenys held onto her Aunt’s arm while Arianne leaned down to whisper into her ear.

“Perhaps it was the wine?” she remarked and Rhaenys nodded her head.”We shall ask my Uncle. He will know if it was poison.”

“We shall,” Rhaenys confirmed quietly and shifted her attention back to the tilt-yard. It seemed the King had no intention to stop the tourney, though the tension among the crowd was palpable. Ser Loras was always well-liked and even the spectators were beginning to realize that there was something rotten about this competition.

Yet nobody dared to act against the King and thus the horn sounded to announce the last match of the joust. The Prince seemed unaffected by the lack of cheers, but Ser Jon was a different matter. There was something aggressive in the way he tore the lance from his freshly acquired squire’s hand. Young Will Noye was not a frightful boy, but even he trembled as Ser Jon urged his horse forward and left only dust in his wake.
Rhaenys nearly felt her breath stop as she watched him take up more speed, her eyes widening when Jon thrusted the lance so hard forward that it exploded against the Prince’s chest in a clash of wood and steel. The hit was so hard that Joff flipped backwards, rolling in the dust and his horse turning around in panic.

There were cheers, but not from the Lannister retinue. Rhaenys saw the glowering looks, the Queen’s sneer and sheer shock written all over their faces.

*Jon didn’t hold back,* she thought as the Prince staggered along like a man too deep in his cups. Rhaenys herself was still too rattled to grasp a clear thought, but when she heard the King’s amused laughter she felt relief washing over her.

“She is safe,” she told Daenerys who carried a wide grin on her face.”It seems the King doesn’t mind.”

On the contrary the King seemed utterly amused and called for one of his servants to bring the crown, a wreath of green vines with red roses braided into it.

He handed the crown to Jon, who was stilled perched on his horse. His helmet was now removed from his head, his sweaty hair plastered around his flushed face and his breathing labored.

He seemed utterly lost until the King patted his shoulder and muttered something into his ear. Then finally he moved his horse onward, passing the King’s booth and towards them.

It was no surprise to Rhaenys that he handed the crown to Daenerys, but warm smile he carried on his lips hit Rhaenys like an arrow to the heart. She never bothered to look at Jon Snow’s face. All she remembered was the pale-faced boy who dared to ask her for a dance, but this was a different face, a familiar face from a time long past.

It couldn’t be. It has to be a trick or her mind succumbing to the famous Targaryen madness, but her eyes didn’t lie nor did her memory. She recognized the straight nose, the even-shaped face and the eyes, though they were the wrong colors.

*Father,* was all she could think, tears rolling down her cheeks. *Eddard Stark’s bastard has my father’s smile.*

*...*
Daenerys

Dany let her fingers brush over the delicate crown of flowers placed before her on the table. The roses braided into the crown were red like blood and the thorns sharp. If she tried to put it on her head the crown would certainly leave her with scars.

Not that it mattered. Everyone ran off and now she was alone in company of Lord Arryn and the King’s family. Jon disappeared after the last joust, but promising his quick return. Lady Margaery remained with her family and Rhaenys excused herself shortly after the feast, claiming to feel quite indisposed.

Dany didn’t know what caused it, but to her Rhaenys looked more than indisposed. She looked utterly pale and frightened as if she saw a ghost.

Maybe the whole incident with Ser Loras unsettled her, Dany guessed and shuddered. Dany knew before coming here that the Queen is dangerous person, but the fact that she dared to poison the son of a highborn lord like Ser Loras unsettled her greatly.

And all of this just to win a stupid tourney, she thought and glimpsed over to the King and his family.

The King was in good spirits. He gorged on his roasted boar, laughing and japing with Lord Arryn who appeared rather weary. In his hand he held a half-filled goblet of wine, but she never saw it touch his lips that night as if he was afraid to share Ser Loras’ fate. Dany didn’t touch her wine either when she noticed the piercing looks the Queen was flashed her over the table.

There was so much hatred showing in her green eyes that Dany was barely able to meet her gaze.

“Don’t you want to put the crown on your head?” a shy soft-spoken voice snapped her out of her thoughts. It was the Princess Myrcella. She was a beautiful girl, graced with golden locks and bright green eyes of jade.

Dany didn’t know what to make of her question until the young girl pointed at the crown on the table.

“The crown has thorns,” she explained and smiled down at the girl. “I might cut myself and start bleeding. I don’t think your Lord Father the King would appreciate that.”

“But it would look so pretty!” the Princess Myrcella countered and giggled.

Dany sighed.

“Well, I can try…,” she gave in and turned the crown left and right, trying to find the right way to put it on her head without cutting herself. Then she carefully placed it on her head, her nostrils filling with the heavy smell of roses.

“So pretty!” the little Princess exclaimed and clapped her hands together. “Now you look like a Queen!”

Dany froze and pulled the crown quickly from her head, before correcting the girl. Having the Queen hear her daughter name a Queen was the last thing she wanted, even if it were just the
words of an innocent girl.

“No, my Princess,” she told her clearly.”The Queen of the Seven Kingdoms is your mother.”

The Princess Myrcella nodded her head and brushed her golden locks over her shoulder. She looked as if she was carefully pondering over her words, before giving her answer.

“Yes, but why can’t there be two?” she asked Dany.”The Queen of the Seven Kingdoms and the Queen of Love and Beauty.”

Dany was fazed by the girl's answer. She is not wrong, she thought and couldn't help but to smile.

“I guess you are right,” she granted the girl.”Two Queens it is.”

“Or three,” the girl added and with a hopeful smile, her lively green eyes fixed the crown in Dany’s hand. Dany sighed and threw a quick look over her shoulder to figure out if the Queen was watching them. Luckily she seemed too occupied to glower at her husband and Lord Arryn.

“Alright, but only for a moment,” she told the Princess Myrcella and placed the crown on the young girl’s head.

The Princess beamed from one ear to the other.”How do I look?”

“Beautiful,” Dany assured the young girl and meant it.”Like a true Queen.”

“Like my Lady mother?” she inquired and Dany nodded her head in confirmation, though she held no love for the Queen.”Very much so, my Princess.”

The Princess smiled and opened her mouth to add something, but then someone interrupted them.

“It seems now we have two Queen's of Love and Beauty,” Jon remarked jokingly and dropped his head in greeting to the Princess Myrcella.

The Princess’ cheeks flushed a deep shade of pink and she quickly pulled the crown from her head, before handing it back to Dany.

“Forgive me, I would never presume to take the crown for my own, good Sir,” the Princess Myrcella replied politely and slipped away to return to her brother’s side. The plump little Prince Tommen was feasting on a gigantic piece of cake, the cream smeared all over his silken clothing and face. Only the Crown Prince was missing, but that was no surprise to her. He seems to be quite a proud person and she doubted he wanted the other people to see his shame.

“Did I frighten her away?” he asked and the ghost of a smile crossed over his lips. Then he leaned closer and offered his hand to her.

Dany shook her head and took the offered hand.”I don’t think so, but you made her blush. It seems you won yourself an admirer.”

“I rather not. I doubt the Queen would like that,” Jon added and jerked his head towards the entrance of the pavilion.”Don’t you think we should leave?”

She grinned, but was unsure, her gaze wandering to Lord Arryn and the King.

“No need,” Jon informed her and pulled her along.”Lord Arryn came to speak to me earlier. He told me to get you back to the Maidenvault. Besides, I doubt the King will even notice your absence.”
“That is true,” she confirmed to him as they stepped out into the cool night air. “I could have died and none of them would have noticed. The only one who spoke to me was the Princess Myrcella.”

Jon wrinkled his brows in confusion as they tried to manage their way through the crowd of people.

“Princess Rhaenys left you alone? Why did she do that?”

“She was not feeling well and excused herself. She looked really pale,” Dany explained and the both of them made their way back to the stables, where Jon’s horse was kept. She wouldn’t have minded going by foot back to the Keep, but it seems Jon deems that inappropriate.

“I see,” he replied and led her along, passing a long row of booths until they found Jon’s horse. “Well, Lady Margaery was also quite rattled by today’s incident. She is still hovering next to her brother’s beside.”

“How is Ser Loras?” Dany asked after she climbed up to join Jon on the horse. Like the days before she traveled by litter and thus she had no horse to call her own. Not that she minded the closeness.

She felt all safe and warm, thought she tried to keep those thoughts out of her mind.

“He will recover,” Jon replied as he led his horse out of the stables. “That is all I know. I didn’t get to see him and had to rely on Samwell Tarly.”

“Tarly?” she asked, the name strange to her ears.

“Lord Randyll Tarly’s oldest son. He is serves as Ser Loras’ page boy,” Jon informed her and urged the horse forward. Soon the voices of the crowd were growing distant and only the whispering of trees could be heard. The rode before them was lonely and muddy, but Dany savored the peace.

She enjoyed the tourney, safe for the incident with the Queen, but it was good to leave the buzz of the crowd behind them, not to mention there was seldom a moment she was alone with Jon.

Usually it was Ser Marwyn hovering around them or someone else. The only time they have been alone since leaving the Vale behind them was in the crypts if one didn’t count the dragons, but it was dark and stuffy down there.

This was much more pleasant. The night air was refreshing and made her forget about the stifling heat that they had to endure all day long.

“I see,” Dany replied. “This is the first time you mentioned this Samwell Tarly. Did you make another friend?”

Jon nodded his head, but he looked hesitant.

“I am not sure,” he replied and soon they were leaving the edges of the Kingswood behind them. She didn’t know what it was, but he looked nervous to her as he was fiddling with the reins of his horse. “I hardly him… I think it is too soon to call him a friend.”

She understood what he meant and touched his hand to still his fiddling.

“Well, we are friend’s, aren’t we?” she asked warmly and he gave her a stunned look, as if he didn’t quite know what to make of her question.
“Of course...,” he confirmed, as if he wasn’t quiet sure. He sounded almost flustered."Of course."

Dany didn’t know what to make of that and remained silent throughout the rest of the way.

Dany huffed in frustration when he helped her from the saddle.

*How dense can someone be,* she wondered as she walked next to him. *He made Queen of Love and Beauty and acts as if it means nothing.*

She had enough of this silly game and decided to get straight to the point.

“Jon, why did you give me the crown?” she asked and stopped.

Jon stopped as well and turned around, regarding her with a strange look.

“I…I didn’t expect to win,” he replied honestly."I never thought….”

Dany sighed, bridged the distance and enclosed his hand in hers.

*Sometimes blunt force is the best way to go if subtlety doesn’t work,* she recalled one of Randa’s comments in regards to one of her many admirers.

“Jon,” she asked him, forcing the words of out of her mouth.”Have you ever kissed a girl?”

The question clearly stunned him and it took him a while to manage an appropriate answer.

“No…,” he replied and sounded quite embarrassed, the muddy ground suddenly far more interesting than her face.

“Why not?” she asked, not allowing him to escape. The he lifted his head, brushing his hand through his dark locks.

“Why?” he asked and there was a hint of bitterness ringing in his words.”I don’t know. Nobody has ever showed interest in me.”

She wanted to name him a blind fool, but decided to be bold instead.

“Kiss me then.”

Jon’s eyes widened and for a moment she thought he might bolt, but to her relief he remained where he was.

“I am a bastard…,” he began, but she cut him off before he was able to find an excuse.

“So what?” she asked."My father was a madman who burned people alive and raped my mother daily. You are a bastard, but you had more than I ever did. Siblings who loved you and a father you can be proud of. I would rather be a bastard if it would bring my mother back to me.”

Another long moment passed. He stared at her through the darkness, only the pale moonlight revealing his face to her.

A thousand of emotions seemed to flicker across his face as he stepped closer. He wrung his hand free from her grip and lifted it to her neck. His touch was soft and careful as he leaned down to put his lips on hers. His kiss was as cautious as Jon himself and thus she decided to help him along.

She was a maid, but no Septa. Daringly, she parted her lips to fit them around his. She could taste the soft, wet, tender skin. Then is grip tightened on her, drawing her against his body. He continued to kiss her until their kiss deepened and his tongue touched her lower lip. Then, as if a
spell was lifted from him, he pulled back, an apologetic look washing over his features.

Yet she didn’t want to let go and kissed him again, deepening the kiss on her own accord and sucking on his tongue. He trembled, but didn’t push her away. He only gasped and pulled back, his breathing labored.

“Now was that so bad?” she asked, half smiling and half disappointed that it was over. Her heart was still hammering in her chest, but the cool breeze gracing her hair helped to calm her down.

“No, not bad at all,” he replied hesitatingly, a smile lightening up his somber face. His pupils were blow and he looked down at her with an intensity that made her shiver.”Not bad at all.”

His voice was soft and his hand was still gracing through her hair.”Yet I am still a bastard... you might not care about it, but others certainly will. Lord Arryn…it would be dishonorable,” he began, but she couldn’t help but to cut him off. His words made her insides boil.

“What makes you think that I care what others think? I care about Lord Arryn, but what right does he have to tell me what to do? Or the King? I care nothing for his stupid crown. I just want to be free,” she threw back at him and left him standing there. The honorable fool.

When she slammed the door behind her she expected to find only the loneliness of her chambers, but there she was. Her niece Rhaenys, lauging on her bed.

Dany nearly felt her heart jumping out of her breast at her sudden appearance.

“Rhaenys!” she stuttered.”By the Seven….you nearly scared me to death.”

“I apologize,” her niece replied and dropped her head.”I didn’t mean to frighten you.”

Dany bridged the distance, settling down on the bed next to Rhaenys.

“It is alright,” she assured her gently.”You just frightened me a little…What brings you here?”

Her niece looked torn and brushed her dark hair over her shoulder.

”I know it sounds like a strange question, but please don’t ask me why….I can’t tell you more… just answer honestly,” she explained, sounding still rattled.”Has Jon ever told you about his mother?”

Dany wrinkled her brows in confusion.”No, Lord Stark never told him…he doesn’t even know her name.”

Rhaenys’ eyes seemed to burn, piercing her through the darkness.

“Has Jon ever voiced any suspicions regarding her identity?” she continued to ask, one question stranger than the one before.

Dany pondered her question and searched her blurry memory.

“Jon never voiced such a suspicions to me, but I heard others do so. Lord Arryn once mentioned a name…Ashara Dayne….I think she was Ser Arthur Dayne’s sister. She is dead though…I think she took her life or that is what I heard,” Dany explained, but Rhaenys seemed unhappy with her answer and wrinkled her nose.

A moment of heavy silence passed.
“I thank you for your honest answer,” Rhaenys said at last and enclosed Dany’s hand in a tight grip. “I know it sounds strange, but you have to promise me not to mention this talk to anyone…not even Jon. Can you promise that?”

Dany didn’t know what to make of her wish, but she was unable to deny her niece such a simple wish.

“I promise.”

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Ser Loras looked still pale, but a smile was showing on his lips as his sister Lady Margaery was trying to comb through his disheveled hair. Looking at him it was hard to believe that the young man was poisoned and got thrown from his horse.

“I am sick, but you are the one who has been frowning all morning,” Ser Loras remarked with an amused smile and snapped Jon out of his thoughts.

“I am not frowning,” Jon tried to defend himself, though things happened to him in the last days that were worth frowning about. There was the matter with Dany and how miserably he handled the whole situation. She was still upset with him and he had no idea how to make it up to her. Doing so would only encourage her more and that would only lead down a dark path. Then there was the matter with the Queen. Shortly after the joust Lord Arryn came to him and told him to keep away from the feast, least he insulted the Queen with his presence.

Jon didn’t know what to make of it. In the North nobody would have made such a fuss about the loss at a tourney, but here in the south everybody and everything needed to be treated with silk gloves.

“Yes, you are frowning,” Ser Loras insisted and jerked his head towards Lady Margaery.”Do you agree, sister? Ser Jon is frowning, isn’t he?”

Lady Margaery rolled her eyes and granted Jon an amused smile.

“Forgive my brother, but he thinks he can behave like a fool because he is sick,” Lady Margaery explained softly.”Yet he is not wrong. I think there is something weighing on your mind, isn’t it?”

Jon exhaled and nodded his head in confirmation. He didn’t like depending on others, but these people knew more about the south than him.

“It does concern the Queen,” he admitted vaguely.”I fear what she is going to do…I didn’t intend to cause problems for my father, but I guess that it is unavoidable given that I knocked the Crown Prince from his horse.”

The mention of the Prince darkened Ser Loras’ mood.

“It was a competition,” Ser Loras replied, his voice ringing with anger.”I for one rejoiced to hear about the royal prick’s fall from his horse, though I expect a rematch between the two of us in the future. It should have been us riding against each other in the finals. Do I have your promise?”

“You have my promise. You will have your re-match, though I doubt I will stand much of a chance,” Jon replied, which made Ser Loras frown.

“Gods, Snow,” he remarked with a deep sigh and ruffled through his hair.”Has someone ever told you how bloody annoying you constant humility is?”
“My brother Robb liked to do so,” Jon granted him and smiled.”And my sister Arya.”

“Then you should listen to them,” Lady Margaery added gently and smoothed out her pale dress.”I watched you riding in the tilt and you are far from bad. Have a bit more trust in your abilities.”

“My sister speaks true,” Ser Loras agreed.”I also don’t think you need to fret about the Queen in the near future. Lord Arryn came to speak to us in the morning and apologized in the name of the King. It seems the Queen’s actions led to quite a discord with her husband. I doubt she will try harming you now that the King’s eyes are resting on her. You may be a bastard, but it is well known that Eddard Stark is dear to the King. Harming you would mean displeasing Eddard Stark and displeasing Eddard Stark would mean displeasing the King.”

“I thank you for your encouraging words, but I intend to remain careful,” Jon told them.”The fact that the Queen dared harming someone of your stature is a clear warning to me.”

Loras laughed.

“I think you are overestimating my importance,” he remarked, his voice tinged with slight resentment.”I am only the third son and my Lord Father would never endanger Margaery's marriage to Renly Baratheon.”

This stunned Jon even more, but then he didn’t know Mace Tyrell personally.

“Don’t speak like that,” Lady Margaery remarked and sounded quite distraught.”Grandmama confirmed in her last letter that Father was very displeased after he heard about the incident.”

Ser Loras gave her an unbelieving look.

"Grandmama was just trying to be nice…,” he muttered and Lady Margaery opened her mouth as if she wanted to add something, but then one of he guards opened the flaps of the tent and led an elderly woman and Princess Rhaenys inside.

Jon didn’t know the elderly woman, but Lady Margaery's happy smile and greeting told him who she was.

“Grandmama!” she exclaimed and hopped to her feet, before bridging the distance and placing a soft kiss on the old woman’s cheeks.”What a pleasant surprise. We were just speaking about you. We didn’t expect your coming before tomorrow. Where are father and mother?”

Jon heard quite a lot about the so called Queen of Thorns, but he expected her to look a bit more intimidating than this doll of a woman.

“It is good to see you hale, my child,” the Queen of Thorns replied and patted Margaery’s cheek, before turning to Ser Loras.”Your father and mother are settling in. Well, my son is annoying the King with his self-importance and your Lady Mother is shooing around her servants. It will be better not to bother them...being occupied helps them to forget about the “unfortunate accident” at the tourney.”

Margaery wrinkled her brows.

“Unfortunate accident?” she asked angrily.”Loras could have died.”

The Queen of Thorns nodded her head and glimpsed over to Rhaenys.

“The Princess has already informed us about her Uncle’s verdict about the substance that was put
into the wine, but there is no proof that it was the Queen who instigated it. Besides, the Lord Hand asked your father for forgiveness and my son considers the matter settled.”

Margaery looked very displeased, but Loras looked unimpressed.

“It was to be expected,” Loras added and jerked his head towards Jon.”Well, I will be satisfied with my lot. Ser Jon was kind enough to knock his royal highness from his horse.”

The Queen of Thorn’s gaze snapped to Jon and suddenly her piercing golden eyes made her appear far more intimidating.

“Well well,” she remarked and clucked her tongue, eyeing Jon from head to toe. He felt like a horse being inspected by a groomsman and he desperately tried to keep his composure.”Looking at you nobody can deny the Stark heritage. I know your father and you do have a lot of him, but I have to say you are much prettier to look upon. Leaving that aside, I am thankful for your actions. I hope his royal highness remembers this day and it hopefully taught him a bit of humility. Those Lannisters surely have need of it, though I admit my son can also be quite a puff-fish.”

Jon was speechless. Never before has he met someone speak this much in this short amount of time. Her words came over him like a mighty wave and his mind was still reeling.

He was so stunned that he didn’t even notice his silence.

“Did you hear what I said?” the elderly woman asked and raised one of her eyebrows.”Are you a simpleton?”

This roused Jon out of his haze and he finally found his voice.

“No, …forgive my impoliteness,” he apologized and dropped his head in greeting.”It is true...I am Eddard Stark’s son and it is a pleasure to meet you, my Lady.”

“You are forgiven, good Sir,” she replied with an amused smile and followed Lady Margaery to Loras’ bedside where she settled down on the cushioned chair left unoccupied by her granddaughter.”You have my thanks.”

Jon was still trying to find a proper answer when the Princess Rhaenys started tugging at his cape, a subtle smile playing on her lips.

“I think Ser Jon and I will leave,” the Princess declared for him and grasped his arm.”I hope we will see each other later. Next time you will surely be out of bed, Ser Loras.”

“That you can be sure of, my Princess!” Ser Loras added enthusiastically.

Margaery chuckled and the Queen of Thorns nodded her head in understanding.

“Of course, we will see each other soon,” the Queen of Thorns confirmed to Rhaenys and winked at them, which Jon interpreted as their cue to leave.

“Jon,” she said as they made their way back to the Red Keep.”I think we should talk.”

“Talk?” he asked, not knowing what to make of her words.”Sure…What do you want to talk about?”

She sighed and brushed her dark braid over her shoulder.

“I want to talk about my Aunt,” she explained quietly and moved closer, walking right next to
him.”I want to know if your intentions towards her are honest.”

“Honest?” he asked, an uncomfortable feeling settling in his stomach.”I don’t understand…”

“Do you think me a fool?” she asked and laughed. It was a strange laugh, ranging between amusement and hollowness.” Compared to other ladies I am considered an old maid, but I know there is something going on between the two of you. That is why I want to determine if you are honest in your intentions towards Daenerys.”

Jon wanted to deny her words, but he no doubt that the Princess would notice his lie.

Thus he decided to remain honest.

“You are no fool,” Jon confirmed vaguely.”Yet nothing has happened so far if you are in fear of repercussions.”

“It is good to hear that my instinct is proving right,” she replied and crossed her arms in front of her as she regarded him closely.”Yet you are wrong. I don’t fear repercussions, but I need to determine if I can entrust her to you.”

Jon wrinkled his brow in confusion. Was she playing with him?

“I don’t quite understand your intentions, but I would never do anything to harm Daenerys. Ask me the questions you deem necessary to judge my honesty if it pleases you, Princess.”

A strange expression washed over the Princess’ features and she moved an inch closer, her green-brown eyes boring into his.

“Good,” she said at last and it seemed as if she had to force the words out of her mouth.”I want to know….tell me about your mother. I know your father, but a mother is just as important as the father.”

Jon felt like kicked him in the guts, but that was not the only feeling. There was also anger simmering inside him.

“I don’t even know my mother’s name,” he explained, trying to sound indifferent.

“And you never asked your father?” she asked in an unbelieving tone.

“Of course I did,” Jon replied and tried to curb his growing frustration.”But my father refused to answer my questions…I don’t know why, but I am sure he has his reasons. Mayhaps there was something shameful about his and my mother’s relationship.”

Rhaenys cocked her head to the side and regarded him with a curious look.

“And what do you think?” she prodded and sounded almost kind.

Jon wanted to refuse her, but that would be unwise. He didn’t want to displease the future Queen of the Seven Kingdoms.

“I am not sure. I once heard the servants mention the name of Ashara Dayne and that my father brought me with him from Starfall. Yet that was a long time ago and I don’t know if there is truth to be found in the gossip of servants. All I truly know is that I was born in the south, probably in Dorne.”

“Dorne,” the Princess Rhaenys repeated and leaned closer.”Are you sure?”
Jon swallowed hard and nodded his head in confirmation.

“I am sure, Princess.”

“I see,” she replied and moved backwards. Jon didn’t know, but there was something different about the way she looked at him. Her gaze was more open and for a brief moment he believed to see the mask lifted from her face and the girl behind it.”I see.”

“I see,” Jon repeated.”What does that even mean?”

She swallowed hard another long moment of silence passed between them.

Then she stepped towards him and placed a kiss on his cheek.

“It means you have my blessing,” she replied quietly and stepped away, but Jon had enough of her cryptic answers and grasped her hand, before she was able to escape.

“Blessing for what?” he asked.”I have already told you that nothing happened and I am a bastard. Lord Arryn…,” he tried to voice his problem to her, but was promptly cut off.

“Bastard here an bastard there,” Rhaenys teased.”Why do you care so much about the old man’s opinion?”

Jon didn’t like her tone, but answered nonetheless.

“He was kind enough to take me into his home…I will not abuse his trust,” he explained, but the Princess only laughed.

“And this little act of kindness gives him now the right to dictate your entire life?” she asked and pulled her hand free.”Well, I have only one advice for you: The old man will not live forever, but you will always regret it if you allow this opportunity to pass.”

Then she dropped a curtsy and left him standing there like a fool.

Yet she was right. It angered him greatly, but she was right.

He didn’t know why he was a weak fool, but he made his way back to the Maidenvault, filled both with fear and determination.

His hand was trembling as he knocked at the door.

Dany’s eyes widened a little as she answered the door.

“What do you want?” she asked, her voice ranging between mild anger and curiosity.”Did something happen?”

Jon swallowed hard and forced the words over his lips.

“Would you care for a walk?”

Surprise washed over her face.

“What do you have in mind?”

“The godswood,” he said at last and offered his hand.”Nobody is going to bother us there…especially not Ser Marwyn…a pious follower of the Seven wouldn’t go there.”
She nodded in confirmation and he pulled her along the narrow paths of the Red Keep. It was way beyond midday and the heat was lessening, but it would take another few hours before the weather could be called passable.

Jon has visited the godswood several times, but always alone. It was an acre of elm, alder and black cottonwood trees, but unlike the weirwoods of older godswoods, the Red Keep’s heart tree is a great oak, covered in vines and red flowers, overlooking the Blackwater Rush.

It was nothing compared to the godswood in Winterfell, but still a piece of home.

Dany’s face lightend up at the sight of the trees and flowers, but he still read apprehension on her features.

“Do you like it?” he prodded and tried to appear confident.

“It is beautiful,” she replied and brushed her silver hair over her shoulder as she regarded the red flowers growing beneath the great oak tree.

Then a smile crossed over her rosy lips and she pointed at the red flowers.

“They are called dragon’s breath,” she explained and straightened herself again, before shifting her attention back to him.”Those flowers gave Randa terrible blisters.”

Jon nodded and stepped closer, his heart hammering in his chest.

“Arya once told me that you need to rub mud on them to remove the itchy feeling,” he explained gently, not sure why this thought was fluttering through his mind in that exact moment.

She raised her eyebrow and pursed her lips.

“Now then…What do you want to tell me?”

Her face was too close to his, her breath tickling his face.

His throat felt dry and he swallowed hard, before banishing away all thoughts of honor and regret.

He touched his hand to her shoulders and pulled her into a kiss, laying his lips on hers. She didn’t seem to mind as her hand was grazing through his hair, sending a shiver down his spine and groin. He parted her lips around his and couldn’t help but to draw her against his body, until he realized that it was far too close. Head swimming he let go of her and felt embarrassed. He had no doubt that she noticed his arousal.

Her cheeks were flushed and her pale locks disheveled. There was an amused smile showing on her lips while Jon felt his cheeks still burning in embarrassment.

“I apologize,” he said and wanted to put more distance between them, but she grasped his shoulders and didn’t allow him to escape.

“For what?” she asked and chuckled softly.”That is quite normal as far as I know.”

“As far as you know?” he asked in surprise.

Dany gave him a knowing smile.”What do you think Randa and I were talking about all the time? The Seven-Pointed-Star?”

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Chapter End Notes

My other story will be probably updated on Sunday or Monday. I usually update on Saturday, but I am not home today. This story will be updated at the beginning or middle of next week. The next chapter will contain Rhaenys thoughts on the matter.
Rhaenys

The bells tolled and Rhaenys shuddered as they stepped out of the Great Sept of Baelor. She had been preparing for this day for the last three years, but the fear was still there. It wasn't only that she had to wed and bed Joffrey that scared her, but the fact that she was now a Baratheon and no longer a Targaryen. It felt as if the High Septon tore out a piece herself when he sealed her and Joffrey's marriage.

"Your smile could be more convincing or mother will be most displeased," Joffrey whispered and tightened his grip on her arm as they stepped down the steps to join King Robert's entourage.

The King was dressed in gold and black while the Queen chose a dress of bloody crimson, a dozen of rubies shining in her golden locks. Rhaenys knew that she chose her dress to slight her, but that meant little to her. With her plan in sight even the Queen's cruelty was unable to thwart her from moving forward.

Thus she showed her most brilliant smile and played the happy bride she was meant to be, though she was more than relieved when she was allowed to part from her husband and able to rejoin her ladies. Among them were of course Lady Margaery, her cousin Princess Arianne Martell, her Aunt Daenerys and several other ladies. All of them were dressed in yellow and carrying white flowers braided into their hair.

They appeared to be in good spirits, smiling and giggling as they flocked around her. Only Arianne, Margaery and Daenerys knew her true thoughts about her wedding to the Crown Prince, but that didn't mean they failed to play their roles.

"You look wonderful," Margaery complimented and clapped her hands together, „and your dress is a dream come true. If mine will be half as beautiful as yours, I can count myself lucky."

Arianne rolled her eyes and lifted her flowing yellow dress to keep it away from the mud and shit littering the way back to the Red Keep."I bit too golden for my taste, but that was to be expected as you are married to a golden lion cub."

This earned her a round of laughter from the three girls, though Daenerys looked much less enthusiastic about the wedding than the tourney. Rhaenys recalled Daenerys' giddy happiness, but now her Aunt seemed almost as melancholic as Lord Snow.

My brother, she thought. My little brother.

It took her a while to come to terms with the truth, but after observing Jon felt like a fool for not realizing it sooner. Hiding beneath the Stark coloring has been a dragon.

He has my father's eyes and smile, she was sure. She was a little girl when her father died, but even she was able to recall his smile, especially not the one he carried when all the smiles died. Her memory was blurred, but the smile showing on his lips when he handed the crown to the Stark girl was etched into her mind. It was this smile that changed everything.

She ought to hate Jon, but how could she hate an honest and kind boy like that?

He may be a bastard, but he is still my brother. The blood of the dragon.
"You have been frowning all morning," Rhaenys remarked as she touched Daenerys' arm."Did something happen with Jon?"

Daenerys shook her head, her silver locks fluttering around her head like a veil and a slight flush apparent on her cheeks.

"No, everything is fine with Jon," she replied and smiled."More than fine, but it feels so wrong to feel happy when they make you go through with this farce."

Rhaenys froze and tightened her grip on her Aunt's arm.

"I appreciate your worry," Rhaenys assured her, „but there is no need for it. All happens as it is meant to be. Trust me."

Daenerys gave her an unbelieving look and swallowed down her discomfort.

The rest of the distance was bridged in silence and quiet whispers. Rhaenys used the time to mentally prepare for the wedding feast and what was meant to follow after it. Yet first she needed to endure the next few hours, being seated next to her beloved Prince.

The feast was held under the wide open sky and the amount of food was even more impressive to behold. There was huge boar, stuffed with all kind of pastry, a dozen of roasted aurochs and peacocks, accompanied by all kind of strange sea creatures Rhaenys was unable to name.

Naturally, there was plenty of wine served. Her Uncle Oberyn alone brought with him eighty barrels of Dornish Red, which was only surpassed by the hundred barrels of Arbor gifted to the King by Lord Paxter Redwyne.

The King was very pleased while Rhaenys herself was barely able to stomach the food. Her anxiety was getting the better of her.

_I am the blood of the dragon_, she reminded herself and let her gaze wander to her ladies seated on the opposing table. Her Aunt Daenerys was whispering with Lady Margaery while Arianne was sipping from her wine. Further off in the distance she spotted her Uncle Oberyn, speaking to the Dornish guests he brought with him.

During the wedding he took her father's position, helping her along when she wanted to do nothing more than to flee this cursed city.

_He would take me away if I just asked him to do so_, she was sure, but sacrificed too much to stop now. _No, if I look back I am lost._

Thus one course followed the other as she and Joffrey tried to ignore each other's presence as much as possible. Under other circumstances he would have made a nasty comment, but he didn't dare to do so with his grandfather present and her Uncle Oberyn among the guests. Joffrey was a little shit, but he was also a coward, even if he would never admit such a weakness to anyone.

A proud lion cannot show weakness, she thought as the last plate was carried away from her and the guests were called forward to show their presents to the Crown Prince.

It was the first time she saw a real smile crossing over Joffrey's face when all those fool crawled before him in the dirt. He received a black steed from Lord Mace Tyrell, a fine blade from his grandfather Lord Tywin Lannister which Joffrey promptly dubbed Lion's Claw, a crimson cloak from his Lady mother and so on. Rhaenys received plenty of gifts of her own, but among the hundreds of dresses and jewels Lord Arryn's and her Uncle's presents pleased her the most.
In a finely-carved box Lord Arryn presented her with two stone eggs once kept by her ancestors. She may never be able to forgive the old man for his part in the Rebellion, but in that brief moment her hatred was dimmed by wonder.

The eggs may be dead, but they were beautiful to behold. One was black as onyx and the other green and golden.

"How did acquire them, my Lord?" she asked him in an almost gentle tone, but she still tried to hide her surprise.

The old Lord graced her with a soft smile and squeezed her hand.

"I did not find them...they belonged to your family...I found them among your father's possessions and kept them for this day...I thought it an appropriate gift for you, Princess."

Rhaenys froze, a chill running down her spine.

"Does my gift please you?" Lord Arryn inquired while Rhaenys tried to sort her conflicting feelings concerning the old man in front of her.

"The gift pleases me," she replied politely and forced a smile over her lips. "I thank you."

"Well, I don't have such a precious gift to offer as the Lord Hand, but I you will be pleased, niece," her Uncle added and placed a wooden box at her feet. It was filled with all kind of bottles, fine garments and jewels.

"A few of those jewels once belonged to our Lady mother. My brother Prince Doran was kind enough to send them here," he explained, before picking one of the small bottles from the box to hand it to her.

"Perfume obtained from the White Lotus," he added with a knowing smile. "It was your mother's favorite and will hopefully please your beloved husband."

Joffrey rolled his eyes, but Rhaenys shuddered as she weighed the bottle in her hand. It appeared to be nothing more than common perfume, but she knew how deadly it was. It was her key to freedom, but now was not the right moment.

A year from now, she told herself and thanked her Uncle for his gift. A year from now and we will both have our revenge, mother.

Then the last act of the wedding feast began and the musician's were called forward to play their merry songs to entertain the guests.

As custom Rhaenys and Joffrey shared a brief dance, but it was just another part of the mummer's show and the rest of the night she spent observing the other guests. She spotted her Aunt Daenerys dancing with Lord Snow, Lady Margaery twirling around merrily with her two brothers and her cousin Arianne winning herself a row of admirers.

She hoped that Lord Arryn would show enough reason to keep her half-brother away from the wedding, but the old man seemed to hold the believe that his position as Hand of the King will be enough to protect them against the Queen's machinations.

I will have to speak with Lord Arryn. Lord Snow and my Aunt need to leave this cursed place.

It was late when the last tunes of the Bear and the Maiden Fair hummed through the night, mixing
with the echo and laughter of the guests.

It was the last song she was meant to hear that night as the King called for the bedding.

Soon men, both old and young, were flocking around her, tearing at her clothing. It made her wonder how her mother endured this nonsense, but that was a long time ago and another husband.

Her father for all his betrayals was never out-rightly violent towards her mother. Even now Rhaenys recalled his gentle hugs and smiles.

Compared to her Joffrey seemed to enjoy the attention he was receiving from the girls, fluttering around him like a swarm of bees. All they saw were his brilliant smile, his golden hair and his eyes of jade. They knew nothing of the cruelty hiding beneath his beautiful features.

*By killing Joffrey I am going to do the world a favor*, she thought but that was far off in the future. A year, a year, a year, she repeated the comforting rhyme as the guests fluttered out of the room, leaving her and Joffrey in eerie silence.

Joffrey gave her one of his smug smiles that made her want to slap him, but she didn't want to grant him the satisfaction to see her fear.

*I am the blood of the dragon. I am a Targaryen and a Martell. Fire and Blood. Unbent, Unbowed, Unbroken.*

She swallowed hard and lifted her chin.

“What are you waiting for?” she asked him haughtily.”Are you afraid?”

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The cool wind was grazing her skin as they rode along the muddy trail. Before them stretched the rich green canopy of the Kingswood and behind them lay the stinking city. It was Lady Margaery’s idea to make this trip to forget the “excitement” of the wedding.

Rhaenys was thankful for that, but even more so that the King didn’t insist on sending the Kingsguard with them. The only one of them she was able to stomach was Ser Barristan, but the old man was hardly ever appointed to her. Ser Jaime may have saved her life, but he was a Lannister. As for the rest, they were all King’s men and would note every word coming out of his mouth.

How Margaery managed it was another mystery to her, but she knew that the young girl had a talent to bend to her will.

“There!” Lady Margaery exclaimed happily and pointed ahead. “There beneath the large tree and brook. I think that is a good place to erect the pavilion.

“It is a good place,” Rhaenys stated and nodded her head in agreement. In truth it didn’t matter to her where they erected the pavilion. She was only happy to leave Joffrey and the city behind, even if it was only a few hours.

“Rhaenys speaks true,” Daenerys agreed. “The tree will provide us with plenty of shade.”

Thus Margaery’s servants went to work and erected the pavilion while the three of them pulled up their skirts and discarded their slippers. Then they hopped into the water, splashing and laughing. Daenerys tried to catch a fish, but only ended up stumbling into the knee-high water.

It was a ridiculous sight and Rhaenys had her return to the pavilion, to dry herself. Allowing her Aunt to get sick was the last thing she wanted.

“Here take my cloak,” Rhaenys told her and placed the cloak around her shoulders. “Lord Arryn would be upset with me if you get sick.”

Daenerys rolled her eyes.

“I am no little girl,” Daenerys remarked and pulled the cloak tighter around her shoulders. “I thank you.”

“You are welcome,” Rhaenys replied and settled down on the carpet next to Margaery.

Then Lady Margaery called for the servants who brought wine and sweets. She had been barely able to stomach food since the wedding a few days ago, but her appetite was finally returning. Maybe it only had to do with the apple cakes served to them. Their taste reminded her of Highgarden, of happier times…

“It is good to see you smile again,” Lady Margaery remarked after Rhaenys had finished her cake. “That was my greatest hope by bringing you here.”

“Then consider your hope fulfilled,” she confirmed and leaned over to squeeze the younger girl’s hand. “Your gift pleased me more than all the jewels and dresses your father gave me.”
Margaery squeezed her hand in return.

“Yet that is not the end of it,” she continued to explain. “I have another surprise.”

Daenerys threw Margaery a curious look.

“Another surprise?” she asked and Margaery nodded her head, before calling for one of her servants. The young page boy gave curt nod, before hurrying off into the woods.

Rhaenys didn’t know what to make of the girl’s secrecy.

“Come…tell us,” Rhaenys prodded. “You know I don’t like secrets.”

Margaery sighed and brushed her golden-brown locks over her shoulders. “I know how much you like music…I thought inviting one of my favorite minstrels would please you.”

Rhaenys didn’t know what to make of that either. She was indeed fond of music, but it was quite obscure to her that Margaery would make such a secret about it.

“Why do you make the poor man crawl through the woods? You could have easily invited him to the Red Keep?”

“I doubt the Queen would have allowed his presence,” Margaery explained and played with her hair. “He is a rather palicular singer.”

This confused Rhaenys only more.

“In what way?” she asked, but Lady Margaery only gave her a knowing smile. A while later the page boy returned and in company of a man. He was dressed completely in blue. His doublet was blue, his cloak was blue and even the silly mask decorated with peacock feathers was blue. Yet that wasn’t the only strange thing about him. The page boy had to steady him as he walked and even had to help him to sit down in the chair provided for him by one of Margaery’s servants.

“This is my good friend, Seamous Bluefeathers,” Lady Margaery introduced and the musician dropped his head in greeting, though he didn’t speak a single word. “He can’t speak and walk properly, but his play is renowned throughout the whole Reach.”

“It would be a pleasure to hear you play,” Rhaenys replied politely and folded her hands in her lap.

The man only dropped his head and clapped in his hands. Then one of the servants brought a harp. It was a beautiful piece wrought out of dark wood and golden roses engraved on it’s wooden body.

Wordless the musician let his finger’s dance over the strings and coaxed forward a familiar tune. It was *Durran’s Defiance*, a rather sad and also quite difficult song to master, but the man did it masterfully. Rhaenys could see the whole story play out before her very eyes. The song spoke of the first Storm King Durran Godsgrief who won the love of fair Eelnei, the daughter of the Sea God and the Wind Goddess. They say she gave him his maidenhead, committing herself to a mortal life, but her divine parents forbade their love. They were wed despite her parent’s misgivings, which brought their wrath upon the lovers. On their wedding night, the gods sent a terrible storm which killed Durran’s family, though Eleni was able to protect her love from the storm. Enraged, Durran declared war on the gods, who replied by hammering his kindom with massive storms. Each time Durran built a castle to face the sea the gods destroyed it. Again and again he failed, but he persisted building larger and more powerful fortifications, until finally, the seventh castle stood strong enough to resist the storms of Shipbreaker Bay and Durran was able to take his love home.
Rhaenys brushed a stray tear away and when it was over.

“Wonderful!” she complimented and meant it. “That song was always very difficult for me to play. I admire your talent.”

“When we last saw each other you told me something very different,” the man suddenly replied, his warm voice ringing with clear amusement.

Rhaenys froze, fresh tears running down her cheeks.

“It can’t be!” she stuttered and covered her lips, but she didn’t believe it until he pulled down the feathered mask, revealing a beloved face. “You can’t be here!”

Willas Tyrell had the beauty of his younger brother Loras, though his features were slightly sharper and his golden-brown hair lacked the soft curls of the rest of the Tyrell children.

Trembling, Rhaenys rose to her feet while Margaery pulled her Aunt Daenerys out of the pavilion.

“Why not?” he asked, a gentle smile playing on his full lips. “Do you think me not daring enough for such a feat, my Lady?”

Rhaenys was torn between crying and laughing as she stumbled forward. It felt as if she lost both the ability to walk or to speak, but thank the gods Willas caught her before she was able to fall down.

“You are a fool,” she croaked between tears and touched his cheeks as if to reassure here that he really wasn’t just some ghost or imagination. “A stupid fool.”

“I don’t mind being a fool, as long I can be your fool,” he replied with a gentle smile and brushed the tears from her cheeks.

“Fool,” she flung back at him and pulled him down to kiss him thoroughly. It had been three years, but there was a familiarity to it that warmed her and made her shiver at once. It felt as if someone put a spell on her and robbed her off all her reason as she started to pull off her dress. Luckily, she chose the kind of dress lacking any of those complicated bindings or this might have ended in utter chaos.

She had never lain with Willas as she had to be a maiden on her wedding day, but even that was lay behind her. The realization hit her like thunder and soon she was helping him dispose of his own dressing, though that a little bit difficult with his bad leg.

He had been very embarrassed when she first laid eyes upon him, but that was now nothing more than routine for her. The fact that she didn’t have to hold back anymore was even more freeing and filled her with a strange kind of bravery. Princess Rhaenys was always cautious, but now she only wanted to forget the dark days that lay behind her and allowed herself to be carried away by his touch.

Willas was never rough with her, even now his touch was soft as he pulled off her shift and kissed along her neck, chest, legs and lower. He was good at that too and kissed her down there until she squirmed with pleasure. She had to bite her lips to stifle her gasps, but she doubted Margaery minded. Knowing her she expected this kind of situation.

She wanted to say something, but then his lips returned to hers and all those thoughts were brushed away. Then slowly and gently, he eased himself into her. Then he kissed her brow.
She smiled at that, kissed him and urged him on with a quick roll of her hips.

“I see now,” she said later and leaned on his chest.”That is why you didn’t come to my wedding. You pretended that your pride is wounded, but all the while you were preparing to stage this silly little masquerade.”

He smiled mischievously and pinched her nose.”You know me. I always had tendency for the overdramatic. I guess that is something I inherited from my Lady mother.”

Rhaenys chuckled and blew her dark hair out of her face.

“Does your grandmother also know about your masquerade? Who else?”

“Of course she knows,” he replied and brushed a loose strand behind her ear.”Margaery and Garlan know. Only Loras, Mother and Father are ignorant of my presence here. I would have told Loras, but you know him…he is terrible at keeping secrets.”

Rhaenys gave him a knowing smile.”I agree. Your brother knows how to knock men from their horses, but keeping his mouth shut is not one of his greatest talents.”

He nodded his head and smoothed his hand over her hair.

“I heard about the Queen’s actions,” he added, in a more serious tone.”It seems she is growing more daring…you should leave this place at once. I fear for your life.”

His concern warmed her heart, but she had no intention to change her plans.

“You know that I can’t do that,” she explained softly.”It is essential that it happens in Highgarden. You will convince your father, won’t you?”

He furrowed his brows and gave a hesitant nod.

“It won’t be a problem to convince my father to hold my sister’s wedding in Highgarden and I doubt Lord Renly will refuse his wish, but that doesn’t mean the King will allow you and the Crown Prince to attend. Then there is the King himself…if you kill his son and crown yourself Queen his allies will raise their banners…Eddard Stark, Jon Arryn and Hoster Tully will not forsake their old allegiances. I am also not sure if my father is prepared to fight such a war.”

“I know that,” she assured him, „but neither Jon Arryn nor Robert Baratheon will survive the next year. This I can assure you.”

Willas’ golden eyes widened in disbelief.

“How do you know that? Are you planning to kill them too?

She smiled, but wasn’t prepared to give him all the information he craved. It would be too dangerous.

“The Queen wants to get rid of the King. She has three healthy children to name her own and I have no doubt that one of her next attempts will succeed. Besides, the King has been drinking and whoring for the last sixteen years…it wouldn’t surprise me if it is a heart attack or a stroke that takes him from this world. Even this useless creature Pycelle told him to consider a more healthier nutrition.”

“And the Lord Hand?”
“The Lord Hand has more enemies than he can know…wait and see,” she added. “Wait and see.”

Willas sighed.

“I have waited for three years,” he explained. “I am sick and tired of these games.”

“Me too,” she admitted, “but it is only a year. Have patience.”

He sighed and pulled her down into another kiss.

“Aye, I will have patience.”

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Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Jon Arryn

The Princess looks radiant today, Jon Arryn thought as he laid eyes upon the young woman. There was something about her flushed cheeks and the strange curl on her lips that convinced him that something has changed about the girl.

Maybe the Prince and her are getting along better than I thought, he mused but that was difficult to find out. He hardly interacted with boy outside of official events. The Queen doesn't hold much love for him and the boy was much the same.

“What brings you here, Princess Rhaenys?” asked the King, his voice ringing with displeasure, though Jon was sure it had little to do with the Princess. The King and the Queen’s relationship has been more than strained since the incident concerning Loras Tyrell.

To both Jon Arryn and the King it was quite clear that incident with Loras Tyrell was the Queen’s work, but that didn’t mean they could do much to punish her. Cersei Lannister was still the Queen and Tywin Lannister’s daughter, which made her a special case. Luckily, Mace Tyrell was a vain man and more concerned with keeping face than waging wars about a lost tourney, but that didn’t mean the Queen’s actions were not concerning. It only confirmed his greatest fear. The Lannisters are gaining more and more power while our King is drinking himself into an early grave.

To think that the Crown Prince will one day rule in his own right was still hard to believe. The boy was all his mother’s son and not only in looks.

Will Robert’s dynasty end after barely sixteen years, he wondered and shuddered at the thought. Will my sacrifices be worth anything in the end?

He was unable to answer this question.

“Forgive me for intruding, your Grace,” Princess Rhaenys replied politely and dropped a curtsy, before straightening herself back to her full height."Yet there is an issue that has been weighing heavily on my mind that concerns all our future."

Jon Arryn didn’t know what to make of her words and the King looked even more confused.

“Then speak, Princess Rhaenys,” the King grumbled."Speak, but make it quick."

The Princess seemed unimpressed by the King’s cool words, but that was no surprise to Jon Arryn. Rhaenys was a girl who knew her curtsies and smiles, but there is also anger lurking beneath her false façade. The King and the others at court might not see it, but Jon Arryn knew hatred when he saw it.

“Of course, your Grace,” the Princess replied, hiked up her dress and climbed up the steps to the Iron Throne, coming to stop a few steps below."As I am now wed I think it is time to settle on a marriage for my Aunt. Princess Daenerys. That is why I came here to speak to you, your Grace."

Jon Arryn froze. Gods be good, he cursed inwardly. Has the girl lost her mind?
When he saw the King’s grimace of displeasure his fear only intensified and he spoke quickly, before he was even able to properly think about his choice of his words.

“I don’t think this matter concerns you, Princess,” Jon Arryn replied warningly. “Your Aunt’s future marriage is a matter of the crown, but be assured that I will find her a worthy husband.”

“Jon speaks true,” the King agreed, but the Princess seemed unmoved by his words. He even believed to see a hint of a smile crossing over on the young girl’s lips.

“Oh, I know about this worthy marriage candidate of yours, my Lord,” the Princess replied daringly. “Harrold Hardyng is a choice I vehemently disagree about. The boy is proud, vain and reckless. My Aunt is a simple and naive girl, but any child of hers could be used as weapon to gain the Iron Throne from your future grandchildren.”

Jon Arryn couldn’t believe what he was hearing, but what surprised him even more was the King’s reaction.

There was no anger, only interest showing in his features.

*He agrees with her,* Jon Arryn thought. *Gods be good.*

“I admit…that Ser Harrold is young and has a bit of a reckless character, but I assure you he will always be loyal to you, your Grace,” he tried to explain, but the King ignored him.

“Explain your thoughts to me, Princess Rhaenys,” the King asked instead and the Princess seemed pleased to answer his question.

“It is not only the recklessness of the boy that worries me, but also my Aunt. She is a young and naive girl who might be easily swayed by the dreams of Queenship. All it would need is a reckless boy like Ser Harrold to stir up another rebellion,” she explained her thoughts to the King, before turning to look at Jon Arryn. “I do not mean to insult you, but your son has a sickly disposition, your wife is known to have problems in bearing children and you are not getting younger. Thus the possibility of Ser Harrold inheriting the Vale is not out of the question and that is why I disagree with your choice. Princess Daenerys is my blood, but I hardly know her and I have to think of my future children. I don’t want them to be endangered by any potential children produced by this reckless young Lord. Wouldn’t you agree, your Grace?”

Jon Arryn felt as if all his breath was drained out of him, his mind reeling. He was unable to make sense of them. He had observed her interactions with her Aunt and saw nothing but warmth between them.

*Was it all an act?*

“I agree,” the King said at last and inclined his head towards Jon. “Your Aunt’s children could pose a danger for my dynasty…,” he continued, but Jon couldn’t help but to cut him off. He needed to act, before this was getting out of hand.

“…Princess Daenerys is a gentle and sweet girl, she would never pose harm to you….” Jon Arryn stuttered, but the King flashed him a displeased look and gave his opinion on the matter.

“Maids swooned softly when Prince Rhaegar played his harp, but that didn’t keep him from raping and murdering my beloved Lyanna …sweetness means nothing these days.”

“Your Grace!” Jon Arryn protested, ringing with his composure.”I have to protest. I will not allow any harm to come to Princess Daenerys, who stands under my protection.”
Princess Rhaenys smiled at that and brushed her hair over her shoulder.

“I never said that I want my Aunt harmed,” the Princess explained, „but we cannot leave this matter unattended. Yet you do not need to fret…I have a solution for our problem, though I am not sure my Aunt will ever be able to forgive me for suggesting it.”

“You are now my son’s wife and foremost a Baratheon,” the King agreed and stroked his beard. “Tell me about your solution?”

“Certainly, your Grace,” the Princess replied. “My solution is quite simple…wed my Aunt to Eddard Stark’s son…his children will never dare to harm you.”

The King’s lightened up in delight, but Jon Arryn sighed in frustration.

_It is not a bad idea to wed her to Robb Stark, Jon Arryn mused, but there is one problem…_ “I like the idea,” the King agreed and turned to Jon. “The girl speaks sense…Let us betroth your ward to Robb Stark. Surely, Ned would feel honored.”

_Ned maybe_, Jon Arryn thought but he doubted the Northern Lord will agree. Not that it mattered, Robb Stark is already betrothed to Ysilla Royce, Yohn Royce’s only daughter. It was a match that made sense and will bring the North a generous dowry. The fact that Ned counted Yohn Royce as one of his oldest friends will make it impossible to break such a contract, especially not in favor of a bride of Targaryen blood.

“It is an interesting idea,” Jon Arryn admitted carefully, „but Robb Stark has been recently betrothed to Ysilla Royce. I have no doubt that Ned would feel honored, but he is not the kind of man to break a given promise.”

The disappointment on Robert’s face was palpable and led the King to ridiculous notions.

“What about the younger boy?” the King asked.

Jon Arryn sighed.

“The boy is nine…”, Jon Arryn began, but the Princess made use of the moment to speak. “I think you misunderstood me…I wasn’t speaking about Robb Stark, but Jon Snow…the boy who won the tourney. The fact that he crowned my Aunt indicates that he holds certain affections for her and though I am not sure if my Aunt returns them I think the boy is of decent character and would at least treat her well.”

Jon Arryn was stunned. Seeing the King’s subtle smile he couldn’t help but to shrug off the feeling that the people around him are going mad.

“Ned’s bastard boy, you say?” the King asked. “It is a rather strange idea…,” he trailed off and stroked his beard again, before falling back into silence.

Jon Arryn made use of the moment.

“Forgive me for speaking out on the matter, but you cannot consider this. The boy, for all his good qualities, is a bastard. It is out of the question for a Princess to wed a bastard.”

Surprisingly, the Princess Rhaenys nodded her head in agreement.

“You are right…a princess cannot wed a bastard and a bastard cannot wed a princess,” the Princess
said, „but the boy can be legitimized. It all depends on you, your Grace.‟

“I could do that,” the King said and turned to Jon. “Do you think Ned would accept it?”

Jon Arryn sighed and brushed through his thinning hair.

“I don’t know Ned’s mind, but I can tell you that his wife will certainly not be pleased by such an arrangement. The boy would pose a danger to her children.”

“How so, my Lord?” Rhaenys asked them as if his words didn’t make any sense to her. “As far as I know even in the North legitimized bastards inherit after their younger trueborn brothers. Lady Stark has three healthy sons and given her young age it is likely that more will follow after them. Jon Snow would be the fourth in line and he doesn’t strike me the kind to usurp his brother’s title. The short time I have spoken to him he never failed to speak with love about his siblings.”

Jon Arryn didn’t know what to say and it took him a moment to find a proper answer while the King and the Princess were both giving him expectant looks.

“You are twisting my words against me, Princess Rhaenys,” he said at last and exhaled deeply. “All you said is true, but it is unheard of for a Princess to wed someone of Lord Snow’s standing. It would make a mockery of us all.”

 Isn’t that the point though, my Lord?” the Princess asked. “All of this is meant to protect the Baratheon dynasty. What danger can the children of a legitimized bastard fourth in line pose to his Grace? Or do you think Eddard Stark, who lost both his father and brother to my grandfather’s madness, would allow another Targaryen to claim the Iron Throne? I admit I have always harbored a grudge against you and his Grace for what happened to my family, but I am now thinking of the future of my children. I want to protect them.”

Jon felt like slapped and the King’s gaze was again resting on him.

“What do you say, Jon?” he asked, his voice grumbling with impatience. “You have been begging me for the last two years to find a betrothal for her and I like Ned’s boy even though he is a bastard. Gods, sometimes I even like my own bastards better than my own heir. We could at least make an offer to Ned and if he disagrees with the idea he will surely make it known to me.”

He will not, Jon was sure. Ned might refuse Robert, but not his King.

“Now?” the King prodded impatiently. “What do you say? Or have you lost your ability to speak?”

Jon Arryn fell into silence.

I have lost, he thought. Forgive me, Ned.

“I will write to Ned, your Grace.”

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on Sunday or Monday. Saturdays have been quite busy for me in the last two weeks and will continue to be so in the next few weeks.
“There is no doubt about it, my Lord,” Maester Luwin muttered. “This letter was written by Lord Arryn’s hand.”

“The King is insane,” Cat added quickly, her face pale like curdled milk. “Why else would he make such a ridiculous suggestion?”

Ned swallowed hard and picked the letter from Maester Luwin’s hand to re-read the letter. It was undoubtedly his handwriting, but the King’s words. While Jon Arryn was kind enough to foster Jon in his household Ned had no doubt that the idea was Robert’s alone.

Ned sighed and folded the paper before putting it back on the table.

“There is no doubt about it. Maester Luwin’s assessment is correct. This is Lord Arryn’s handwriting,” Ned told his wife and Maester Luwin. “He is also quite clear: The King offers to legitimize Jon and to wed him to Princess Daenerys Targaryen.”

“I read it myself, Ned,” Cat replied and brushed her braided hair over her shoulder. “Even hearing it from your mouth makes it sound mad. I say it again, the King lost his mind.”

Ned sighed again and ruffled his hand through his hair, before contemplating the matter, but he found no answer to this conundrum.

“I know Robert since I was a young boy and he always acted rashly without thinking about the consequences of his actions. I know from Lord Arryn’s letters that the King was very pleased to meet Jon… the only explanation I have for his actions is that he thinks he is doing me a favor. To you it may sound foolish, but in Robert’s eyes it is an act of generosity which makes it only harder to refuse.”

Cat’s eyes widened in shock and Ser Luwin coughed.

“You are not considering this, are you?” Cat asked, her voice ringing with fear. “You will refuse him, won’t you?”

Ned wished it was so easy. Refusing Robert was one thing, but refusing his King another.

He exhaled deeply and shook his head.

“He is my King,” he replied carefully and leaned over to squeeze her hand. “I cannot simply refuse the King.”

Cat grew only paler and opened her mouth to speak, but no words came.

“Forgive me,” Maester Luwin began and decided to speak. “I think there is motive. Lord Arryn might not explicitly tell us so in his letter, but I don’t think it is plain generosity that drives the King.”

Both Ned and Cat gave the old man a curious look.
“Please speak your mind, Maester Luwin.”

Then Maester Luwin and gave his thoughts on the matter.

“It can’t be a coincidence that the King writes to you so shortly after the wedding between his heir and Princess Rhaenys. By marrying the King’s heir the blood of the dragon and the blood of House Baratheon are united, but there is always a danger that Princess Daenerys could be used to stir up a Rebellion. By marrying the Princess to Jon there is little chance that she can be used for such means. Even as a legitimized bastard Jon would only inherit after his trueborn siblings.”

“That makes sense,” Ned returned, but it made it only harder.

“That may be true,” Cat added harshly, „but it didn’t stop Daemon Blackfyre from trying to usurp his brother’s rightful claim.”

Ned was stunned by her words. Jon was many things, but Daemon was the last thing that came to his wind when thinking about the boy. In looks he had little of his true father, the Dragon Prince, though they shared a similar temper. In looks he was through and through Lya’s son.

Yet he was unable to share his thoughts with Cat. The burden of my lies.

“I know I have burdened you with the boy’s presence, but even you have to admit that such ambitions are completely contrary to his character. He loves Robb and the rest of our children. I firmly believe he would never harm…,” he tried to explain, but Cat cut him off.

“Believing is not knowing,” Cat insisted.”Besides, the boy has been residing in the South for nearly three years maybe he changed. He is a knight and the King is offering him a Princess to wed. What if he grew proud? Nobody is free from temptation and power is the greatest temptation there is.”

“That may be,” Ned granted her, „but are misjudging my bannermen. They would never support a legitimized bastard over my trueborn son, especially not if he is wed to a Targaryen Princess. Many of them lost family in the Rebellion. The Mad King’s daughter will never be Lady of Winterfell.”

Cat was shaking her head in a disbelieving manner, her blue eyes shining with tears.

“No,” she insisted.”I have been tolerating his presence for ten years…you cannot expect me to agree to this. Refuse Robert as politely as possible. He once called you his oldest friend…he will understand.”

“Cat,” Ned told her more firmly and waved the letter before her face.”I haven’t seen Robert in years. He is no longer the young boy I grew up with in the Eyrie. He is a King and he will think of my refusal as an insult.”

“No, I won’t have the boy here,” Cat remained stubborn and averted her gaze.”I won’t allow it.”

Ned opened his mouth to speak, but Maester Luwin decided to interfere again.

“Lady Stark,” he addressed Cat in a gentle tone.”I understand your feelings, but I agree with Lord Stark. We can’t refuse the King, but nobody says that the boy has to stay here. The boy is a knight and thus eligible to hold lands. I suggest granting him a Lordship and then won’t have to tolerate his presence here at Winterfell.”

Yet the Maester’s words didn’t help to ease Cat’s fears.
“Think about what your bannermen will say if you grant the boy and his Targaryen bride a Lordship. They will mock us,” she replied sharply and met Ned’s gaze.

“Nobody said it has to be a prestigious Lordship,” Maester Luwin began, but Cat wanted to hear none of it.

“I care not,” she threw back, her gaze resting on Ned. “I won’t allow it. You may be the Lord of Winterfell, but my father is still the Lord of Riverrun. He will not tolerate such a humiliation.”

Ned felt like slapped, though he should have expected it.

*You demand too much,* Jon Arryn had told him on the day he offered to foster Jon in the Eyrie. *Let me give the boy a home.*

“Your father?” he asked. “You would bring your father into this?”

“What other choice do I have?” she asked, her voice tinged with desperation.

Ned felt torn. There was Cat and there was his sister. To both of them he gave a vow. To Cat a vow of marriage and to Lya a vow to protect her son.

“And what choice do I have?” he asked and couldn’t help but to feel resentment stirring inside him, though it was more directed at himself than at his wife and departed sister. “Have you ever considered my feelings in the matter? The boy may not be your son, but he is mine. I have a responsibility towards him.”

“And what about my feelings?” she asked, tears running down her cheeks. “Everyday I had to look at him, the boy who looked more like a Stark than my trueborn children. Everyday…wondering about his mother, a faceless woman you refuse to speak about. Why I asked myself? Any other Lord in the Westeros would raise his bastards away from his trueborn children, but this boy has always been a special case. Whoever this woman was, you must have loved her dearly.”

The answer cut deeper than a sword.

He couldn’t tell her the truth, but he needed to make her understand.

“Jon’s mother is dead,” he said at last and realized that he was trembling. “She is no danger to you.”

A grimace of pain washed over her features and she brushed her tears away.

“That may be, but her son and his future children are a danger to mine.”

“They are my children too,” Ned assured her. “I would never do anything to bring harm upon them. Do you have so little trust in me?”

“Trust,” she repeated and laughed. “Do you have trust in me? You are even refusing to give me this dead woman’s name.”

It felt like another slap to the face.

“Cat,” he began, but she shook her head and left the room, slamming the door behind her. “Cat!”

Ned exhaled deeply and ruffled through his hair.

“My Lord,” Maester Luwin spoke after another moment of silence had passed between them.”I
know this matter is none of my business, but Lady Stark has a point. You have always been very mysterious about the boy’s mother. I am only an old man, but maybe it will be easier for Lady Stark to make her peace with the past if you told her the truth about the boy’s mother. Whatever the reasons for your secrecy, but I think it is time.

*Aye,* Ned knew. *It is time to tell the truth.*

…

It still took him longer than expected until he gathered enough courage to seek her out. He was the Lord of Winterfell, but now he felt like a young boy.

For*give me, Lya,* he told himself as he knocked at the door leading to his wife’s chambers.

“What do you want?” she asked when she opened the door. She looked bad, her face flushed and her eyes red-rimmed.

“We should talk,” he replied as calmly as possible.

“Talk?” she asked and laughed.”I told you my thoughts on the matter. I won’t change my opinion.”

“Not about that,” he assured her.”You said that I don’t show you enough trust. You are right…but Jon’s mother is a difficult matter for me to talk about, but if you want…I am willing to try.”

Her eyes widened and her features softened a little.

“Truly?” she asked, her eyes filled with disbelief.

“Truly,” he confirmed, „but we should seek out a more private location. It is a delicate matter.”

She dropped her head in acceptance.

“Of course,” she added.”What place do you have in mind?”

He offered his hand to her.

“The crypts, my Lady.”

To his relief she didn’t question his choice and followed after him as he led her down the whirling stone steps. Left and right, the statues of his forefather’s lined the way, observing them through their empty stone sockets.

Cat didn’t speak a single world until they arrived at his father’s tomb, flanked by his sister's and his brother’s statue.

They were the faces of ghosts wrought in stone, but their tombs were the only things left to remember them.

“Ned,” she spoke at last, her voice surprisingly soft as she touched his trembling shoulder.”You are shaking, Ned. Why did you bring me here?”

Again he tried to brush his doubts away, but he was unable to be as blunt as he wanted to be. *He is not my son,* he wanted to say, but the words failed him.

“I forgot…You weren’t at the Tourney of Harrenhall, were you?”
She shook her head, her braid tumbling over her shoulder.

“No, but I heard enough about it to know what happened there,” she replied. “But what…,” he continued, but Ned cut her off.

“Please, let me speak. We we were all there. Brandon, Robert, my sister and…Rhaegar Targaryen. His is wife was also there, his little daughter the Princess Rhaenys and his Mad Father. I assume you know the story… Prince Rhaegar crowned my sister as his Queen of Love and Beauty in front of his wife, Princess Elia. I still recall the deadly silence that followed as if it was meant to herald the woe that befell us afterwards. It was a shameful act, but my sister could hardly refuse. Thus she took the crown and placed it upon her head. She was never more beautiful…and then after the tourney…,” he continued, but his voice left him there.

“She was taken by the Dragon Prince,” she ended for him, but it was another lie.

“No,” he replied, forcing the words out of his mouth. “No, it is all a lie. A lie Robert believed to forget about his grief.”

She looked at him, her eyes wide in disbelief. The air was so thick one could have cut it with a knife.

“A lie?” she asked. “I don’t understand?”

“You will soon. We found her in Dorne, hidden in a tower. The Kingsguard was there. We killed them all… It was a bloody fight, but I and Howland Reed made it out alive. When we arrived at the tower my sister was already dying…there was so much blood… I will never get the smell out of my nose. Roses and blood that is what I remember the most…,” he tried to explain, the painful memories were returning to him like a long forgotten nightmare.

“You don’t have to tell me about that if it pains you too much,” she told him then, but it needed to be done.

“No, I have to,” he told her and took another breath, before continuing. “She wasn’t murdered… the birthing fever took her.”

He didn’t dare to look at her, but he felt her tight grip on his arm, her nails digging through leather of his surcoat.

“What happened…,” she stuttered, but then her voice faltered and realization dawned on her face. “Jon Snow… He is,” she whispered, her voice barely audible.

“… the son of Prince Rhaegar and my sister Lyanna. I promised her to protect him,” he added.

“And you did,” she whispered and let go of his arm. He inclined his head to look at her and flinched at the pain showing on her face. “By making him your bastard.”

“Aye,” he replied, expecting her to shout at him, but nothing of the like happened. She was deadly silent, her hands balled to fists. He saw that she wanted to hit him and he would have even welcomed it. Everything was better than bitter silence and maybe it would help to ease her pain, but she stopped herself and left him standing there in the darkness, her leaving footsteps the only sound echoing back at him.
I thought I would be able to wrap it up in one chapter, but I don't think Cat would just get over it and accept it. I will write the next chapter from her perspective and then we go back to Jon.
A cool gush of wind coming through the door made the candles flicker. For a brief moment Cat thought they would be extinguished, but they kept on burning.

When she first left Ned, she headed up to her private solar, but she found no peace there and didn’t want any of the servants to see her tears. The Sept was the only place to find the peace she craved. There were only a handful of people to be found in Winterfell who worshiped the Seven, though none of them would dare to come here. Ned built this Sept for her alone, the Lady of Winterfell. Now it was her only refuge from Ned and the bitter truth.

For years she had hoped that Ned will eventually tell her about this faceless woman. This woman he loved so much that he allowed his bastard to grow up among his trueborn children. It wasn’t even that he fathered a bastard that irked her so much, but the fact that she had to look at him every single day.

Not even once came her the thought that someone else could be the boy’s father given how much resemblance Jon Snow showed to Ned and Arya. That the boy looked more like a Stark than her own children was another sore point that made her dislike the boy so much, but now all of it was a lie.

The boy is not only the son of Lyanna Stark, but also the son of Rhaegar Targaryen. Oh, it was not inconceivable for her to understand why Ned acted like he did. Whenever the murder of Prince Rhaegar’s son and wife was mentioned Ned never failed to make his disgust known. She knew from others who fought with him the Rebellion, that Ned and King Robert once had a terrible argument over the matter that nearly shattered their friendship and that only his sister’s death brought them back together.

She herself made attempts to speak with him about the matter, but Ned always refused her, telling her that this dark past was not something he wanted to talk about. It was only natural, she thought that Ned wouldn’t want to speak about his terrible experiences, but now all of it made much more sense. Ned lost both a father and a brother to the Mad Targaryen King, but so far she never has heard him mutter a single bad word about Rhaegar.

Now she knew why that is the case, but it didn’t make it any easier to get a clear head amidst this myriad of feelings washing over her.

There was anger, regret, bitterness and fresh fear. While the boy is no longer her husband’s bastard he is now the son of a deposed Prince. Knowing King Robert he would tear down House Stark if he ever found out the truth about the boy.

The boy she was still unable to love. No, she doubted the bitterness would ever leave her, but she also understood why Ned acted like he did. She also had a sister and a brother. She would have done the same for Lysa or Edmure, but that didn’t change the harsh truth.

In the eyes of the realm Ned would be seen as a common traitor. The King can never know, or all would be lost. Her House, her children, all of them would die.

*The boy needs to return to the North,* she knew and hated the idea more than anything. *Here he will...*
be safe from prying looks.

Becoming overwhelmed once more, she leaned backwards and closed her eyes.

She should be relieved, shouldn’t she?

Jon Snow was not the fruit of her husband’s affair with another woman, but now there was another thorn that edged itself deep into her heart and stirred up fresh anger.

Sixteen years. He lied for me for sixteen years and he would have continued to do so if the King didn’t have this bout of madness.

Yes, it was the lack of trust and the lie that hurt the deepest.

She understood why Ned didn’t initially tell her, but sixteen years was too long of a time to be simply brushed aside.

I need to know, she told herself and gathered all her courage to face the bitter truth once more. Taking a deep breathe she left the safety of the Sept behind her and decided to seek out Ned. When she stepped outside the sky had taken the color of blood.

Dusk, she realized and only then it dawned on her how long she had been sitting there in the Sept. Nearly half the day.

Not much to her surprise she found him waiting in her chambers.

He looked much the same way she had left him; pale and guilt written all over his lined face. In that moment he looked suddenly much older than his years.

His pleading look was even worse and managed to make her forget about her anger, even if it was only a brief moment.

“So your sister went willingly, didn’t she?” she asked, trying to keep voice down. She had enough of fighting.

Ned exhaled deeply and brushed his hair out of his face. Then he gave a hesitant nod.

“She did. I didn’t know …and Brandon and Robert jumped to their own conclusions. You know what came afterwards. Brandon, ever the hothead rode to his death and Robert swore revenge for his beloved,” Ned explained with a trembling voice.”I know how much Lya disliked the idea of marrying Robert, but I couldn’t believe she would do something this foolish. Only when I found her dying in the tower did I understand. She was my sister and dying…,” he trailed off.

Cat sighed and settled down next to him.

“I understand,” she granted him hesitatingly.”I suppose that makes Jon Snow not only a bastard, but also a royal bastard.”

Her words were meant as an attempt to lighten the mood and to ease her nerves, but the shocked look on Ned’s face frightened her.

“Gods, there is more, isn’t there?”

He nodded his head and a moment of heavy silence followed until he spoke again.

“The boy is no bastard,” he said at last.”Before she died Lya told me that they were wed. Rhaegar
made her his second wife. I suppose that makes Jon Snow a Prince in the eyes of those who support such a practice. I am not sure about the others, but among Targaryen supporters it would matter little. Prince Rhaegar was beloved and widely respected and even Robert’s word can’t change that.”

“It matters not,” she told him.”It matters not if your sister was wed to Prince Rhaegar. The King can never know or we all die. Do you understand that?”

Ned nodded his head, his grey eyes resting on her. There was so much pain showing in them that it was hard for her to even look at him.

“Of course I understand,” he told her, his voice tinged with bitterness.”I have lived with this lie for all these years. You told me that I don’t trust you. Aye, it is true…I didn’t tell you, but I hardly knew you when we were wed and then I saw how much you resented the boy’s presence…I feared…,” he continued, but didn’t dare to speak the words, though she knew what he wanted to tell her.

“…that I would sell him out,” she ended for him, in a trembling voice.

He nodded and averted his gaze.

This hurt the most, but she couldn’t deny the truth.

“Aye, I resented the boy and I wanted him gone, but I am not mad…I would have never dared to do something like that. If you had told me…I could have tried to love the boy, but you never gave me that chance. Instead you lied to me.”

Ned sighed and his gaze wandered back to her. There were tears shining in his eyes, tears she ignored.

She knew he wanted her forgiveness, but that was not something she could give. Not now. Maybe later.

Yet there was still the matter of Jon Snow.

She disliked it, but the matter needed to be dealt with, no matter how much she disliked the thought of having the boy here.

“I agree,” she forced the words over her words.”The boy can return here. Legitimize him and allow him to wed his Princess…you may even give him a Lordship, but there is one condition.”

Ned looked stunned.

“One condition?” he asked, his voice brimming with hope.”Name it.”

“You will tell the boy the truth. I cannot live on pretending. He is old enough to know. I may not hold much love for him and I doubt I ever will, but the boy is no fool. I don’t think he wants to lose his head.”

Ned frowned, but at last he dropped his head in acceptance."I accept your condition."

…
Next chapter, Jon or Dany.
They were growing reckless, meeting several times a week in the godswood, but she was unable to stay away from his touch. His lips on her neck, lips or elsewhere made her squirm with warmth. Even now his mouth was feasting hungrily on her neck. Normally he tried to be careful not to leave any evidence of their encounters, but today his mind seemed somewhere else, his hands tugging on the cleavage of her summer dress.

It was not the first time that he touched her breasts or kissed them. She also very much enjoyed his attentions, but he never allowed her to do the same, telling her that it is not appropriate for ladies to do that.

Dany may be a maid, but she knew what the boys were doing when they went down to the river to watch the servant girl’s bathing, though she had never seen Jon in their company.

It’s because he thinks himself a bastard, she was sure and let her hands roam through Jon’s dark locks. They were so oft to touch, almost like silk. He seemed to like it and continued to nuzzle her neck. It made her gasp and giggle, but it also meant to that she will have to wear a shawl around her neck for the next few days and make her sweat like a pig.

But those thoughts were soon forgotten when his lips returned to hers and she opened her mouth to deepen the kiss. He tasted sweet like the fruits served during supper. Yet that was not the only thing familiar to her. She noticed his arousal rubbing against her belly.

Now, she told herself and a mischievous thought entered her mind. He seems distracted.

While returning the kiss she allowed her hands to wander downwards towards his trousers, clumsy fingers tugging at his laces.

She sighed when he grabbed her wrists to stop her, breathing hard. Pressing his forehead into her neck, he shook his head.

“It will make a mess,” he told her and pulled away, his face flushed and his dark hair fluttering around him like raven feathers. He disagreed with her idea, but still carried a happy smile on his lips as he brushed her locks out of her face. “We should go back. It is getting late and Ser Marwyn will ask questions if we stay away too long.”

Dany sighed, straightened her dress and smoothed her hair.

“Ser Marwyn can hump a horse for all I care,” she replied and Jon laughed and placed a kiss on her cheek, before pulling her along.

And just as Jon prophesied the man in question was awaiting them with a familiar grim look.

“It is nearly dusk,” he complained and pointed at the sky.”Where have you been?”

“I paid a visit to Princess Rhaenys,” she replied and flashed the man a disarming smile.”I apologize, but we forgot the time. If you don’t believe me you may ask the Princess. I am sure she
will be happy to confirm my story.”

Ser Marwyn carried an unbelieving look.

“I don’t think that will be necessary, Princess,” he replied, his gaze flickering from Dany to Jon. “Anyway, that is not the only reason I came to find you. I am here to inform you that Lord Arryn wants to see you.”

“I see,” she replied hiding her apprehension. “I will go to see him at once. I assume he can be found in the Tower of the Hand?”

Ser Marwyn nodded his head in confirmation.

“Aye, but he wants to see you both.”

Dany froze.

“Us both?” she asked in confusion.

“Aye, you both,” Ser Marwyn grumbled, “and you better be quick. Lord Arryn said at once.”

“Understood,” Jon added. “I thank you for informing us.”

Once they had left the sour knight behind them they stopped.

“Do you think he knows?” Dany asked fearfully.

Jon frowned and touched her shoulder, leading her along.

“I hope not,” he replied, “but everything is possible.”

His words helped to calm her a little and together they made their way to the Tower of the Hand where they found Jon Arryn seated at his table, littered with papers, books and scrolls. The smell of dust and ink was everywhere and the heat was even worse.

_How can Lord Arryn work in this stuffy place?_

“My Lord,” Dany greeted him and dipped her head. Jon followed after her and imitated her gesture.

Lord Arryn lifted his head, but the smile on his lips hardly reached his face. He also looked paler than usual, his skin wan like candle wax.

“Aye, I did,” he confirmed and winked them closer. Dany sat down, but Jon remained in a standing position, as if he was afraid to sit down next to her. “There is an important matter I need to bring to your attention.”

Dany took a deep breath and folded her hands in front of her. She tried to appear calm, but her heart was hammering away in her chest.

“What matter, my Lord?” she asked with a breathless laugh.

The old man wrinkled his brows and started to search through the heap of papers nearest to him, before pulling out a parchment and putting it in front of him.

Dany tried to get a glimpse, but she was unable to make out any of the writing as stack of books was hindering her view.
“It concerns your future, Princess,” he added then, his voice heavier than expected. *Gods, no,* she thought and balled her fists.”The King found you a match.”

It felt like a slap to the face, though she expected it beforehand. *I am five and ten and a maid flowered.*

“Those are good news, my Lord,” Jon added, but she heard the dislike rumbling in his voice.”But why did you call me here?”

*Is it to taunt me,* she read in Jon’s features.

Lord Arryn sighed and stroked his beard, before lifting his gaze to regard Jon closely.

“I called you here because you are the young man in question,” he explained.

Dany didn’t know whether she wanted to laugh or weep, but when she saw Jon’s flabbergasted face she could only stifle a laugh that was threatening to spill from her lips.

“Are you jesting?” Jon asked, his eyes wide in disbelief.”I know I displeased the Queen by knocking the Crown Prince from his horse, but…,” he trailed off.

Lord Arryn sighed and handed Jon the folded parchment.

“I am not jesting,” Lord Arryn added quickly.”To make the match more eligible the King even asked your Lord father for you to be legitimized. As it turns out, your Lord father agrees and intends to make you a Lord.”

Jon went even paler. In that moment his face looked as if all blood had left his head.

She wanted to take his hand, but she wasn’t sure if it was appropriate.

*Lord Arryn seems to disapprove,* she guessed, which was no much of a surprise to her. He had hoped to wed her to Lord Hardyng and now the King destroyed all his plans.

“That can’t be true!” Jon insisted and moved closer to the table.”Lady Stark would never allow it.”

Lord Arryn leaned over and put his hand on Jon’s shoulder.

“I am just as surprised as you,” Jon Arryn replied, „But nobody likes to go against the word of the King, no matter how strong the grudge harbors for you, my boy.”

Jon leaned on the table and shook his head in disbelief.

“But why did the King do that?”

“That is a question you should direct at Princess Rhaenys. It was Princess who proposed the match to the King,” he explained.”Not that it matters. The King’s command remains: he wants you two to be wed and return to the North. You may ask the King yourself, but I think he would only take it as an insult if you did. Besides, you wanted to return to Winterfell…,” Jon Arryn added, but Jon cut him off.

“You don’t have to fret, my Lord. The won’t refuse the King’s command, but I am trying to make sense of this,” he stuttered.”You also said my father wants to make me a Lord?”

Lord Arryn jerked his head towards the letter in Jon’s hands.
“Your answer is in the letter, my boy.”

Jon nodded silently and unfurled the paper, before quickly reading over the letter.

A moment of heavy silence followed. Then he nearly stumbled against the table, before turning back to her and to Lord Arryn, a look of utter surprise showing on his face.

“It is true,” he stuttered. “He wants to make me Lord of Moat Cailin… I always knew that father wanted it rebuild, but he always lacked the gold… How is he going to pay for it?”

“You don’t have to worry about that. I am sure the dowry will be sufficient and you won a good amount of gold in the tourney, didn’t you?”

Jon ruffled his hand through his hair and exhaled deeply as if to calm himself.

“I did,” he confirmed, „I did.”

Then Lord Arryn shifted his attention to Dany, who had been observing everything in silence.

The way Jon Arryn was looking he probably expected her to be sad when she wanted to do nothing more than to laugh at the absurdity of the situation.

“I know it is not what you hoped for, Princess,” he began and leaned over to touch her folded hands, „but it is the King’s Command.”

Dany tried to appear as distraught as possible.

“Of course,” she said. “I would never question the King’s Command.”

…

Chapter End Notes

Either Jon or Rhaenys are next, but I think Jon is more likely.
They ventured out early to seek out Princess Rhaenys. Lord Arryn wants to leave as soon as possible, but neither Jon nor Daenerys could leave without speaking to her.

And while Jon is thankful for her help, there was something that irked him about the whole situation.

Was it just selflessness or was there another motive?

Sometimes when she thinks nobody is looking at her Jon saw the bitterness shining her eyes.

“As much as I am happy to see Winterfell, I am also a little sad that I won’t have the possibility to be one of Rhaenys’ ladies-in-waiting,” Daenerys whispered to him as they walked hand in hand towards Princess Rhaenys' residence.”Though I guess it is better that way, given that the Queen has been throwing glowering looks at me since you gave me the crown at the tourney.”

It is good that we are leaving this stinking city behind us, he thought but didn’t tell Daenerys his true thoughts. While she seems as happy as him he knew how much her niece meant to her, despite the short time they spent together.

Thus he smiled and squeezed her hand.

“The Queen will not be able to touch you in the North,” he explained and pulled her along.”Though the cold might be a bit disconcerting to you. It snows there all year.”

Her laughter was a soft caress to his ears.

“And I will finally meet your other siblings,” Daenerys explained.”I am excited to meet Arya. She sounds like a delightful child, but I am not sure if she will like me. I am a Targaryen after all. I am also worried about the reaction of the Northern Lords.”

“The Northern Lords are a stubborn lot, but my father will make sure that they keep their comments to themselves. Arya will be easy to win over. All you have to do is to go riding with her. Our stable Master always jested that Arya is half a horse, though he is not wrong. She was riding her pony before she was able to walk.”

Daenerys chuckled.

“What about your other siblings? Do you think they will like me?”

“Sansa always loved the tales about princesses and knights. She will flutter around you like a bee around a honey pot. Robb you have already met and Bran was a little boy when I left. He likes knights and wants to be one when he is grown-up. Just tell him about the Kingsguard and he will never leave your side.”

She nodded her head.

”I will keep that in mind.”

As expected they found Princess Rhaenys seated in her solar and surrounded by her ladies-in-
waiting. One girl was prettier than the one before and all of them were clad in fine dresses. Some were stitching, some were playing games and others were reading.

The only one Jon recognized among them was Lady Margaery who wore a flowery dress of yellow and orange. As the highest ranking lady among the girls she was seated next to the Princess who was playing on her harp.

Standing behind the Princess was a man of the Kingsguard. He was easily recognizable because of his golden locks and green eyes.

**Jaime Lannister**, Jon knew and dipped his head as he approached the Princess Rhaenys. In presence of all these strangers he couldn’t afford to be too cordial.

Lady Margaery was the first one to spot them and tapped on Princess Rhaenys’ shoulder to alarm her of their presence.

When Rhaenys spotted them she gave them each a smile.

“Princess Daenerys and Ser Jon,” she greeted them and dipped her head a little.”Your visit is a pleasant surprise.”

“It is,” Lady Margaery agreed and grinned, twirling her brown locks between her fingers.”And I heard congratulations are in order, though my brother was very disappointed when he heard that you are to return to the North. He so very much hoped to ride against you in the next tourney.”

“Sadly, my father is not the kind of man to host tourneys,” Jon answered and ruffled through his hair.”Mayhaps there will be another opportunity in the future.”

Margaery nodded her head, gaze flickering to Rhaenys.

“Lady Margaery speaks true. You are a good horseman. It would be a pity if you gave up the tilting,” the Princess added softly and put a crimson cloth over her harp.

Then she winked at Ser Jaime who immediately came to her side.

“Ser Jaime,” she said and her voice sounded almost kind.”My Aunt will depart tomorrow and I hope it will be no bother for you if we leave you for a while to speak in private. I am sure Lady Margaery is more than qualified to take care of the ladies during my absence.”

Whatever Ser Jaime thought about the matter didn’t show on his even-shaped face.

“Of course, Princess,” he said and smiled.

“I thank you, Ser Jaime,” she replied, before rising to her feet and jerking her head towards another door hidden behind a curtain.

“Please follow me,” she told them. The both of them followed after her like two obedient ducklings while the whispering and giggles of the girls echoed after them.

*Sansa would love it here*, Jon surmised after taking in this giggling flock of girls.

The Princess Rhaenys led them into another solar, which was smaller but filled with the smell of fresh flowers placed in every corner. There were a dozen of them, each different from the next.

The Princess Rhaenys smiled when she saw his curious look.
“Do you like it?” she asked. “My Uncle told me that my mother liked to grow flowers. The lilies over there were her favorites. They are good for perfume.”

“They are very beautiful,” Daenerys replied and kneeled down to admire the flowers. “I hope you can send me some of that perfume.”

“Of course,” Rhaenys replied and folded her hands in front of her. “But I doubt that is why you came here.”

“No,” Jon confirmed and exhaled deeply. “We came here to say our goodbyes and to thank you. I don’t understand how you did it, but we heard from Jon Arryn that you convinced the King.”

A happy smiled washed over Princess Rhaenys’ lips, but Jon couldn’t help but to notice he hint of sadness glinting in her eyes.

“It wasn’t as hard as you think. The fact that the King holds much liking for your father certainly helped,” she explained to them. “Though the main reason he allowed it is, because he hopes to prevent a future succession crisis. I know it sounds cruel to the ears, but the King thinks that by marrying you to the legitimized bastard of his loyal friend Eddard Stark your children will be less of a danger to mine and Joffrey’s heirs. Do you understand what I am trying to say?”

“That the King wants her to marry me to extinguish the Targaryen name,” Jon stated and felt a hint of bitterness for the King. He held no love for Mad King Aerys, but these two girls were mere children when the Rebellion took place and King Robert was not exactly the most dedicated King.

_Everyone but him would be a better King. Jon Arryn, my Father…_

Rhaenys nodded her head, her dark locks falling over her shoulder as she regarded Daenerys.

“I would understand if you think me cruel for acting like that…,” she began, but Daenerys bridged the distance and enclosed her niece in tight hug, before placing a kiss on her cheek.

“I don’t care what you said or did, I am just thankful for your help,” Daenerys said, her soft like feathers. “But it pains my heart to leave you here in this pit of vipers. I could be a comfort to you.”

Rhaenys returned the hug and gave Daenerys a tearful smile.

“You would be in danger here,” she told Daenerys. “You are comforting me by going North. I hope I will be able to come to the wedding.”

Dany laughed and brushed her tears away.

“I wouldn’t even mind if you brought that horrible Prince with you as long as I can have you there,” Daenerys told her and both girls started to laugh.

“Oh, no,” Rhaenys told her and inclined her head to look at Jon. “Joff would never go North. He hates the North now that Jon threw him from his horse. He calls it a godless land full of barbarians.”

“Well, I won’t shed a tear if he stays home,” Jon added.

Rhaenys laughed and moved closer, regarding him with a warm smile.

“Me either,” she told him and enclosed him in hesitate hug, before placing a gentle kiss to his cheek.
“Take care, Lord Snow,” she told him with a knowing smile. “We will see each other again. I promise.”

Jon didn’t know what to make of her word, but he hoped that this to be true.

Then he smiled and patted her shoulder.

…
Robb has grown. That was the first thing he noticed when he laid eyes on his brother. At Randa’s wedding he was a few inches shorter than Jon, but now the two of them reached nearly the same height.

“Let me take a good look at you, brother!” Robb remarked after he released Jon from his embrace.

Smiling Robb eyed him from head to toe as if to make sure that everything is still in place.

“Nothing has changed about you, brother,” Robb stated and smiled sincerely.

“I could say the same about you, brother,” Jon replied and inclined his head to get a glimpse at Robb’s bride.

Jon met Ysilla Royce at Randa’s wedding, but now was the first time he saw this close. Back then he was playing Lord Royce’s page boy and he doubted the Lady was even aware of his presence.

“I assume that is your brother,” she remarked and graced Jon with a smile that only helped to enhance her beauty. She was rather tall for a woman, but graced with a heart-shaped face and brown curly hair.

“It is a great pleasure to meet you, good Sir,” she added and dipped her head in greeting.”Robb told me much about you, but I can assure you that it were only good things.”

Jon lowered his head and granted her a polite smile.

“The pleasure is mine. Robb has been gushing about your beauty in his numerous letters to me.”

That earned him a dark look from Robb and made his brother's bride flush.

"Well, Robb is normally not that forward. It is good to know that he his honest with his brother," she replied shyly, before shifting her attention to Daenerys.

"It has been such a long time and I don’t recall when we last had an opportunity to speak, Princess Daenerys.”

“I think you were ten, my Lady,” Daenerys offered in return and smiled gently.”You had pigtails and one of your brothers cut them off. You were furious.”

Lady Ysilla's face lightened up like a room full of candles.

“That was Waymar’s work,” she replied as Robb helped her from her horse. She was dressed in a rich green dress and a pale-colored travelling cloak that got caught in the stirrup."He always liked playing pranks on me, but I paid him back. The next time he got horribly drunk I shaved off his hair. He looked ridiculous and refused to speak with me for weeks.”

Daenerys laughed, her purple eyes shining with amusement.

“I recall your brother,” she confirmed."He danced with me and was bragged that he killed a bear in the hunt."

“Aye, my dear brother was always a braggart,” Lady Ysilla remarked and joined Daenerys’ side. “It was my father who killed the bear while my brother was merely helping him. He tells this story to every girl he meets, but so far he hasn’t found himself a lady to name his own. No wonder he wants to run off to the Night’s Watch.”

“The Night’s Watch is always in need of men,” Robb added quietly and touched her shoulders. “A highborn knight like brother would make a worthy addition.”

Ysilla nodded her head and squeezed his hand, but from the expression on her face Jon deduced that she is not very thrilled about the idea. He himself once played with the thought to join the Night’s Watch, but back then he was a boy of ten and wanted to escape Lady Stark’s glowering looks.

“Tell that my mother and she will cut off your head, love,” Ysilla teased which earned her a smile. “She doesn’t approve Waymar’s decision and has yet to give her approval on the matter.”

“Her approval hardly matters, sweetling,” the grumbling voice of a man added. Judging by his tall stature and slate-grey eyes Jon recognized him as the famous Bronze Yohn. “Your brother is a man grown and can decide for himself.”

“Of course,” Lady Ysilla replied obediently while the Bronze Yohn shifted his attention to Jon.

“Your brother didn’t lie…you really look a lot like your father,” Lord Royce remarked. “I also heard you knocked Ser Harrold from his horse. I assume you got that talent from your father. Ned never held much love for jousting but he is an excellent rider. His brother Brandon was even better and his sister half a horse.”

That he mentioned late Uncle and Aunt surprised Jon. People usually avoid speaking about them.

“I thank you, my Lord,” he replied politely. “I had luck.”

Surprisingly this answer coaxed a smile from the grim man.

“You are truly Ned’s boy…humble to the boots,” he added and moved on to greet Ser Albar. “It is good to see you hale, though I am a bit disappointed to find my cousin absent. May I ask where he is?”

“My father joined Lord Arryn up in the Eyrie,” Ser Albar explained. “I apologize, but you will have to contend with my presence. My wife and Randa were busy preparing for your arrival. I hope all will be to your satisfaction.”

“Don’t fret about it, my boy,” Yohn Royce grumbled. “If my cousin is up in the Eyrie it will be important business that calls him there. I will pay him a visit once I brought my sweet Ysilla to Winterfell.”

“I am sure my father will be pleased to hear that,” Ser Albar replied and led them inside.

Jon was not surprised when they found the tables prepared. People may call Lady Marissa Royce plain and quiet, but when it came to the Gates of The Moon she long ago usurped Randa Royce’s former position. She knew every servant by name and when something was amiss she dealt with it as efficiently as Lord Royce.

The evening passed quickly and soon the cakes were served. By then the Bronze Yohn had long
left in company of Ser Albar and Lady Marissa Royce. Lady Ysilla, Daenerys and Randa left soon after, giggling and slightly tipsy from the served wine.

It was then that Robb’s smile faded and a more serious expression took hold of his face.

“Forgive me, but I have to ask…What did you do that the King betrothed you to a Targaryen Princess?”

Jon took a sip from his wine to wash away the sick feeling settling in his stomach.

“I did nothing,” Jon replied vaguely. Jon had no idea what Princess Rhaenys did to convince the King, but he doubted she would want him to tell his brother about her involvement. “I won the tourney through sheer luck and then I crowned Daenerys. The King probably thought it appropriate…he doesn’t appear to be the most sober kind of man. Maybe the wine is showing its effect on his judgment.”

Robb nearly choked on his wine when he heard that.

“Jon,” he coughed and pounded his chest.”To hear you speak in such a manner…,” he continued, but his voice failed him again.

“…about the King,” Jon ended for him patted his brother's shoulder in a soothing gesture.”If you knew the King personally you would think the same way. His Kingship changed him. The Lannisters rule in King’s Landing and not the King.”

“The Lannisters?” Robb asked and wrinkled his brows in disbelief.”But Jon Arryn is Hand of the King.”

“He is,” Jon whispered.” but that doesn’t change the truth. The Queen’s family rules the Seven Kingdoms. The tourney proved that.”

“The tourney?” Robb asked.

“Aye,” Jon confirmed.”In fact I owe my victory to the Queen’s foolish plot.”

“Tell me more,” Robb added and nodded his head as if to indicate for Jon to continue with his explanation.

“The Crown Prince was only able to win against Ser Loras Tyrell because the Queen poisoned him. Well, in the end I knocked him from his horse.”

“I admit…I would have loved to see that,” Robb replied honestly.”But it also surprises me that the Queen would dare to endanger the son of someone as powerful as Mace Tyrell. What did Lord Tyrell do about this matter?”

“Nothing,” Jon replied and received another look of disbelief.

“That is indeed worrying,” Robb remarked and brushed through his hair.”I don’t mean to insult you, but the whole matter with the King confuses me. Even Mother and Father are behaving strangely these days.”

"In what way?” Jon asked, trying to sound indifferent.

“Mother was furious after reading the King's letter, but then she suddenly changed her mind,” Robb explained hesitantly.”I don’t know what father told her, but it changed her greatly.
Recently she even allowed Arya to start training with the bow."

"Gods, be good!" Jon exclaimed."That can't be true."

"You are not the only one to remark upon her strange behavior," Robb added and frowned."Maester Luwin asked her if she is in need of his help."

"He dared to ask her that?" Jon asked.

"He dared," Robb confirmed.

"And what was her answer?"

"I don't know."

"And father?" Jon asked."What does he think about all this?"

Robb huffed and shrugged his shoulders.

"I have no idea, but shortly after the incident father traveled to the Neck. I first thought he wants to inspect Moat Cailin, but Ser Roderik told me he went to visit his old friend...Howland Reed, the Lord of Greywater Watch."

"Well, I think we will know more once we are home," Jon replied.

"I hope so," Robb agreed."I hope so."

...
Cold and deary. That is how Daenerys would describe the North if someone asked her opinion on the matter, but she knew so much before coming here. Jon told her much about the North and about the people living there, but seeing it with her own eyes was a different matter.

And while she missed the green meadows and the soft sunshine of the Vale there was a strange beauty to the barrenness of this land. Whenever she looked at the sky it appeared endless and promised freedom.

Yet it was the snow that fascinated her the most. During the last winter Daenerys was still a small child and the only snow she has ever seen was on the top of the Giant’s Lance, a place far from her reach.

The North was full of it even if the snowfall was always accompanied by sharp winds that left her shivering. Lady Ysilla Royce seemed to share her pain, though the Lady never complained.

Only Robb and Jon were unaffected by the cold. They ran around in plain cloaks as if it was still spring.

“We will soon arrive in Wintertown,” Robb informed her and Ysilla Royce, an amused smile crossing over his lips.

“That is good to hear,” Lady Ysilla replied, her laughter muffled by the shawl wrapped around her head. “My fingers are getting numb. How are you able to endure it, my Lord?”

Robb grinned and jerked his head towards Jon.

“We are born and bred in the cold. That is why we most Northmen think of the south as a land of sighs and sunshine.”

“Don’t listen to my brother’s bragging,” Jon added and gave each of them an assuring smile. “The North is cold, but Winterfell is pleasantly warm. The castle was built on hot springs.”

Thank the gods, Dany thought but didn’t voice her opinion. She didn’t want to make the impression of a whimpering maid, but the cold was beginning to get to her.

After another hour of travel they finally reached the promised town located outside of Winterfell. It was a small village consisting of neat houses built on log and undressed stones.

The smallfolk greeted Robb as they passed, the banner of House Stark fluttering above them.

A group of whooping children followed them along the way, throwing snowballs at he back of the column of riders.

Even from the distance Dany was able to hear the Bronze Yohn’s grumbling.

“Father,” Robb was the first one to greet the man standing at the head of a group of people awaiting them in the courtyard. “Forgive the delay, but the constant storms lengthened our travel.”
Said man was not very imposing in stature, but the there was coldness in his grey eyes that was reminiscent of ice. Ice that instantly melted when he laid eyes on Robb.

“We expected that,” Eddard Stark explained with a smile and hugged Robb, before shifting his attention to Jon.

He didn’t hug Jon, but smiled at him.

“My you have grown,” he remarked.”I scarcely recognize you, my boy.”

“Then you are blind!” piped a young girl that was soon hanging around Jon’s neck like a monkey around a tree.”Jon looks still the same!”

“Arya!” Jon exclaimed, a smile of pure happiness washing over his long face.”Oh, how I have missed you, little sister!”

Then he ruffled through her already untidy hair and placed her back on the ground.

“I am not little,” she complained and crossed her arms before her.”I am big enough.”

“That you are,” Jon confirmed while Robb beckoned them to step forward, though it was the Bronze Yohn who made use of the moment to greet Lord Stark.

“It is good to see you hale, Ned,” the Lord from the Vale grumbled and patted Lord Stark’s hands between his own.

“It seems time was kind to you as well, my Lord Royce,” Lord Stark replied and returned the man's gesture.

“How can I not be graced when I have a lovely daughter like my Ysilla,” Lord Royce added and winked at Lady Ysilla.

“It is a great pleasure to meet you, my Lord,” the Lady greeted and dropped a perfect curtsy.

“The pleasure is mine,” Lord Stark replied and kissed her hand, before shifting his attention to Dany, who felt strangely lost among these happy reunions.

Jon seemed to sense her peril and helped her along.

“Father…may I introduce Princess Daenerys…,” he began, but Lord Stark cut him off.

“…Targaryen,” Lord Stark ended for him and gave her an encouraging smile.”I have heard much about you from Lord Arryn.”

“So did I,” she replied clumsily as she tried to free herself from the shawl still wrapped around her head. She probably looked ridiculous which was confirmed to her when she heard Arya's giggle.

Gathering her wits she dropped a curtsy.

“I mean…I am pleased to meet you, my Lord,” she added and even managed to smile, despite the anxious feeling inside. Eddard Stark didn’t frighten her like King Robert and his Queen, but she didn’t know how to address a man that lost two of his family members to her father’s madness.

“I am also pleased to meet you, Princess,” he replied at last and placed a kiss on her hand.”I didn’t intend to frighten you with my remark. Lord Arryn only told me kind things about you.”
His words made her flush in embarrassment.

“I assure you…I am not frightened,” she replied and straightened herself.”I am just cold…In fact we are all frozen to the bones.”

Lord Stark laughed.

“You are quite right;” he agreed and patted Robb’s shoulder.”I have been neglecting my duties as a host. The warm hearth and food is awaiting us. My wife has been awaiting your arrival for days.”

This earned Lord Stark calls of approval from Lord Royce, Lady Ysilla and the rest of their travelling companions. Only Jon grew tense when he heard Lady Stark’s name. It was as if someone put a spell on him.

“What is wrong?” Arya asked him immediately and pulled on his cloak.

“Nothing…now come along,” he replied and pulled her along towards Dany.”Meet Daenerys. I have been reading all your letters to her. She finds them quite amusing.”

“You are pretty Princess,” Arya remarked after eyeing her closely.”Sansa will like that. She likes everything that is pretty. Bran will think you pretty too, but he will never admit it. He says he doesn’t like girls, but I know he is a liar. He was flushing like a fool when he met Lord Howland Reed’s daughter. Rickon will like you as long as you give him plenty of cake.”

She understood now why Jon loves Arya so much. The girl in front of her had something that many people lacked. Disarming honesty.

“That is good to hear,” Dany replied.”I will heed your advice, but I also came here to meet you. Jon says you are half a horse…well in the Vale they say the same about me.”

Surprise showed on Arya’s face.

“We will see about that,” the Arya replied then and gave Dany a challenging look.”When Jon left I was half a baby. I have improved. Nobody in Winterfell can catch me, not even Bran.”

Jon laughed.

“Speaking of Bran and Sansa,” Jon added.”Where are they?”

“Sick. They caught a fever and mother keeps them locked up in their chambers. She is afraid that Rickon will also get sick.”

“Oh, that sounds unpleasant,” Dany remarked while Arya shrugged her shoulders.

“Sansa seems happy to occupy herself with her needlework, but Bran hates it. He is eager to meet you. I told him about your visit to the dragon skulls and he wants to hear everything about it. I hope mother will allow a visit.”

At the mention of Lady Stark Jon’s smile faded.

“I see,” Jon said and cleared his throat.”And Theon?”

“Last I saw him he was running around with one of the servant maids,” Arya explained, a knowing smile showing on his lips.”You know what that means.”

Jon grimaced.
“I know what that means,” Jon confirmed and offered his gloved hand to Dany. Now let us go inside and get warm and after supper we will pay a visit to Bran and Sansa.”

Arya huffed and they followed after the others.

A small feast was held for them that day. The meal was heavenly and consisted of fresh-baked bread and honeyed chicken accompanied by roasted onions and vegetables.

As expected Arya kept them entertained while Lord Stark and Lord Royce were reminiscing about their time in the Vale. Later a certain Lord Reed joined them in company of his daughter, though Dany took her for a child when she first laid eyes on her. Luckily, the girl didn’t seem to mind Dany’s curious look and was soon regaling them with tales about her home. Even Lady Ysilla listened with rapt attention when the girl explained to them how to use a frogspear.

Thus the evening passed quickly, but they saw nothing of Lady Stark.

Dany knew her only from Jon’s stories and expected someone like Lady Lysa, but when Dany finally got a glimpse on her she was pleasantly surprised.

Lady Stark had little of her unhinged sister. She was quite beautiful for a Lady her age and the way she hugged Robb told her that she held nothing but affection for her children.

*For her children, but not for Jon,* Dany recalled when she saw Jon’s tense expression.

Then when the Lady turned to look at Jon, he automatically averted his gaze as if just looking at her brought him pain.

Yet when Dany turned to look at the Lady she found no hostility in her bearing...only fear.

…

Chapter End Notes

Sansa and Bran will appear next chapter. Ned will have his talk with Jon next chapter as well.
“Jon!” a youthful voice exclaimed and a moment later a young boy was hanging around Jon’s neck. This one was around Arya’s age and showed a great resemblance to Robb Stark. They shared the same full face, auburn hair and blue summer eyes.

“Bran,” Jon said, a smile blooming on his lips as he regarded his little brother.”You are so heavy. When I left Winterfell I was still able to carry you with one hand.”

“I am nearly ten,” the boy replied, a proud smile curling on his lips.”I am nearly a man grown.”

“That you are,” Jon confirmed and placed his little brother back on the bed. Then Jon turned look at the girl seated at the hearth.

She was maybe one or two years younger than Dany and showed a great resemblance to Lady Stark. They shared the same fine-featured face, auburn hair and blue eyes. Sansa.

“Your visit is a lovely surprise, brother,” the girl replied in a polite manner and put her needlework away, before making her way over to Jon.

Then she placed a kiss on Jon’s cheek before shifting her attention back to Dany. The girl dropped a perfect curtsy that even her niece Princess Rhaenys was unable to rival."And it is a great pleasure to meet you too, Princess Daenerys, though I wish I was a bit more presentable."

Dany didn't know what to answer. In the Vale hardly anyone treated her like a Princess. To them she was only a hostage.

"Nobody cares if you look presentable," Arya quipped and earned herself an annoyed look from her sister."We are not at court."

“No we are not,” Sansa snapped back as quickly as a whip.”At court know their manners…unlike you.”

Arya rolled her eyes at that and was about to throw another comment at her sister when Dany finally found the words she was searching for.

“Don't fret about it, my Lady,” Dany assured her and smiled at Sansa.”You don’t need to look proper for me, especially if you are sick.”

The gentle smile showing on the other girl’s lips told her that he appreciated her comment.

“Now that we got that out of the way,” Bran added quickly and gave Jon an excited look."Why don’t you tell us about the Vale? Robb told us that you killed a hundred men when you ventured out to save Lady Belmore.”

Honest as ever Jon destroyed his little brother's illusions.

“A handful maybe, but not more than that,” Jon explained and settled next down on the bed next to Bran.”Robb embellished that tale quite a bit."
Sansa was also quick to offer a seat to Dany next to the crackling fire.

“But you won the tourney, didn’t you?” Bran asked.

“He did,” Dany provided quickly, before Jon was able to answer and dim his accomplishment.”He won against the likes of Harrold Hardgyn and Ser Ronald Waynwood, both of them excellent riders by my estimation.”

“And the Crown Prince,” Lady Sansa added with the sigh.”I heard he is very handsome and gallant. You are very lucky that you won against him, Jon.”

“He is pretty indeed,” Dany confirmed hesitatingly.”But he only got to partake in the finals because he is the Crown Prince. He is also a bad loser. He didn’t even attend the final feast because he was glowering over his loss.”

Sansa looked as if Dany just took her prettiest dream and tore it into pieces.

“That can’t be true,” Sansa said disbelievingly.”But he is the heir and…,” she continued, but Arya cut her off.

“…and can still be a spoiled brat. Theon is the heir to the Iron Islands and can be quite a brat. Why should this Prince Joffrey be different?”

“Theon at least knows how to hold his own,” Jon told Sansa.”The Crown Prince only got to partake in the finals because his mother the Queen bribed half the competitors and punched Ser Loras’ wine. That is why I don’t regret knocking him from his horse. He deserved every bruise he got.”

Sansa’s eyes widened in shock and she clutched her chest.

”Ser Loras…as in Ser Loras Tyrell?”

“Aye,” Dany confirmed, though she was surprised Sansa knew him.”Have you made his acquaintance?”

Sansa flushed and lowered her gaze to her folded hands.

“Oh, no…I never had the honor,” Sansa explained.”But even here in the North we have heard about the Knight of Flowers. Is he really as pretty as they say?”

“Very pretty,” Jon replied in a joking manner.”Even prettier than his sister Lady Margaery. The maids swoon when they see his flower cloak from afar.”

“A flower cloak? Are you serious?” Arya asked and Jon grinned. To see him smile like that warmed her heart. He has been so gloomy since leaving the Vale.

“It is true,” Jon confirmed to Arya.”But the reason he wears that cloak can be called admirable. His is wearing the cloak to please his Lady mother. Joking aside…Ser Loras is a decent person. You have good reasons to admire him, Sansa.”

“Oh, I do,” Sansa admitted and flushed again.”Though I doubt I will ever have a chance to meet him.”

Dany was torn between laughing and telling her that Ser Loras is not that interested in girls. Dany herself didn’t believe it when Arianne Martell told her, but when Rhaenys confirmed it to her later she had no doubts left. Renly Baratheon and Loras Tyrell are lovers.
Not that she judged them for it. The Faith of the Seven may frown upon it, but her own mother and father were brother and sister.

“Ser Loras is very admired, but he already has someone who owes his heart,” Dany remarked vaguely. “But I heard he has an older brother…Ser Garlan who is still unwed…they call him Garlan the Gallant.”

“Gallant?” Sansa asked. “That sounds really knightly.”

“Knightly or not,” Bran added and seemed utterly bored by the topic. “Why don’t you tell us about the dragon skulls? Arya told me you saw them.”

“We did…we saw Balerion the Dread, the dragon Vhagar and many more. Sadly, we found no eggs, but my niece has two of them. She will come here for my wedding. I am sure she would be happy to tell you more about them if you are interested, my young Lord.”

“Bran is enough. My brother Robb will be the Lord and I will be a knight,” Bran corrected her and gave Jon a hopeful look. “Even mother says I am old enough to become a page. I could be yours, Jon.”

Jon shook his head and patted Jon's shoulder.

“You will the page to someone of higher status. Someone like the Blackfish or your Uncle Edmure,” Jon explained. “Have a little patience.”

Bran seemed to disagree and was about to protest when the door opened and Robb stepped inside.

“I apologize for the interruption,” Robb apologized and his gaze sweeping across the room. “But father asked me to get you, brother…and your Lady if it is no bother for her?”

Dany was surprised by this turn of events but she was a guest in these halls and had no intention to be a bother.

“Of course not,” she replied and smiled. “It is no bother.”

When Robb led them into the Great Hall they found Lord Stark, Lady Stark, Lord Howland Reed seated around the hearth. Especially, Lord Stark and Howland Reed looked very serious. Their whole demeanor was a far cry from their merry laughter only hours ago during the feast.

Gods be good, she wondered and found Jon equally tense. Even Robb's demeanor promised a difficult talk. Why are they looking as if they are about to attend a funeral?

“Father,” Jon said, his voice heavy. “You called for us?”

“I did,” Eddard Stark confirmed and nodded his head towards the two empty chairs placed next to the hearth. “There are things we need to talk about. Things I should have told you a long time ago.”

“I don’t understand,” Jon said and paled visibly. “What do you mean?”

Lord Stark exhaled deeply and exchanged a look with Lord Howland Reed.

“It is about your mother,” Howland Reed replied. “It is time you to hear the truth.”

“The truth?” Jon asked, his voice heavy with emotion.
“The truth,” Lord Stark confirmed and rose to his feet to get the flagon of wine placed at a nearby table. Then he filled the prepared goblets to the brim and handed each of them to the assembled people.

“Drink up,” he told Jon at last. “Believe me it will help.”

*How terrible can this truth be*, Dany wondered and took a hesitant sip from her goblet.

“How terrible can this truth be,” Jon asked and quickly inclined his head to look at Lord Stark. “All this secrecy is making me nervous, Father.”

Lord Stark exhaled deeply and shifted his attention back to Lord Reed.

“Lord Reed knew your mother. That is why I called him here, but we should start at the beginning. The Tourney of Harrenhall…”

“Howland to speak. I am sure you will be able to understand once you heard the story.”

“As you say, father,” Jon replied, his dark eyes flickering from Lord Stark to Lord Reed.

Lord Reed then cleared his throat and started to speak.

“There was a group of squires who attacked me before the tilt and it was Lady Lyanna Stark who saved me and invited me to sit at her father’s table that day. That is how I met Eddard, your Uncle Brandon, Uncle Benjen and Robert Baratheon. It should have been enough to ease my humiliation, but Lady Lyanna decided to help me win back my honor. To achieve this feat the Lady took the role of the Knight of the Laughing Tree. Her mummery was successful, but it also brought her an unexpected enemy…,” Lord Howland Reed explained, but paused when his eyes fell on Dany.

“Enemy?” Dany asked and didn’t even recognize that she stopped breathing.

“That Mad King,” Howland Reed explained at last. “He sent your brother Prince Rhaegar to find this mysterious knight…,” Lord Howland trailed off.

“…and a year later he found and raped her,” Robb finished, who has been silent throughout the whole conversation. “We know all that, but I still don’t understand what all of this has to do with Jon’s mother.”

“Let them speak, Robb,” Lady Stark told her son. “Let them speak.”

His mother’s words was enough to silence Robb and Lord Stark used the moment to continued.

“That is what we all believed…especially after Prince Rhaegar crowned my sister his Queen of Love and Beauty,” Eddard Stark explained, his eyes shining with tears. “We all thought Prince Rhaegar abducted her, but once the bloodshed was done we found out the bitter truth. She left out of her own free will. They loved each other.”

Dany shuddered and felt as if someone cast her into a pool of icy water.
All the bloodshed was for nothing...

Brandon Stark and Rickard Stark butchered by the hands of her Mad Father. Poor Princess Elia raped and murdered by the hands of the Mountain. Poor Prince Aegon smashed to pieces like nothing...

It was all a lie.

“Loved each other?” Jon stuttered, his grey eyes wide in shock.”Why? Why did you hide the truth?”

“Because Robert would have never accepted the truth,” Lord Stark explained.”It was the only way after…,” he continued, his voice faltering under the heavy burden of this bitter truth.

“After your mother died,” Lady Catelyn ended for Lord Stark, her voice hushed and barely above a whisper.”Don’t you see? Lady Lyanna is your mother.”

Of course, Dany thought all the pieces falling into place. That is why Eddard Stark made such a secret out of it. That is why he named Jon his bastard. That is why he hid his mother’s name. It made all sense now, but it didn’t make the truth less frightening.

Dany didn’t know what to feel or to think. There were too many emotions whirling inside her to place them properly. There was relief, happiness and a certain amount of bitterness at her brother Rhaegar.

Rhaegar should have known better, she thought and forced herself look at Jon, who looked like frozen to his chair. But if he hadn’t acted like he did Jon wouldn’t be sitting before me.

Fate is a wicked thing.

Then she inclined her head to regard the other people in the room. Lord Eddard Stark was utterly silent, his Lady wife affectionately smoothing her hand over his shoulder. Robb looked speechless and Jon was deadly silent as if someone robbed him off the ability to speak.

The only sound was the crackling of the logs Lord Stark had placed into the hearth only moments ago.

“Jon,” Robb called out to Jon, but looked utterly helpless. Dany felt even more helpless.

What could she say? What could she do to make it better?

“Then Rhaegar Targaryen is my father,” Jon said and flashed Lord Stark a terrifying look. She had never seen him this angry."All is a lie then. You allowed me to believe a lie. How long would you have continued with this mummery?"

Lord Stark’s whole bearing could only be described as painful.

“As long as necessary,” Lord Stark replied and Dany believed him. This was a man who gave up his own honor to protect his sister’s son. This was a man who didn’t owe anything to her family. She understood Jon’s anger, but she also understood Eddard Stark. Prince Aegon's skull was shattered in to pieces."As long as necessary."

Strangely, Lord Stark's words made Jon laugh. It was a laugh filled with bitterness and anger.

“You allowed me to believe that my mother never loved me!” Jon choked out.”You allowed me to
believe that I am the sole stain on your white vest!” he continued even louder, almost shouting. His
dark gaze fixed at Lord Stark was piercing like a sharp blade.

”Do you know how guilty I felt? And now it was all based on a lie…I can’t…,” he stuttered and
rose to his feet, but Dany grabbed his arm before he was able to burst away.

Running away was not the right thing to do. At least not now.

“Jon,” she whispered softly and pulled on his arm.”I don’t think Lord Stark is finished.

“The Princess is right,” Lord Stark admitted, his voice brimming with emotions.”There is more.
When we found your mother in Dorne the Kingsguard was there. We were able to defeat them…
they were not there to protect Prince Rhaegar’s mistress, but his wife and heir.”

“Then he married her?” Robb asked.”But he was wed to…,”

“To Princess Elia,” Jon added defiantly.”How is that even possible?”

“He made Lya his second wife,” Lord Eddard explained.”That is what Lya told us when we found
her dying in the tower.”

“The word of my dead mother means nothing,” Jon countered stubbornly.”Most people would still
consider me a bastard…a Targaryen bastard. All these people died for me…for nothing.”

“There is no reason for you to feel guilty, my boy,” Lord Reed argued.”The realm was on the brink
of Rebellion before the Mad King murdered Brandon Stark and Rickard Stark. Blood would have
been spilled either way. There were even rumors that Prince Rhaegar intended to remove his father
from power.”

“Howland speaks true,” Lord Stark agreed and leaned to touch Jon’s arm.”What happened wasn’t
your fault. I only wanted to protect you, but I see now that it was wrong from me to withhold the
truth from you. You deserved to know and I held it back out of fear.”

Jon disagreed vehemently and pushed his hand away, Angry tears were shining in his eyes.

“Now I wished you never told me,” Jon replied weakly and freed himself from Dany’s grip. “I have
no need of your pity.”

Dany wanted to go after him, but Robb held her back.

“When my brother is angry like that it is better to leave him be,” Robb explained.”He might say
things that are discourteous to your ears.”

“I am no weeping maid,” she insisted, but Robb pulled on her arm and made her sit back down in
her chair.

Then threw an accusing look at Lord Stark and Lady Stark.

“Why now?

“Because you are the heir to Winterfell,” Lady Stark explained.”Your father won’t live forever and
if Jon continues to reside in the North you need to be aware of the danger. That is why I asked of
your father to make the truth known to you and Jon.”

His mother's words changed Robb’s face into a grimace of anger.
“Danger?” he asked. “Jon is no danger to me. He is my brother no matter who fathered him. Do you honestly think he is stupid enough to proclaim that he is Rhaegar Targaryen’s son?”

Lady Stark paled, obviously shocked by Robb’s harsh tone.

“No, but it is still better if he is aware of the danger.”

“Your mother is right,” Dany told Robb and brushed his hand away. Then she rose to her feet and made her way to Lord Stark. “Jon may be angry, but it is better to know the truth than to continue living with a lie.”

Then she gave Lord Stark a warm smile.

“You do not need to be afraid, my Lord. I harbor no ambitions for the crown. My niece Rhaenys will be Queen and her son will rule after her even if he carries the Baratheon name. I can accept that. Nobody will know the truth. I swear it.”

Then she knelt down and grasped Lord Stark’s hand between her own.

“It might not mean much to you, my Lord, but I am thankful for what you did,” she told him and meant it. “I understand the intention behind your lie. You protected Jon when you did not have any reason to do so.”

Lord Stark remained silent, but she had no need for an answer. She only rose to her feet and went to search for Jon.

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Chapter End Notes

The next POV will be Jon. In regards to the wedding: Robb's wedding will be first and quite soon. Lord Royce specifically went North to pay witness to it. Rhaenys will join soon and attend both weddings. Obviously, Jon's will be simpler since he is Ned's natural son and not the heir. Moat Cailin is still a ruin and so they will stay a while longer in Winterfell.
The weirwood tree with its crimson leaves stood out against the fresh-fallen snow like a sore wound. Made of bone and wood, as the Northern people like to say the weirwood trees stand vigil to the coming and goings of lords and kings alike. Some people might find this place eerie, but Jon found the whispering of the wind comforting as like the soft song of a lullaby. Whenever Lady Stark was displeased with him or Theon bothered him he used to come here to hide away from the world.

Back then he was a Northern bastard, but he still belonged here. Now he belonged nowhere. Neither to the South nor the North. He was a strange sort of mongrel. A dragon and a wolf. A bastard and a prince.

All of this was utterly ridiculous, but the worst was the sting of betrayal. Lord Stark allowed him to suffer to conceal his lie. It wasn’t that Jon didn’t understand the sacrifice Lord Stark made on his account, but he didn’t even bother to tell him about his mother’s death. Instead he allowed him to hope and dream that she could come back to him one day. That she is still alive and living her life somewhere far away from him…

Now even this hope was taken from him. His true father was a man who left his family to run off with his mother and threw the realm into bloody turmoil. No, he had no mother, only a stone statue to fill the hole she left.

He didn’t know why, but the anger inside made him want to tear someone apart. It was like the pulsing of a fire, raging unchecked and untethered, unable to find an outlet. For a moment he wished for Theon to call him “bastard” for old times’ sake only to find an outlet for the rage inside him.

No, that thought was unworthy of him. Theon was an ass, but he didn’t deserve his rage. He had nothing to do with all of this.

Jon huffed and pulled his cloak back around his shoulders. The silver wolf brooch Robb gifted him when he was made a knight had slipped out of place.

“Another lie,” he thought, bitterness leaking into his heart like a poison. No, Robb meant well. He was also fooled. As was Lady Stark and all the others.

I have no brothers and sisters, only cousins. His half-brother was killed, his skull dashed into pieces as if he was a toy. His half-sister Rhaenys yet lives, but it felt foreign to think of her like that. It was only now in the silence of the godswood that the blunt of force of reality hit him.

The girl who threatened to take his head on their first meeting was his sister. The girl who fooled the King was his sister. A sister who will surely hate him if she ever finds out the truth.

And how could she not?

Her mother was raped and murdered, because my father left her…because he fell for my mother and forgot about his duty.
When Jon left Winterfell for the Vale he hoped to leave his guilt behind him. Back then he believed being the sole stain on honorable Lord Stark’s vest was the worst that could happen to him, but now all of it was much worse.

_I am a danger to them, he knew._

“Jon,” he heard a soft voice coaxing him out of his dark state of mind. It was now that he realized how cold it was. The icy wind made his skin burn and his gloved fingers felt numb.

“Do you want to freeze to death?” Daenerys asked and put her cloak over his shoulders. He didn’t even bother to put on something warmer when he stormed out. He needed to get away. Even now he wasn’t sure if he will ever be able to look into their faces.

“No,” he told her, his voice weak against the howling wind, whirling fresh snowflakes into he air.

Daenerys was now kneeling next to him under the tree, her hair untidy and mess from the strong wind.

“Doesn’t look like that to me,” she said and grasped his arm, but he instinctively pulled away. He needed space, from everyone. It was then that he realized that she is his Aunt.

First Rhaenys and now Daenerys. One is his sister and the other his Aunt. An Aunt that is nearly a year younger than him. All of it sounded absurd, but it is the truth.

She looked hurt by his behavior, but it didn’t show in her demeanor. Her voice remained soft as ever and for a brief moment the guilt helped to blind out the anger raging inside him.

“I understand that you are grieving…,” she began, but he couldn’t help but to cut her off.”I am not grieving. I am angry…I cannot even describe the anger I feel.”

Daenery cocked her head to regard him with wide purple eyes.


“All of them. I feel like an utter fool…and Lord Stark would have continued…,” he tried to explain, tears welling in his eyes, but he brushed them away as quickly as they came.

“I see,” Daenerys added gently.”And you are rightly angry, but try to see it from Lord Stark's perspective. He just lost his father, brother and then his sister. Imagine how terribly afraid he must have been and yet he kept you and protected you. He had no reason to do that and a weaker man would have gladly handed you to King Robert to advance his status, but Lord Stark made even his wife believe…,” she continued, but the anger inside him compelled him to interrupt her again.

“…that I am his bastard. He fooled her as he fooled me. If she found out it was only recently. That would at least explain her sudden change of behavior. She feels guilty. If Lord Stark had told…,”

He tried to find the words, but they got lost.

“…her she might have come to care for you. I cannot speak for Lord Stark, but a woman who treats her husband’s bastard with kindness is as likely as a snowstorm in Dorne. People would have started asking questions. I understand why he didn’t tell Lady Stark.”

“I know that, but it was still cruel of him,” Jon insisted defiantly, not wanting to hear the truth.

“Aye,” she confirmed.”It was cruel to him, but I am sure he had the best intentions. What he did was done out of love.”
“Maybe,” he granted her and gritted his teeth. The fact that she agreed with Lord Stark's actions made fresh anger well up inside him.”But that doesn’t mean I can forget the pain he brought me.”

“I doubt Lord Stark expects that…,” she protested and he rose to his feet, not wanting to hear more excuses.

“I don’t care what he expects!” he flung back, rage boiling inside his gut.”Why should I care what he wants? Has he asked me what I want? Has anyone ever asked what I want?”

Daenerys looked at him in contemplative silence as he desperately tried to regain his composure.

“What do you want?” she asked him then, her full lips suddenly too inviting to resist. Without thinking he quickly touched his hands to her shoulders and pulled her into a kiss.

Her burning touch on his lips broke the stillness. He kisses her quick and hard, almost hungrily. She is not much different, feasting on his lips, hands sinking into his hair and twisting, urging him closer as if there isn’t already room between them.

“Jon,” she gasped her breath warm against his cheeks.”Not here…it is freezing out here…,”

He unwillingly pulled away, his breathing fast and the cold wind biting into his skin.

“Isn’t that what Targaryens are supposed to do?” he replied in a rasping voice, attempting to make a joke. At least something positive should come of all this madness.

She laughed and brushed his hair out of his face.

“Was that a joke?” she asked in a teasing manner. Her cheeks were flushed, but he doubted it was from the cold.”Are you sick?”

He couldn’t help but to laugh, even though the anger was still there inside him.”Not sick, just tired. I don’t want to go back and speak with Lord Stark or anyone else. They will ask questions.”

She sighed and nodded her head.

“I doubt Lord Stark expects you to accept all of this in a matter of a day. Take your time and then go and speak with him. He seems a very patient man to me.”

He exhaled deeply and nodded his head in confirmation.

“Aye, I will speak to him.”

…

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will either be Ned's or Jon's POV. In regards to Jon not being suspicious of Rhaenys' past behavior...He thinks Rhaenys was kind to him because Daenerys is fond of him. Rheanys' chapter will appear after the next chapter.
Jon

Jon parried Theon’s blow quickly. Right and left, up and down the blades met like in a dance, bringing forth the familiar clinking of steel. Theon has improved, but Jon was still quicker than the heir of the Iron Islands. He saw the next blow coming and parried it quickly, before stepping backwards and aiming at Theon’s left side.

Theon was barely able to meet the next blow and stumbled backwards. At the last moment he regained his footing, but it was already too late. Jon was much quicker and sent Theon stumbling to the ground.

“Do you yield?” Jon asked and waved his blade before his face.

“Put that blade away, Snow,” Theon grumbled, hidden anger ringing in his voice as he brushed his sweaty dark hair out of his face.”I yield and now brush that smug smile from your lips. Tomorrow I will win. That was pure luck.”

“That wasn’t luck,” Jon replied teasingly.”I was just quicker than you.”

“Maybe,” Theon granted him.”It seems the South didn’t turn you into a weeping maid. Good for you.”

“And it seems you learned humility, Greyjoy,” Jon replied.”I didn’t think you had it in you.”

“And I didn’t think you had it in you to get yourself a woman,” Theon retorted mockingly and jerked his head towards the girls leading their horses the stables. There were Lady Ysilla, Daenerys, Sansa and Arya seated on their horses, laughing about something Arya was telling them.”I didn’t think you had it in you. I remember that you ran off like a little girl when I took you and Robb to see the naked girls. Will you do the same when you wed her? I truly pity the girl.”

Theon's boys made him boil with anger.

“At least I have a girl that is no whore,” Jon snapped back, which earned him a scowl.

“Well, the whores have never complained about me,” Theon was quick to answer.”At least…,” he obviously wanted to add, but then Robb decided to intervene.

“I think that is enough, Theon,” Robb warned from the sidelines.”Jon defeated you fair and square.”

“Spare me your scolding, Stark,” Theon replied and brushed the mud from his breeches.”I was just teasing Lord Snow. It seems Jon is still prone to his usual hussy fits.”

“Ser Jon!” Jon corrected him coldly.

“Ser or not,” Theon threw back.”You haven’t really changed all that much. You are still the same little--,” he began, but the rest of his words were lost when Jon’s fist met his cheek.

Jon didn’t even realize what he did until he felt the pain in his knuckles. Theon was an ass, but he
was right about one thing. He got lost to his temper, but the betrayal was still burning inside him and Theon gave him an outlet.

“You dare!” Theon shouted and soon the two of them were rolling on the ground.”You dare!”

Yet it took only a brief moment until Robb and and the girls were there to separate them.

“Jon,” Daenerys whispered to him and pulled on his cloak.”Stop that.”

“Oh, what a brave knight you are!” Theon taunted and howled with laughter.”That you are in need of --,” he wanted to continue, but then something hit him right into the face.

This time Theon howled in pain and fell to his knees while Jon found the culprit. It was Arya.

“You should wash your mouth more often, Theon,” his Arya teased Theon with a devilish grin.”I think the snowball fulfilled that purpose.”

“You…,” Theon grumbled angrily while the others laughed.

”Never mind…,” Theon said at last and shook his head, before stumbling away. He would never dare to harm Arya. He was far too afraid of Lord Stark.

“That serves him right,” Arya added triumphantly.

“Theon will not forget that,” Robb scolded her, before shifting his attention back to Jon.”I understand your anger, but don’t allow Theon to get under your skin. He is just jealous.”

“Jealous?” Jon asked and frowned in disbelief.

“Of course he is jealous,” Robb said and nodded his head in confirmation.”You are a bastard and you get to marry a pretty highborn girl.”

“I see,” Jon replied and tried to brush the dirt from his cloak. The idea that proud Theon Greyjoy could be jealous of him didn’t occur to him at all.”I see…I mean I understand.”

“Good,” Robb replied with a smile and patted Jon’s shoulder, before shifting his attention to Lady Ysilla, who has been observing the whole spectacle at Sansa’s side.

Jon couldn’t hear what he whispered into her hear, but it made the young girl laugh.

“Arya,” Sansa called after her sister.”We should get inside. We are late for our lessons. The Septa expects us.”

Arya’s smile was immediately washed away.

“Then tell her I am feeling sick. I rather stay here a bit longer,” Arya replied, but Sansa remained firm.

“You weren’t sick when I saw you training with the bow,” Sansa argued and Arya huffed in frustration.

“Very well, I am coming,” Arya replied and joined her sister after flashing a smile at Jon. Glad to be of service, it told him.

“You were right,” Daenerys said and helped him brush the mud from his cloak.”Theon Greyjoy is really a charming fellow.”
“He is,” Jon replied. “But Robb was right. I should get a better hold of my temper.”

“I think you should get a bath. You are dirty,” Daenerys remarked with a soft smile and brushed his sweaty hair out of his face. “I think I need a bath too. You promised to show me the hot springs. Remember?”

“Aye, I did,” he confirmed and squeezed her hand. “But it is--,” trailed off.

“No excuses,” she told him gave him a disarming smile. “Now come. You can’t run around all dirty.”

He sighed and laughed. “Very well.”

Jon knew it was a mistake when he watched Daenerys remove her boots and stockings. She was always more comfortable with such things. For her everything was a game while he was still harboring this deep-seated fear of fathering a bastard. The very idea was ridiculous now that he knew the truth, but he still wasn’t able to brush away the feeling inside him.

“It is pleasantly warm,” she remarked, a smile showing on his lips as she dipped her toe into the scalding water.

“It is,” he replied absentmindedly as he was distracted by her naked leg. Theon would have laughed about his embarrassment. “I …;”

“How deep is the water?” Daenerys asked and discarded first her cloak, before starting to work on the bindings of her dress.

“It reaches my shoulder,” he told her, knowing very well what she had in mind.

“Good, because I can’t swim very well and we are both in dire need of a bath,” she declared and slipped out of her dress. Jon saw her naked before. The girls liked going swimming in the brook not far from the Gates of the Moon and the Princess was no exception. It was the only reprieve during a hot summer day.

“Don’t you want to get clean?” she asked him and stepped into the waist-high water. “Or are you afraid?”

“No,” he replied. “Of course not.”

“Then what are you waiting for?” she asked teasingly.

He didn’t like being called a coward and started to pull off his cloak. The rest of his clothing followed afterwards and soon the water was engulfing him. It was indeed pleasantly warm.

“See, I am not afraid,” he told her and she grinned, splashing water at him.

“You are blushing or is that the heat?” she teased again, before moving into his arms.

Daenerys only giggled and brought her hands to touch his shoulders, leaning in to kiss him.

The taste of her mouth was sweet as ever and he couldn’t help but to pull her closer to him. She laughed as he as he lowered his mouth, leaving kisses on her neck and the swell of her breasts. For
her this was amusement, but for him it was a pain. He was sure that she felt his arousal grinding against her.

The closeness made him groan, gasping for breath.

She ignored his whispered words of protest and kissed first his cheek and then his neck. Her touch made him forget his anger and he touched his lips back to hers.

Soon he was longing to breathe and let go of her lips, regarding her in silence.

Her lips were swollen from the kiss, a mischievous smile curling on her lips as she reached for him with her hand. A gasp escaped him and tightness coiled in his lions as the movement of her hand quickened.

Waves of dizziness were crashing over him as he pressed his forehead against hers as he came.

Afterwards he felt like waking from a haze and the only thing he felt was the soft brush of her hands on his hair and neck.

When he found his strength again he kissed her neck, nibbling at the skin before kissing her throat. He continued kissing, her there until she started to tremble. Then his hands skimmed down her body softly, squeezing the swell of her breast, before moving his hand further down...

She didn’t stop him when he moved his hand further down between her legs, caressing the warm skin there.

Yet he still hesitated, his heart drumming in his chest.

“I will show you,” she whispered softly against his neck and instructed him. Her gasps of pleasure encouraged him and soon she was sobbing into his shoulder, her fingers pulling on his hair until he feared she might tear it out.

“Now was that so bad?” she asked afterwards, a satisfied smile playing on her lips.”Though I tore out a few locks along the way.”

He laughed, his hands brushing her hair out of her face.

“No, I feel much better,” he assured her and placed a kiss on her brow.

“It has been nearly a week,” she told him then.”I think you should go and speak to Lord Stark. The longer you wait the harder it will be.”

He knew she was right, but it didn’t make it any easier.

“I will go to him,” he assured her.”I promise.”

…

Jon found Lord Stark and Lord Reed in his private solar, the both of them seated next to the warm hearth like so often these days. He knew this fact from Daenerys and it made him wonder what they were talking about. At first he thought it was about the Rebellion, but Daenerys heard them more than once laughing.

“Lord Stark,” Jon greeted hesitantly.”May we speak?”

Sheer relief washed over his features and a mild smile showed on his lips.
“Of course,” Lord Stark assured him. “What do you want to know?”

Jon had a thousand questions, but now he was unable to speak.

Lord Reed seemed to sense his predicament and helped him along.

“Maybe we should visit your mother?” the small man offered, his green eyes resting on Jon.

Jon shrugged his shoulders and took a deep breath.

“That would please me,” he said at last and received a quiet not from Lord Stark.

“Then we need to get flowers,” Lord Stark added with a sad smile, which confused Jon, but Lord Reed was quick to explain.

“Winter roses for your mother.”

Jon accepted the answer in solemn silence and soon they were descending down into the darkness of the crypts. Even with the torchlight he was only able to make out blurry shapes and shadows. Left and right sat the Lords and Kings of Winter, their empty eyes following them through the darkness. It felt like an eternity until they found the grave of his mother.

He knew her statue of course. As a young boy he and Robb liked to play down here and once they even dressed up as ghosts to frighten their siblings. Sansa was so angry with them that she didn’t speak with them for nearly a whole moon. Not that she ever spoke much to him, but that was the first time it didn’t bother him, because Robb got the same cold treatment.

“They were her favorite flowers,” Eddard Stark explained them and placed the freshly picked flowers in his mother’s arms.

“I remember…Prince Rhaegar gifted her with a crown of winter roses. She cradled it in her hands until she passed away,” Lord Reed added gently.

Jon’s heart clenched when he heard the anecdote about his mother and father, yet the sting of bitterness also remained.

“I get it. They loved each other, but still…they were selfish,” he protested and received a heavy sigh from Lord Stark.

“Aye, they were,” he confirmed and touch his mother’s cheek.”Lya was a stubborn girl. She never did what people expected of her. My father believe that he could simply bend her to his will. I myself believed she will come to love Robert. Do not misunderstand me…Robert is my friend. He is also my King, but he is a different person from the boy I knew in the Eyrie. The crown has changed Robert greatly.”

“I know,” Jon agreed hesitatingly.”But that doesn’t make their actions less selfish. He left his wife and children.”

He left Rhaenys, he thought but didn’t dare to voice his thoughts openly. He left her and my brother.

“Nobody is devoid of selfishness,” Lord Stark replied in a heavy voice.”The heart wants what the heart wants. I myself once longed for a beautiful Lady…Lady Ashara Dayne. When she danced with me at the tourney of Harrenhall all my dreams became true, but my brother took that from me. I hated him for it. He was the heir and already betrothed to a beautiful Lady. I felt that he had no
right to take that happiness from me. I was an infatuated fool and didn’t even consider the Lady’s feelings in the matter. When I brought her Ser Arthur’s sword I realized how much she had loved my brother… my brother who would have never wed her. Truly, she was the only thing I ever wanted and I was very tempted to take it. I love Cat, but there are times I wished I gave the Lady the comfort she needed. Maybe she wouldn’t have killed herself, though I would have never been able to replace my brother. What I am trying to say is that even men like me are not free from temptation and I am sure Lady Stark harbored similar thoughts throughout our marriage. She certainly didn’t love me when we were wed.”

“And yet you made the best out of it,” Jon stated, his words only confirming his feelings.”You didn’t run off with Ashara Dayne.”

“No,” Lord Stark replied.”I didn’t.”

“I only met your father once, but I think there was more to his motivation than mere infatuation. Prince Rhaegar was a mysterious man. Before your mother died she told Ned that her child is the promised Prince meant to bring back spring. She named you Jaehaerys after Prince Rhaegar’s grandfather, but Ned named you Jon.”

“Lord Reed speaks true,” Ned added agreed.”Though it was probably the fever that made her speak like that. It matters not. Rhaegar is dead and his prophecies died with him.”

“I am still Jon,” he insisted defiantly.”I am still Jon.”

“Of course you are,” Lord Stark replied and touched his shoulder.”But you are also my sister’s son…and there is more. There is something we found in the tower that belongs to you…Lord Reed has been guarding it for me over the last years. It is part of the reason I asked him to come here.”

“What is it?” he asked, his heart threatening to jump out of his breast.

“I will show you,” Lord Reed assured him.

Thus Lord Reed led them back to his private chambers. Whatever it was he kept it in a wooden box that could only be opened with a key. The object he lifted out of the box was wrapped in a cloth of black and red.

His father gave Howland Reed a knowing smile as he touched he fine garment and allowed his fingers to smooth over the red ornaments of a tree-headed dragon embellished with glittering red gemstones. Rubies, Jon realized. A wedding cloak.

“Is that the wedding cloak?” Lord Stark asked Lord Reed.

“The very same we found in the tower,” Lord Reed confirmed and started to reveal the precious gift. An egg, Jon knew at once as he admired the white-blue surface of the stone egg. A dragon egg.

…”

Chapter End Notes

My reasons for choosing Jaehaerys has nothing to do with popularity. I chose the name out of the following reasons:
The name Aemon is already reserved for someone else. The name Daeron would be an outright insult to the Dornish. While I think Lyanna didn't wast much of a thought on Elia, I doubt she would give her son a name that would be taken as an insult by Dorne. I think she had more brain than that. Jaehaerys was Rhaegar's grandfather and a decent person and the first Jaeherys was basically the best King the Seven Kingdoms had. It also sounds similar to Jon. Aegon doesn't bother me as much as some people here, but I don't think Rhaenys would be very happy about that name, even though it was not uncommon for Kings do give their children the name of a deceased child. I think Henry the Eight had several stillborn or dead sons he named Henry.
Their travel proved more tedious than expected. The harsh storms delayed their travel by nearly a week and when they finally made it White Harbor they were met with fierce snowstorms that left her trembling down to her bones. The icy wind felt like bare steel upon her skin, though she was wore thick pelt.

Even Ser Barristan was shivering in his thick armor, though he never complained about it. No he was ever silent, watching her with his sad blue eyes. Rhaenys didn't know what to make of the man. He has been serving her family for nearly her whole life, but she couldn’t forget the fact that he bent the knee to King Robert.

And yet I will need his help, she knew and cast her eyes back at the grey walls of Winterfell touching the deary grey sky of the North.

There was a certain beauty to it, but Rheanys couldn’t imagine spending the rest of her days in such a cold place. Even in King’s Landing her heart yearned for the heavy smell of flowers and the touch of spring sunshine on her cheeks.

A year, she repeated her daily prayer as they continued to ride on along a muddy road leading through a small town. Wintertown it was called and brimming with activity which surprised her given the unpleasant weather. Even now an icy wind was blowing and left them shivering, whirling fresh snowflakes into their concealed faces.

“Finally!” and “Gods be good!” she heard the guards mutter in relief as they continued on through the castle gates into a wide spacious courtyard. There she found the family assembled.

She recognized Lord Stark immediately, though she has never met him before. He had a solemn face, plain brown hair and dreary grey eyes that made him easily recognizable. Truly, it was no surprised that people believed him to be Jon’s father, though when one took a closer look it was hard to oversee his true father. Jon’s face was softer, his nose straighter and his lips full. Even his hair was a shade darker and it had a pretty curl that helped to soften his features.

In truth it made her a little nervous that Jon Arryn sent Ser Barristan with her. She knew from one of her informants that the Queen asked the King to sent Ser Jaime, but Jon Arryn argued that the Kingslayer would be an insult to Ned Stark and thus Ser Barristan agreed to accompany her.

Yet the danger remained. Ser Barristan knew her father and she had no doubt that he would recognize the resemblance.

I will have to keep him away from my brother, she knew and shifted her attention to Lord Stark.

“It is a pleasure to have you here, Princess Rhaenys,” he greeted her as formally as expected, before lowering his head and placing a kiss on her hand.

Throughout her youth she had hated the man in front of her for his part in the Rebellion, but now everything was different. He lied and committed treason to protect my brother. Whatever ever past grudge she may have harbored for him didn’t count any longer.
“On the contrary. It is my pleasure to be here,” she replied and was soon enclosed in a tight hug. As expected it was her Aunt Daenerys, who looked strange in the grey wool dress, her silver hair braided and hidden under the hood of her cloak.

“You are crushing me,” Rhaenys complained with a happy smile on her lips.

“Oh, I am sorry,” she apologized and smiled warmly.”I am just relieved that you made it here at all. We thought the snowstorms swallowed you on your way here.”

“It certainly was a long and hard ride,” Rheanys remarked politely when she found Lady Stark’s eyes resting on her. She was a beautiful Lady for her age, graced with copper hair and blue summer eyes, but there was something tight about her smile.

She is afraid, Rhaenys realized soon. She fears my presence here.

Not allowing her thoughts to show on her faces she gave the Lady a polite smile and dropped a quick curtsy.

“I am thankful for your hospitality, Lady Stark,” she added.”I am sure it was a bother to delay your son’s wedding to wait for our sake. Sadly, none of us has control about the weather.

“Indeed,” the Lady replied and dropped her head in reverence.”I know it well. The constant storms is something we people from the South have to get used to.”

“Indeed,” Rhaenys replied tightly and searched for her brother among the assembled Stark children. Yet both Jon and the oldest son were absent, but Lady Ysilla his wife-to-be greeted her, before she moved on to the rest of the children. The younger sons were children and proved more interested in Ser Barristan and the guards he brought with him than her. Without their mother’s presence they would have probably forgotten about their manners. At last she made the acquaintance of to the daughters. The older one named Sansa was a beauty like her mother and proved as graceful as Lady Margaery while the younger sister eyed her prominent scar with great curiosity.

“Arya!” her sister was quick to scold the younger girl.”It is impolite to stare like that.”

Then Sansa gave Rheanys an apologetic look.”I apologize. My sister is sorry.”

Arya frowned, but apologized.

“I am sorry, I didn’t mean to insult you, Princess. It is just I have never seen a Lady with a scar like that. Usually it is only men who go around bragging about their scars to prove their prowess in battle. I myself have smaller scars…but mother says ladies are not supposed to show them. That is why I stared…I thought it admirable that you don’t hide it.”

“Oh,” it escaped her, fazed by the girl’s words.

“Well, then there is nothing to apologize for,” she assured Arya Stark and moved to join Daenerys’ side.

“I am surprised that Jon and his brother aren’t here,” she came straight to the point.”Where are they if you don’t mind me asking?”

Daenerys chuckled.

“Lady Stark sent the boys to be groomed and get their hair cut. You should have seen Jon’s face.
He looked utterly terrified."

"Because of a haircut?" she asked and couldn’t help to smile. "What torture."

"Indeed," Daenerys agreed and showed her to her chambers.

"Lady Stark asked me about your preferences, but I couldn’t really give her a proper answer," her Aunt explained and helped her take off her cloak. "I hope it pleases you."

She nodded her head, not really caring about such comfort.

"It does," she assured her Aunt. "I am happy as long as I get a warm hearth and plenty of furs to ward of this horrible cold. How do you endure it?"

"The hot springs help," Daenerys told her and went to stir the fire in the hearth. "I can show you if you like."

"That would please me," she added and settled down in the cushioned chair next to hearth and regarded the plain grey dress her Daenerys was wearing. In the South people would consider it plain but Daenryes appeared happy and that was all that counted for Rheanys.

"Grey doesn’t suit you," Rhaenys still didn't hold back her opinion.

"You are right," Daenerys agreed and laughed. "But it keeps me warm and treat me more kindly. I think they like that I am trying to adapt."

"Good for you," Rhaenys replied and rose to her feet and started to search through her belongings. "But I hope you won’t wear that for your wedding."

Daenerys frowned at that. "I don’t really care about that. I think I will just put on of my summer dresses and a warm cloak. The wedding ceremonies here are not as drawn out as in the South. I think I will survive it."

Rheanys smiled when she finally found the gift, wrapped up in a fine cloth.

"That may be but I will not have you freeze to death," Rhaenys added and handed Daenerys said gift. Well, it wasn’t from her. Lady Margaery gave it to her for Daenerys. Rhaenys herself has a different gift in mind for her Aunt.

"What is that?" her Daenerys asked, her purple eyes shining with curiosity.

"Open it and see for yourself," she prodded and Daenerys obeyed without asking further questions.

A surprised look showed on her face as she regarded the dress.

It was made of fine white wool, in-laid with a warm pelt and a cape that was made of white fox-fur.

"I hope--," she began, but was silenced by another fierce embrace and a kiss on her cheek.

"I thank you," Daenerys told her and smiled happily.

"Don’t thank me, but Lady Margaery," Rhaenys explained. "It was her idea. I didn't have so much foresight."

"Oh," Daenerys said, but her smile didn’t fade. "Then you will have to relay my thanks to her."
“I will gladly do that,” Rhaenys added and squeezed her Aunt’s shoulder. “Speaking of wedding ceremonies…I assume the wedding for Lord Stark’s heir will be held tomorrow and yours sometime later?”

“In a week,” Daenerys confirmed. “But Robb’s wedding will be tonight.”

“At night?” she asked, a bit surprised by this turn of events.

Daenerys gave her an understanding look.

“I know it sounds strange, but Jon told me that it is how marriages are handled here in the North. The ceremony is also held in the godswood to ask for the blessing of the gods.”

“I see,” Rhaenys said. “But Lady Ysilla hails from the Vale. I assumed they will have a Septon, but it seems my assumptions proved wrong.”

“Well, those Northern people are quite insistent on their traditions and it is no bother for Lord Royce.”

“Well, then I need to get dressed,” Rhaenys added with a smile. “I will call for my ladies, but I would also appreciate your council. I don’t want to embarrass myself.”

Daenerys grinned.

“It would be my pleasure, but I doubt I will be much of a help to you.”

…

The moon bathed the godswood in a soft glimmer as Robb Stark and his bride Lady Ysilla Royce stood before the heart tree to be joined in marriage.

For Rhaenys all of this felt foreign, but she couldn’t deny the beauty of the ceremony. The colorful weirwood tree, the moonlight and the lanterns carried by the assembled guests gave it a peaceful solemnity.

Young Robb Stark was dressed in a grey doublet as befitted the heir of Winterfell and Lady Ysilla looked even lovelier. Her dress was a dream of grey silk and a glittering veil of silver and white pelt.

“Who comes before the gods tonight?” Lord Stark’s solemn voice broke the silence that had settled over them.

“Lady Ysilla Royce comes here to be wed…a woman grown, trueborn and noble…she comes to beg for the blessings of the gods,” Lord Royce declared. Daenerys was not far, standing among the other ladies, all dressed in grey and flowers woven in their braided hair. Jon was at Robb’s side, standing next to Theon Greyjoy. Rhaenys has never met him before, but he stood out with the kraken showing on his clothing.

“Who comes to claim her?”

Robb Stark appeared very anxious as he stepped forward to claim his bride for his own.

“Robb Stark, heir to Winterfell and the North,” the young man added in a trembling voice and raised his head to look at Lord Royce. “Who gives her?”

“Lord Yohn Royce, Lord of Runestone,” the Lord replied and placed his daughter’s hand in Robb
Stark’s.

“Do you take this man?” Lord Stark asked.

“I take this man,” Lady Ysilla was quick to answer and tightened her grip on Robb’s hand. Robb Stark smiled and carefully pulled the golden cloak from the Lady’s shoulders before replacing it with his heavy fur cloak embellished with a grey direwolf.

“You may now kneel before the gods to receive their blessing,” Lord Stark added and both Robb Stark and his bride knelt down before the weirwood tree. A moment of silence and prayer followed before Robb Stark helped his bride back to her feet to kiss her.

Daenerys was not wrong when she said that the marriage ceremony will be short. Not that she minded. She was more than thankful to return inside.

As he wife of the Crown Prince she was seated at the high table next to Lady Stark, though the Lady spent most of her time with keeping her children in check. At one point the younger sister Arya started to throw food at her older sister Sansa and one of her friends which ended with both the girls being escorted to bed. The younger boy Bran behaved more lordly and even danced with the girls while the younger boy named Rickon clung to his mother’s skirt, asking for more plum pie. Soon he was also escorted to bed and only the grown-up guests remained.

By then most of the people were deep into their cups and the bawdy songs were played. The Bear of the Maiden Fair was played at least six times and when the jolly tune of the Dornishman’s Wife rang through the halls Rhaenys couldn’t help but think of her Uncle Oberyn. He loved that song.

The guests seemed to agree, because half of the drunken men started to join in the song played by the minstrel. In the South most people considered the Northern people cold and humorless, but this night disproved them all wrong.

Even Jon, not even a passable dancer, stumbled over the dance floor with her Daenerys. Robb Stark was much the same, though a much better dancer than his brother. For a brief moment she contemplated asking him to share a dance, to banish away her longing for Willas’s presence. Strangely, Robb Stark and the heir to Highgarden had a similar smile.

“Do you not care for dancing, Princess?” Lady Stark asked, snapping her out of her deep thoughts.

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Not really,” she replied politely.

The Lady smiled softly and leaned on the table.

“Well, you are freshly wed yourself. I assume you miss your Prince?”

Rhaenys had a hard to time to keep her smile in place, but the Lady knew nothing of Prince Joffrey’s true character.

“I do,” she lied. „but Joffrey holds no love for the cold. Thus I came alone.”

“And we are glad to have you here,” Lady Stark added and silence settled over them again. Rhaenys didn’t know what to talk about. The whole visit here made her strangely gloomy, but she was here to be of aid to her Aunt and not to complain.

Thus the rest of the night passed in a blur of music and drunken men. Finally, the end of the feast
was announced when a mighty Northman with a bushy beard started to call for the bedding.

*Lord Umber,* was his name or that is what she deduced when she heard Lady Stark mutter his name under her breath.

Then the usual proceedings followed. Soon Lady Ysilla was lifted into the air and carried out of the hall while her ladies pushed along with young Robb Stark.

Rhaenys followed after the herd of giggling ladies and soon found Daenerys standing next to the door, observing the whole spectacle with mild amusement.

Lady Ysilla Royce didn’t seem to mind the attention either and giggled when the enthusiastic men helped her out of her dress.

*What a waste for the pretty dress,* Rhaenys thought as they tore on the bindings. She never held much love for the whole bedding ceremony.

“I think we should leave,” Daenerys said then and touched her shoulder.”You wanted to see Jon. He is a bit drunk, but I am sure he will be pleased to see you now that the guests are gone.”

Rhaenys smiled, appreciating Daenerys’ foresight.

“Then we shouldn’t let him wait,” she replied and took her offered arm. Together they made their way back to her chambers where Daenerys left her to get Jon.

He gave her one of his seldom smiles as he touched his lips to her hand.

“I am happy that you were able to make it, despite the difficulties of your travel, Princess,” he thanked her and pulled off his cloak while Daenerys put logs into the fire.

“It was worth the effort,” she replied as she roamed through her belongings. The dress to her Aunt was Lady Margaery’s gift, but she brought her own gift.”I am happy to be here. I also brought you two a gift.”

“A gift?” Jon asked, his dark eyes eyeing the object covered in a crimson cloth with great curiosity.

“Aye,” she confirmed and revealed one of the dragon eggs she received as a wedding gift. Giving the egg to Daenerys made the most sense, though she also intended it as a gift to Jon. She longed to tell him the truth, but she feared his anger. She knew how much his Stark heritage meant to him. *He will not like the truth if he ever finds out. It is also far too dangerous.*

Daenerys’ face lightened up like a room full of candles.

“That is for me?” she asked and touched the egg.”But it belongs to you.”

Rhaenys covered Daenerys’ hands with her own.”I have one. I have no need for two eggs. It is a gift for you and Jon.”

Then she turned to give Jon a smile and was surprised to find him utterly pale.

“Are you feeling sick?” she asked and touched is arm.

He shook his head and forced a feigned smile over his lips.

“It is just…that is such a precious gift…and you said it is a gift for both of us…but I am not…,” he stuttered, fumbling for words.
*You are my brother*, she wanted to say but found a way around it.

“Your children will have dragonblood and I once read that putting them into a child’s crib brings luck. Luck is something we all have need.”

Jon paled even more, but he kept smiling at her.

“I see,” he said.”I see.”

…

Chapter End Notes

Rhaenys will find out in the next chapters, I promise. She will have another POV. Next either Jon or Daenerys. I have yet to decide.
Daenerys

Dany realized that she didn’t care much for wedding preparations. Sansa made her sit still for hours, braiding and loosening her hair as if she couldn’t quite decide what to do with it. As expected Arya found the whole fuss annoying and frowned when her sister forced her unruly hair into a braid. Even Rhaenys smiled about the girl’s complaints. Looking at Arya now she was hardly recognizable clad in her proper grey dress and flowers braided into her hair. Usually the little girl ran around in her dirty riding-garb, her worn-out boots and her hair in wild tangles. Watching her run around with the children of the servants one could have taken her for one of them. Her sister Sansa was the complete opposite. Always prim and proper, the girl made her way through life, enjoying music and song. Daenerys liked both both of them, but their constant fighting often made her head squirm with pain.

At least today they were rather peaceful, though she believed it had to do with the punishment the two of them received from Lord Stark for misbehaving during Robb’s wedding. Arya had to spend six full evenings with the Septa, working on her stitching and Sansa had to take care of her horse without the help of the stable boys.

“I think that will do,” Sansa said at last and made her move to the looking glass. It belonged to Lady Stark, but she borrowed it to them for the evening. Dany’s hair was open, but braided on the sides and decorated with pale-blue flowers. Sansa and her friend Jeyne Poole picked a whole basket of such flowers in the glass gardens.

Dany nodded her head and gave the girl a thankful smile. She herself couldn’t have done it better.

Then she shifted her attention to Rhaenys, who was seated near the window, staring into the flames. Daenerys didn’t know what to make of her recent gloomy state of mind, but it was not the first time that she saw her like this. Maybe it is the weather, Dany mused recalling her complains about the lack of sunshine.

“What do you think?” Dany asked her niece, who instantly turned around, giving her a smile.

“Precious,” Rhaenys remarked and rose to her feet, a thick pelt wrapped around her shoulder.”The flowers suit the dress. A good choice, Lady Sansa.”

Sansa blushed and gave her niece a sweet smile.”It wasn’t my idea. Lady Ysilla suggested it.”

“I see,” Dany added.”Then I will thank her later, though I think that will be hard as she and Robb are always occupied.”

“Occupied?” Arya asked and wrinkled her nose in disgust.”It is bad enough when father and mother are doing the “kissy” thing, but Robb is my brother. I don’t want to see him doing that. At least my chamber is far away from mine.”

“Arya,” Sansa chided, her cheeks flushed.”That is no appropriate topic for ladies.”

“And why is that?” Arya asked teasingly.”The horses do it as well. You should have seen it as you were mucking the stables all week long.”

Sansa looked like slapped and Dany had to cover her mouth to keep herself from breaking out in laughter. Rhaenys’ remained calm as ever, but even from the distance Dany saw a smile tugging on
her rosy lips.

“Mother would wash your mouth if she heard you speak like that,” Sansa warned her sister, but Arya remained unimpressed. "Mother would be more displeased if she knew that we are fighting again."

Dany saw that Sansa wanted to retort something, but she decided to intervene.

“Sansa,” Dany addressed the other girl and touched her shoulder. "It is getting late. We should go."

“Indeed,” Rhaenys agreed and joined Dany’s side, smoothing her dress and cape. Truly, Lady Margaery gifted her a beautiful dress. "We should hurry."

“Of course,” Sansa accepted and straightened her skirt. Her dress was also white, pale-blue flowers woven into a long braid falling over her shoulder.

...

There were fewer guests at her and Jon’s wedding, but that was no surprise to Dany. Jon may marry a Princess, but he was still a bastard in many a man’s eyes. Even legitimized the stain of bastardy couldn’t be removed.

Not that it mattered. Dany and Jon knew the truth. These other Lords may think what they please.

When they stepped out into the godswood even the thick cloak was unable to keep her warm. It was freezing cold, an icy wind biting into her skin. It made her long for the warm hearth and the sun.

But all those thoughts were soon brushed away when she saw the beautiful weirwood tree and the full moon standing high on the starry sky, soft moonlight falling through the heavy canopy. It was in the middle of the night, but the lanterns carried by the remaining guests lightened up the darkness around them better than the stars ever could.

Rhaenys gave her a soft smile and led her along to stand under the weirwood tree, the strange leaves glittering like rubies in the candlelight.

Jon was already waiting there in company of Lord Stark and his brothers. To the world he may be a bastard, but today he looked like a trueborn Stark. He was dressed in a grey jacket lined with white and grey breeches made of soft Northern wool.

“Who comes before the gods tonight?” Lord Stark’s solemn voice rang through the night.

“Princess Daenerys Targaryen comes here to be wed…a woman grown, trueborn and noble…she comes to beg for the blessings of the gods,” Rhaenys declared, her soft-spoken voice breaking the serenity of the godswood.

It was only suitable that it was her who stood beside her. She was after all her oldest living relative, though Rhaenys refused at first, telling her that it was the duty of a male member of her family.

“Who comes to claim her?”

“Ser Jon of Winterfell,” Jon replied in a trembling voice. “Who gives her?”

“Princess Rhaenys Targaryen,” her niece replied and joined her hand with Jon’s.

“Do you take this man?” Lord Stark added, his dark eyes unreadable as ever. Even when his son
was wed he hardly smiled, thought she learned soon enough that this didn’t mean he wasn’t happy for him. Lord Stark was no man made for laughs. Jon was much the same, though his lack of smiles had another reason. A childhood in the shadows and filled with lies.

“I take this man,” she replied then when she felt Jon’s grip tightening on her hand.

It was then that Jon smiled, his whole face lightening up like a room full of candles.

It filled her with warmth that made her fingers and toes tingling.

Rhaenys helped her to pull the heavy cloak from her shoulders. It was the cloak of a Princess of House Targaren gifted to her by Lord Arryn upon her departure to the North. It was a black cloak embellished with red silk that showed the three-headed dragon.

For a brief moment she felt the cold burning on her skin, but Jon quickly placed his own cloak around her shoulder. It was not the cloak of a trueborn Stark, but beautiful in it’s own right, especially because it was the fruit of Sansa’s hard work.

The cloak was made of dark-grey wool and a white-wolf formed out white pearls. The cloak was warm too, better than her own cloak, which was probably intended for a wedding in the South.

“You may now kneel before the gods to receive their blessings,” Lord Stark declared quietly and Jon pulled her along to kneel down before the crying face of the weirwood tree. The face made her shudder when she first laid eyes on it, but that was the way of the North.

A moment of silence and prayer followed, though Dany had no idea how one addressed to the old gods. In a Sept people light candles and sing songs, but the Northmen have no need for such fancy things. Their candles were the stars and the wind whispering through the leaves were their prayers.

Slowly then, Jon pulled Dany into his arms and touched her cheek before kissing her. He lingered longer than acceptable, kissing her not once, but a few times. Not that she minded, but she supposed the people wanted to go inside to enjoy the warm hearth and a meal.

The feast simple, but Dany hardly cared when everyone appeared to be in good spirits. That Lord Manderly, who Arya called the fattest man alive, sent enough wine, to drown the entire North helped.

Jon danced with her of course, though he hated it. Robb did too, though he left shortly after in company of his Lady wife, promising to return later. This earned him a lot of snickering and laughter from the drunken men who congratulated Lord Stark on his “hard-working” son. They only stopped when Lady Stark flashed them a scolding look.

Later Bran came to ask her for a dance, though she was sure he only did it, because Sansa instructed him to do so. She did the same on Robb’s wedding.

Thus she left Jon and the little Lord danced with her. Surprisingly, young Brandon Stark proved a much better dancer than his brother, though the bored look on his face told her that he took not much pleasure in it. Every few minutes his eyes darted to Ser Barristan, who sat in company of his men, drinking and joking.

Dany knew from Rhaenys that he once served her family and bent the knee to the King after her brother Rhaegar lay dead in the river Trident. It was the first time that she saw him this close, because Rhaenys kept him occupied.

“Do you know him?” Bran asked then, his blue eyes brimming with hope.
Dany shook her head and led him back to his place.

“Sadly not,” she told him and placed a kiss on his cheek.”But my niece does. Maybe I can ask her to introduce you.”

Bran beamed.

“You would do that?”

“Sure,” she confirmed and sent him on his way, before returning to her seat next to Jon.

His pale cheeks were a little flushed from the wine as he jerked his head towards Bran.

“Did he break your toes?”

“Not at all,” she assured him.”In fact he is a much better dancer than you.”

Jon chuckled.

“That doesn’t surprise me. Bran’s feet are light like feathers. He climbs trees with the ease of a squirrel…dancing is a child’s play for him. Arya likes to call him twinkle toes for a reason.”

“I see,” she replied and leaned closer to brush the hair out of his face, giving him a warm smile.”I see.”

The rest of the night passed in a blur of laughter and wine. Dany tried to keep it in measure, but Rhaenys poured her one cup after another, telling her that it will help to curb the nerves.

Dany didn’t quite think that it helped, but she was sure that her niece meant well.

A while later into the night the younger children were finally escorted out of the hall, young Rickon Stark already asleep in Lady Stark’s arms.

Then The Bear and the Maiden Fair was played again. Not that Dany disliked the song, but they played aplenty on every wedding she has attended in her young years, though this time the drunken men started to make up new lines of their own as the singing continued.

Soon it was no longer the “the Bear and the Maiden Fair!” but the “the Wolf and the Maiden Fair!”, which made Jon blush, though she was sure it was not from the wine.

Then after the minstrel had played the last tune, the mighty lord everyone only called the Greatjon called for the bedding ceremony. He did the same on Robb's wedding and it made her wonder if this was some official position he claimed for his own.

Rhaenys frowned in displeasure at the drunken men, pulling on her clothes. One young man received a particular piercing look from her niece and another a slap on the arm. For a moment she thought Rhaenys would even remain there with her in the wedding chambers.

Yet then she kissed her cheek and left.

“You do look lovely,” Jon declared after a while, his eyes wandering over her naked body. She knew it was meant as a jest.

She slapped him playfully and grinned. Jon was good at many things, but joking was not one of them, though he certainly made her laugh.
“I wear nothing,” she replied and let her hands wander through his curled hair.

“Exactly,” he told her and placed first a kiss to her cheek and then to her mouth. The kiss made her feel dizzy and she wanted slap him again, but then he grasped her hand, leading it downwards…

“Please…touch me like you did in the hot springs,” he whispered against her lips.

His request surprised her, because he was usually so cautious. The wine, she thought and thanked Lord Manderly for his generosity. May the gods praise him.

Then she gladly fulfilled Jon’s wish and touched him, her touch gentle as she stroked him. A gasp escaped him and then his mouth was on hers, feasting on her lips. After a while he stopped and pulled her hand away, his breathing labored, before he leaned down to kiss her throat. Slowly he continued to kiss her breasts, her stomach and pulled her legs apart. Then bending down, he lowered his mouth to kiss her between her legs…

“Jon!” it escaped her then. Randa never told her about that.”What are you doing?”

He gave her a fearful look, which made her regret her instantly regret her actions.

“Theon said girls like that,” he stuttered and for a moment she didn’t believe her ears. A week ago the two of them nearly punched each other bloody and now he was following his advice.

“Theon?” she asked, trying to hide her amusement.”As in Theon Greyjoy?”

“Aye,” he confirmed in slight embarrassment.”I hold not much love for him, but he knows much more about such things than I do. I didn’t ask him for advice though…I only listened to his bragging.”

When she remained silent he gave her another fearful look.

“We can just skip that part if you like,” he added and she couldn’t help but to laugh.”Theon is a fool.”

“It’s not that,” she told him.”We can try that later when I don’t have to be reminded of that Greyjoy boy.”

He smiled at that and leaned down to kiss her again. Then she wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him down to her. He moaned into her mouth as she deepened the kiss, his hand smoothing over her knee to gently pull her legs apart.

He buried his face in her neck as he shifted to move between her legs, before sliding inside her in an almost gentle manner. The Septa told her once that it was meant to hurt terribly, but there was no pain, only a dull ache of need. No wonder. The old Septa probably never touched a man…

Yet those silly thoughts were soon forgotten as he fully sank into her, his breath hot against her neck.

“A moment,” he gasped, clearly ringing for his composure. She tried to remain calm, but it was harder than she imagined. Finally, he withdrew and pushed inside her again, his head still buried in her shoulder. She forgot to breathe for moment, but soon all that was forgotten as she lifted her hips to meet his. It was more instinct than anything, accompanied by heavy gasps and without much of a proper rhythm to it.

Yet she felt warm, so very warm. Not even the hot springs were able to warm her like that.
Then she shuddered, though it was not from a sudden gust of cold air. Her mind meant blank and she felt Jon’s kiss on her neck, as she tightened around him. He moaned and then he faltered against her as if all strength had left him at once.

It took him a while before he recovered and then he rolled off her, though she didn’t mind his presence. In fact, she missed the warmth.

“I forgot to ask,” he said then and brushed his sweaty hair out of his face.”Did it hurt?”

She couldn’t help but to laugh in amusement.

“I once fell from my horse and broke my ankle. That hurt.”

Her brazen comment made him grin from one ear to the other.

“I was just asking out of consideration,” he teased and leaned down to graze her cheek with his lips.”We should make it count then, shouldn’t we?”

…
Arya Stark looked unhappy as the Septa tried to school her on her stitching. Next to her sat Sansa Stark, a content smile placed on her lips as she continued to blabber with her friends Jeyne Poole and Beth Cassle. Her voice was soft and meant for a Lady at court, while Arya frowned and spoke as loud as she pleased. Rhaenys was schooled to be like Sansa Stark, but at times she wanted to speak as freely as the younger girl.

She was unable to say why, but observing life here in Winterfell makes her melancholic. Maybe it was just her longing for Highgarden, but she couldn’t help but to shrug off the constant sadness inside her. Before coming here she counted every day until her plan is meant to come to fruition, but now she felt a certain amount of fear. Much will change and she was not sure if Daenerys and Jon will approve of her actions.

Yet she was unable to abandon her cause. She had to think of her duty as one of the Last Targaryens. She won’t allow the Lannisters and the Baratheons to destroy her family legacy. No, I will mend what was broken.

“That will not do!” the Septa complained loudly and snapped Rhaenys out of her deep thoughts.”That will not do at all!”

“Arya Stark!” the Septa shrieked when Arya continued to ignore her.”I think will have speak to your mother.”

Rhaenys didn’t know why, but she took pity on the girl and decided to intervene.

“Septa Mordane,” she addressed the elderly woman with a sweet smile.”Mayhaps I could assist Lady Arya?”

This earned her a surprised look, but the Septa didn't dare to refuse her wish.

“Very well,” Septa Mordane said and made space for her to sit down next to Arya. Before this Rhaenys had been sitting next to the window, waiting for Jon’s return. He promised to show her the landscape in company of Daenerys, but in the morning a rider came before Lord Stark to inform him about an oathbreaker that needs to be executed for desertion. Thus Lord Stark, Robb, Jon, the Greyjoy boy and the younger boy Bran packed their things and left early in the morning.

Now it was midday and neither Jon nor Daenerys were to be seen. She and Lady Ysilla Royce left in the late morning to go to Wintertown. They asked Rhaenys to join, but she refused and chose to remain with Sansa and Arya to get to know the girls Jon considered his siblings.

“Now let me take a look at your work,” she prodded and received a skeptical look from Arya as Rhaenys regarded her work.

The sight stunned her. She hadn’t paid much attention, but she heard from the Septa instructed the girls to embellish wolf on a piece of cloth. Sadly, that animal looked more like a rabbit.

Arya sensed her amusement and shrugged her shoulders in frustration.

“I know it is horrible. I will never be able to do it. I am hopeless.”
“You are not hopeless,” Rhaenys assured the younger girl, though it will be hard to salvage the
girl's work. "You will learn it in time. Do you think I was able to learn the harp without any effort?"

Arya's eyes widened in surprise.

“But you played so well,” Arya protested and Rhaenys smiled down at the younger girl.

“Maybe no but you should have heard me play when I was your age. The Septa was scolding me
all the time for my bad stance,” she began to explain and recalled watching the younger girl
training with the bow. "Were you able to hit the target on your first try with the bow?"

Arya shook her head.

“No, I was very bad. I had to train very hard, but now I am better than Bran.”

“I am sure you did and if you apply the same discipline to your stitching practice you will master it
soon.”

“But why do I have to learn it in the first place?” Arya asked. "It is no use."

“You are right,” Rhaenys agreed. "But people will eventually expect you to adapt. That is why your
mother wants you to learn it…to prepare you, not to torture you."

Arya nodded her head in understanding, though Rhaenys found little acceptance reflected in the
younger girl's features.

“I don’t care what my mother wants," the girl leaned closer and whispered into her ear. "She always
preferred Sansa."

“Nonsense,” Rhaenys countered quickly. "I have been watching your mother. She loves you all very
much…I admit I am even a little jealous of you."

“Jealous?” the Arya asked in disbelief. "Of us?"

Rhaenys nodded her head and leaned closer.

“Of course. You have a mother…I would be prepared to stitch for the rest of my life it brought my
mother back to me.”

“Oh,” the Arya said and looked rather distraught. It made Rhaenys regret her words and she
wanted to apologize, but then door opened and young Rickon Stark stormed inside.

“They are back!” the young boy exclaimed. "And they found direwolve pups!"

Direwolves, Rhaenys repeated to herself and tried to recall the stories she heard about these
animals. She thought they were mere fairy tales. Well, the boy is five. Maybe he misinterpreted
things as boys his age tend to do. Sansa gave her brother an unbelieving look while Arya sprinted
out of the door with the agility of a squirrel.

Rhaenys followed after Sansa who gave the Septa an apologetic look, before they slipped out of
the room.

She felt the icy wind burning on her skin as she stepped outside, but the pain was soon forgotten
when she beheld Jon, Robb, Theon and young Brandon Stark coming their way.

“Arya! Sansa! Look!” Brandon Stark exclaimed loudly, his pale face flushed as red as his
“Robb found them. Five of them, one for each of us.” he continued to explain and showed her the small bundles of furs in his arms. For Rhaenys they looked like normal wolves, but she doubted her opinion would be appreciated by the children.

“Where did you find them?” Arya asked, her lively grey eyes flickering between Jon and Robb.

“We found them in the woods. Their mother was killed by a stag,” Robb explained, while Jon leaned closer to reveal two more pups. Both of them were of grey fur and had golden eyes like running honey.

“Those are the female ones, one for each of you,” Jon explained further and smiled down at his sisters.

“Give her to me!” Arya demanded and stretched out her arms, hopping from one foot to the other. “Give her to me!

“Here,” Jon said and hoisted one of the pups in Arya's arm before doing the same for Sansa. “But be careful. They are no toy.”

“Of course,” Arya confirmed and eyed the other wolves with great curiosity. Bran and Robb both carried two pups, though the white pup with the red eyes stood out the most.

“This one is mine,” Jon explained to her, a loving smile showing on his lips as he stroked the pup's ear. “The runt of the litter.”

Rhaenys nodded her head. *The runt of the litter. If you knew the truth you wouldn’t smile like that.*

Upon their return they were greeted by Lady Stark.

“By the gods,” she muttered and gave her husband a questioning look. “Are those wolf pups?”

“They are direwolf pups. We found their dead mother in the woods,” Lord Stark explained in his usual serious voice. “The children begged to keep them. What was I supposed to do?”

Lady Stark sighed, but the soft expression on her face told Rhaenys that she had no intention to refuse her children's wish.

“Very well,” she said at last and gave each her children a serious look. “But you will take care of them yourselves…Understood?”

The reply was an unified “Aye” and moments later the children went to work. Rhaenys, who didn’t know what to do with herself helped them wherever she could, though she received strange looks from Ser Barristan and her guards when they carried hay from the stables.

Then Jon and Robb organized milk while Arya and Bran started to build a sleeping place for the animals. In the meantime Sansa and her cared for the animals, wrapping them up in thick furs to keep them warm.

Once the pups were fed the children started to discuss names.

“What will you name your pup?” Bran asked Arya.

“Nymeria…like the Princess of the Rhoynar.”

“And you?”
“Summer,” the Bran declared proudly.

“That is a boring name,” Arya remarked honest as ever and shifted her attention to the others. Sansa was brushing her pup’s fur while Robb and Jon were each feeding their pup.

“Robb, Sansa, Jon,” Arya addressed them.”What will you name your pups?”

“Greywind,” Robb replied.

“Lady,” Sansa added, which earned her an amused smile.

“What about Rickon’s pup?” Jon asked.”He needs a name too.”

“He calls him Shaggydog,” Robb replied.”Though I am not sure if he will remember that tomorrow.”

"There you are," Lady Stark said and interrupted their merry talk. The Lady looked terribly pale."It is time for supper."

As expected the Lady received little enthusiasm, but nobody dared to refuse her. “Our absent Princess and Lady have also returned.”

Her words brought a smile to Robb’s lips and Jon was quick to follow after his cousin. Rhaneys followed suit and was pleased to see her Aunt alive and well. Knowing the North she could have frozen to death.

“I apologize for the delay,” Daenerys was quick to apologize to Lord Stark."We forgot about the time."

Lord Stark nodded his head and soon they were all seated around the table.

Thus the evening passed as her Aunt regaled her about he findings in Winter town. Later Theon gave them an in-depth description of the execution, which earned him disgusted looks from Lady Ysilla and Sansa. At one point Arya threw her bread at the bragging boy which was enough to silence him for the rest of the evening. Even Lady Stark seemed to approve and didn't even scold Arya for her actions.

After the cakes were served Lady Stark rose to her feet and gave them all a serious look.

What happened, Rhaenys wondered not for the first time. Did someone die?

“Your father wants to make an important announcement.”

In the blink of an eye all eyes were fixed on Lord Stark.

“The King…King Robert is riding for Winterfell.”

The news stunned her.

Gods be good, she muttered and turned to Lord Stark. He seemed to sense her confusion and provided her with an answer to her question.

“Jon Arryn is dead,” he said in a grave tone. She knew from Jon how much the old Lord meant to Lord Stark, but seeing him this grief-stricken she couldn't help but to soften her hard stance against the man in front of her. She may not have hated Lord Arryn as much as King Robert, but she was never able to forgive him for allowing Tywin Lannister to go unpunished.
And yet she wouldn’t be alive without him…

“But why would the King come here all the way to Winterfell?” Robb Stark asked, but Rhaenys already knew the answer, though she didn’t dare to voice her thoughts openly. He wants to make Lord Stark his new Hand. It was the only possible explanation.

“I have no clear answer, but I am sure we will know soon enough,” Lord Stark replied, before rising to his feet. Lord Stark’s announcement received divided reactions. Robb and Jon appeared worried. Sansa was already dreaming about her future at court while Arya and Bran were excited to see the Kingsguard.

Only Daenerys appeared happy amidst her obvious sadness for Lord Arryn.

“Why are you smiling like that?” Rhaenys asked.’Lord Arryn is dead.’”

“I know,” Daenerys apologized and leaned closer to whisper into her ear.”But you will be able to stay longer.”

I didn’t even thinking about that, she realized. Yet she still needed to know more. She didn’t interact with Lord Arryn on a daily basis, but she knew that he had enemies, especially among the Lannisters. He was also in good health when she left. His death was no coincidence and she needed more information to be sure.

Thus she decided to seek out Lord Stark who retreated back to his private solar.

The Lord gave her a curious look as she stepped inside, her hands folded in front of her and a polite smile showing on her lips.

“Princess Rhaenys,” he said and put the quill away.”What can I do for you?”

“I came to offer my condolences,” she answered softly and moved closer.”Lord Arryn always spoke very highly of you, my Lord.”

Then she exhaled deeply and posed the question she really wanted to ask.

“If you don’t mind me asking…What was the cause of Jon Arryn's death?”

Lord Stark’s didn't answer, but picked a letter from the table and handed it to her. She read the letter carefully, but there was no valuable information to be found other than the fact that Lord Arryn died from a sudden bout of illness.

“I see,” she said and handed the letter back to Lord Stark.”That is not good…not good at all. And that the King is coming here makes it even worse. Are you aware what that means, my Lord?”

“He wants to make me Hand of the King,” Lord Stark replied in a grave tone.”Lady Stark told me so much.”

“Then you should refuse his offer, my Lord,” Rhaenys replied and braced herself on the table.

“He is the King,” Lord Stark countered and leaned forward.”I cannot refuse the King…and Robert is my friend. If he is in need of my help I will not abandon him.”

“My Lord, the South is not a place for a man like you,” she protested, but when she saw the confusion showing on Lord Stark’s face she regretted her ill-chosen words. She didn’t know what it was, but the North was beginning to make her headless. Her thoughtless words were the proof of
“I don’t understand,” Lord Stark said. “I admit I hold not much love for the South, but I think I can take care of myself.”

“I don’t deny that,” Rhaenys tried to explain, without saying too much. “But your life will be in danger if you go South...Like Lord Arryn.”

“Danger? Like Jon Arryn?” Lord Stark asked and wrinkled his brows. “I assume that is why you came here to ask me these strange questions. You don’t believe that Jon Arryn died from a simple bout of illness, do you?”

“I have no proof for that, but I know that the Queen has been trying to get rid of him for years,” she replied in a low voice. “You understand what I am trying to say, my Lord?”

“I already know about the Lannisters and the Queen,” Lord Stark replied and gave her a reassuring smile. “You don’t have to fret about me, Princess Rhaenys. I have dealt with worse things than the Lannisters. Robert is the King and he will not allow them to harm me.”

“He is the King only in name,” she countered, fear gripping her heart when she saw how blind Lord Stark was to the danger ahead of him. “But the Lannisters rule the Seven Kingdoms. Lord Arryn has been trying for years to reduce their influence, but without much success. I may be young, but there is a reason Lord Arryn agreed to send Jon and Daenerys to the North. The King’s wish was no the only reason. He feared for their safety.”

“I don’t understand,” Lord Stark said then, his voice growing in intensity. “Why would the Queen care about Jon?”

“Simple. Jon knocked the Crown Prince from his horse. The Queen will never forget such a slight. Please, my Lord. Refuse the King…for Jon’s sake…”

She only realized her mistake when she saw the suspicion displayed on Lord Stark’s face.

“Jon?” he asked, his voice taking a dangerous tone. “What has Jon to do with all this?”

“I…,” she stuttered and wanted to back away, but he grasped for her hand to keep her in place.

“My words were misplaced…,” she tried to salvage the situation, but Lord Stark’s grip on her hand tightened only more and his glare made her shiver.

“I don’t think so,” Lord Stark stated, realization dawning on his face. “You know…you know who he is, don’t you?”

“I don’t know what you are referring to, my Lord,” she replied and tried to appear indifferent, but failed miserably.

“Oh, I think you do,” Lord Stark insisted, his dark grey eyes burning into her. “I makes all sense now. It explains your insistence to have Jon and your Aunt wed. I should have realized it sooner. You know that he is…,” he continued, but Rhaenys cut him off.

“I know,” she forced the words out of her mouth. “I have known for quiet a while. All I did was to secure their happiness. I did for Jon what I was unable to do for my other brother Aegon…”

Lord Stark’s eyes widened in shock and he finally let go off her hand.
The sadness displayed on his face made her heart clench in pain.

“I regret what happened to your brother,” he told her, his eyes shining with tears. “I was there… I should have done more, but Robert didn’t listen to me… he was so full of hatred for your father.”

“My brother and mother were innocent,” she added, her voice lacking the usual strength. “But let us not speak of the past. I am not going to lie. I held a grudge against you for your part in the Rebellion, but what you did for Jon pales compared to my hatred. I thank you for protecting Jon even if he can never know the truth.”

Hearing her words Lord Stark paled even more.

“Then you don’t know,” he realized. “I thought you knew.”

She felt like slapped. Know what? It can’t be!

She was barely able to breathe as she posed the next question. “Jon knows?”

“He knows… your Aunt as well… I told him the truth barely a moon ago,” Lord Stark confirmed, rendering Rhaenys speechless.

I was such a blind fool, she cursed inwardly and recalled Jon's reaction to her gift. Gods, I was blind.

“I see,” she stuttered, hitched up her dress and barely managed a proper greeting, before rushing out of the solar.

Along the way she nearly bumped into one of the servants. It was as if she lost her ability to walk, but that was no surprise when her heart was threatening to jump out of her breast.

When she found Jon’s chambers she was glad to find him and her Aunt alone. If anyone saw her like this they would probably think her mad.

“Rhaenys,” Daenerys said and sounded concerned. “You look so pale… Are you sick?”

Rhaenys was unable to answer, her mouth in knots as her gaze wandered to Jon.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she asked bracing herself against the wall. She felt dizzy and would have probably collapsed on the floor if Jon hadn’t risen from his seat and caught her in time.

“Easy, easy,” Jon told her and helped her sit down in a chair. “What did I not tell you?”

Jon wanted to step away, but she pulled on his arm to keep him in place.

“That… that you are my brother,” she stuttered.

“How… How did you find out?” he asked, barely able to speak.

“I have known for quite a while… since the tourney,” she admitted and received a look of utter confusion.

“I don’t…,” he stuttered and she rose to her feet to touch his face.

“Your smile,” she replied in a trembling voice. “My father was a man who hardly ever smiled, but when he did it was like sunshine after a long winter day. I don’t remember much from my father, but his smile is etched into my memory.”
Jon paled, his dark eyes shining with tears. It gave him the appearance of a little boy, though he was half a head taller than her.

“Then you don’t hate me?” he asked in utter disbelief. “What my mother did…”

His silly question made her laugh and she placed a quick kiss on his cheek, before smiling about his flabbergasted face.

“Of course not,” she told him. "If I hated your for your mother and my father action's I would be quite the hypocrite. My grandfather was a madman who enjoyed torturing people.”

“Mine too,” Jon replied jokingly and she couldn’t help but to laugh. The joke wasn’t even particular funny, but in that particular moment her heart felt suddenly much more lighter.

“I told Jon the same,” Daenerys added gently and leaned on her shoulder. ”But he is half a Northman…they are quite stubborn. Forgive him.”

Rheanys could only smile, tears burning in her eyes. ”There is nothing to forgive.”

…
Jon

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jon

Jon was certain that he will never get used to the terrible darkness reigning in the crypts of Winterfell. As they descended downwards the shadows the King’s of Winter and the Lords of Winterfell stared a back at them through the darkness, their eyes of stone empty and cold.

“We are nearly there,” Daenerys’ said her grip on his hand tightening as they continued down a long narrow path. They passed a few more broken statues here and there, but then they finally found the graves of his grandfather, his Uncle Brandon and his Lady mother.

His mother’s was the only female statue in the crypt, but Jon found it strangely fitting. She was a Queen, though she never wore a crown and like his father’s other uncrowned Queen she found an unfortunate death, though less gruesome.

It was also not the first time that he came here, but with the impending arrival of the King he came even more often. The King was the man who slew his bloodfather and while Jon hardly knew Rhaegar Targaryen he couldn’t help but to hold a grudge against the King. At times he wondered how his life would have gone if Prince Rhaegar had lived.

Would it be better or worse?

On other days he couldn’t help but to lame his mother and father. While his mother had no obligation to love King Robert, she could have at least informed them about her actions. Maybe then his Uncle and Grandfather wouldn’t have perished by the Mad King’s hands.

Why didn’t you tell anyone, mother?”

He asked her this question several times, but it was no use. All he had was a statue. It had to be enough.

“Do you have the flowers?” he asked Daenerys and broke the silence that had settled over them.

“Of course,” she replied softly and handed him the wreath of winter roses. Arya and Daenerys went to pick them in the glass gardens and Sansa braided the flowers into a wreath.

Jon hesitated for a brief moment before he put the garland into his Lady mother’s lap, but when he saw how pretty it looked he forgot about his hesitation. Lord Stark told him that his Lady mother cradled the crown of flowers his bloodfather gifted her until her dying breath. Now she had another one to call her own, though Jon was not sure if Lord Stark will approve.

The King is coming, Lord Stark had told her only weeks ago. It is best for you to keep out of sight and only attend to the King if he asks for your presence.

Jon agreed of course, but he hated hiding. The entire household was currently lined up to greet the King and his Lannister Queen. He doubted the King would have even noticed, but Daenerys herself preferred to keep out of the King’s and Queen’s presence. Her last meeting as the Lannister Queen was a sour memory for her. Thus it was no wonder that she asked him to accompany him down here, where they were far away from the King’s eyes.
“She looks sad,” Daenerys remarked as a gust of air swept over them, whispering to them. It was only air, but it gave him comfort. “Lord Stark should have asked his stonemason to make her smile. People should at least smile in death.”

He wanted to answer, but then they heard the familiar sound of footfalls on the stony ground, accompanied by two distant voices. Then a light flashed in the distance, rousing him out of his frozen state.

He grabbed Daenerys and pulled her around the corner, hiding in the shadows of a crumbling stone statue, a direwolf baring his teeth at him through the darkness.

“I didn’t get to see your other boy, Ned. The one I gave to Targaryen girl to marry. Did you send him off?”

He heard his Lord Stark’s heavy sigh.

“No, I told him to remain out of sight. We heard that your Queen was not quite pleased by his performance at the tourney held in honor of your son’s wedding to Princess Rhaenys. My wife was also not pleased about the legitimization…you will see him and the Princess at the feast.”

Jon was surprised how well Lord Stark was able to lie in presence of the King. Lady Stark hasn’t said a single word to him about that matter. She mostly ignored his presence as if she hoped he would just disappear, though she stopped giving him cold looks and no longer tried keeping him away from Robb and the others.

One of these days we should have a proper talk, he knew, but the avoided it at every turn. How could he talk to a woman who had resented him for most his life?

“Well, it is understandable,” the King replied. “But boy won’t remain here forever, won’t he?”

“No, once Moat Cailin is ready he will move there, but that will take at least another year. The castle is in a bad shape.”

“Aye,” the King agreed. “We saw it when he passed a Neck. A scary fortress, but it is a good idea to restore it. It is the gateway to the North and the boy of yours will be a good gatekeeper. I also heard he and your heir are close…that is rather surprising given his birth.”

“I made sure that they grow us true brothers,” Lord Stark explained quickly. “It is only natural that they love each other.”

“Like we,” the King added and patted Lord Stark’s shoulder. “We are not brothers by blood, but through our shared time in the Eyrie. Gods, I have missed you, but you were always a stubborn fool, hiding up here in this frozen wasteland.”

“I had my duties to attend to,” Lord Stark excused himself and the King laughed, shifting his attention to his Lady mother’s statue.

“She was more beautiful than that,” the King declared almost softly and touched her cheek. “She shouldn’t be down here in the cold and dark. She should be on a green hill with a blue sky above her.”

“She was of the North and this is where she belongs,” Lord Stark’s heavy voice echoed against the stone walls. “She made me promise to bring her home and to put her to rest next to our father and brother.”
That was another lie, although an omitted one. *He promised her to keep me safe from you.*

“Gods, Ned!” the King exclaimed, his voice too loud and ringing with suppressed anger.”It was not enough. I could have killed Rhaegar Targaryen a thousand times, but it is never enough.”

Lord Stark’s answer was calm and measured, but Jon heard the fear in his voice. It was very subtle, but he knew Lord Stark well enough to know when he was uncomfortable. That was such a moment.

“It is done, your Grace,” Lord Stark said.”Prince Rhaegar is dead and gone. You have your crown and the war is over.”

“The game never ends,” the King grumbled, turned back to the statue and lifted the garland Jon and Daenerys left there only moments ago.”What is that? Flowers?”

A moment of deadly silence followed, Lord Stark’s breathing the only audible sound.

“The girls brought them here,” Lord Stark lied again.”I told him once that their Aunt liked these kind of flowers. They took it to heart and bring her fresh flowers whenever I forget about it.”

“That is kind of them,” the King complimented.”You are lucky. The older one is a pretty flower and the younger one looks like a handful. Your boys are also fine. My heir is a coward who spends more time at his mother’s skirt rather than attending to his duties. I hoped marriage would suit him, but mostly ignores the Targaryen girl. The other two children are sweet, but Tommen is too much of a kitten.”

“Your heir will grow into his role in time,” Lord Stark replied diplomatically.”He is still young.”

“May the gods hear your words,” the King muttered and sighed deeply, before broaching another topic.”But now even Jon is lost to me. They told me it was an ailment of the stomach, but it is still hard to believe that he died like that. One day he was still jesting with me and on the next day the Silent Sisters carried him off. My Queen wants me to appoint her father as Hand of the King, but I don’t trust the old Lion. My wife and her family are overstepping their bounds nowadays…Did you hear what happened to the Tyrell boy?”

“I only heard that he had an accident during the tilt.”

“It was no accident, but Cersei’s work. She asked one of the boy’s servants to punch his wine. The boy nearly broke his neck. The woman’s foolish act nearly cost me an important ally. With your sister as my Queen such nonsense would have never happened.”

“My sister is dead,” Lord Stark stated the facts, for which Jon was thankful. *She would have never wanted to marry you,* he wanted to tell the King. *She would have hated you.*”And we should join the rest of the guests. The feast is awaiting you, your Grace.”

“There is another matter, old friend,” the King declared and straightened himself, his imposing shadow lingering over Lord Stark like a giant over a midget.

“I did not only come here to inform you about Jon’s passing,” the King continued.”Lord Eddard Stark, I would name you hand of the King.”

A moment of heavy silence followed, before his father answered.

“Your Grace…that is too much of an honor.”
“Nonsense,” the King disagreed. “It is no honor to hold this position. You will do all my work while I am whoring myself into an early grave. Maybe my next suggestion will make it more palatable to you. If your sister had lived we could have been brother’s bound by marriage, but fate decided differently and took her from me. Well, I have two other children. I first wanted to suggest a betrothal between your younger boy and my Myrcella, but that would displease my wife’s family. According to Cersei a younger son cannot marry a Princess. That is why I would like to suggest a betrothal between my younger boy Tommen and your younger daughter….”

Gods be good, Jon thought and desperately tried to keep his mouth shut. Arya would kill the boy. Refuse him.

“Arya,” Lord Stark told the King, his voice palpable with tension. “Her name is Arya and I feel very honored by your offer, but she is quite the handful and not very interested in being a proper lady. I doubt a soft-hearted Prince like your younger son would be able to handle her.”

The King barked with laughter.

“Well, even better. A spirited girl like her will will turn the kitten into a stag. Besides, they are practical children. It will be years before the girl can be wed.”

Another heavy moment of silence followed until Lord Stark gave his answer.

“I cannot answer that question now, your Grace. I will need time to think about the matter and speak to my wife.”

“That is understandable,” The King granted his father, but Jon heard the clear disappointment in his voice. “But don’t let me wait too long for an answer. I don’t get any younger, Ned.”

Lord Stark chuckled, but the tension was still there.

“None of us does, your Grace.”

“That is true,” the King muttered. “But there is another matter, Ned.”

“What is it, your Grace?”

“Stop calling me, your Grace. Even Jon called me Robert.”

Then they left, the light of their torches growing thinner as they climbed up the stairs. Jon and Daenerys waited a while longer and re-lit their torches, before they made their way back up the steps.

Outside the cool air bit into their skin, but helped to clear Jon’s mind.

“Then it is true what Rhaenys told me…the King really wants to make your father Hand of the King,” Daenerys remarked and brushed the dust from her cloak and dress.

Her words surprised him.

“You knew?”

She shook her head and pushed him along. “I didn’t know for sure…until now. I thought Rhaenys was worrying needlessly.”

“Well, she was right again,” Jon added and put his arm around her shoulder as they made their way over the courtyard.
The night had already fallen and a few stars glittered on the distant horizon. Even outside they could hear the music and the merry laughter of the guests.

Along the way they also saw a few of the King’s men, but they didn’t even notice their presence as they passed.

But someone else did.

“Ghost!” Jon exclaimed happily as his wolf came running towards him to rub his head against his gloved hand.”It took us longer than expected, but now we are back…,” he added, but soon one of Ghost’s brothers joined in. It was Summer.

“There you are!” Bran’s youthful voice ringed through the night. He was already dressed in a grey tunic, dark breeches, polished boots and a grey cloak of pelt.”The feast has already started and father asked me to search for you, but it were Ghost and Summer who found you.”

“It seems so,” Jon agreed and stroked Summer’s ear.”Forgive our delay. Let us go inside.”

Together they walked the rest of the way, while Bran informed them about all his observations.

“The King is horribly drunk and all the girls are humming around him like a pot of honey…that is at least what Theon said. And Uncle Benjen arrived…well I only saw him briefly, but I am sure he will stay longer…and tomorrow there will be a Great Hunt. Robb convinced him that I am allowed to join…Isn’t that exciting?”

“It is, little brother,” Jon agreed and patted his shoulder, before they entered the Great Hall. It was like stepping into a foreign world. Normally, it was only his family and the people residing in the castle who occupied the Great Hall, but now there were hundreds of people, their laughter and voices mixing with the music.

On the high table he spotted Lord Stark and Lady Stark in company of the King and the Queen, while his siblings and the royal children were placed at a lower dais. Seated next to the scowling Crown Prince was Rhaenys, who winked at them from the distance as they settled down next to Ser Roderik and his daughter Beth Cassle. Jeyne Poole was also not far, giggling with a dozen of other girls clad in pretty dresses and flowers braided into their hair.

Daenerys was quick to strike up a conversation with Beth Cassle while Jon occupied himself with feeding Ghost.

A while later someone tapped on his shoulder and Jon found his Uncle Benjen grinning down at him.

“You have grown quite a bit,” his Uncle remarked and patted his shoulder.

“Bran told me that you are here,” Jon replied and grinned.”Where have you been hiding?”

“I was speaking to your father,” he explained, his eyes flickering to Daenerys.”Your father told me that she is pretty, but I didn’t expect her to be that pretty. You are lucky.”

“I am,” he replied and made space for his Uncle to settle down next to him. They spoke about everything, but Jon couldn’t bring himself to breach the topic he actually wanted to talk about. Only recently Rhaenys mentioned their Grand-Uncle Aemon, who is currently serving as a Maester of at Castle Black. Jon was utterly flabbergasted by the fact that he had a relative of his sitting at the Wall. Truly, the gods have a strange sense of humor. It was then that Jon recalled his promise to take Daenerys to the Wall. Back then it was meant as a jape between children, but now he
actually had a reason to go there. This Maester Aemon was an old man and who knows how long he will live. That Uncle Benjen is here was even more unfortunate, though Jon had his doubts that his Uncle would agree to take him and Daenerys to the Wall, especially because he didn’t know the truth.

In the end he came to a different decision.

I will first ask for Lord Stark’s approval, he thought and went to seek him out after the feast was over.

It was very late when he finally caught him alone and seated in his private solar, a goblet in hand and a warm warm fire crackling in the hearth.

“Lord Stark,” he greeted and dropped his head. “Am I bothering you?”

“Of course not,” Lord Stark replied and put the goblet down. “I sent Bran to find you…Where have you been hiding?”

Jon swallowed hard, but he didn’t want to lie to a man he still considered his father.

“I and Daenerys went down to the crypts…to bring her flowers,” he replied. “When we heard you and the King we hid away…I apologize for my heedlessness, but I didn’t think he would go down there.”

Lord Stark nodded his head, a grim expression taking hold of his face.

“I didn’t he would,” Lord Stark admitted and squeezed his hand. “But luckily the King bought my lie.”

“Indeed,” Jon remarked with amusement. “I didn’t think you would be able to lie that well.

An uncomfortable expression took hold of Lord Stark’s face after he heard his words.

“My lies bring me no joy,” Lord Stark told him. “But I doubt that is why you came here to speak with me.”

“No,” Jon confirmed and took a deep breath, before speaking. “I heard you and the King…Are you considering his offer?”

Lord Stark shrugged his shoulders and leaned back in his chair.

“I think I will,” he replied. “Robert is my friend and what he has been telling me is very concerning. He needs me and we have to keep up appearances. He allowed you to wed the Princess because he shows great trust in me, but if I refuse his generous offer it makes me appear in a very bad light.”

All Lord Stark said was true, but that didn’t mean Jon liked it.

“And the betrothal between Arya and Prince Tommen? Did you agree?”

His father shook his head.

“As I said…it is a very generous offer…and Sansa is too old for Prince Tommen. I wish I could have refused, but we all have to do our duty.”

“Aye,” Jon replied, keeping his anger at bay.”But Arya will hate it. They will make her wear dresses and behave like a lady. I also don’t trust the Lannister Queen.”
“That is why I will keep her here in Winterfell for another year...to get accustomed to the idea. Then she will join Sansa at court. The King wants her to become one of Princess Rhaenys’s ladies.”

“Sansa will be delighted for sure,” Jon grumbled.”But Arya will never get accustomed to it. I know her.”

“That may be,” Lord Stark countered.”But Arya will have to marry eventually, no matter how much she hates it. Bran, Rickon and Sansa will have to do the same. I have given Arya all the freedom she wants...I allowed her to train with the bow and recently agreed that she may partake in Ser Roderik’s lessons, but she is still a Stark. Besides, she will have plenty of time to get to know the Prince and I won’t force her into it if the match if it proves catastrophic. I am only asking her to give it a try.”

This relieved him, but he still wanted him to refuse the King.

Yet he knew Lord Stark. Once settled on something it was hard to dissuade his mind.

“And Bran and Rickon? Will they join you at court?”

Lord Stark shook his head.

“Rickon is too young and Lady Stark wants to keep Bran in Winterfell. When I told her about the incident with Loras Tyrell, she grew very fearful. Besides, I have already asked the Blackfish to take him as a squire, though Lady Stark asked me to wait for another year, before sending him to Riverrun.”

“Bran will like that,” Jon replied and balanced himself on the table.”But I also worry about you, my Lord. The South is not like the North.”

“I appreciate your concern,” Lord Stark said in an almost soft voice.”But I have confronted worse enemies than Tywin Lannister and his daughter.”

Jon sighed dropped his head in acceptance.

“There is another matter,” Jon added and forced the words over his lips.”As Uncle Benjen is here...I wondered if you would allow me to take Daenerys to see the Wall. Her Grand-Uncle Aemon lives there.”

Lord Stark’s eyes widened.

“Who told you that?”

“Princess Rhaenys,” Jon replied.”He is very old and it could be very well the last opportunity to speak to him.”

Lord Stark covered his face with the palm of his hand and exhaled deeply.

“There is a problem,” Lord Stark replied at last.”Lord Tyrion Lannister also wants to visit the Wall.”

“I see,” Jon said and pondered over the problem, before giving his thoughts.”But we can be careful and I doubt old Maester Aemon would sell us out.”

“That is not my only fear,” Lord Stark replied.”But the Wall is no place for a girl. The men there
are not all like your Uncle Benjen. No, I cannot take that risk and the King would not be pleased.”

“But…,” Jon protested, but Lord Stark gave him a sharp look.

“I am sorry, but I can’t allow that. You may go, but the Princess has to remain here. I could assign you as Tyrion Lannister’s companion. Tell him a few stories about the Wall and he will be satisfied. The Princess may write Maester Aemon a letter that you may deliver to him in a hopefully discrete manner. Can you accept that?”

Jon frowned, but he didn’t have much of a choice in the matter. A letter was better than nothing.

“Very well,” Jon replied.”I accept your condition.”

Chapter End Notes

In regards to Ned: Just because he is Hand of the King doesn’t mean he will die. This is after all an AU. Yes, Rhaenys warned Ned, but Rhaenys misjudged him as well. The fact that she told him all these things convinced him only more that it is the right thing to do.
In regards to Arya: She will remain in Winterfell.
In regards to Bran: He will go to the Hunt and thus not encounter Jaime and the Cersei. The reason for the war will be different than in he books.
Jon and Catelyn will eventually get their big talk, but at the moment they are still trying to adjust to the new reality. It has only been a few moons since they found out the truth.
In regards to Sansa: she will be one of Rhaeny's ladies. That will be good for her I think.
Daenerys

It was early in the morning when Arya and Bran assembled in her and Jon's chamber.

“Quiet,” Jon told Arya and Bran when he heard them giggle.”If anyone hears us our whole plan will be for nothing.

“Arya was laughing,” Bran complained and received a hit on the shoulder.

“You were laughing too, stupid,” Arya threw back nearly started to quarrel, but Jon grabbed her and covered her mouth.”Quiet or Sansa will hear us. Then the whole castle will know about our plan.”

Arya sighed and carried the bag on her shoulder to the bed.

“Did you get everything we need?” Daenerys asked her.

“I think so,” Arya confirmed and turned to Bran.”Bring your things here, brother.”

“Of course,” Bran agreed. Then he put a cloak and a pair of boots on the bed.”I bought them in Wintertown. The things should suit our purpose.”

“Aren’t they a bit too big for Daenerys?” Jon asked and eyed the boots critically.

“Maybe,” Bran agreed.”But it was hard enough to get all this without being noticed.”

“My task wasn’t much easier,” Arya declared proudly.”Stealing that tunic, breeches and jerkin was like trying to steal a treasure of gold from a dragon. Old Martha should be named the Queen of the washbasin.”

“Aye,” Jon confirmed and laughed.”I understand what you mean. Once I gave her one of my old cloaks to wash and she gave me such a frightening look that I went to wash it myself.

“Even Lady mother is afraid of her,” Arya added.”But I was much quicker and got it anyway. I hope it suits you better than Bran’s over grown boots.

Daenerys nodded her head an eyed the clothing meant for her disguise.

“It has to be enough...Thank you for your help,” Daenerys said and granted Bran and Arya a smile.

“Stop thanking us and get quickly dressed,” Arya replied and pulled Bran out of the room.”They will leave soon and we told our Lady mother that you are not coming downstairs, because you are upset about your niece’s departure. Be mindful not to be seen.”

“Aye,” Jon added and urged Ghost from the bed.”We should hurry. Uncle Benjen is waiting for us in company of the recruits.”

Daenerys nodded her head and quickly slipped out of her dress, before putting on the tunic, the breeches and the worn-out boots. Then she pulled on the cloak and braided her hair out of her face,
hiding it under a head-covering made of dark pelt.

“What do you think?” she asked with a grin.”Do I look like a boy joining the Watch?”

“That is not funny,” he told her and frowned, before straightening her head-covering.”Dany Flint got murdered and raped for dressing up like a boy. You should not forget about that.”

“I am not Dany Flint,” she countered quickly.”And your Uncle Benjen said he will keep me safe. Besides, I won’t stay at the Wall. I am only going there to see my Grand-Uncle. He is very old and could very well die before I get another opportunity. Besides, I am not only going for myself, but also for Rhaenys.”

Jon exhaled deeply and brushed his hair out of his face.

“Aye,” Jon he added and offered his hand to her.”Let us go then, Uncle Benjen is waiting for us.”

They found Uncle Benjen at the stables, pacing circles in an almost anxious manner.

“There you are,” he said and and gave Daenerys a serious look.”Listen carefully. These boy’s are not like the highborn you usually interact with. Some of them are criminals. For them you are Will, a mute boy from Wintertown. Keep your mouth shut and don’t speak to anyone. Is that understood?”

“I understand,” Daenerys replied quietly and inclined her head to take in the dirty pack of boys.”But there is one thing I would like to know. Why are you helping me, my Lord?”

Uncle Benjen gave her a quick smile and patted her shoulder.

“I have known your Grand-Uncle for many years and he saved my life numerous times. I know how much he wishes to meet his relatives. Besides, I don’t see any harm in visiting an old harmless man like him. I doubt you are plotting treason with old Maester Aemon.”

Daenerys laughed.

“I never understood why the King thinks I am plotting treason against him. I would never harm my niece.”

“The King loved my sister very much,” Benjen Stark replied, sadness ringing in his voice.”Such love can be blinding at times.”

“Aye,” Daenerys replied. *Hatred as well...*

…”

They left an hour later when the first sunbeams touched the horizon. Daenerys said her goodbyes to Rhaenys on the previous night and while her niece was not even far from her it felt as if they will soon be worlds apart. Once Daenerys returns from the Wall she will remain in Winterfell, but Rhaenys will be far away in the capital. I could be years before they see each other again. Rhaenys was more enthusiastic and even promised that they will see each other again.

The life on the road as a common boy didn’t prove very pleasant, but she was prepared to accept this in order to see her Grand-Uncle. At first Jon out rightly refused, but a few days of begging helped to change his mind, though she doubted he would have agreed if Benjen Stark hadn't offered his help.
Thus hours of riding passed and they finally reached the King’s Road where the King’s party parted from them. From the distance Daenerys watched as Jon said his goodbyes to Lord Stark and Sansa.

Until the last moment she continued to watch as her niece and the golden banner of House Baratheon disappeared behind distant hills and valleys.

“What are you looking after, boy?” one of the other boys asked her. He was tall and had strange floppy ears. The other boys called him Pyp and he liked to entertain them with his silly antics.

Daenerys wanted to tell him to let her be, but she had to play a mute boy. Thus she gave a quiet nod and whirled her horse around to rejoin the others.

Uncle Benjen gave her a relieved look when he spotted her.

“Now the harder part of our journey begins,” he told her and the other boys.”It will get colder the closer we get to the Wall. Keep your mouth and ears hidden under your garments and all should be well.”

Daenerys has been doing that since she left Winterfell, but she was still freezing and shivering throughout the nights. Even the fires didn't offer much reprieve against the cold.

That Jon spent most of his time in company of Tyrion Lannister irked her as well, but he had no other choice. They needed to keep up appearances.

Daenerys often heard the other boys joking about the dwarf’s ugliness, but Jon seemed to get along with him. She often saw them talk over the fire and sometimes the dwarf shared his mulled wine with him.

Daenerys herself didn’t know what to make of the dwarf. He was as ugly, but she hadn’t had the possibility to judge his character.

“Will!” Grenn called after her. He was Pyp’s friend and an giant of a boy.”Come and eat or it will get cold.”

Daenerys gave the boy a smile and settled down next to the fire.

The soup was warm and meager, but better than nothing.

“You are always watching Stark’s nephew,” Pyp remarked curiously.”Do you want get under his sheets?”

Daenerys nearly choked on her food and soon Grenn was patting her shoulder.

“Told you it is not a good idea to ask such questions,” Grenn chided and flashed Pyp a grim look.”You nearly killed the boy.”

Pyp ignored the other boy and gave Daenerys a goofy smile.

“There is no shame in that. The boy is prettier than most girls.”

Daenerys didn’t know what to say she had a hard time keeping a straight face.

“Can’t you see that you are bothering him with your stupid questions,” Grenn remarked again. Daenerys used the moment get to her feet and rushed off.
When she was far away from camp she started to laugh until her stomach hurt. After she regained her composure she walked further to find a private place to take a piss.

When she was done she pulled down the pelt from her head and grouched down to re-braid her hair.

She was half-finished when a swishing noise coming from the foliage caught her attention. Grabbing for her dagger she turned around and heard a rustling noise.

"Who goes there?" she asked and tried to hide her fear.

"Only me," a slurred voice replied and a moment later Tyrion Lannister stumbled out from the high foliage."Put that dagger down, my Lady."

"I am no Lady," she corrected him and the dwarf grinned."Why were you hiding there?"

"I was not hiding, just taking a piss," the dwarf quipped."It seems great minds think alike, Princess Daenerys."

Daenerys gasped and dropped her dagger. Well, there goes my grand plan.

"This far from camp?" she asked instead and put the dagger away."Do your small feet not ail you, my Lord?"

"A witty one, aren't you?" he asked and gave her a curious look."But you are not wrong. I have noticed you before…because my assigned travelling companion is staring at you all the time. Now I understand why, but what are you doing here?"

"Going to the Wall," she replied, not knowing what else to say."Like you."

The dwarf laughed again.

"I can see that," he remarked and rubbed the back of his neck."But why are you dressing up like a boy?"

She sighed and pondered a possible reply. _I need silence him. But how? He seems far too clever to be easily fooled by a lie. Honesty is all that remains._

"I want to meet my Grand-Uncle Aemon. Lord Stark forbade it, because he thinks it would displease the King, but I need to meet him. He is very old," she explained honestly."Please, don’t sell me out. I can offer you gold."

"Gold?" Tyrion Lannister asked and rumbled with laughter."I am a Lannisters. I have enough gold. Some say we even shit gold. I think you will have to offer me something else to buy my silence, Princess."

_Silly girl_, she cursed herself and soon her mind was rattling.

"Well…Is there something you always wanted, my Lord?" she asked, not knowing what else to say.

Lord Tyrion tapped his chin and gave her an amused smile.

"When I was a little boy I wanted a dragon, but I doubt you can help me with that."

_A dragon_, she pondered, but then it hit her like thunder. Well, _I have no dragon, but a dragon egg._
That will have to do.

Thus she flashed him a sweet smile and stated her offer.

“I don’t have a dragon, but a dragon egg. I left it in Winterfell, but when we return I can show it to you. I also noticed that you are great reader. I have several precious books from Lord Arryn’s library. What do you say to my offer, my Lord?”

When she saw his flabbergasted face she knew that she won him over.

“A dragon egg,” he repeated in hushed whisper.”How did you acquire it?”

“My niece received two on her wedding day. She gifted me one.”

Understanding washed over his face.

“Well,” he said and rubbed his chin.”I am honest…I don’t hold much love for my good-brother the King and the opportunity to lay eyes on a precious dragon eggs is probably the closest I will ever get to a real dragon,” he added and offered his hand to her.”I think we have a bargain, don't you think?”

She smiled took his hand.

“We have a bargain, my Lord.”

...
Their stay at Castle Darry was short and brief. Rhaenys would have liked to stay longer, but the King was impatient to return to the Capital. For Rhaenys it was like a change of weather to meet people who look favorable on her family name. Three of Lord Darry’s brothers had died for House Targaryen and now only Lord Raymund Darry and his young son Lyman remained.

*One day I will return the lands that were stolen from him,* she thought as she took languid steps along the muddy shore of the River Trident not far from the famous Inn of the Crossroads.

It was late evening and the blue sky slowly taking a pink hue. Somewhere at the distance sky she even spotted the first glimmering stars and a thin half-moon.

“Are you sure this is the right way?” Lady Sansa Stark asked. She looked slightly afraid, her and roaming through Lady's soft fur.

“Lord Darry assured me it is here,” she insisted. They have been walking for nearly an hour, but the tree Lord Darry described to her was harder to find than anticipated.

*A crooked elm tree can be found near the shore,* he had told her, but now she was beginning to have her doubts. Nearly sixteen years have passed since her father's death and time eats at a man’s memory.

“It is getting late…we shouldn’t have come here without a guard,” Sansa reminded her again. Rhaenys knew the girl meant well, but taking one of the King’s men with her was out of the question.

“You offered to come with me,” Rhaenys replied gently.”And you promised me to keep our true purpose a secret…What do you think would the King think if I go to visit the Ruby Ford?”

“Oh,” the girl said and nodded her head in understanding.”I forgot about that…But would the King really be that displeased?”

“The King hates my father,” she explained and offered her hand to the girl.”His name alone can send the King into a rage. That is why we are just taking a walk and nothing more...Do you understand?”

“I understand,” Sansa replied and nodded her head in confirmation, her red hair falling around her like a curtain of fire.

“Good,” Rhaenys replied and pulled her along. They continued to walk a bit further down the pebbled shore littered with reeds. A cold gust of wind blowing through the trees made her shiver, but when she saw the broken elm tree she knew that she found the place that had haunted her in all her nightmares.

“Here it is,” she said and winced at the sound of her strained voice.”That is the Ruby Ford.”

As a child she always imagined a broad river-bend overflowing with blood and rubies, but this was nothing more than a small brook that can be easily crossed on horseback. She heard that King Robert pierced her father’s chest with his mighty hammer, but she always believed that the river's current that killed him. They say drowning is a more pleasant death than bleeding to death.
“It looks peaceful here,” Sansa added gently and squeezed her hand, before picking spray of flowers they had picked from the vest of her cloak. It were white daises mixed with bright red flowers named Dragon’s breath. Touching them to human skin can bring painful blisters and rash, but Rhaenys thought them fitting.”Not at all as scary as I imagined.”

“Peaceful and sad,” Rhaenys whispered and picked the bundle of flowers from Sansa’s hand, before making her way over to the Elm tree. There she laid the flowers down and muttered one of the prayers her Septa desperately tried to instill into her when she was a child.”A place to mourn a King that never was.”

Sansa didn’t comment on her words, but Rhaenys regretted her choice of words. For Sansa her Prince Rhaegar was a man who raped and killed her Aunt.

It seems the North has loosened my tongue, she thought and rose back to her feet, before turning back to look at Sansa.

“We should go back,” Sansa said and stroked Lady's head.”Lady is hungry.”

Rhaenys laughed.

“I can see that,” Rhaenys replied and leaned down to touch the wolf’s head.”And you are right. We should get back.”

Then she offered Sansa her arm and together they made their way back to find their horses still bound to the tree where they had left them.

“Finally,” Sansa sighed. Rhaenys smiled in a agreement, but when saw Joff’s golden curls her smile faded.

“There you are hiding,” he greeted her with his usual arrogance, his hand touching the new sword he received for his last nameday. It was made of gleaming blue steel, the pommel wrought in the form a of a lion.”My father the King asked me to find you.”

Rhaenys exhaled deeply and bowed her head, before putting her mask in place. It was the usual procedure, but his sudden appearance had left her speechless, even if it was only brief moment.

“That is very kind of you, but completely unnecessary. We are on our way back.”

“Frail ladies like shouldn’t roam around without company,” he remarked coldly, before shifting his attention to Sansa, who quickly dropped a curtsy and even managed a smile.

"You are most kind, your Grace.”

Her demeanor seemed to please Joff, because there was a smile showing on his plump lips.

“Did you hear that?” he asked and turned back to Rhaenys.”Lady Sansa knows her manners. You could learn from her.”

Rhaenys bit a comment back and dipped her head.

“As you wish, husband,” she replied softly and balled her fists in the skirt of her dress.”Now let us go. The King will not be pleased if we waste too much time.”

But Joff smiled cruelly and crawled from his horse.

He towered over her by half a head, though he was several years younger than her. And he had a
sword. He may be a coward, but she saw him use it against the squires he likes to torment with his superior fighting skills.

"First you will tell me what you were doing out here," he replied and grinned."What could be so interesting that you are roaming through this wilderness?"

“We were picking flowers,” Sansa answered quickly and pulled another bundle of flowers out of her vest."Here."

“I am no fool, beloved wife,” Joff countered and graced her with one of his insufferable smiles.”You are not the kind of person who goes picking flowers in the countryside. You came here to weep for your weakling of a father.”

Rhaenys tried her best to keep her composure as he moved closer to touch her cheek.

“Not that I disapprove of your actions…it is good for you to remember how my father killed yours, though I doubt he will be pleased hear that you wept for a man who raped his late betrothed.

“I didn’t weep for my father, but my mother and all the others who died in this useless war,” she replied. It was half a lie and half the truth, but that didn’t matter to Joff. When he was in the mood to be cruel nobody is able to stop him.

“Why do you weep for these fools?” he asked mockingly.”They lost and died. Weaklings deserve no pity. The same goes for your mother…sickly and useless as she was…no wonder your father found himself the Stark whore to satisfy himself…,” he continued, but was cut off when Rhaenys slapped him straight on the face.

It was pure instinct and only when she felt the burning in her knuckles did she realize her mistake.

For a moment he looked at her with wide eyes, but then she saw the anger washing over his face and felt the pain on her cheek. Then she felt the blood in her mouth and the muddy ground beneath her. He had slapped her and she somehow ended on the ground.

“How dare you hit your Prince!” he seethed through gritted teeth and pulled out his sword, putting the naked steel to her neck. Behind her she heard Sansa’s gasp.”I think it is time to teach you a lesson…,” he muttered and drew blood from her neck.

He grinned happily and would have probably continued, but Lady toppled him and buried her teeth deeply in his sword arm.

Joff’s wail of pain helped to snap her out of her frozen state. Quickly she pulled herself on her feet and tried to take a look at the wound while Sansa was pulling her direwolf away from the weeping Prince. It wasn't that she cared for Joff's welfare, but her desperate attempt to salvage the whole situation..

“Don’t touch me, dragonspawn!” he snapped and slapped her hand away, before stumbling back to his horse. Like a man too deep in his cups he climbed back in the saddle.

“My mother will hear of this!” he added in shrill voice and galloped away.

Rhaenys, who was still a bit rattled from the whole incident, inclined her head to appraise Sansa. The girl looked utterly pale, but was otherwise unharmed.

“We need to go back…,” Sansa stuttered helplessly, tears shimmering in her eyes.
“No,” Rhaenys replied and inclined her head to look at Lady. “I mean yes, but first we need … Lady can’t return with us.”

Sansa’s eyes widened in confusion.

“No,” Sansa stuttered and shook her head. “Lady is good and kind…,” she continued, but Rhaenys cut her off.

“Joff will not forget that,” she tried to explain. “He will have her killed. I know him…”

“But we can’t just leave her here,” the Sansa protested, tears rolling down her cheeks. “It is dangerous in the woods…”

“Lady is a direwolf… she is from the North… a place far dangerous than this one. Here she can roam free and find friends,” Rhaenys tried to find the right words, her heart still hammering violently against her chest. “Maybe she will even be able to find her way home… When I was a little girl I had a cat named Balerion… once he disappeared for nearly a year, but came back fat and happy… I promise you, Lady will like it here much better than in King’s Landing.”

Sansa looked at her with wide eyes and a heavy moment of silence followed.

Then finally, Sansa nodded her head in acceptance.

...

The night had fallen when they arrived back at the Inn of the Crossraods. There another unpleasant face greeted her. It was the Hound, Joff’s sworn shield. It was not him who murdered her mother, but just hearing the name Clegane was enough to leave her trembling. It was the very reason Joff made him his sworn shield. To hurt her.

“There you are,” he grumbled, his eyes taking in their appearance. “The King wants to see you… at once.”

Rhaenys exhaled deeply and tightened her grip on Sansa’s hand. She felt tired and the shawl wrapped around her neck didn’t help to still the bleeding. Her dress was certainly ruined. Not that she cared about the dress, but she dreaded their looks of pity.

“I would like to clean myself,” she told him, forcing herself to look at his ugly face.

“The King said at once,” the Hound grumbled, his eyes flickering to Sansa. “Your father is also there. He wanted to send men to find you, but the Queen forbade it. She wants the head of that wolf of yours and feared that Lord Stark’s men might help you in hiding the beast…,” he added, but stopped when he noticed the absence of the wolf.

“Lady grew wild and ran off into the wilderness,” Sansa explained softly. “It is better that way. A wolf is no pet.”

An amused smile crossed over the Hound’s face.

“Well spoken, little bird,” he remarked and shifted his attention back to Rhaenys. “Now come along, Princess.”

Rhaenys sighed and braced herself for the worst.

The King carried an annoyed look as they entered, a goblet of wine in hand. The Queen sat next to
him, her green eyes blinking with rage and one hand ranked protectively around her precious boy.

Lord Stark looked very tense, but when he saw Sansa a relieved smile crossed over his lips.

Rhaenys let go of her hand and a moment later Sansa was in her father’s arms.

“Where is the wolf?” the Queen asked, her green eyes piercing into her.”Where is the beast that
dared to harm my son?”

“Oh, calm your tits woman!” the King grumbled and turned to look at Rhaenys.”And allow me to
hear what they have to say.”

“Joff told me you slapped him and that Ned’s girl commanded her direwolf to attack him,” the
King recounted Joff’s lies.”Is that true?”

“I slapped Joff,” she admitted and tried not to flinch under the King’s hard gaze. She took a deep
breath and forced herself to continue.

"It was not right of me to do that, but he said rather discourteous things about my Lady mother and
your late betrothed Lady Lyanna. My mother may have been wed to your enemy, but she was just
another victim of my father’s betrayal…not unlike Lady Lyanna,” she explained in a trembling
voice pulled and down the shawl wound around her neck.”Angered by my actions the Prince drew
his blade and held it to my neck. Lady was merely trying to help me. That is all there is to say on
the matter. Lady Sansa will confirm my words if you ask her.”

The King’s eyes face grew flushed as he turned to look at Joff.

“What did you say about Lyanna?”

“I …father,” Joff stuttered.

“What did you say?” the King asked again, his voice rising in strength.

“Weaklings deserve no pity. The same goes for your mother…sickly and useless as she was…no
wonder your father found himself the Stark whore to satisfy himself…,” Sansa recounted Joff’s
words to the King. Her voice was weak, but Sansa was the daughter of Eddard Stark. Her words
held greater strength than hers and Rheanys was sure Sansa knew that.

No answer came from the King, but the grimace of anger displayed on his face told her everything
she needed to know. Joff was about to earn himself a beating, but the Queen was quick to place
herself between her son and the King.

“Don't you dare to lay hands on him!” she shrieked.

“Out of the way woman!” the King shouted.

“Only over my dead body!”

From the corner of her eye Rhaenys saw the Kingslayer moving towards them, but then Lord Stark
intervened.

“Your Grace,” Lord Stark addressed the King and touched his shoulder.”The Prince is certainly in
need of punishment, but blunt force will not help to make him understand. The Princess tried and
failed, I doubt you will have more success, old friend.”

The King gave Lord Stark an unbelieving look.
“He insulted Lya…,” he began, but Lord Stark cut him off.

“The Prince’s insults were no doubt the words of a foolish boy,” he said and flashed Joff an icy look.”An apology will be needed.”

“An apology?” the Queen asked and stamped her feet on the ground.”It was your daughter’s wild beast that nearly murdered my son…Where is the creature?”

“Lady grew wild and ran off into the wilderness,” Sansa repeated the same words she gave to the Hound only moments ago.”It is better that way. A wolf is no pet.”

“Well, then we will have to search…,” the Queen began, but the King was quick to silence her.

“We will do no such thing,” the King grumbled.”You heard Ned’s girl. The wolf is gone and won’t come back. No harm will come to Joff. Now get him out of here or I might end up doing something I will regret…”

“Very well,” the Queen replied tightly and pulled Joff along.

Once they had left the King turned back to look at Ned and Sansa.

“I am sorry about the wolf,” he said and gave Sansa a sad smile.”But your girl is right. A wolf is no pet.”

Then the King shifted his attention back to her.

“Get that cut treated and avoid Joff the next few days,” he advised her.”And in regards to you mother…It was Tywin who gave the order to kill her. I never asked him to murder her. She was just an unfortunate victim…like …,” the King continued, but stopped himself.

Like Lyanna, he had wanted to say.

“I understand,” she replied and dropped a curtsy, before leaving them. What the King said was true, but he didn’t punish Tywin Lannister for his crime when he had the chance to do so.

...
The travel to the Wall took them nearly half a moon. It were weeks of storms and shivering outside under the Northern sky.

Jon didn’t mind so much, but Lord Tyrion and Daenerys were a different matter. Even their thick pelt was unable to protect them against the cold.

Soon, he had told Daenerys the night before and she gave him a thankful look, though he believed it had another reason other than to escape the cold. She will finally meet...no that they will finally meet their Grand-Uncle. It has been a rather tedious travel and he had no doubt that Lady Stark will raise hell once they return to Winterfell.

The thought made him shudder, but he doubted they will ever get another possibility to speak to Maester Aemon.

“Jon,” Daenerys’ hoarse voice snapped him out of his thoughts.”Look!”

Jon lifted his head and couldn’t help but to be in awe of the monstrous wall of ice rising before them. His mouth stood open, because it was hard for him to believe that a building like that can actually exist. The Wall stood nearly seven-hundred feet tall, the pale morning light painting the icy surface in a pale blue color that was reminiscent of the flowers they put into his mother’s grave.

His Uncle Benjen chuckled when he saw their stunned faces.

“Impressive, isn’t it?” he asked and grinned.

“Quite the sight,” Lord Tyrion added and shielded his eyes against the rising sun.”How do you get to the top?”

“There is a way,” Benjen replied politely and led his horse towards the barred doors.”And I will be pleased to show you the way, my Lord Lannister.

Jon, Tyrion and Daenerys rode close behind him, followed by the boys meant to join the Night’s Watch.

Daenerys made friends among them, one named Pyp and the other Grenn. Jon was a bit wary of them at first, but they proved good company. When Daenerys revealed her true identity the both of them were stunned, but also oddly amused.

I might have been one of them, he thought as he listened to the rattling of the portcullis.

“Benjen Stark!” greeted one of the men who had opened he door. They exchanged a few words, before his Uncle turned around and jerked his head towards the recruits.

“As you can see…I bring fresh recruits,” he explained while the other man regarded the boys with amusement.
“Aye,” the other man confirmed and pointed at Lord Lannister. “But I don’t think this one counts as a full man.”

“Then it is good that I don’t have any intention to join,” Tyrion Lannister huffed and led his horse pass the men.

“I doubt I count as a full man,” Daenerys whispered and Jon couldn’t help but to laugh. Pyp and Grenn shared his amusement.

“Grenn certainly thought you were a boy,” Pyp added, his floppy ears flushed from the aching cold.”But I knew there was something iffy about you from the beginning. Boys are usually not that pretty, though by that standard your husband should be a girl.”

“Your words don’t make sense, Pyp,” Grenn replied and rolled his eyes in annoyance.”Girls can be ugly too.”

Jon ignored their bickering and took in the surroundings.

Castle Black was not much different than any other castle in the North. Everywhere he looked he saw men at work. One was a grim-faced man drilling the recruits mercilessly.

Said man’s face grew only grimmer when he spotted Uncle Benjen.

“Stark,” he greeted through gritted teeth.”Is there anyone useful in this bunch of green boys?”

“We will see, Ser Alliser,” his Uncle replied and jerked his head towards Jon.”May I introduce my nephew?”

“I see,” Ser Alliser remarked and regarded Jon with a cold look.”A pleasure.”

Jon dipped his head and forced a smile over his lips.

“It is a pleasure…,” he began, but Ser Alliser cut him off.”Are you joining?”

Jon was taken back by the coldness of the man and struggled for an answer, but his Uncle Benjen was quicker.

“Jon is Lord Tyrion Lannisters’ travelling companion,” he explained, before pointing at Daenerys.”But he is not our only guest…may I introduce Princess Daenerys Targaryen.”

The man named Ser Alliser nearly dropped his wooden sword, his face taking on a waxen hue.

“Are you fucking insane, Stark?” he asked and flashed Uncle Benjen an icy look.”Why did you bring her here?”

“She is here to meet her Grand-Uncle Aemon,” Jon replied after he had regained his speaking ability.

Realization showed on Ser Alliser’s marred face and he turned to look at Daenerys. The expression washing over his face was a mixture of understanding and determination.

Then he turned around and pounded his wooden blade against his shield.

“Listen up, boys!” he shouted and called everyone to attention. Jon was not surprised when obeyed. He doubted anyone of these boys wanted to anger the grim knight.
Then Ser Alliser turned around and pointed his sword at Daenerys.

“Can you all see that girl?” he asked the men, who shook their heads in unison. “Touch her and I will cut off your cocks. Is that understood?”

Nobody dared to speak out against the man and what followed was utter silence.

“Good,” Ser Alliser murmured, before continuing with the drills.

“What a delightful fellow,” Lord Tyrion, an amused smile curling on his lips.

“His name is Ser Alliser Thorne,” Uncle Benjen said as if his name explained everything. “You better stay away from him, my Lord. He doesn’t like Lannisters.”

“Understandable,” Tyrion replied with a knowing smile. “But he doesn’t seem to like the Starks either.”

“Aye,” Benjen confirmed and turned to look at Daenerys. “But that is no surprise. He fought for your father’s side and was forced to take the black after the Rebellion. That is why he dislikes me and Lord Lannister. What he just did was his way of showing courtesy to you, Princess.”

“I see,” Daenerys replied, an expression of understanding washing over features. “I see.”

…

“When will we be able to see my Grand-Uncle?” Daenerys inquired later when they sat down to eat. They didn’t eat with the other recruits though, but were kept in a private solar by the courtesy of the Lord Commander. Jon had seen him only briefly, this Lord Commander Mormont, but going by his grey beard he had to be quite old.

“The Lord Commander was not pleased when I told him about your presence here, Princess,” Uncle Benjen replied and chewed on the hard bread. “But he wants to meet you all tomorrow.”

“Why would he want to speak with me?” Jon asked and felt perplexed. He was no Lord of Winterfell or King able to support the Night’s Watch. “That he would want to speak to Lord Lannister is understandable, but I am only the brother to the heir of Winterfell.”

“Exactly,” Lord Tyrion added and grimaced at the taste of his ale. It tasted atrocious, but Jon didn’t want to complain. “That is why he wants to speak with you. He hopes that you will convince your brother to send more men or resources.”

“And my Grand-Uncle?” Daenerys repeated her question. “Did he disapprove of my request?”

“Aye,” Uncle Benjen replied at last and grinned when he saw Lord Tyrion’s grimace. “He approved, but he is not happy about your presence here.”

Daenerys looked slightly disappointed, but shook her head in understanding.

“I don’t care what the Lord Commander thinks. I only want to meet him Grand-Uncle.”

“Good,” Uncle Benjen replied. “We will go to him after supper. Your visit will be quiet a surprise for him… you should be careful. He is rather old and brittle.”

“Of course,” Daenerys assured Uncle Benjen. “We will be careful.”

As promised Uncle Benjen led them to the Maester’s humble residence, a plain wooden keep
beneath the rookery.

It was Benjen who knocked at the door and soon one of the stewards opened and led them inside a room, kept warm by a burning hearth and several half-burned candles.

The smell of birdshit was also quite poignant.

“Who is there?” a man asked, his voice cracked like old paper.

“It is me,” Uncle Benjen replied.”Benjen Stark. I bring the promised visitors.”

“I heard,” the old shrunken man replied and gave them a toothless smile. Then his unseeing eyes started to search the room.

_He is blind_, Jon realized, but that didn’t surprise him. The man in front of him was even older than Old Nan.

“Why are your visitors silent?”

Jon swallowed hard and Daenerys looked equally lost. Uncle Benjen rolled his eyes and gave him a pat on the shoulder, before barring the door behind him.

“I am Jon…son of Eddard Stark,” he replied politely and dipped his head in greeting, though it was very unlikely the man was able to see it.”Uncle Benjen is my Uncle.”

“I heard about you,” the old man replied, his milky eyes staring into nothingness.”You are the legitimized son, the one who wed Rhaella’s girl…,” he continued, but his voice faltered. It seems speaking about his family was not easy for him.

“It is true,” Daenerys finally spoke, her voice soft like feathers.”I…”

“Please speak up,” the old man requested and wrinkled his brows.”I am an old man and my hearing is not the best…you almost sounded like a girl.”

“I am a girl,” it escaped Daenerys. She exhaled deeply, before continuing to speak.”Jon brought me here all the way from Winterfell, Grand-Uncle.”

The old Maester grew utterly quiet, his unseeing eyes wide in shock. His frail body started to tremble and Daenerys was quickly at his side, grasping his gnarled hand between her own.

“I didn’t mean to frighten you, Grand-Uncle,” she explained and knelt down on the ground.”I didn’t know how to speak to you…”

The old man remained silent and didn’t answer for a long time. He only lifted his free hand and paced it on Daenerys’ face. He touched her cheeks, mouth, nose, lips and then her chin.

Afterwards the old man’s hand dropped back into his lap to grasp Daenerys’ hand, tears glittering in his milky eyes.

“It was foolish of you to risk your life for an old man like me, child,” Maester Aemon whispered.”But I am thankful that you are here. I never thought I would be able to meet another member of my family.

“I am not the only member of my family who wants to meet you,” Daenerys assured him and squeezed his hand. Then she pulled Rhaenys’ letter out of her vest and pressed it between Maester Aemon’s fingers.
“Princess Rhaenys sends her greetings, Grand-Uncle,” she added and smiled. “I can read the letter to you later...but there is another matter. Rhaenys and I are not the only members of our family who want to meet you...there is one more. He is here.”

Jon’s heart was beating rapidly as he regarded the Maester’s confused face.

“I don’t understand...,” he began, but Jon cut him off.

“Lord Stark has only recently told me about my mother. Before that day he always refused to speak about her. I believed her to be a commoner, but I was wrong. Now I know now who she is and I also found out that Lord Stark is not my true father,” he explained and paused for a moment to give the Maester an opportunity to take in his words.

A moment of heavy silence followed, before Maester Aemon finally spoke.

“What is the name of your mother, my boy?”

Jon breathed deeply, before forcing the words out of his mouth.

“Lady Lyanna Stark...she died giving birth to me in a tower in Dorne and Lord Stark made me his bastard to protect me from King Robert’s wrath.”

“And your father?” the Maester asked in hushed whisper. “What was your father’s name?”

The answer was clear, but Jon sensed that the old man wanted to hear it from his mouth.

“Rhaegar Targaryen...the Last Dragon.”

“Come here,” the old man asked of him and lifted his hand to reach for him. Jon was quickly at his side and knelt down next to Daenerys.

Slowly the old man smoothed his gnarled fingers over Jon’s face and gasped, fresh tears glittering in his eyes.

“Are you unwell, Maester?” he asked, but the old man only laughed and brushed the tears from his eyes.

“Forgive the weeping of an old man,” he apologized. “It often felt as if I am alone...it is a great relief for me to meet you.”

“There is nothing to forgive, I am...we are both very happy to meet you,” Jon stuttered and rose back to his feet.

“You both have the features of my brothers and sisters...touching your faces feels like conjuring my family back to life.”

“I don’t look much like Daenerys,” Jon added hesitatingly. “I have my mother’s coloring...dark hair and dark-grey eyes. Lord Stark called it luck.”

“Luck indeed,” the old Maester agreed. “You also have my brother’s features, but that is no surprise to me. Your father Rhaegar showed a great resemblance to my brother Egg.”

Jon was stunned by this revelation.

“You met my father?”
“I did,” He confirmed and bobbed his head.”That was a few years after he married Princess Elia. He also wrote me letters.”

“Was he a good person?” Daenerys inquired.

“Oh, yes,” the Maester replied and smiled sadly.”I admit he was of a rather melancholic character, but he was always courteous. He also harbored a great love for prophecies and most of his letters concerned such matters. He liked the stories about dragons...in truth I didn’t know him very well, but I think he dreamed of dragons like my brother Egg. A beautiful dream, but we are all human.”

Jon didn’t know what to make of his father’s love for prophecies, but he believed Maester Aemon when he said that his father was a good person.

“We have eggs,” Daenerys added gently.”Rhaenys has one, Jon has one and I have one.”

The Maester gasped.

“Who gave them to you?”

“Rhaenys received two eggs from Jon Arryn. He found them in Rhaegar’s belongings and Jon received one from Lord Stark who has kept it for him over all these years.”

“Gods be good,” the old man muttered.”Listen to me now, children. Do not follow into my brother’s footsteps...Egg...King Aegon the Unlikely nearly wiped out his entire house. Dreams are beautiful, but at the end of the day they are only dreams...Promise me to be careful.”

“Of course,” they replied in unison, though Jon wasn’t sure if he will be able to keep his word. Yet the old man deserved nothing, but peace of mind for the last years of his life.

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Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will be Rhaenys and then Daeneys. Daenerys' next chapter will have more interactions on the Wall.
It was good to see Sansa Stark smile again, but that was not much of surprise. Sansa Stark told Rhaenys more than once how much she longs to see the capital with all its wonders and splendor. For the girl seated before her King’s Landing was a place full honorable knights and gracious ladies, when in truth it is nothing more than a deadly pit of vipers.

She will soon see that that with her own eyes, Rhaenys knew and felt pity for the girl in front of her.

“Now tell me Lady Sansa, is it true that it snows all year in the North?” Lady Margaery asked the younger girl, a soft smile curling on her full lips.

Sansa flushed and took a hesitant sip from her cup of honeyed wine. Before attending this invitation Sansa’s feared to make a fool of herself in front of Lady Margaery. Rhaenys assured her that she doesn’t have to fret about her appearance, but the young girl spent half the day choosing the perfect dress and brushing out the curls in her auburn hair.

“It is true,” Sansa confirmed hesitatingly, her voice soft like feathers.”We have snow in summer and in winter, though the summer snow is very different from the winter snow. I was a child during the last winter, but my father likes to call us “summer children” to remind us of our duties. Old Nan also likes to tell us stories about the harsh winters, but I don’t believe everything she says. My brother Bran loves the scary tales and I think Old Nan is embellishing them to please him.”

Lady Margaery chuckled, her hands falling into her silken lap.

“My brother Loras was much the same. As a boy he used to tell me scary tales that frightened me so much that I asked to sleep in my maid’s bed. He only stopped after my grandmother told me to stop listening to Loras’ silly stories.”

Sansa listened with rapt attention to every word that poured out of Margaerys’s mouth. Especially, the name of Ser Loras conjured another maidenly flush upon her cheeks. If she only knew the truth about the knights of flowers, Rhaenys mused and turned her goblet in front of her to take a look at the golden stag in front.

“Oh, I heard so much about your brother…I wonder if I will ever have the honor to meet him,” Sansa gushed and clapped her hands together.

Margaery brushed her curls away and leaned back in her chair, before giving Rhaenys a knowing smile.

“Then I think you can count yourself lucky, Lady Sansa. My brother will soon return to King’s Landing to attend another tourney…this time a real one…not this sham the Queen celebrated in honor of Princess Rhaenys' wedding.”

Lady Sansa’s eyes lightened up like two twin stars as she turned to look at Rhaenys.

“There will be another tourney?” she asked and Rhaenys felt the urge to chide Margaery revealing their knowledge. One of the girls, who is often running errant’s for the Small Council and tends to slip her information about their meetings, recently revealed to her that the King is planning another one of his wasteful tourneys. It was not much of a surprise to her that the King used the
appointment of his new Hand to throw out more gold dragons, but she also doubted it was his idea. The Lannisters never failed to encourage the King in his wastefulness. Lord Arryn tried his best to keep the King in control, but she doubted Eddard Stark will have more success. He sharply protested, her girl had reported to her, but that was no surprise to her. Lord Eddard Stark didn’t make the appearance of a wasteful man.

“Princess,” Margaery said and snapped her out of her whirling thoughts.”It is true, isn’t it?”

“It is,” Rhaenys replied and felt embarrassed for her daydreaming.”The King intends to host a tourney in honor of your father’s appointment as Hand of the King.”

For a moment Rhaenys feared Lady Sansa would drop out of her chair, but then she regained her composure and grinned.

“Oh, my…I will need a new dress,” she stammered.”Though I wonder why father didn’t tell me about it?”

Because he didn’t approve of it, Rhaenys wanted to answer, but the girl lost her direwolf and she didn’t want to take away her newfound happiness. She will have to grow up soon enough. It can’t hurt to allow her a few more days of happiness.

“I am sure he will tell you soon, Lady Sansa,” Margaery added friendly and continued to smooth the hem of her dress.”But if you are in need of a proper dress I am always willing to serve you. My seamstress could take your measures…I am sure she would be able to conjure something beautiful for you. One’s first tourney should always be something special.”

Rhaenys couldn’t help but to laugh. Margaery hasn’t changed since she was a little girl. Back then she was dressing up her dolls and now she is dressing up other girls.

“That would be wonderful, but I first have to ask for my father’s approval,” Sansa replied and emptied her plate of lemon cakes.”Speaking of my father…it is getting quite late. He expects me for supper.”

“Then I hope to see you soon, Lady Sansa,” Lady Margaery added softly.”It would be my pleasure to help you to a dress.”

“No, it will be my pleasure,” Sansa replied and dropped a deep curtsy.

Then she left them to join her Lord Father for supper.

“What a sweet girl,” Margaery remarked after Sansa had closed the door behind her.”It is a pity that she will have to leave that innocence behind her.”

“She has already seen Joff’s cruelty,” Rhaenys countered.”I hope it will be enough to keep her away from him.”

“That is good, though I suppose it won’t matter…my wedding will be in three moons…It is strange how fast time flies by,” Margaery remarked and graced Rhaenys with a knowing smile.”I hope I will be able to please Renly.”

Maybe if you allow Loras into your marriage bed, Rhaenys wanted to answer but kept her comment to herself.

She smiled instead and leaned over to pat the other girl’s arm.
“I am sure Renly will come to love you in time.”

“Maybe,” Margaery remarked and looked around, before leaning closer to whisper into Rhaenys’ ear. "But considering what you are planning I wonder if he will go along with it… King Robert is after all his brother and Prince Joffrey is his nephew."

Rhaenys knew that. Renly will certainly be a difficult matter. Either he will accept her Queen-ship or she will have to use other measures...

“I will be generous to him if he accepts me as is Queen,” Rhaenys assured her. “And he holds not much love for his brothers. I guess it will depend on whether he chooses his love for you over his family.” Or better said his love for Loras.

“Probably,” Margaery agreed. "What about the King? And Lord Stark's friendship with the King is another matter that needs to be considered. He could raise the North, the Riverlands and the Vale against you. The Stormlords are another matter that needs to be considered. If Renly were to accept you as Queen it is very likely that the Stormlords will abandon him, but if you take him hostage you will have to face Lord Stannis’ and King Robert’s wrath."

Rhaenys knew all that, but she has a trump card not even her trusted friend Margaery Tyrell knows of. Granted she would only take this measure if Lord Stark decides to side with House Baratheon, but given his honorable nature it wouldn't surprise her if he did.

But if I were to reveal Jon’s parentage, even the honorable Eddard Stark would be forced to take sides.

“You are right,” she agreed. "But Lord Arryn is dead and I think it is very likely that the Queen is responsible for his demise…maybe the King will be her next victim and then we would be rid of another obstacle in our path."

“Indeed,” Margaery agreed and nodded her head. "But I hope we will be far away from the capital when that happens. I don’t want to harvest the women’s wrath once she is free from her husband’s shackles. I tell you…it won’t even take a moon and Lord Tywin will be Hand of the King."

“It won’t matter,” Rheanys assured her. "But it will be good for Lord Stark to return home. King’s Landing is not the right place for him. I warned him, but he didn’t listen."

...
Daenerys

“My Lord Lannister, I apologize for disturbing your fruitful inspection of the Wall, but I thought you would appreciate a goblet of wine,” Lord Commander Mormont grumbled. He was a man of immense stature, towering over Tyrion like giant over a tiny child. Even Jon, tall and lean as he was, appeared small compared to the old man.

“I thank you,” Lord Tyrion replied politely and took a hesitant sip from the wine. Daenerys followed suite. It was not bad, but not really good either. Yet the Wall was no place for luxury, so much she learned from her stay here.”I always appreciate hospitality.”

The Lord Commander nodded his head and stroked his white beard while the raven on his shoulder hopped from one to the other.

“Corn! King! Corn!” it squeaked in a shrieking voice that made Daenerys ears bleed. Quickly the Lord Commander silenced the bird with a handful of corn.

“I apologize,” The Lord Commander said and lowered his head.”But my hospitality has a reason… the Watch has need of your help. Our numbers are dwindling every day and our rations for the winter are meager at best. Winter is almost upon us and you are the Queen’s brother…,” the Lord Commander continued to explain, but Lord Tyrion cut him off in a polite manner.

“I fear I will prove a disappointment to you. Sadly, I hold no sway over the King or over my sister.”

“That may be,” Maester Aemon added in a strained voice.”But the Watch expects not much. We are prepared to take all recruits and resources your the King may spare. That is why I put this letter into writing…our hope is that you will relay it to the King.”

Lord Tyrion looked skeptical, but dropped his head in acceptance.

“Very well…I will try my best, but I can’t promise anything.”

“We don’t ask for more,” the Lord Commander grumbled.”But winter is almost upon us and dark things are lurking beyond the Wall.”

The way the Lord Commander said it made Daenerys shudder. It made her think of the scary tales Randa liked so much as a child.

“Dark things?” Lord Tyrion asked and laughed in amusement.”What are you referring to? Snarks and gumpkins…or are you referring to the Wildlings?”

The Lord Commander glowered at Lord Tyrion and put his goblet down.

“For you these things are mere tales, but I know for certain that there are far darker things lurking beyond the Wall than these so called grumpkins and snarks or even Wildlings. The Others we call them.”

“The Others,” Jon repeated.”You are not joking, are you, Lord Commander?”

“Why would I be joking about something like that, my boy?” the old man asked.”Once dragons ruled over the skies and you name a direwolf of your own…Why is it inconceivable to you that the
"Others exist?"

"Good point," Jon granted him, but remained skeptical."Anyway, I will gladly inform my brother Robb about the needs of the Night's Watch. The harvest is nearly upon us and I am sure he can spare a few resources."

The Lord Commander’s face softened after he heard Jon’s reply.

"I thank you," the Lord Commander replied and emptied his goblet."The Night’s Watch will be thankful for any help your brother can offer us. And in regards to the Others…I hope for you that the day never comes that these fairy tale turn out true."

Jon swallowed hard and even Lord Tyrion paled little, though he kept smiling.

"When the day comes I will gladly admit my ignorance, but I have a hard time in believing in things I don’t see with my own eyes."

"I see, my Lord Lannister,” Maester Aemon agreed.”Your sceptisism is understandable, but there are more things to the world that can be seen with one’s eyes, my Lord Lannister.”

Daenerys chuckled, because she believed to know what her Grand-Uncle was referring to. Jon was a Targaryen, but nobody saw it.

"I cannot deny your wisdom, good Maester,” Tyrion replied and hopped from his seat."But I prefer reason. Well, I am tired and the constant cold leaves me wanting for sleep. I think I will pay another visit to the vaults, before taking a nap.”

Then he turned to Daenerys and Jon, still seated at the table."I hope you have a pleasant evening."

The Lord Commander left them soon after and Maester Aemon went back to work, tending to his many ravens. Daenerys gladly assisted him and so did Jon. Every spare minute with the old man was precious to them, even if it meant cleaning cages full of raven shit.

Afterwards the old man asked his stewards to bring them mulled wine and a soup, which the Maester devoured happily. It seems their presence helped to strengthen his appetite.

"I know that you are soon going to leave, children,” he said after he finished his meal."There is another... very delicate matter that needs to be addressed."

Daenerys’ heartbeat sped up after she heard the Maester’s words.

Jon rose to his feet and barred the door properly, before shifting his attention back to Maester Aemon.”The door is barred…or only witnesses are the ravens. You may speak freely, Grand-Uncle.”

The old man grinned, baring his toothless smile to the world.

"I thank you, my boy. Now come and sit down. I don’t have all the time in the world. I wasn’t sure if I should tell you…given your circumstances I doubt you will ever be able to claim the throne, but it is better for you to have it than to let it be forgotten beyond the Wall. But you will have to hide it well and nobody can ever know about it.”

A dragon egg, Daenerys thought or something else, but whatever it was it had to be tied to their Targaryen legacy.
“What are you talking about?” Jon asked, his hand twitching in anticipation.

The old man exhaled deeply and took a sip from his goblet, before he continued to speak.

“Have you ever heard about Brynden Rivers, children?”

Jon’s eyes widened in surprise and Daenerys wondered where this was leading. Of course she heard about Brynden Rivers, the son of another King named Aegon…

“Wasn’t he Lord Commander of the Night’s Watch?” Jon asked and then even Daenerys recalled that flimsy piece of information still lingering in her mind from her many history books.”Did you know him personally?”

“It is good to know that you know your history, my boy,” Maester Aemon remarked kindly.”You are quite right. He was Lord Commander, but much more than that. He was a spymaster and some say even a wizard…not that it matters. He vanished beyond the Wall and now only his memory and his sword remains.”

“Sword?” Daenerys asked, searching through her mind for any mention of a sword.

“Dark Sister,” Jon whispered and Daenerys wanted to slap herself for forgetting the name. Swords never held much interest to her though.”Did he give it to you?”

Maester Aemon nodded his head in confirmation, his milky eyes shining brightly in the dim candlelight.

“He did,” Maester Aemon whispered back and braced himself on the handle of his chair.”I helped him hide it.”

“Where?” Daenerys gasped, barely able to keep her excitement in rein.”Here at the Wall?”

“Beyond the Wall,” the Maester answered.”There is an ancient weirwood tree and a cave not far from the Wall. What you are seeking for is hidden beneath said weirwood tree. Back then I still had my eyesight and I can give you a general description, but you will have to find it on your own.”

“We will,” Jon replied, determination ringing his voice.”Dark Sister…truly…the sword wielded by Aemon the Dragonknight.”

“It is a beautiful sword,” Maester Aemon said, his voice barely above a whisper.”Even now I remember it and I am sure it will be unblemished by time. That is the wonder of Valyrian Steel.”

“But meant for someone like Aemon the Dragonknight…not me,” Jon protested, but the old Maester was quick to counter his words of protest.

“Who else is left?” he the old Maester asked.”There is no one else but you, my boy.”

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The wind burned on her skin, though she wore a thick shall wrapped around her face. The official reason for their visit beyond the Wall was to see the weirwood tree, but the Lord Commander was still very hard-pressed to accept it. Only after Maester Aemon spoke to the Lord Commander did he finally give in to his demands.

He even wanted to send two brothers with them, but Jon assured him that Ghost is enough protection for them. Not even the Lord Commander had an argument to refute his words.
Ghost was no longer the pup they found, but a mighty wolf with sharp fangs. Daenerys felt safer with him than with any of those brothers of the Night’s Watch, though she doubted they would dare to harm her. This Ser Alliser made quite clear what he would do with them if they went against his orders.

Thus they followed the path their Grand-Uncle described to them. Finally, after another hour they found the weirwood tree and the cave, or better said it was Ghost who found it. When they arrived there he was already slumbering under the tree with its beautiful crimson leaves.

“Ghost!” Jon gasped and quickly made his way to the wolf, an amused ring to his voice.”How did you know?”

Ghost opened his ruby eyes and yawned.

“Never mind, boy,” Jon said and laughed, before leaning down to stroke his ear.”I am happy that you showed us the way.”

“Below the face...our Grand-Uncle said,” Daenerys provided, hopping from one foot to the other. The cold was getting to her, but she didn’t want to complain.”We should hurry.”

“Of course,” Jon replied and made his way back to the horse to get the shovels they brought with them.

They slaved all morning, but the ground was hard and frozen. Past midday the sun came finally bursting forward and felt almost like an appearance. Daenerys savored the warmth, but it didn’t make their work any easier. The effort that was needed to break open the earth was great. Then finally, it had to be way past evening, Jon stopped and winked her to his side.

“I found something,” he informed her, his voice muffled by the thick shawl wrapped around his head. Then he put the shovel away and settled down on the ground, his gloved hands brushing the wet earth away, only to reveal an old tattered cloak. It was a fine garment though, going by the golden treads woven into the wool, but now there was little left of its past beauty.

“Careful,” Jon told her as she pulled off her gloves and started to unfurl the garment, which dissolved only moments later. All that was soon forgotten when she pulled away the last piece of cloth.

Daenerys didn’t dare to touch it, but Jon smoothed his hand over the dark smoky surface. Daenerys got a glimpse on Lord Stark’s sword, also made of Vayrian Steel, but this sword was very different. It had a slender grip, meant for the hand of a lady. For Visenya Targaryen, the first owner of this precious sword.

Carefully, Jon cleaned the sword from grime and dirt, before handing it to her.

She grabbed the hilt, the black smoky surface shining like black diamonds when the sunshine fell upon it.

Then she handed the blade to Jon and smiled back at him.

“Take it…it is yours.”

He nodded his head and put the blade into the scabbard he brought with him.

“We should go back,” Jon declared and brushed his free hand over hers. Her fingers were already frozen, but that hardly mattered.
The sword was worth all the effort.

The sun was descending beyond the horizon when they returned to Castle Black, all frozen to the bones, but happy.

They ate a warm supper in company of Lord Tyrion, who inquired about their visit beyond the Wall, but was more than satisfied to retire back to the vaults soon after. The vaults were a massive library and Lord Tyrion spent more time there than with anyone else.

After supper they went to seek out Maester Aemon. At this time of the day he usually took a nap or tended to his ravens, but she doubted he will mind their presence.

“Come in, children!” he called out to them and jerked his head towards the crackling fire. "Come in and warm yourself. I am sure you are frozen to the bones.”

“Thank you,” she replied and settled herself down near the fire, Ghost not far. Jon usually kept him outside, but without him they would have been lost beyond the Wall. He deserved a reward and the Maester agreed. Shortly after he even asked one of the stewards to bring some leftover bones for loyal direwolf.

“Were you successful?” Maester Aemon asked after Jon had barred the door, the ravens their only listeners.

“We were,” Jon confirmed, his voice still hoarse from the cold."But it was harder than expected.”

The old Maester chuckled.

“Well, if you hadn’t come here the secret would have certainly died with me.”

“Indeed,” Daenerys replied and watched as Jon unsheathed the blade and laid it upon their Grand-Uncle’s lap.

With a lover’s touch their Grand-Uncle smoothed his hand over the surface of the blade.

“Careful,” Jon whispered.”It is very sharp.”

The old Maester gave a toothless smile.

“I know…it is beautiful.”

“Aye,” Jon replied stangely quiet.”It is.”

“And now it belongs to you, my boy. Use it well.”

“I will,” Jon replied quietly and squeezed Maester Aemon’s hand."I will.”

“Good,” the old Maester remarked happily.”Now go and rest. I heard from Lord Tyrion’s mouth that he intends to leave in a few days. It seems he is growing weary of the cold.”

His words were enough to wash away all her previous happiness. She hoped for a few more days, but Lord Tyrion was the reason Jon was even allowed to come here.

“You are right,” Daenerys whispered, trying to hide her sadness as she leaned down to place a kiss on her Grand-Uncle's cheek."But I rather stay a while longer. You have yet to dictate the letter meant for Rhaenys.”
The old man nodded, his warm breath tickling her cheek.

“Ah yes, I have almost forgotten. Very well, your niece shan’t say her Grand-Uncle has forgotten about her.”
Two tourneys in one year were too much for Rhaenys’ taste. She didn’t hold much love for the amount of people, but the King did as he pleased. Lord Stark and her might not see eye to eye, but in this matter they shared the same opinion. All of it was a waste of gold and nothing more.

The stifling heat didn’t help either. She was Dornish and yet she missed the storms common to Storm’s End or the gentle spring breeze of Highgarden. She didn’t know why, but the heat made the smell of shit and sweat only worse and made her all the more happier that she will soon be able to leave this cursed city behind.

“The first tilt begins!” Sansa Stark's excited voice snapped her out of her thoughts. She sat next to Margaery, the two of them dressed in fitting green dresses of silk and brocade, their hair braided up to the top of their heads. Margaery has taken quite the liking to the younger girl and often spent hours dressing her up in the newest garments. That Lady Sansa is quite gifted with the needle helped to endear the girl only more towards the Maid of Highgarden. A few days ago she even offered to sew a dress in the Dornish style after Margaery mentioned it to her.

“It is exciting, isn't it?” Margaery asked both Lady Sansa and her friend Jeyne Poole. The girls giggled and nodded their heads in confirmation, before their words were drowned out by the blowing of a trumpet, announcing the first tilt of the day.

This time Rhaenys hadn’t even bothered to study the lists. The joust was opened by Ser Horas Redwyne and Ser Jory Cassle, one of Lord Stark's guards. He winked at Sansa as he passed and received a sweet smile in return.

He will not be much of a challenge, she knew from Ser Hobber’s previous performance during the tilt held in honor of her wedding. Jon had no problem in throwing him from his horse.

While Rhaenys was more than bored, Lady Sansa grabbed the bench tightly and tried not to flinch as the two riders clashed together. As always the lances met and splintered, the horse hooves leaving a cloud of dust in their wake. It took a brief moment and then they saw Ser Horas sprawled on the ground, his feet caught in the reins of his horse that continued to drag him over the dusty ground. It was a ridiculous sight that earned him more laughter than cheers.

To her defence, Lady Sansa didn’t laugh. She seemed actually quite worried about the young man, though a smile returned to her lips when the triumphant Ser Jory winked at them.

“Don’t worry about it Lady Sansa,” Margaery added with a smile, when the girl shifted her attention back to Ser Hobber. He looked rattled and had to be steadied by his squires.”Ser Hobber knows how to properly fall from a horse without killing himself. He is used to it.”

“Oh,” Sansa said and gave Margaery a dumbfounded look.”I see.”

Rhaenys smiled and continued fanning air into her face as the next riders were called upon the field.

“Who is next?” Jeyne Poole asked excitedly when the riders took their respective positions at the opposing sides of the tilt-yard.

Rhaenys straightened herself and was confused by the sudden silence and hushed whispers. It was as if spell had been cast upon everyone when the mountain of a knight rode forward to show himself.
“Gods be good!” Margaery gasped at the sight of the man’s banner. Rhaenys froze as well and didn’t even notice when her fan dropped on the ground.

Three black dogs on a yellow background, the mighty knight wore embellished on the back of his cloak. It felt as if a spell was cast upon her in that moment, her body starting to shudder from the tip of her fingers down to her toes.

“Rhaenys,” Margaery called out to her and touched her shoulder. “Are you well?”

_No_, she wanted to say, but she had no intention to make a fuss. She wouldn’t give them the pleasure and gritted her teeth. Then she straightened herself and kept her gaze fixed at the enemy.

“I am well,” she assured her as the flags were waved and the riders were called forward. The thunder of horse hooves’ made the world around her rattle as the Mountain charged towards the young squire from the Vale. His name escaped her momentarily, but the sight of horror that presented itself before them robbed her off her ability to speak.

The Mountain didn’t just throw his enemy from his horse, but drove his lance right through the knight’s throat.

Yet the blood was worse. It dripped from the knight’s neck like a river of crimson. More and more of it dripped down as he collapsed on the ground, before he drew his last choked breaths.

She tried to keep composed, but the sight woke something she had buried deep inside her mind. The smell of blood filled her nostrils in that moment, though she was far away from the dead knight. _The wind_, she tried to tell herself and leaned down to pick up her fan. She completely forgot about it. Trembling she searched, but was unable to find it.

_Where is it_, she muttered to herself, a strange sort of panic washing over her. It felt like needles beneath her skin and a hand pressing around her neck.

“Here,” Margaery told her in a trembling voice. She tried to appear composed, but she read the disgust on the other girl's face. “Your fan fell down.”

“Thank you!” Rhaenys gasped and pulled herself up. In that moment it felt as if all air had been drained out of her and different kind of panic took hold of her.

_I can’t breathe_, she thought and rose to her feet, moving forward to lean against the balustrade. _I need air_, she thought, the world around her distant and unreal. There was also this agonizing swishing sound that made her want to tear off her ears.

“Rhaenys!” Margaery’s voice called her back to reality coming to stand next to her at the balustrade. Lady Sansa stood next to her, a worried look edged on her face while Jeyne Poole cowered on the bench, her face buried between her hands.

“I…,” she tried to speak, but wasn’t able to manage more than a hollow breath. She brushed Margaery’s hand way and forced herself to look at the Mountain. I am a dragon, she told herself to face the monster that had butchered her brother and mother.

He hasn’t changed much. He was still the monster picked right out of her nightmares. The sight of him brushing the blood from his shining armor sent a shudder through her body that left her dizzy.

The world started to whirl in circles and she grabbed the railing of the balustrade to balance herself. But soon it was not enough, her feet giving away. If Margaery or Lady Sansa hadn’t been there she would have certainly collapsed down on the tourney ground.
“Rhaenys,” Margaery whispered, her hand brushing over her cheek. “Gods… you are bleeding!” she suddenly shrieked. The sound didn't fit at all to Margaery Tyrell’s composed nature.

Rhaenys tried to lift her head while the darkness was closing in on her.

“Rhaenys…!” Margaery cried out again, her voice taking a desperate hue. Sansa’s voice was also there, but muffled by the cries of the other people joining them to see what the commotion was about.

“Quickly! A Maester!” she heard Ser Barristan’s voice.

Sweat was rolling down her cheeks and she felt a terrible stabbing pain inside her stomach. Then she felt something wet and warm between her legs that made her bury her nails into Margaery’s arm.

Another stab followed and this time she welcomed the darkness.

…

Day and night, for a long time she didn’t know the difference. When she woke she felt even worse…as if someone placed heavy stones upon her chest.

_I am still alive_, was the first thought that flickered into her mind. _Why_, was the second, but then she recalled everything.

“Princess Rhaenys…,” the strained voice of Grand Maester Pycelle called out to her and filled her with disgust. She would have bolted straight out of the bed if she didn’t feel too weak for it.”It is good to see you awake…we feared the worst.

“Grand Maester,” the gentle voice of Margaery addressed the old man.”I think Princess Rhaenys needs a bit space. I am sure the Queen is awaiting your report. Would you leave us for a moment?”

“I am not sure…,” the old man stuttered, but Margaery’s smile was enough to get his agreement.”Very well…but only for a few moments. The Princess needs her rest. Whatever poison remains inside her will take at least another few days to be cleansed from her body.”

Then finally, Grand Maester Pycelle left and only Margaery remained. Her change in dressing told Rhaenys that at least a day had passed since her collapse.

“What happened?” she asked, her voice strained like glass.

“You collapsed,” Margaery explained softly and settled herself down on the bedding beside her.”The Maester thinks it could have been in the wine…poison. Whatever it was…you nearly bled to death. You have been asleep for nearly three days and the ….the child…it died.”

_Child_, she thought and felt to her shame a pang of sadness. She knew for a while that she was with child and intended to rid herself off it once they went to Highgarden, but it seems fate took care of it, though it nearly killed her.

“Do you think it was the Queen?” Margaery whispered into her ear. Rhaenys didn’t know nor did she care. The only thing that mattered was to get to Highgarden. It was her only hope.

“Maybe…though I doubt she had any intention in killing her grandchild…it was probably meant to teach me a lesson,” she whispered and saw relief washing over Margaery’s face.
“Gods be blessed… I thought it was…,” Margaery began, but Rhaenys cut her off. Willas paid them two more visits, the last one barely two moons ago. It was only natural that Margaery assumed that it could be her brother’s child. Yet that was impossible, for only a week later and much to her own disappointment, she had her moonblood.

“No, it was not,” she told her and gave her a weak smile. “It seems the gods have a strange sense of humor.”

“Indeed,” Margaery added and squeezed her hand. “But there is more… the Queen asked the King to keep you here. You should have heard her feigned concern. It made me want to gag.”

“It only shows that she mistrusts me,” Rhaenys added weakly. She had no strength for anger and needed to find a solution for her problem. “I guess I have no other choice…” she trailed off.

Then she took a deep breath and gave Margaery a pleading look.

“I need to speak to Lord Stark,” she asked of her, tightening her grip on Margaery’s hand. “Can you ask him to attend to me?”

“Of course,” Margaery assured her. “But he is busy… the King suffered an accident in the melee.”

The news left her gasping for air.

“Will he recover?”

“Maester Pycelle thinks so, but it was quite close. He could have easily died.”

“I see,” she muttered. “Please call for Lord Stark… He will come… I know he will.”

“I will,” Margaery assured her again. “But now you need to rest… Willas would have my head if I kept you from getting better.”

To her relief Lord Stark came to attend to her two days later. She was also feeling much better and able to walk around again, even if it wasn’t for too long. *A week or two and you will be well,* Maester Pycelle assured her but Rhaenys didn’t trust the man’s words. Not that it mattered.

*I will go to Highgarden, even if I need to kiss Lord Stark’s feet.*

“I thank you for coming, Lord Stark,” she greeted him with a smile.

“It is no bother,” he replied, his face weary and pale. It seems the position of Hand of the King did not bring him much joy. “Lady Margaery informed me that you want to speak with me.”

“It is about the wedding,” she said and came straight to the point. “I know from Lady Margaery that the Queen wants to keep me here, but I beg of you… Margaery is a sister to me… I need to go.”

“Princess… I don’t think it is my place to interfere…,” he began, but Rhaenys cut him off before he was able to find an excuse.

“You are the Hand and you have power… use it.”

“I have been Hand for barely a few moons,” he replied, but Rhaenys didn’t have any intention to let go. Her frustration spurred her own. “Don’t you see… It was the Queen who did this to me!”

He paled even, his sharp face taking a grim look.
“Do you have proof for that, Princess?”

“No,” she replied in frustration. “Of course not, but she hates me…and she hates the King. The accident at the melee was probably another one of her plots. I told you…King’s Landing is a pit of vipers. That is why I need to leave…at least for a few moons. Please Lord Stark…I don’t have the same protection as you. The Queen wouldn’t dare to harm the Lord of the North as openly as she did with me, but I don’t have a family to stand behind me. Lord Arryn was my only protection.”

“Do you want me to beg?” she asked and thought of her mother to bring tears to her eyes. “You may have forgotten…but we are kin…you told me once that you regretted not bringing Tywin Lannister to justice. Now is your chance to help me. Allow me to go…even the Queen can’t go against the Hand of the King…you might not know it, but you are speaking with the King’s authority.”

Lord Stark swallowed hard when he saw her tears.

“Very well…I will make sure that you can go Highgarden.”

...
Ser Roderik greeted them at the gates, a grim look showing on his old face. Jon expected that, but it didn’t help to take away the sour feeling in his stomach. He had no doubt that Arya and Bran had to face punishment for helping them and he also feared Lady Stark’s anger. He was a man grown, but her anger was a prospect that still scared him.

“We expected your return,” Ser Roderik greeted them politely.”Lord Stark is keeping court. You can find him inside,” he added and turned to look at Daenerys.”You gave us quite a scare. Thankfully, Lord Brandon didn’t waste much time to tell us the truth or we would have been searching the entire landscape for days. What did you make attempt something foolish like that?”

”My Gran-Uncle…I wanted to meet him…that is all,” she replied honestly and squirmed under his gaze, but didn’t look away.”I apologize if my actions scared you.”

Ser Roderik’s features softened at her admission.

”Lord Brandon already informed us about the reasons, but it is good that you aware of it. Lady Stark and Lord Robb were the ones that fretted about your safety, though I am happy to see you hale, Princess.”

Daenerys swallowed hard and lowered her head, before they led their horses back to the stables.

Lord Lannister joined them to meet Robb, who looked very changed. His brother sported now a beard and occupied the high seat where Lord Stark received his petitioners.

Robb was in the middle of a discussion when they entered, Greywind sprawled before his feet. At the sight of Ghost Greywind hopped to his feet and joined his brother. A moment later they were rolling on the ground and wagging their tails.

Robb spoke a few more words to the two parties and dismissed them kindly, before rising to his feet. He is wearing steel, Jon noticed next, but the relieved smile on Robb’s lips helped to curb his fears.

”It is good to have you back,” Robb said and hugged him tightly, before smiling at the sight of Ghost and Greywind rolling on the ground. Then he turned to Daenerys and kissed her hand.”And you, Princess. However, I hope you will not frighten us like this again. My mother was very upset.”

”There was no need for worry,” Tyrion Lannister added jestingly.” Your Uncle Benjen kept us safe throughout our journey.”

”That may be,” Robb replied, his voice growing colder at the sight of Lord Tyrion.”But the Wall is no place for girls. My mother was right to be worried…the Princess could have been raped or worse.”

”If you had met Ser Allister you would disagree, Lord Stark,” Lord Tyrion replied, a knowing smile playing on his lips.”Well, I am not here to settle disputes…but to ask for your hospitality. I will leave in two days, if it pleases you, my Lord.”

”Winterfell hospitality is yours, Lord Lannister,” his brother replied curtly.”I asked one of the servants to prepare your old chamber…not far from the library. Supper is at the usual time…it would please me if you join us.”
“Doesn’t sound like it to me,” Lord Tyrion replied politely. “But your invitation is appreciated…yet I have to kindly decline. I am rather tired.”

Robb didn’t look disappointed, but nodded his head in understanding.

“Well, then I will ask one of the servants to bring you supper.”

“That would be very much appreciated,” Lord Tyrion replied and left to retire to his chambers. After the dwarf had gone Robb turned back to them.

“Was the trip at least worth upsetting my mother?” Robb remarked tensely. “You know how much she dislikes you and yet you act like that.”

Jon swallowed hard, but nodded his head in acceptance. What Robb said was true and he had no interest in fighting with him.

He opened his mouth to speak, but Daenerys was much quicker.

“I will apologize to Lady Stark…it was after all my idea.”

“I will apologize too,” he forced the words over his lips and smoothed his hand over his scabbard. “But to answer your question…it was worth the travel. I want show you…but I can’t do it here.”

In the blink of a moment his brother’s face softened and curiosity showed in his blue eyes.

“The crypts…nobody will dare to go there other than us,” Robb offered quickly.

“Good idea,” Daenerys added, a mischievous smile curling on her lips. “Shall we go after supper?”

“We go now,” Robb insisted. “I had to endure listening to the complaints of farmers all day long…I have need of a distraction…and Ysilla is not feeling very well,” he added and lead the way, Greywind and Ghost soon trailing after them as they made their to the crypts.

Robb unlocked the doors while Jon lightened one of the lanterns placed at the entrance, before they made their way down the stone steps.

“Now show me…I can see that it is a sword,” Robb said eagerly, his gaze fixed on Jon’s scabbard. From the outside it looked like a plain sword. Even the hilt was not particularly adorned or precious to behold. “What is so special about it?”

Jon answered his question by unsheathing the blade.

Robb gasped when he saw the lantern light waft off the surface of the blade.

“That is Valyrian Steel,” Robb added more gently, his hand touching the blade carefully as if he feared it might break apart. “Where the fuck did you find a sword made of Valyrian Steel?”

“From my Grand-Uncle…look at the grip and you have your answer, brother,” Jon added and couldn’t help but to laugh when he saw Robb’s dumbfounded expression.

Robb eyed the grip of the sword, his eyes widening in shock. “Such a slender grip…,”” he began, but it was Jon who finished the sentence for him. “Almost for a lady…don’t you think?”

Jon smiled when he saw recognition taking hold of Robb’s face.
“No…it can’t be…is that,” he stuttered and Daenerys was kind enough to provide him with the answer he was seeking for.”Dark Sister.”

“How?” Robb asked and gave her an unbelieving look.”Isn’t it supposed to be lost?”

“It was lost…but we found it beyond the Wall where my Grand-Uncle hid it beneath a weirwood tree. The last owner Brynden Rivers disappeared beyond the Wall and thus my Grand-Uncle hid the sword away…he wanted for me…us to have it.”

“Gods,” Robb muttered.”I understand your happiness…but don’t show it to my mother. She would have a heart attack.”

Jon frowned at that. This sword was once handled by Visenya Targaryen and Aemon the Dragonknight. It is not meant to rot away in some forgotten chamber. It is meant to be used.

Yet Robb was right. He can’t parade it around. Someone could notice and then they would be all fucked.

“I know…I thought about hiding it down here…until it is needed.”

Robb nodded his head and ruffled his hair out of his face.

“Hope that it will never be needed.”

“Of course not…I didn’t mean.”

“I know,” Robb assured him and patted his shoulder.”Now let us return inside. I am sure there is much to tell. I have never been to the Wall. I want to hear every detail.”

“Of course.”

…

“Jon!” Arya exclaimed and was hanging around his neck a moment later.”I thought it would take much longer.

She looked quite happy given the circumstances. Robb informed him that Lady Stark gave her and Bran strict punishments. Arya has to attend further lessons with the Septa while Bran has to improve on his sums with Maester Luwin.

“I am happy to be back,” he replied and ruffled through her hair, before putting her back into her chair. Bran grinned while he was feeding Summer, lying sprawled on the floor. Yet the smile didn’t quite reach his face.

*Something his wrong*, Jon sensed, but he didn’t dared to ask further questions when Lady Stark entered in company of Rickon.

In the blink of a moment it felt as if he was back on the Wall. The air around them grew frigid.

The Lady looked equally uncomfortable, her face tense and taking a pale hue.

“You should have informed about their return,” she told Robb and flashed him an accusing look, before shifting her attention back to Daenerys.

Robb gave her an apologetic smile.
“Forgive my forgetfulness, but I didn’t want to disturb you when you were taking care of Ysilla… Can I see her now? What did Maester Luwin say? Will she recover?”

Lady Stark’s face softened a little at Robb’s concern.

“It is nothing serious…you should go and speak to her yourself. In fact, I think now would be an appropriate moment,” Lady Stark added her gaze flickering from Bran to Arya.”I am sure Lady Ysilla would be pleased to get a look at you two.”

“We haven’t even got our cake yet,” Bran complained unhappily and Arya didn’t hesitate to make her agreement known.

“We can’t have cakes and sweets for two weeks. The period ended yesterday.”

Neither Bran nor Arya seemed to get the hint that this didn’t concern cakes, but Robb did.

“You will get your cakes,” Robb assured them and patted Bran’s shoulder.”But first we go and pay Ysilla a visit.”

Arya remained skeptical and also Bran didn’t look convinced, but in the end the two of them didn’t dare to disobey and followed after Robb, leaving them alone with Lady Stark.

A heavy moment of silence passed, Lady Stark’s gaze fixed on Jon.

Jon tried not to flinch, but he knew that it was necessary. They can’t go on avoiding each other forever. They needed to find an arrangement that pleased both sides.

“Lady Stark…we did was stupid, but I am prepared to explain it to Lord Stark. I will even pen a letter to…,” he began, but was quickly cut off.

“You will do no such thing…Lord Stark doesn’t know about the incident. I chose not to write him about it given that he has already enough worries weighing on his mind.”

“We appreciate that,” Daenerys added softly, her gaze lowered.”You are right to be upset, but it was my idea and not Jon’s…I begged him and his Uncle Benjen to help us. You have to understand…Maester Aemon is a very old man. This could have been very well the last time I laid eyes on him…I needed to see him…only for once.”

Lady Stark’s façade softened at her admission, but Jon couldn’t help but to notice the fear shining in her blue eyes.

“I understand why Jon did it,” she said, forcing his name over her lips. It was in fact the first time she addressed him with his given name. Before this he was only the boy or Snow.

Then she exhaled deeply and turned to look at Daenerys.

“I was young myself and I did foolish things to please Brandon Stark. I was cruel to a friend of mine and he nearly died. Your brother took a betrothed girl and destroyed his entire dynasty …love is not always wise and it makes us do stupid things…even if this love is directed at a Grand-Uncle,” she tried to explain her thoughts. Ten years in the Stark household taught him well how to read her face. She was definitely angry and holding herself back.

“We can only apologize.” Jon remarked, trying to keep his voice calm.
“It is not her apology that I want to hear, but your promise to not do something like that again,” she relied sharply. “I am honest...I know you don’t like me and I don’t like you either...but we have to live with each other at least until you can go and live in Moat Cailin. I know what happened in the past will always stand between us...sixteen years of lies cannot simply be brushed away...but I am willing to try,” she continued and softened her voice a little.

Another moment of silence followed, her gaze flickering from Jon to Daenerys and then back to Jon.

“What about you?”

Jon felt like slapped. That was the last thing he expected from her words, but then he was no longer her husband’s bastard. He lied to her too, he knew.

“I fear I don’t understand you...my Lady,” he admitted honestly.”I never wanted anything other than to get along with you. That recent incident was an exception...I have no intention of doing something like that again. I am prepared to give you my promise if that is what you want to hear.”

“And yet you endangered us all,” she snapped back, her mask falling out of place.”What do you think Robert Baratheon will do to us if he finds out? He would butcher us all.”

“Us?” Jon asked, and felt the old bitterness rushing through him.”Be honest and say what is on your mind...you couldn’t care less about me. You knew how much I love Robb and yet you treated me as if I am some vile bastard who wants to steal his brother’s inheritance. Where would I be if Lord Arryn wouldn’t have come to take me away? At the Wall, far away where you don’t have to look at me anymore. I never expected of you to love me and I doubt Lord Eddard Stark did, but do not pretend that you care about me when it is a lie.”

Utter silence reigned now between them. Lady Stark looked utterly pale and Daenerys was squeezing his arm tightly.

“You are right,” she admitted then.”I wanted you gone...I can’t love you nor will I ever be able to...before you were my husband’s bastard and now you are the proof of his betrayal. I am not even sure if I will ever be able to completely forgive him for his lie. However, I am honest when I say that I am willing to get along. I don’t expect anything from you...I only want your promise to not endanger your siblings...cousins. Isn’t that something we have in common? That we care about Robb, Sansa, Arya, Bran and Rickon?”

“I do care for them...I would die for them,” he told her and rose to his feet.”You have my promise. I am willing to swear it if my word is not enough to you.”

She sighed deeply and shook her head.

“Your word is enough for me.”

…

Lady Ysilla didn’t look sick when Jon laid eyes on her. On the contrary, she beamed from one ear to the other.

“It is good to have you two back,” the Lady said and dipped her head in greeting. She sat near the hearth and was clad in a white nightgown. Robb sat next to her, Greywind dramatically spread on the floor before them while Arya, Rickon and Bran chose to sit on the carpet.”We were worried that the Wildlings stole you away, Princess,” she added and jerked her head towards an unoccupied chair placed near the hearth.
“Sadly, we didn’t get to see any Wildings, but I met my Grand-Uncle Aemon,” Daenerys replied and eyed Lady Ysilla closely. “We heard you were sick… I hope you are feeling better.”

“Much better,” Lady Ysilla replied and elbowed Robb. “But I wasn’t really sick.”

Jon was confused by her vague answer, but seeing the smile curling on Robb’s lips meant that it has to be something good.

“I am going to be an Uncle!” Rickon exclaimed, before Robb was even able to open his mouth.

“That was not for you to tell, stupid!” Arya remarked chidingly.

“It is alright…,” Robb added and patted Arya’s shoulder. Then he grinned. “It seems father is going to be a grandfather… I hope that makes him re-think his position as Hand of the King.”

Jon doubted that, but was happy for Robb and his Lady. And having hope was always a good thing.

“Well, he will certainly visit, won’t he?” Daenerys asked. “I mean the first grand-child is a grand thing and I doubt the King would mind. Jon Arryn returned to the Eyrie all few moons… to see his wife and son.”

Robb gave her a hopeful look. “Sadly, the Eyrie is not the North and you know my father. He is not someone to shy away from work.”

“That is true,” Daenerys agreed and stroked Ghost’s ear. “But I didn’t have the impression he wants to occupy this position till the end of his days. At least not like Jon Arryn… I doubt your father would remain as Hand if the King’s were to die. My niece told me that Tywin Lannister has been hoping to fill this position for years.”

Jon was sure that Daenerys didn’t mean to upset anyone, but her words brought a serious expression on Robb’s face.

“It is likely that many people are envying our father for his position… Tywin Lannister among them,” Robb replied before shifting his attention to Arya, Bran and Rickon. “Anyway… I think it is time for you to leave. Maester Luwin said Ysilla needs rest.”

Arya and Bran frowned, but Rickon was the only one of the three who dared to make his disagreement known.

“An Uncle is a grown up person,” the boy stated. “Doesn’t that mean we can stay up longer like other grown-ups?”

“Uncle… Aunt,” Robb replied and patted Rickon’s shoulder. “That doesn’t make a difference… we all need our bed rest… now go or mother will be displeased.”

“Very well,” Arya agreed and followed after Bran and Rickon. “But you owe us lots of cake, brother.”

Robb howled with laughter.

“Of course,” he assured her. “Tomorrow you will have as much cake as you want.”

Shortly later they left. Unsurprisingly, Ghost made use of the moment to occupy the bed. When he was just a pup it was not much of a problem to have him sleep at edge, but he has grown enormous
“I don’t think there is enough space,” Daenerys told Ghost and smiled. She was already dressed in her nightgown, but the direwolf made not attempt to move aside.

“You are no longer a pup, boy,” Jon said and started to stroke his furry ears. Then he whistled and pointed at the carpet on the ground.”The carpet is quite comfortable.”

Ghost hesitated for a moment, but after another command the wolf jumped from the bed and made his way to his new sleeping place, his head slightly bowed.

“I think you made him sad,” she remarked amusedly.

“Do you think so?” he asked and realized how close she was. Her warm breath was grazing his cheek and her full lips were very inviting. “Daenerys,” he said then, his voice sounding suddenly very different.”You should sleep.”

“I fear I am not tired,” she replied, a soft smile on her lips as her fingers were playing with the hem of her nightgown.”Are you that tired?”

“No,” he replied and couldn’t help but to smile.”I just thought you are.”

She sighed and leaned closer to kiss his cheek, her purple eyes resting on him anticipation.

He nodded his head and was quick to lay his lips on hers.

As he returned the kiss her he let his hand travel up her ribcage to squeeze her soft breasts through the nightgown. She sighed and he left her lips to kiss her jawline and then down her slender throat.

“Jon,” she gasped and patted his shoulder.”I need to pull off my dress.”

“Aye,” he replied, still a little fazed by the taste of her lips. He watched her pull out of the gown and there she was, naked like her nameday. The sight of her made his cock twitch and when she started to pull on his breeches he helped her eagerly.

She chewed on her lip, before settling in his lap.

The warm made him delirious and he tried to forget about it by placing soft kisses to her neck. She gasped, her breasts rubbing against him, which made it only harder for him. Thus he rolled her over, before kissing her breasts, which coaxed a gasp from her lips.

“Kiss me again,” she whispered.

“I will do more than that,” he assured her and flinched at the low tone of his voice.

He kissed her, but not on the mouth. Instead he kissed his way down over her belly before doing the same between her legs.

“Gods!” it escaped her. He held her by the legs and soon she was grabbing his hair and arched her back when she found her release.

“Gods,” she gasped again, but the smile on her lips told him that she didn’t dislike it.”Where did Theon Greyjoy learn that?”

“You don’t want to know,” he assured her and leaned down to kiss her cheek.
“A secret then,” she told him, an amused smile playing on her lips as she started to stroke him.

He moaned, but quickly brushed her hand away when it began to overwhelm him.

“Now,” she whispered then and Jon understood at once. Exhaling deeply he parted her legs and slipped inside her.

She gasped, but not in displeasure, her head rolling backwards and her hands stroking his back in circles.

Jon’s breathing grew labored as he pushed inside her. The heat of her made him clench his eyes shut and soon he lost his rhythm. Her soft moans echoed off the walls as he lost himself inside her until he felt her clench around him, which sent him over the edge.

When he came back to himself, he felt her finger brushing through his sweaty hair.

She seemed happy and smiled up at him.

Jon slipped out of her and rolled on his side, feeling suddenly very tired, before drifting off to sleep.

…
Rhaenys

Highgarden greeted them with a wide blue sky and a landscape touched by the hand of autumn. Out on the fields the smallfolk occupied themselves with harvesting while the trees bared their leaves in bright colors of orange, red and yellow.

For Rhaenys it felt as if a heavy weight fell from her shoulders when she left King’s Landing behind her. Not even Joffrey’s sullen expression and biting comments were able to take away her happiness.

Soon, she told herself. Soon this mummery will be over.

“Finally,” Joffrey muttered in his usual bored tone, urging his horse forward. Before them rode Ser Barristan and behind them several guards dressed in crimson cloaks. They were Lannister men, but Eddard Stark was kind enough to have the Hound stay away from Highgarden and sent Ser Barristan to accompany them. The Hound might have given her problems, but with a bit of luck she might be able to win Ser Barristan as an ally. “This place is boring. Nothing to be seen other than fields and flowers…”

What do you expected, she wondered and bit back a comment. Then finally, the marble towers of Highgarden appeared before them.

The sight filled Rhaenys with a familiar longing. I am home, she thought though she never had a place to call home. When she was a child she thought of Storm’s End as her home. When she was a bit older she thought of King’s Landing as her home, thought that didn’t last long after she set foot in the cursed city. Now it was Highgarden, but then there was also the North and her brother and her Aunt…

“Ah,” Ser Barristan said and gave her a knowing smile. “Highgarden is always a pleasant sight, isn’t it, Princess?”

Joffrey frowned at that, though nobody asked his opinion on the matter.

“I forgot…you have never seen Casterly Rock. It makes Highgarden look like a cheap hovel. I will ask grandfather’s approval to take you there, sweet wife.”

Sweet wife, was as usual spoken in a cruel sweetness that left her shivering.

She feigned a smile.

“As you say, my Prince.”

The rest of the travel was bridged in uncomfortable silence. Yet all those dark thoughts were quickly banished from her mind when she climbed from her horse and was greeted by familiar faces.

Mace Tyrell hasn’t changed much, though his girth increased considerably. His wife Alerie’s hair turned completely white and even Garlan was now sporting a beard. Willas, clean-shaved as usual looked even slightly younger next to his younger brother. At last came Loras, who grinned brightly as he swept Margaery from her horse. Renly was not far, a hesitant smile showing on his lips as he came to greet Joffrey.
“Well met, nephew,” he said and lowered his head. “I am surprised you left your Hound behind. He is always such a delightful fellow.”

“I have no patience for your japes, Uncle,” Joffrey replied sullenly. “But the Hand thought it wiser to keep him at home after Mountain’s actions on the tourney of the Hand. I still don’t understand what the fuss was about...this poor fool shouldn't have challenged someone as mighty as Ser Sandor Clegane.”

“Your wife would think differently,” Renly whispered, before shifting his attention to Rhaenys and Margaery.

“It is always a delight to behold your smile, Princess Rhaenys,” he said and placed a brief kiss to her hand, before lifting his head to grin at Margaery.

He may no love her, but his charm was not lacking. But that was how Renly Baratheon went through life, always a smile on his lips.

“Sadly...I have to say that you can’t compare to the beauty of the Maid of Highgarden. You are a delight, Lady Margaery.”

“You are too kind,” she replied softly and even flushed a little when he kissed her hand.

Rhaenys used the moment between the two of them to speak to the rest of the Tyrell family.

“It is a pleasure to see you again, my Lord,” Rhaenys greeted and received a friendly smile from the elderly man, followed by kiss on the cheek by Lady Alerie and another kiss on the hand by Garlan and at last Willas…

She tried to keep her gaze lowered, to still her quickening heart. Only a little while longer, she told herself and lifted her head to give Willas a subtle smile.

She wanted to applaud him for the almost indifferent and bored expression he was able to conjure on his face.

“It is good to see you hale, Princess,” he replied and dropped her hand as if it was nothing more than a dirty rag.

For a moment she believed his gesture to be genuine, but then she saw the hint of sadness showing in his golden eyes and knew that this was just as hard for him as for her.

“It is good to see you hale as well, my Lord,” she replied her voice barely above a whisper.

Then Joffrey joined her side and grasped her arm in an almost possessive manner. Usually, Joffrey ignored her, but it seems he believed the rumors his mother spread about her and the Heir to Highgarden.

“Lord Tyrell,” Joffrey greeted, a self-sufficient smile plastered on his lips. “I didn't see you on my wedding, my Lord. I heard your twisted leg was ailing you.”

Rhaenys saw the hint of anger flickering in his golden eyes, but as usual Willas kept his composure. He was used to be teased for his affliction. Even being his Lord Father’s heir didn’t protect him from such comments.

Respectfully, he lowered his head and forced a smile over his lips.
“I am back to health, my Prince. It honors me that you are worried about my health.”

“Great honor or not,” the Queen of Thorns added moodily, leaning on a gilded crutch with a golden rose on the top.”The sky promises rain…maybe we should retreat inside. A feast is awaiting you, my Prince.”

Joffrey looked liked slapped by Lady Olenna's forward ways, but regained his composure moments later.

“Of course,” he replied and grasped her arm tighter, before leading her inside. The feast was wonderful as expected, though Rhaenys could hardly stomach to eat, seated next to Joffrey. She usually ate with her ladies or Margaery, but said girl was placed next to Renly and giggling happily over the silly jokes pouring out of his mouth.

Sansa sat next to her and was flanked by Margaery’s many cousins, one pettier than the next, though Sansa stood out against them with her auburn hair like a sore thumb.

Thus supper passed peacefully and Joffrey was soon coaxed away by Garlan Tyrell, who offered to show him around. That he didn’t decline surprised her, but then Garlan was one of the most charming people she knew. He had spent all evening listening to Joffrey’s bragging about his feats in the hunt. It seems Joffrey found him to be a more or less agreeable companion.

At last Lady Alerie and Lord Tyrell retired, leaving only Rhaenys, Margaery, Willas and Lady Olenna. Loras had disappeared earlier in company of Renly and Sansa had excused herself to join Margaery’s cousins on a late ride through the flower gardens.

A moment of eerie silence had settled over them the moment Lord Mace Tyrell and his Lady Alerie left the room.

“Does someone want more wine?” Lady Olenna asked, probably with the intention to break the silence that had settled over them.

“Yes please, grandmama,” Margaery said and smiled sweetly as Lady Olenna poured more wine into her goblet.

Willas refused as well and so did Rhaenys. She had three cups that night, more than she usually took so close before sleep.

Then the Lady Olenna filled her own goblet to the brim and fixed Rhaenys with her golden eyes.

“Here we are, sweet girl,” she declared and gave her an expectant look.”I made sure that you have your stage, now you need to tell us our lines and give us the requisites necessary to pull off the mummer your planned.”

Rhaenys smiled shyly and picked the small rubies braided into her hair. Her Uncle Oberyn hid them in the bottles of perfume given to her as a wedding gift. That inside them was a fast-working poison was hard to believe, but then her Uncle has an in-depth knowledge of poisons.

That they were a fast-working poison if dissolved in a liquid was hard to believe, but then her Uncle was a Master of poisons.

She gathered them carefully in her hand and showed them to Lady Olenna.
“One or two should be enough. It will be quick and without much pain. I am not a butcher.”

Lady Olenna took a sip from her wine and wrinkled her brows as he regarded the small rubies.

“Well, your Uncle always had a strange sense of humor.”

The ceremony for Renly and Margaery proved as lavish as expected. Truly, Mace Tyrell didn’t spare with the gold dragons when he prepared this wedding. It showed in Margaerys’ dress made of ivory silk and Myrish lace. Renly’s dressing was not less impressive, but he always had a love for colorful clothing. His cloak was made of golden silk, a stag embellished in the middle. Margaery on the other hand wore a maiden’s cloak made of a hundred golden roses sewn on green velvet. They made a lovely pair, though Rhaenys had no doubt that Renly would have preferred Loras in his bed. Maybe if he closed his eyes, the resemblance between Margaery and Loras was close enough.

Then the seven vows were made, the seven blessings invoked, and the seven promises exchanged, before Renly exchanged Margaery’s cloak with his golden one. A brief kiss followed and it was done, before the procession marched out to the large spacious gardens where the wedding feast will be held beneath the open sky.

Lady Olenna thought it a folly, given the likeliness of late autumn rains, but Margaery was insistent and Mace Tyrell was not a man to go against his daughter's wishes.

As the guests of honor they sat on the upper dais, watching over the other guests. Rhaenys knew most of their names. There was House Redwyne, House Fassoway, House Hightower, House Tarly and many more. The colors of their clothing blurred before her as she continued sipping on her wine.

_It has to happen after the bedding_, she had told Lady Olenna.

Yet it was still a long time until the bedding will be called. For Rhaenys it felt like an eternity.

Thus the evening passed. Margaery spoke in soft whispers to her husband while Joffrey picked on his food as if it was some leftover dish from yesterday. Granted it was no boar, like his Lord Father liked to serve on his feasts, but it was fresh game from the woods only an hours-ride away from the castle.

One course after another was served. Joffrey had his cup refilled several times, always from a different servant. Rhaenys kept a close look on them, all the while wondering who is the one chosen by Lady Olenna.

The sun was disappearing behind the horizon when the minstrels were called forward to play their merry tunes to entertain the guest. The servants put the tables and benches aside and soon the young maids were twirling with knights and Lords alike. Sansa was among them, cheeks flushed as she danced with Garlan Tyrell and then with Loras Tyrell.

_Soon the peace will be shattered_, Rhaenys thought and wondered for a brief moment if what she intended to do was not too much. She held a grudge against her father for running off with Lyanna Stark and plunging them into a war that destroyed her family. Granted it were Brandon Stark’s and Rickard Stark’s death that caused the war, but it was his father’s love for the Wolf Maid that started it. Yet she couldn’t help but to love her brother. He is her second chance, her second Aegon, even if he carried a different name. _Jaehaerys_, was his true name, but he asked her to call him by
his given name. *Jon.*

Yet when she recalled her mother’s battered body and her brother’s smashed skull she lost all her doubts. It were blurred memories she tried to banish away, but they were now emerging like a foul illness to taint her mind.

No, she thought and bit her lips, before shifting her attention back to the minstrels. They were now singing *The Bear and the Maiden Fair* for the third time.

Finally, she didn’t know who gave the incentive, but soon the guests were gathering around the groom and the bride, to escort them away, though in a much less rowdy manner than usual. It was more like a calm procession accompanied by quiet laughter and giggles.

Joffrey, who showed not much interest in his Uncle and bride, remained in his seat as did Mace Tyrell, his wife, Lady Olenna and Willas.

“It seems the pie is not to your taste, my Prince,” the Olenna remarked.”I can understand your distaste. I never much like pies. It harms the two teeth I have left. Wine helps they say, isn’t that true, Mace?”

“It is true,” Mace Tyrell added proudly, his face flushed. *Puffish,* Lady Olenna liked to dub him.”Arbor never fails to wet the tongue, my Prince.”

Joffrey frowned and lifted his goblet.”Then I will take a sip from the Arbor, if it pleases you, my Lord.”

Mace Tyrell opened his mouth, but Lady Olenna was quicker and clapped into her hands, calling one of the many servant girls to her side. This one however, looked eerily familiar. It was the golden hair and the fullness of her lips, but then the memory came back to her. This was no servant girl, but one of Lady Olenna's ladies, a lowborn girl born to one of her many Redwyne cousins. *Marya or Maira,* Rhaenys recalled her name. The King himself had her on the tourney she danced with Jon. Later that year she even bore him a bastard girl.

“What is your wish, M'lady?” the girl inquired politely, her eyes briefly darting to Joffrey, before returning to look at Lady Olenna.

“Bring one of the bottles of Arbor and a fresh cup for the Prince. He has been using this one all night long. We can’t have the Arbor wine sullied.”

“Of course, M’lady,” the girl replied and returned moments later with a flagon of wine and a fresh goblet for the Prince. Carefully, she poured the wine in Mace Tyrell’s, Lady Alerie’s and Rhaenys’ goblets, before doing the same for Joff and handing him the fresh cup.

“A toast to your Uncle and his beautiful bride!” the Lady Olenna declared and lifted her goblet, before bringing it to her dry and wrinkled lips.

Joffrey did the same, drinking long and deep, his troath bobbing as the wine ran down his chin.

“A bit bitter…,” he said, his words breaking off in a fit of coughing. Again he brought the goblet to his lips, but it was no use.

Rhaenys could neither breathe not move. For a moment the world had shrunken to that brief moment, her heart hammering violently in her chest.

Joff’s face was now as red as the leaves of a weirwood tree. His eyes were wide open, staring back
at her in vitrol hatred.

_He knows_, she knew but it was too late. Joff’s was trashing out at her, gasping for breath….

Then he dropped to the ground like a puppet without strings.

_It is done_, was all that Rhaenys could think of as the world around her descended into chaos. _It is done._
Ned

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ned

The smell of death met Ned's nose when he entered the King's chamber. His condition worsened overnight and it was in the early morning hours that Grand Maester Pycelle called for him to attend to the King. Ned had dressed quickly and followed him through the half-lit halls, but he didn't expect this.

Inside the smell was even worse, the floor beneath the King's bed littered with the wool bindings Maester Pycelle changed every day. Last time Ned was present and the King was even joking with him about it.

"Ned!" Robert's hoarse voice greeted him through the darkness of the chamber." Is that you?"

Ned nodded his head and felt the need to gag when the strong smell met his nostrils again.

"I am here, your Grace."

The King laughed, his face ashen pale like the fresh-fallen summer snow.

Grand Maester Pycelle, standing at a nearby table was squashing herbs with a pestle, but started to speak when he spotted Ned.

"Ah, my Lord Hand. It is good know that you were able to come this quickly. The King is in dire need of company. The Queen paid a visit this morning in company of Prince Tommen and Princess Myrcella, but the King sent them away shortly after. Truly, your presence was the only thing that was able to lift his spirits."

"I see," Ned replied, eyeing the herbs with great interest. The smell was bitter and musky." But consider me surprised. A few days ago the King was still on the road of recovery...and now he is in such a terrible state. What happened?"

The old Maester sighed deeply.

"The wound is infected and the King is suffering from fever bouts. Sometimes only a cut is needed to poison the blood stream. I fear only time will tell."

"Gods...Pycelle...stop talking like I am not here," the King barked angrily." Sent the old man on his way and come here."

Ned sighed and gave the Maester a pleading look. The old man dipped his head as he made his way for the door.

"I will excuse myself for now. But his Grace needs his dire rest. Not too long, my Lord Hand."

"Of course," Ned replied and shifted his attention back to Robert.

Even close to death's door he was laughing.

"That cursed melee match. Even Cersei was warning me... I should have known that it would be
the death of me!"

"Maybe," Ned replied vaguely, though he doubted the Queen's concern was honest. He came to understand quite quickly that there is no love between the Queen and Robert." But you are not dead yet... Take courage, old friend."

Then Ned sat down next to him and regarded him more closely. Seeing the wound quite close it didn't look very threatening. It was a cut and nothing more. A young Robert would have laughed about such a wound and mounted a horse on the next day...

"A pitiful sight, isn't it, Ned?" he asked and grimaced in pain. The sweet smell of puss whirled off the wound and Ned recalled the Master's words. Blood poisoning. A sickness that can take even the strongest of men.

"You are my King," Ned replied instead." And my friend. You were always like that. Stubborn like a mule without any concern for your own safety."

"Aye, but it was that Kind of disregard for safety that won me this cursed crown. Gods, Ned... I never wanted it. I always loved fighting, but ruling was meant for the likes of you and Jon Arryn. Not me. I should have refused Jon's demands and taken up the life of a sellsword. Then I would have at least died with a sword in a hand and not like and old woman. I can't even piss on my own."

Ned felt sick and didn't know what to answer. He needed to say something to comfort him, but he had no answer. Instead, his thoughts came back to the strange behavior Jon Arryn displayed in the last weeks of his death. By now Ned had questioned several individuals, among them a young smith who turned out to be the King's bastard, but it didn't give him the answer he was seeking for.

If he only had more time, but the King is dying and the moment of the King's death will mean his removal as Hand of the King. Not that he ever cared to keep this position, but it left a sour taste in his mouth that he wasn't able to get behind the mystery regarding Jon's death.

I still have to pay Stannis Baratheon a visit, he knew. Ned called him to court several times, but he always refused to answer his call. Whatever transpired, he must be fearing for his life, for Stannis Baratheon is not a man easily frightened.

"You were a better King than King Aerys. That is why we chose you."

"Aye," the King said and grimaced in pain." At least I am not as bad as that mad fucker. Truly, you never had a way with words, old friend."

"Aye, Lord Arryn was always much better at it than me. I am sure his presence here would give you more comfort than mine, your Grace."

"Gods, Ned. Just call me Robert...like in the old times. I told you... I never wanted that cursed crown. It gave me nothing other than grief."

Not only you, Ned wanted to say but kept his comment to himself.

"Robert," he said at last and tried to recall the young boy with the blue eyes and the bright smile running wild in the halls of the Eyrie. It was a sad memory that filled him with a deep longing to return home.

"Robert, tell me... Why did you call me here this urgently?"
"You are foremost my friend, but also the Hand I chose. I called you here to dictate my will."

"You will?" he asked. Robert's word made it reality. He is going to die.

"Don't be so surprised. I intend to name you Lord Regent and Protector of the Realm. Joff is only a boy, and he needs better guidance than his mother and the likes of Tywin Lannister. I realized that now."

Ned was stunned.

"I don't think...!" he protested, but Robert lifted his head and squeezed his shoulder tightly.

Seeing his suffering he could only agree. Thus, he exhaled deeply and placed his hand on Robert's arm.

"I will do my best."

"Good," Robert replied, a sad smile showing on his lips." At least one good thing came of my time as King. I can die at peace knowing that I will leave the realm in your hands."

The guilt pierced deeper than steel. If you knew how much I lied...

"I hope so," he replied and called for the Grand Master to dictate the King's will. Ned remained for the rest of the morning and returned in the evening to keep the King company.

The horizon was painted in orange and red when Ned returned to his chambers in the Tower of the Hand. Ned felt the weariness in his bones when he settled down to pen a letter to Cat, mentioning his possible return in the near future. It that moment a knock at the door snapped him out of his reverie.

Ned rose to his feet and opened the door. It was Jory, who looked worn out by his duty.

"My Lord," he replied and bowed his head in greeting." I come to inform you that there will be a ship leaving for Dragonstone. Would three days be appropriate?"

Ned sighed heavily. " And the next one?"

"A week later, my Lord," Jory replied.

"That will do," Ned confirmed and gave the man a thankful smile. Jory didn't leave and lingered at the door.

"Haven't you seen it, my Lord?" he asked and jerked his head towards the bookshelf placed near the wall. It was a massive book, wrapped up in a thick silk cloth. Tired as he was he didn't even notice it.

"What is it?" he asked and Jory quickly provided him with an answer.

"The book you demanded from Maester Pycelle," Jory explained."The Lineages of the Great Houses...sounds like a tedious read if you ask me, my Lord."

Ned sighed heavily and paled at the sight of the book. Then there was the meeting with Lord Baelish, who promised to take him to one of the brothels for another investigation. The man liked to call himself Cat's friend, but whenever Ned is present he feels as if he is taking him for a fool.

Lord Baelish will have to wait a while longer, Ned decided right then. But King is dying...
"I thank you," Ned told Jory at last and dismissed him from his presence. Then he lightened a fresh candle and poured himself some wine, before starting to read through the dusty pages. It smelled of age and death. Maester Luwin would be enthralled, but Ned was soon consuming more of the wine than reading. When he woke again the candle was extinguished and a pale sheen of morning light was falling through the shutters.

Carefully, he rose to his feet and stretched his legs, before putting the sleep-inducing tome away. Out on the way he met Tom, who was on his usual morning duty.

"Greetings, my Lord," he said and dipped his head, though he looked quite sleepy.

"Greetings to you," he replied and brushed his messy hair out of his face. It came free from its braid and was hanging into his eyes." Are there any news about the King?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"The Queen sent a page. She expects your attendance in the Throne Room."

It has to be about the King, Ned thought and felt a hint of sadness washing over him.

"I will go and speak to her at once. I only need to change into something more appropriate. Please inform Vayon about my absence."

"Of course, my Lord," Tom replied and rushed off while Ned went exchange his clothing. Least he insults Queen Cersei with his Northern stink as he had heard her say before.

I will be glad to leave this place, he thought again and made his way to the Red Keep. The sky was bright on that morning. A clear blue and the sunlight felt pleasant on his skin. Yet it was only morning and Ned knew how cruel the midday heat will can be.

When he was finally received he found the Queen sitting on the Iron Throne, her second-oldest son placed in her lap. The golden-haired Princess was nowhere to be seen. Only the Queen was there in company of Pycelle and a handful of goldcloaks each placed at the walls. The sight alone made Ned uneasy, but he tried his best not to appear intimidated by the woman.

He had a handful of guardsmen waiting outside, but that didn't help to put him at ease.

"Lord Stark," she greeted, a cold smile curling on her lips. There was nothing of her usual pretence in her bearing, her face unnaturally pale. Her eyes were even slightly red as if she cried recently.

The boy on her lap gave an equally sad picture. His face was flushed and his eyes puffy.

Ned froze at the sight, knowing what it meant.

The King is dead.

"Your Grace," he replied and gritted his teeth as he forced the words over his lips."You have my utmost condolences...and you my Prince. Your father was very dear to me."

"King!" Cersei Lannister snapped at him and tightened her grip on Tommen Baratheon's shoulder." He is the King!"

Ned was confused, but tried to remain polite.

"Your other son... Prince Joffrey," he began, but was cut off by the Queen and the appearance of
Janos Slynt, the Commander of the Goldcloaks.

"Is dead," he told Ned indifferently.

"What?" he asked, barely able to catch a breath. "How?"

"I hoped you would be able to answer this question, my Lord. It was you who allowed Princess Rhaenys to travel to Highgarden and it as there that my son was slain by that Little whore."

The Queen's words send Ned's mind reeling with thousands of questions.

"How can you be sure that it was the Princess?" he asked, trying to keep his composure.

"Who else?" the Queen snapped angrily and nearly cut herself at the sharp blades of the throne. Her golden hair boy whimpered and tightened his grip on her arm. "The little whore as been planning this from the very beginning. I know it."

Then she cocked her head to the side and gave Ned a damning look.

"And you...you allowed her to leave when it was my utmost wish to keep her here. That places you under suspicions...and Commander Janos Slynt informed me that one of your men has been inquiring about a ship leaving for Dragonstone."

"Suspicions?" he asked and couldn't believe his ears, though he was getting the feeling that there was a corn of truth in the Queen's belief. The Princess begged him to allow her to go to Highgarden. "What interest could I have in killing your son? I only granted Princess Rhaenys' wish, because I felt pity for her after her loss."

"Lies!" the Queen snapped, her face a grimace of sadness and pain. It was the face of a grieving mother and someone lacking clear reasoning. "Your daughter was betrothed to my sweet Tommen...maybe you wanted to help her to a crown. Maybe there is a clever man hiding beneath your honorable cloak, my Lord. Not that I care. You will be placed under house arrest until further investigations are able to prove your innocence."

Chapter End Notes

Cersei is certainly not taking it well, but there is a main difference here to the books. Tywin Lannister is alive and Ned is much more useful to him as a hostage. It was Joff who killed Ned in the books/show and not Cersei.
Daenerys

Daenerys' watched the Karstark men move over the courtyard, their spears glittering in the dying sunlight. They were the last ones to arrive after nearly more than a week of waiting.

It felt like an eternity ago that they heard of Lord Stark's imprisonment and shortly after Robb called the banners. Why exactly Lord Stark was imprisoned is still unknown to them but the rumours allude that it has to do with the sudden death of Prince Joffrey on Margaery Tyrell's and Renly Baratheon's wedding. Some say it were the Tyrells who slew him, others say it was her lost brother Viserys Targaryen who decided to take revenge against the Baratheon's, some think it were the gods, but Daenerys knew better. Rhaenys never hid the hatred she harboured for the Prince. Not that he instilled much love into the people around them. Daenerys knew that he was often cruel with Rhaenys, but that she supposedly murdered him on Margaery's wedding surprised her.

You hardly know her, Daenerys knew and felt torn on the matter. War is coming, so much she knew. But the last war nearly killed her entire family and thus she remained sceptical about the outcome. That Lord Stark was caught somewhere in the middle of it frightened her.

"Daenerys," Ysilla Royce's soft voice snapped her out of her thoughts."Are you still there?"

"I apologize," Daenerys replied and lifted her head to smile at her friend. Lady Ysilla Royce was now close to her fourth moon. Sadly, it also means that the Lady has to remain in bed, given her regular bleedings. At least that is what Maester Luwin insists on."It seems Lord Karstark has arrived in company of his sons."

"That is one of the last ones," Ysilla remarked and folded her hands in front of her."You should get dressed. Jon will be waiting for you."

Daenerys shrugged her shoulders and leaned down to stroke Ghost behind the ear.

"I don't even know why I should go there. They are planning a war I can't even partake in. Jon wants to keep me here, because the thinks Tywin Lannister could take me hostage if I were to set a foot below the Neck.

"Knowing Tywin Lannister that could very well be the case," Ysilla Royce added."I know you don't share my opinion, but I am happy to have you here to keep me company and help me in Lady Stark's absence. I will need your help to take care of Rickon. Arya and Bran are old enough to take care of themselves, but Rickon is only a boy and is incredibly upset about Lady Stark's departure.

"Well, I share his opinion. I doubt Lady Stark's presence in the Vale will urge Lady Arryn to fight with us. I have lived with her for eight years and she never once had a kind word for her sister. She is also paranoid and lives in constant fear that someone might try to murder her boy. I doubt she is prepared to take up weapons against the Lannisters."

"Maybe," Ysilla granted her"But my father will not like that."

"Maybe I am wrong," Daenerys huffed."I still don't like sitting her for moons while the rest of them go off fighting."

"Maybe it won't be that bad," Ysilla said enthusiastically."Robb thinks it could be over in a few weeks. Tywin Lannister will surely understand that he can't keep the Warden of the North..."
imprisoned without consequences."

"True," Daenerys replied, though she disagreed with her opinion. Yet she had no intention to destroy her enthusiasm.

Ysilla chuckled and shook her head."I am no fool, Daenerys. I know how dangerous war can be. My father never fails to tell my brother about the Rebellion. It is not a happy memory for him."

Not only for him, Daenerys thought but buried these feelings deep in her heart.

"I know your father doesn't hold much love against the Targaryens. I hope he won't advocate against my niece."

"I know what my father will do. But knowing him he would surely want to fight for Robb and help Lord Stark. Your niece is a difficult matter. We will have to wait and see."

"We will have to wait and see," Daenerys repeated and smoothed her hand over her stomach. She wondered if Jon will return in time to see their child born, though she has yet to tell him about it.

"When do you intend to tell him?" Ysilla asked, a gentle smile playing on her lips.

Daenerys wrinkled her brows in confusion."Tell him what?"

"About the child," Ysilla remarked and smiled amusedly."For how long have you known?"

"Not long," she confirmed quietly."I planned to tell him today...given that they are going to leave in a few days. They were so busy that I didn't find the right moment."

"Then you should go," Ysilla told her and patted her hand."I can't attend, but I need you to tell me everything. Be my eyes and ears."

Daenerys smiled back and leaned over to place a kiss on her cheek, before rising to her feet and making her way to the door.

"I will see you later," she told Ysilla, opened the door and allowed Ghost to slip out on the corridor. Then she quickly changed into a proper dress, grey like the dreary sky of the North, before making her way to the door.

"Will you come?" she asked Ghost, who had settled down on his sleeping place on the carpet before the hearth.

Ghost raised his ears and howled, before finally following after her.

...

The Great Hall was filled with the Lords and Ladies of the North. Some of them Daenerys knew from her wedding, others were strangers to her, though she recognized their banners and names. There was Roose Bolton, the Greatjon Umber, Lady Maege Mormont and her oldest daughter Dacey. Next to her sat Lord Cerwyn and grim Lady Dustin, who never failed to glower when addressed.

Daenerys knew how anxious Jon is to leave, but the North is vast and it takes time to travel here this quickly. That Robb is still half a boy didn't earn him much respect. The Lords showed it in their demeanour, especially the older ones. The Greatjon even dared to draw bare steel, though Greywind made quick work of him and bit off two fingers. Surprisingly, the Greatjon was
unaffected by the wound and spent half the night drinking with the other Lords, his bloody hand wrapped in a white cloth.

How he can endure the pain without Milk of the Poppy was a mystery to her, but then the Lords of the North were used to harsher conditions than their Brothers in the south.

Robb handled their disrespect with a regal manner, though his serious Expression was a reflection of his state of mind. Jon, who sat next to her, looked equally grim and even Theon Greyjoy, kept his usual stupid grins to herself.

The feast was a dour affair. There was no jesting to be heard, only silence.

It was then that Robb rose to his feet and declared his intentions.

His plan was simple. To gather enough men and to march towards Moat Cailin. It was meant as a threat to Tywin Lannister and the Queen, who supposedly imprisoned Lord Stark.

Afterwards the assembled Lords and Ladies were allowed to speak and add their opinions on the matter.

It was the Greatjon who spoke first, his grey eyes narrowed.

"I have known your Lord Father all my life. Whatever madness possessed Cersei Lannister to imprison Ned...I am sure it is all nonsense. Ned would never help murdering the King's son."

"It doubt it matters what we think, but all the rumours agree on one matter...my father was imprisoned and Rhaenys Targaryen had something to do with Prince Joffrey's death. That it happened in Highgarden makes it very likely that the Tyrells are somehow involved in the plot. If they are it is very likely that they will support her claim and we all know what that will mean for us...war. The Princess is also half-Dornish and it wouldn't surprise me if they would join hands with the Dornish," Robb replied.

"The Tyrells joing hands with the Dornish?" Lord Karstark asked and wrinkled his brows in disbelief."That is like throwing cats and dogs together. That will not end well."

"Maybe," Lord Cerwyn agreed."Some say it was poison that killed the Prince and the Princess' Uncle is called the Viper of Dorne. I wouldn't surprise me if he helped along."

"Lord Cerwyn speaks true," Lord Roose Bolton added, his pale eyes calm as the surface of a lake. His snake-like voice made her shudder whenever he spoke. The horrible rumours Daenerys heard about the Boltons didn't help to endear the man to her."Yet one question remains: Why does the Queen think that Lord Stark conspired with Rhaenys Targaryen to murder her son?"

"I have yet to receive a raven from King's Landing," Robb replied."All I know is that Prince Joffrey died on a wedding and that his father followed after him, before the Queen took my father prisoner. However, I am sure Tywin Lannisters will not remain silent forever if we march down to Moat Cailin."

"Well spoken!" the Greatjon added enthusiastically and smashed his hand on the wooden table."Surely, the lion will roar once he hears about us!"

"Tywin Lannister is not a man easily frightened, though it is more likely that he is too occupied with the Tyrells and the Dornish to care about us," Lady Mormont remarked sceptically.

"Mace Tyrell can muster fifty-thousand men, but it will take him moons to assemble them, before
he can even think about marching towards the capital. Tywin Lannister will make use of that time...this I can assure you, my Lord," Roose Bolton added calmly."We should be careful and choose wisely which side we take. However, the might of Highgarden shouldn't be ignored."

His words earned him baffled silence. Strangely, the Lord seemed unbothered, his pale eyes fixed on Robb.

Robb looked uncomfortable, but didn't flich away when he answered.

"Are you urging us to side with the Princess, Lord Bolton?"

All eyes were now fixed on Lord Bolton, but he gave his opinion without any pretence.

"Why does my question surprise you so much, my Lord? King Robert is dead and Prince Tommen is a mere child. At least for now Tywin Lannister will rule the Iron Throne and not the Baratheons. Stannis Baratheon remains silent, Renly Baratheon is probably a hostage and the Lannisters imprisoned Lord Stark. Surely, that makes them our enemies. I am honest...I care not if a Targaryen or a Baratheon occupies the Iron Throne, but we should be smart enough to choose the right side. Make of my words what you will."

Curses were muttered, but Robb was quick to silence them. Daenerys saw the conflict showing on his features as his gaze rested on Jon. He looked equally pale, their faces revealing what they were really thinking.

"Your advise is appreciated, my Lord," Robb replied diplomatically."But I cannot make such a decision based on my current knowledge. I am sure will soon know more."

Daenery felt relief washing over her when the meeting ended. She had feared calls for war against her niece, but she didn't get the impression that Lords of the North are not very enthusiastic to go to war. Maybe this matter can even be handled without the North's involvement. That was at least her hope.

Jon's dour expression told her that he didn't share her opinion. After he heard about Rhaenys he had grown incredibly quite, sparring half the day with Robb. When he returned he asked her if she believes it possible that Rhaenys would do something like that. Daenerys couldn't help but to confirm his belief and told him about Joffrey's cruelty. Her niece had asked her to keep it to herself, but she was unable to lie to Jon.

Since that night he hasn't broached the topic again. Tonight he decided to bring it up again.

"We will leave in two days. I may not approve of Rhaenys' actions, but I understand it," he said, his dark gaze resting on her.

"Do you think she anticipated that Lord Stark could get harmed?"

"I don't know," she replied honestly and shrugged her shoulders. She didn't know what to think or to feel. She was torn between supporting Rhaenys and the other side, who saw her as a Kingslayer."Who knows...maybe the Queen only imprisoned your Lord father because she feared he might raise the North against her. Maybe it is all a mummery."

He grasped her hand and kissed her knuckles.

"I hope that you are right."

A moment of silence passed between them in that moment. She knew that she has to tell.
"Jon...," she said and tightened her grip on his hands. Then she exahaled deeply and forced the words over her lips."There is more."

He gave her a curious look.

"Is it about Rhaenys?"

"No...I am...with child."

He froze, a smile ranging between happiness and disbelief washing over his face. She grinned from one ear to the other, but Jon didn't say a word. It took another long moment of silence before he finally spoke

"Truly?"

She laughed.

"Why would I lie about that?"

He barked a laugh, all grimness forgotten, even if it was meant to last only for a few days.

"Are you pleased then?"

"Of course," he gasped, his hand wandering up her neck to touch her cheek."I just want to curse Queen Cersei for making me leave."

...
Rhaenys

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rhaenys

As common these days Mace Tyrell’s face was devoid of his usually jolly smiles, but that was something she expected. No Lord appreciated it if a Prince is slain under his halls, especially not on a wedding celebrated for his only daughter.

*Joffrey was never a Prince*, she knew now after they received Stannis Baratheon’s letter to the realm. It named Prince Joffrey and his siblings bastards, born between Cersei Lannister and her brother Ser Jaime Lannister.

It should be no surprise to her, but that the Queen was that brazen surprised even Rhaenys. She even felt a hint of respect for Queen Cersei that she dared to cuckold a volatile man like Robert Baratheon. If he ever found out the truth not only she, but also her children would have been butchered. Robert Baratheon slew her father for taking his beloved away...such a humiliation would have never been forgiven by the King. It made her regret that she didn’t wait a while longer, but now there is no turning back.

If I look back I am lost, she thought and shifted her attention back to the letter placed in the middle of the polished table. It was the letter showing the sigil of House Baratheon. It was Stannis Baratheon’s letter to the realm to stake his claim on the Iron Throne.

“Stannis Baratheon demands of us to bend the knee and return his brother Renly,” the Queen of Thorns summed up the letter.”He also threatens to remove Mace from his position in favour of his Florent relatives. What do you think did he write to Tywin Lannister?”

“Probably something very similar, grandmama,” Margaery added softly, her hands neatly folded in her lap. Renly, her husband was a now a prisoner, albeit a comfortable one, and still refused to speak to Rhaenys. Even Loras attempts showed no result and he remained silent.

Rhaenys expected him to be angry, but she didn’t expect him to be this stubborn. Given that he never bore much love for either King Robert or Stannis she didn’t expect him to be this upset. She underestimated his romantic side too much.

*I may not love my brothers, but I won’t betray my family*, he had told her.

“Two weeks and no answer from Tywin Lannister,” Mace Tyrell grumbled impatiently.”I have waited like you asked of me, Princess, but I think it is time to make a decision. The whole realm is preparing for war and we are sitting here with Prince Joffrey’s corpse. My stance is the same: We could simply deny the accusations of murder and claim it was an unknown assassin. I said it before and I say it again: I don’t like it that you spilled blood in my home. You not only soiled my family’s name, but also your own. Now is still time to stop this madness. I am sure Tywin can be reasoned with if we are prepared to help him against Stannis or if you rather want me to join Stannis we simply have to return his brother to him.”

His stupidity made her want to throw her goblet against the wall. Mace Tyrell was truly Luthor Tyrell’s son. What surprised her was that he hasn’t yet fallen off a cliff like his late father.

All this nonsense he had told them numerous times and as always the Queen of Thorns didn’t
hesitate to make it clear to her son.

“Do you even listen to yourself, Mace?” she asked. “Tywin Lannister is a proud man. He will not simply forget about the murder of his grandson. Stannis is made of a similar cloth. Make him King and his Florent wife will make sure that House Tyrell returns to it’s steward position. War is unavoidable at this point. The only question that remains is whose ascension to the Iron Throne benefits us the most. Certainly not Tywin Lannister’s bastard grandson or Stannis Baratheon with his Florent wife. You may disapprove of our actions, but Princess Rhaenys’ is Rhaegar’s trueborn daughter and we once supported her father.”

Mace Tyrell’s face flushed and he braced himself over the table to give his mother an unhappy look.

“No, I have not forgotten your involvement in this madness, mother,” he muttered, before giving his daughter Margaery and his son Willas the same look. “Yet it is not only the bloody deed the Princess committed under our halls that makes me hesitant, but also the fact that it would mean to join hands with Dorne. It was your brazen Uncle who crippled my Willas.”

“Aye, he did,” Rhaenys confirmed and it took all her strength to keep her composure. “But it was nothing more than an unfortunate accident...the only one who grumbles about it are my Uncle Doran and you, my Lord. It is time that we leave this feud behind us...” she continued, but Mace Tyrell cut her off, his face slowly taking the color of a lobster.

“Unfortunate accident...,” he grumbled angrily, but Willas interrupted before things got out of hand. “Father, what Rhaenys says is not without truth. I hold no grudge against her Uncle Oberyn nor against any of her family members. The only one who still takes it as a slight is you. I understand that the Martells and the Tyrells have a great distance to bridge before we can be called allies, but we could use this as a beginning to leave our old grudges behind us. Rhaenys is offering to make me her King. A grandchild of yours may one day sit the Iron Throne...Isn’t that what you always wanted, father or am I not as worthy as Margaery?”

Willas’ words hit right were they belonged and within the blink of a moment all air had drained out of Mace Tyrell’s face.

“That...,” he began, fishing for the right answer, but Margaery came to her brother’s support.

“Grandmother told me that you intended to offer me as a bride to King Robert. This makes me wonder...Did you know that Queen Cersei’s children are be bastards?”

“I didn’t know,” he stuttered and squirmed under his daughter’s gaze. “But there were rumours and I thought it would be enough. Renly was also supportive of the idea, but then I realized that Robert would never abandon Tywin as his ally. That is why I offered the match between you and Renly to Jon Arryn...,” he continued, but Rhaenys cut him off.

“And it was me who convinced Renly to accept it,” she added gently. “But leaving that aside... You were hoping that Stannis would die without a son, didn’t you? Or did you think about crowning Renly?”

“These are prosperous accusations!” he huffed and puffed.

“Oh, Mace...spare us your act of hurt pride,” the Queen of Thorns added. ”And don’t play stupid. You wanted Margaery to be Queen and there is no shame in that nor is there any shame in Princess Rhaenys’ wish to retake her family’s legacy. Wouldn’t you want to do the same, my son?”
“Yes, father,” Margaery added softly and touched his hand. “Wouldn’t you want to take revenge if something similar happened to our family?”

“Of course,” he stuttered and she knew then that the battle is won. Well, half won. There is another matter that is occupying her mind.

A few days after the wedding Eddard Stark was imprisoned by Cersei Lannister. The news came as a shock to her. She expected that Lord Stark will be dismissed from his position, but not that. Whatever possessed Cersei to such madness made her position even more difficult.

Eddard Stark is now sitting in a prison and Robb Stark called his banners. Then Stannis decided to reveal the truth about Queen Cersei’s children. None of this was planned and now she felt like standing before a black abyss, for there is one question looming over her like a sharp sword.

Which side will Robb Stark take?

Stannis was the possibility she feared he most. She doubts all the Reach Lords will support Mace Tyrell if he were to take her side. Robb Stark commands the North and the Riverlands. He may know about Jon, but she also knows what a honorable man he is. She doubts he will simply abandon the past allegiance his father forged...unless the finds out about Jon’s true birth. Then Robb Stark would be forced to take sides and she has no doubt that he would try to protect his brother. Stannis Baratheon would demand Jon’s head. To reveal the truth was part of her plan, but Eddard Stark becoming a prisoner of the Lannisters was not.

“Rhaenys...,” Margaery called out to her and touched her shoulder.”Did you hear?”

She nodded her head and forced a smile over her lips.

“Forgive me...my mind was straying,” she said and shifted her attention back to Lord Tyrell.

“What Willas said is true. I intend to make him King and if the gods are kind your grandchild will one day sit the Iron Throne.”

Mace Tyrell’s face softened a little after he heard her words, but he remained hesitant.

“Very well,” he replied.”But that is not my only fear. It is very likely that Robb Stark will support Stannis Baratheon, especially if Stannis offers him help to free his father. The Reach is powerful, but I doubt I will be able to convince my Lords to fight a war if the North, the Riverlands and the Vale join together with the Baratheons.”

Rhaenys took a deep breath, her eyes flickering to Lady Olenna, before returning to rest on Mace Tyrell. Not long ago she had told the elderly Lady the truth about her bastard brother. Surprisingly, the Queen of Thorns wasn’t very surprised, though Rhaenys doubted she knew about it. Maybe it is her age that makes it impossible to surprise her.

“Robb Stark will not join hands with Stannis Baratheon,” she forced the words over her lips.”And I know something that will force Robb Stark to support us.”

Stunned silence reigned, all eyes fixed on her.

“What can it be?” Willas asked, his hand moving over the table to touch hers.”And why didn’t you tell me?”

She exhaled deeply and squeezed his hand.
“Because it is a very personal matter and it was not the right time to do so,” she added and let her gaze wander over the rest of the Tyrell family. "Remember...you all wondered why the King wed Princess Daenerys to Eddard Stark’s bastard. Well, it was me who convinced him that the marriage will prevent any offspring of my Aunt to take arms against his future grandchildren. Well, Eddard Stark’s loyalty to the King was never as deep as we believed...the truth is...the boy is my half-brother...my father’s bastard son, born to Lady Lyanna Stark."

Rhaenys expected the deadly silence that followed. Mace Tyrell’s face took the colour of snow, Margaery’s face showed understanding and Willas appeared frozen in place. Loras, who had been listening to the entire conversation in companionable silence with his brother Garlan, nearly dropped from his chair. Lady Alerie only gave a lady-like gasp.

“The sullen knight,” Loras stuttered. “That was your father’s bastard?”

She nodded her head in confirmation.

“Jon is my brother...my bastard brother. He has my father’s smile and Lord Eddard Stark confirmed it to me when I was in Winterfell. Jon, Daenerys, Lord Stark’s wife and Robb Stark know the truth. I assure you...this boy is my father’s blood.”

“It makes sense though,” Lady Alerie remarked. “They say Lady Lyanna died from a fever...Could it be that she died in the birthing bed?”

“Exactly,” Rhaenys confirmed. “She died and made Eddard Stark promise to protect her son from King Robert. That is why Eddard Stark named him his bastard son.”

“Well, it explains why Eddard Stark allowed his supposed bastard son to grow up with his trueborn children. I always found that rather strange, The Queen of Thorns added matter-of-factly.” Not that it matters now. Important is what we are going to do with this information. If we reveal this nobody can guarantee for Lord Stark’s safety. It will paint him as a traitor, but it could help to keep Robb Stark away from Stannis.”

I know it is a bitter sacrifice, the Queen of Thorns had told her after they discussed the matter the day before. But if you want to rule you will have to make bigger sacrifices, sweet child. It is for you to decide.

“Nothing is sure,” Rhaenys said at last.”But it is just as likely that Tywin will avoid acknowledging the truth. He has no need of another Targaryen pretender, even though he is a bastard. Cutting off Eddard Stark’s head would only confirm the truth...that is why I think Eddard Stark is relatively safe. Besides, Eddard Stark is his only hostage against Robb Stark. No, Tywin Lannister will not sacrifice such an important card unnecessarily.”

At least that is what she told herself to ease her guilt.

“Maybe,” Willas remarked and regarded her with a strange look, his golden eyes narrowed and very serious.” You call him bastard born, but the fact that he is Rhaegar’s last living son will endear him to many of your father’s former supporters. What makes you so sure that he will not crown himself if you reveal the truth? The Lords of the North will certainly prefer him over you, a southeron woman. That he is a bastard might count little to them. And the Riverlands and the Vale could follow.”

Then the chance for one of us to claim the throne will only grow. If I fail it will be up to Jon, she thought.
She is not naive. She knows very well what dangerous game she is playing, but by splitting the cards the chances of success will improve. At least that is how Rhaenys thought of the situation. Yet she couldn’t tell that to Mace Tyrell, who wants one of his grandchildren on the Iron Throne.

“Jon is far too humble to take the crown and he won’t fight against his own sister. I am not Rhaenyra and he is not Aegon. His true name is Jaehaerys...after that Conciliator. That should tell you all you need to know.”

“Names are wind, sweet child,” the Queen of Thorns remarked and laughed.”And power has enticed even the most humble kind of men to bloodshed.”

“I think Rhaenys is right in this case,” Loras added gently.”I have met the boy...he is more than humble. I think we can trust Rhaenys in this matter.”

“I thank you, Loras,” she replied and smiled at the young man. He was rather rather rattled by the wedding, but since Rhaenys promised him that no harm will come to Renly is back to his old self.

Then she turned to Lord Mace Tyrell.

“What do you say, my Lord?”

“That I will call my Lords for a war council and there will be a wedding held.”

Rhaenys smiled, but believed to know what Mace Tyrell is really thinking. If she were to prove a disappointment, he could still take Jon’s side.

However, that doesn’t matter to her. Either way her family could only win and that was all that counted to her. The crown is only a tool to gain freedom from the Lannisters and to take revenge for her mother and brother. All that matters is that a Targaryen takes the crown.

She also doubted that Jon would ever harm her. In the worst case he would force her to retire and that is not such a bad prospect.

As long as I can keep Willas I will be happy with my lot.

...

Chapter End Notes

All I am saying in regards to Ned is this: He will get help... : )
His father was angry, but his sister looked even worse. Her beautiful face was marred by grief and her eyes red-rimmed from the tears she shed. Joff was his nephew, but Tyrion can’t bring himself to share her grief. If it were Tommen or Myrcella he would have shared her grief, but Joff never once had a kind word for him. He was also a vicious cunt who enjoyed torturing his siblings. He would have made a terrible King, only surpassed by the Mad King.

Not that his sister would appreciate such a comment and thus he sipping from his wine while his Lord Father continued to read through his correspondence.

Especially, Stannis Baratheon’s letter stood out among the scrolls littering the table.

“Quit your weeping, Cersei!” his father remarked and graced Cersei a cold look.”You are a Lannister...act like it.”

“Father...,” Jaime said, obviously displeased with his father’s harsh tone.”She lost her son.”

“He was also my grandson, but I don’t go around imprisoning Lord Paramounts...no I act with reason and calmness.”

“She is a mother who lost her son,” Jaime repeated and received a scolding look from his father.

“Cersei should have contacted me before imprisoning Eddard Stark and now his son assembled an army and is marching towards Moat Cailin. Then we have Princess Rhaenys, who is sitting Highgarden and plotting against us with the Tyrells. And at last we have Stannis Baratheon who claims that that my grandchildren are bastards.”

The mention of Stannis snapped his sister out of her lethargic state.

“That is a lie...you know it,” she insisted, but Tyrion knew better. More than once did he see his brother sneaking into Cersei’s chamber when he was just a little boy. Stannis’ Baratheon’s letter only confirmed his suspicions. Cersei and Jaime are still lovers.

“Of course,” his Lord Father agreed.”Stannis Baratheon tries to slander us to claim the Iron Throne for himself. He was always the overlooked brother. Now he is seeing a chance to change that.”

“Maybe,” Jaime added and straightened himself, his hand still resting on Cersei’s shoulder.

“But...there is still the matter of Eddard Stark’s bastard...or better said Prince Rhaegar’s bastard.”

“Rhaegar had no bastard with the Stark whore,” Cersei remarked angrily and brushed Jaime’s hand away.”I saw her at the tourney...she was dirty and ran around like a boy. He may have taken her to bed, but he certainly had no son with her.”

“But he crowned her,” Jaime argued, obviously not sharing his sister’s observations.”And it would explain why the honorable Eddard Stark had a bastard. Now I wish I took a better look at the boy.”

“He looks like a Stark,” Tyrion remarked quietly.”But I have never met Prince Rhaegar. I can’t judge if there is a resemblance. I can only tell you this...the marriage between Princess Daenerys and Prince Rhaegar’s supposed bastard is a happy one. It seems to me that Princess Rhaenys fooled King Robert into arranging this match.”
“Nonsense,” Cersei insisted and hit the table. “Why would Eddard Stark protect the son of his sister’s rapist?”

“Maybe he never raped her,” Jamie countered and earned himself another damning look from his sister.

“Impossible!” she shrieked. “Everybody says so.”

“Since when do you believe what everyone says?” Tyrion asked and clucked his tongue.

“Nobody asked you . . .” she began, but was silenced by their Lord Father’s word.

“Enough with the fighting,” he scolded Cersei. “We are all Lannisters and we have to stand together if we want to face our enemies. It matters not if the boy is Prince Rhaegar’s son or not. What matters is that Rhaenys Targaryen acknowledged it openly for all the realm to hear. That gives the boy more legitimacy than silver hair and purple eyes. That he is married to Princess Daenerys makes it even worse. Bastard or not, any child born to the Targaryen girl could endanger us.”

“Very well,” Cersei murmured unhappily. “Then have Eddard Stark executed and send his head to Robb Stark. Make sure that Eddard Stark’s son understands the consequences if he doesn’t hand over Rhaegar’s supposed bastard and Princess Daenerys. His Lords will surely force him to action and that way we will be able to rid ourselves of two Targaryens at once. Then only the Dornish whore and Stannis Baratheon will remain. If we are lucky they will tear each other apart before they can even fight us. Stannis may not hold much love for Renly, but Renly’s lords will expect of Stannis to free his brother.”

Tyrion laughed.

“You are deluding yourself if you think that Robb Stark would hand over one of his relatives. The boys are close and the Lords of the North protect their own. I doubt they will expect Robb Stark to give up his brother . . . no cousin.”

Cersei rolled her eyes.

“How come that you are suddenly an expert on the North?”

“I am not,” Tyrion replied and grinned. “But I am giving you the truth . . . something you like to ignore.”

“You little!” Cersei cursed, but was again silenced by their Lord Father’s word.

“Enough!” he exclaimed sharply. “Your constant fighting his making my head squirm. There will be no execution . . . at least for now. But you are not completely wrong, daughter. I will make clear to Robb Stark that there are consequences for his actions. He will have to hand over his supposed brother and the Princess Daenerys if he wants to make peace with us.”

“And if he refuses?” Jaime asked in an alarmed tone. “What will you do? How will we fight three enemies at once?”

“Two,” their Lord Father corrected him. “I agree with your sister’s assessment . . . Stannis Baratheon and Princess Rhaenys will fight each other. Stannis will see it as a slight against his honor if the Princess continues to keep his brother hostage and the Stormlords will expect him to free Renly before they swear their swords to him. Renly is very well liked, something Stannis Baratheon never was. And in regards to the Stark boy . . . he dared to assemble an army and I intend to give him
a taste of war...a war I have been preparing in the last weeks while the rest of you were weeping for my grandson.”

“What do you have in mind, Father?” Jaime asked.

“The Riverlands can be easily attacked. I wrote to Kevan...to raise two hosts. One will be led by you and Ser Gregor Clegane to invade the Riverlands through the Golden Tooth and the other one will march for the capital to protect the city against a possible assault. Burn and pillage everything in your path to lure out Robb Stark and Rhaegar’s supposed bastard...if we are lucky you will be able to kill both of them. I trust that you won’t hesitate to do what needs to be done.”

Jaime swallowed hard, for his brother knew very well what their Lord Father was referring to.

“I was a member of the Kingsguard...and the Princess was an innocent girl, but that is the past,” Jaime replied, but Tyrion read the discomfort in his brother’s face.”I will do what is necessary, but if I fail the Stark boy might join his army with Princess Rhaenys to give us the death blow.”

“No, he won’t,” their Lord Father replied and smiled.”The Stark boy will soon have other problems to contend with. The attack on the Riverlands is meant to lure him south while the true enemy is going to attack his lands.”

“True enemy?” Tyrion asked.”What enemy are you talking about, Father?”

“I made Balon Greyjoy an offer he can’t refuse...I am giving him a possibility to free his heir and take revenge against the Starks.”

“Was that all?” Jaime asked in utter disbelief.”What else did you offer the old cunt?”

“Nothing of consequence. I offered him independence and a possible marriage for his heirs. Not that I intend to keep these promises, but Balon Greyjoy is growing old and bitter...he will want to taste blood before he joins his Drowned God. He sounded quite eager in his last letter.”

“The Ironborn will never be able to hold the North,” Tyrion remarked and emptied his goblet.”They are merely a distraction, aren’t they, father?”

“Indeed,” his father replied.”And if we are lucky, they will kill themselves along the way. Less work for us.”

...
Ned

The darkness around him has become his constant companion. Thus when the bright candle chased away the darkness his eyes started to burn and Eddard Stark averted his gaze.

He didn’t know how much time had passed since his imprisonment. The only people he saw were the changing guards who brought him food or fresh hay. The appearance of this stranger gave him hope.

Finally, he thought as the stranger moved closer towards the bars. Finally, someone I can speak to.

Yet all hope was washed away when he saw the stranger’s face. It was Lord Varys, the Master of Whispers.

“Forgive the rude words, but you look rather pale, my Lord Stark,” Varys remarked, a mild smile curling on his lips as he regarded Ned through the darkness.

“It doesn’t matter what I look like," Ned grumbled and pulled himself to his feet. The inaction made his limbs grow weak and his feet wobbled with every step towards the bars."I need answers. What is going? What will happen to me?"

“I fear there is going to be a war,” Varys replied and smiled sadly, before moving closer towards the bars.”Stannis Baratheon revealed to the realm that King Robert’s children are bastards born between Queen Cersei Lannister and her brother Jaime Lannister the Kingslayer. Rhaenys Targaryen is raising the Reach and Dorne against the Lannisters. Your son called the banners to protest against your imprisonment. As I said...war is coming.”

The words hit him like an arrow and now he finally understood why Jon Arryn had to die. His foster father had to die because he found out the bitter truth.

“Did you know about this?” he asked and steadied himself against the bars.”Did you know about the children’s true parentage?"

Lord Varys chuckled.

“I knew, my Lord. But that is not important anymore...It seems you have been guarding an even bigger secret than we could have ever fathomed.”

Ned froze and blinked one, then two times. It can’t be true , he thought, but when he saw Lord Varys’ knowing smile he knew it to be true.

They know about Jon. The thought alone made his blood freeze.

“How did they find out?” he asked and collapsed, because his feet gave away.

“Princess Rhaenys revealed it for all the world to hear...I supposed she wants to keep your son away from Stannis Baratheon, who will see Rhaegar’s bastard as another enemy on his path to the Iron Throne.”

“Gods no!” he muttered and brushed his hands over his face.”I should have never told her...it is my fault.”
“Consider me just as surprised. I never thought a man like you could lie like that, but then I never knew that Rhaegar Targaryen fathered a bastard on Lyanna Stark. Not that I am here to judge you, my Lord.”

“Bastard,” Ned repeated and couldn’t help but to frown. Then he grabbed the bars and lifted himself back to his feet to be able to look in Lord Varys’ eyes.”The boy is no bastard...he is Rhaegar’s trueborn son. He wed my sister and she asked me to protect her son after dying in childbirth. I thought Princess Rhaenys knows, but maybe Jon neglected to tell her.”

“Maybe,” Varys said, his quite like a whisper.”But it doesn’t change the fact that you have to leave this place, my Lord. You are the only person who can put an end to this war.”

“Me?” Ned asked in disbelief. If the truth is out everyone will see him as nothing more than a traitor.”Why should they listen to me?”

“You are the Lord of the North. Tywin Lannister has already sent a letter to your son, demanding the head of your nephew and his wife. No answer came from your son and I doubt it ever will. It also means that you will die if I can’t get you out of this city.”

Ned couldn’t help but to mistrust the man’s intentions.

“Why would you want to help me?”

“Because I serve the realm. If I can help to end this war quickly I will play my part. That nephew of yours,” Lord Varys replied, his smile unyielding.”Does he have a good character?”

“Jon is a good boy,” Ned offered in return.”He is humble, educated and knows how to wield a sword. However, he wasn’t raised to be a King nor do I think will he try to claim the crown without anyone’s prodding. I also doubt he would fight against his own sister. You mentioned that the Reach and Dorne are supporting Princess Rhaenys. Why are you not supporting her, if you care for a Targaryen on the throne?”

“Mace Tyrell is like a kite...he follows the directions of the wind and the Dornish are not powerful enough to keep the Iron Throne. The Vale will never accept her as Queen and I doubt your Lords and your father-in-law will be much different. The boy is both a Stark and a Targaryen and could bridge the enmity created by the Rebellion. The Dornish will not be pleased, but their temper will be calmed if they receive Tywin Lannister’s head.”

Ned’s head hurt from all these new revelations, but he understands what Lord Varys was is trying to tell him.

“Then you want me to crown the boy?”

“First we need to free you, my Lord,” he replied and gave him a knowing smile.”Then I want to meet the boy...I want to speak to him.”

Ned was stunned.

“You intend to accompany me?”

Varys chuckled.

“I do,” he confirmed and picked a key out of his cloak. Then he worked on the door and a minute later it slipped open.
Ned didn’t know if he wanted to thank or slap the man in front of him.

“What about the guards?”

“Asleep. Too much of my wine will do that to you, my Lord.”

“And how will we get out?”

“The Red Keep has many hidden passages and I know my way. Trust me, my Lord.”

“Trust is not easily earned,” Ned whispered to himself and followed Lord Varys through the darkness. Yet he is willing to try if it will get him out of this cursed city.

...
Morning dawned when Jon went to see Robb. Greywind greeted Ghost happily and soon the two wolves were rolling on the ground.

A day ago Lady Stark, the Blackfish and Lord Manderly's men joined them at Moat Cailin, informing them about Lady Lysa's refusal to join their war against the Lannisters. A good part of the Vale Lords, among them Lord Royce, protested vehemently against the Lady’s decision, but so far none of them dared to go against their vows.

Lysa will soon see reason, the Blackfish had assured Robb, but Jon doubted his brother believed him. Lady Stark herself was rattled by her meeting with her sister and called her a grieving widow. Jon didn’t believe any of this, because Daenerys told him more than once that Lady Lysa never held much love for Lord Arryn.

Why should she grieve for a man she disliked?

“There you are, Jon,” Robb remarked and granted him an assuring smile. Then he pulled his grey cloak over his shoulders and brushed his dishevelled red hair out of his face.”Are you nervous?”

Jon didn’t know what to answer. For years he had been the invisible bastard of Eddard Stark, but now everyone was staring at him as if he grew a second head.

He still felt angry about Rhaenys’ betrayal, but then he also recalled what Daenerys told him about his sister’s suffering under Joffrey. It made him wish that he hit him much harder when he knocked him from his horse.

Not that it matters. He is dead and gone.

And yet Rhaenys left Lord Stark to the lion's mercy. This betrayal hit much deeper than the fact that she revealed his secret.

Did she sacrifice Lord Stark willingly or was it just a mistake in her plan?

This question was dominating his thoughts these days, though he knew he should worry about the war and how they are going to face the Lannisters.

“It is alright,” Robb replied and moved closer to pat his shoulder.”I shouldn’t have asked.”

“It is not your question that bothered me,” Jon replied and sighed heavily.”You know what is weighing on my mind.”

Robb laughed and picked the two scrolls from the table, both he and Robb read more than once. One was written by Tywin Lannister's hand, demanding Jon’s and Daenerys’ heads in return for peace. The other was written by Rhaenys’ hand, urging Robb to join their cause. Both letters put Robb into a rather difficult position.

“Aye,” Jon replied, but saw the answer written on Robb’s face.”You won’t answer.”

Robb nodded his head and ruffled his hand through Greywind’s fur.
“Tywin Lannister’s demands are an insult and your sister...she threw my father to the lions. My Lords would spit into my face if I joined her cause.”

“I don’t know my sister’s thoughts, but I don’t think it was her intention to sacrifice Lord Stark. Maybe she hoped he would be simply dismissed from his position...she waited a fair amount of time, before she acted...,” Jon tried to explain his sister’s actions. He had wasted several sleepless nights on this, but that was the only possibly explanation he was able to find.

Robb appeared less pleased, his face flushed with anger.

“And yet she revealed my father’s secret!”

“I know,” Jon replied, hoping his voice may help to calm her brother.”She only acted after Stannis revealed the truth about Queen Cersei’s children...maybe she was afraid you would join his cause. Now there is no chance that Stannis will accept an allegiance with us. He would demand my head like Tywin did before him.”

“Maybe,” Robb replied and gritted his teeth.”It matters not. First we will have to drive the Lannisters out of the Riverlands and then I we will have to make an even more important decision.”

Jon shuddered, for he knew what Robb was referring to.

*He wants me to stake a claim to the Iron Throne.*

The thought made him laugh.

“Why are you laughing?” Robb asked, his face very serious. The Lord’s face Jon liked to call it.”You are Prince Rhaegar’s son...and trueborn at that. By all the laws you are his heir and Princess Rhaenys’ word gives you legitimacy, though I doubt she intended for the revelation to have this kind of effect. She called you Prince Rhaegar’s bastard...”

That she called him a bastard was another matter that confused him at first, but then he never told her the full truth.

“I doubt she meant to Insult me...I didn’t tell her the full truth, because I feared it might upset her if I told her that our father dishonored his wife Princess Elia by marrying my mother. Or maybe I am wrong...I never thought she would murder Joffrey.”

Robb sighed deeply and ruffled his hand through his hair, before shifting his attention back to Jon.

“I care not...I have a war to win. The Kingslayer invaded my grandfather’s lands and is slaughtering the smallfolk. The last reports indicate that he is heading for Riverrun...probably to lay siege to the castle.”

“I understand...,” Jon replied, but Robb’s sharp look told him that his brother doesn’t quite believe him.

“No, you don’t,” Robb remarked.”Because you are ignoring the reality at hand. Father is in Lannister hands and there is no way that Tywin will ever return him to me. The only way would be to bring him your head, but I rather cut off my own balls than to betray may own blood. Your sister may have her reasons for doing what she did, but my father’s and my grandfather’s lords will not share that opinion. They will see her as a traitor...they will never accept her as a Queen. Yet they might accept you...you grew up in Winterfell. They know you...you are a Northman like them.”
Jon felt trapped, but Robb was right.

“Very well,” Jon replied and met his brother’s gaze.”I will think about it...but first we need to drive the Lannisters out of the Riverlands.”

“Good,” Robb replied, a ghost of a smile curling on his lips.”Now let us go...the Lords are awaiting us.”

“Us?” Jon asked.

“Of course...you will join me,” his brother insisted.”Hiding you away will not help us. They need to see that you are still one of them.”

All eyes were fixed on him when they entered. Robb walked first, behind him Lady Stark and the Blackfish. Jon walked not far behind and took a brief look at Lady Stark.

Like in the past she hardly spoke to him, but Jon thought it had more do with grief than anger.

_She frets about father_ , Robb had told him only yesterday.

Jon swallowed hard and tried to appear as indifferent as possible.

Then silence reigned. Jon felt his stomach squirm, but Robb ignored all of that and continued with his usual calm demeanour.

_Pull yourself together_, Jon told himself and straightened himself.

“More than a week ago the Kingslayer invaded through the Golden Tooth. My Uncle Edmure sent men to engage him, but they were defeated. Now the Kingslayer is moving on to Riverrun, probably to lay siege to the castle. We can only hope that the Riverlords can act fast enough to relieve my Uncle, but I doubt that will be the case. Another host led by the Mountain is pillaging and burning his way through the Riverlands...last we heard he was engaged by Darry men...they were all butchered. Rumours indicate he remains near the Rubyford while his henchmen continue with the butchery,” Robb explained and paused for a moment to lean down and smoothed his hand over the map spread before him. “To get to Riverrun we need to cross the Green Fork...near the Twins or the Rubyford.”

“I say we confront the Mountain,” the Greatjon remarked boastingly as ever.”The reports indicate that this is the smaller host.”

“Aye,” Robb replied, but Jon read hesitance on his brother’s face.”But it could also be a trap. Both the Kingslayer and the Mountain are not holding back with their cruelty. Tywin Lannister always used fear and terror to achieve his goals, but I think there is a clear intention hiding behind all this butchery. He wants to lure us out.”

“To lure us out?” Lord Karstark asked.

“Aye, my Lord,” Robb confirmed, his gaze flickering to Jon.

“He hopes to kill me and Jon. Tywin is desperate...he needs to defeat us quickly to fight against his other enemies.”

“That makes sense,” Lady Mormont added, her eyes resting on Jon.”Your brother is a danger to
him...and so are you, my Lord.”

"Exactly," Robb agreed."That also leaves us with Walder Frey."

“I would rather face the Mountain than to negotiate with Walder Frey,” the Blackfish scoffed and earned himself a round of laughter.

“He will definitely demand a price for his help,” Lady Stark added softly.”He is a greedy man and bitter at that.”

“A marriage perhaps?” Robb asked and received a confirming nod from his mother.

“Very well,” Robb muttered.”What about a match for Rickon?”

“Walder Frey will not be satisfied with a third son,” Lady Stark replied.”Bran would be a more appropriate offer.”

Jon didn’t like the idea.

“Why does it have to be Bran?” Jon asked.”Why not someone from the Riverlands?”

Jon’s words caused discussions among their men. Luckily, Robb came to his aid.

“What do you have in mind?”

“Lord Edmure...he is not married. That should be enough honour for Walder Frey.”

“Edmure will kill you if he hears about that,” the Blackfish remarked, but the wry smile on his lips told Jon that he was merely joking.

“Good,” Robb added and smiled.”Now that we have decided on this matter...we should talk about the Mountain. I said that we should focus on the Kingslayer, but I intend to send a smaller host to engage the Mountain...mostly consisting of footmen. The cavalry will move on to Riverrun...thus we can speed up our travel.”

Then he turned to the Greatjon.”I want you to lead them, my Lord.”

The Greatjon grinned.

“It would be my honour.”

Jon wanted to join, but his brother refused.

*I will not send you against this monster*, he had said. And while his Robb's worry touched him he didn’t like the idea of being coddled.

Robb sighed in relief and let his gaze sweep over the assembled Lords.

“Now that I have explained my intentions...Do you have questions?”

“I have a question,” Lord Bolton asked, his pale eyes unsettling as ever.”What will we do afterwards? After we have relieved Riverrun?”

A moment of heavy silence followed and Jon closed his eyes to blend out their questioning looks.

“That is a valid question, but I cannot foresee what the future holds. First we need to fight and then
we will make further decisions.”

Yet Roose Bolton had no intention to simply let go.

“That is your right, Lord Stark, but we are all risking our lives in this war. Many of us are wondering what you are going to do concerning your brother...not your cousin...now that his parentage is known to the world.”

Robb looked torn, but didn’t flinch under Roose Bolton’s gaze.

“Jon is my brother. He grew up in Winterfell...he is one of us. I have no intention to give my brother to Tywin Lannister. This is my answer.”

“I don’t think that is what Lord Bolton meant,” Lady Mormont added.”Your father is a still a prisoner and Stannis will think of him as a traitor for harbouring Rhaegar’s son. That means we will have to face him eventually, even if we are able to defeat the Lannisters. The only ally that remains to us is Princess Rhaenys.”

“You can’t be serious about that, My Lady!” Lord Karstark grumbled.”She sold our Lord to the enemy.”

“Whatever reasons she had,” Lord Bolton remarked cold as ever.”Highgarden and Dorne are her allies. Past grudges should not stand in the way of reason, unless you want to crown another King, my Lord.”

Lord Bolton’s words cut deeper than steel and his unyielding gaze was even worse.

Jon was at a loss of words, but Robb put an end to the conversation.

“I told you, my Lord. I will decide on this matter after Riverrun is retaken.”

“Very well,” Lord Bolton replied and lowered his head in acceptance.”It will be done as you say.”

...
Daenerys

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Daenerys

The arrow hit the target right in the middle and Daenerys felt a hint of pride washing over her. Every morning she and Arya trained with the bow. In the Vale ladies are not supposed to learn how to use a weapon, but the inhabitants of Winterfell found it rather amusing.

Not that Daenerys would have cared about their opinions. Training with the bow was one of the few distractions she had. The majority of her time was spent in company of Lady Ysilla, who is steadily growing in size.

Robb will mistake me for a walrus, she had told her yesterday. Before Jon’s departure she might have shared the Lady’s enthusiasm, but now she felt only dread.

Rheanys’ actions only helped to increase her fears.

Why, she asked herself more than once. Why did she reveal the truth?

It was still hard for her to accept that Rhaenys endangered Lord Stark’s life. It didn’t make any sense, she was always so kind to them…

Maybe she used you, Lady Ysilla had told her. The Lady’s comment angered Daenerys, but she kept her thoughts to herself.

“Good work,” Arya complimented. “Though a smile would be more appropriate than a frown.”

“You are right,” Daenerys replied and forced a smile over her lips. “Now it’s your turn.”

Arya grinned and quickly placed an arrow in her bow. Ser Roderik usually helped them with their training, but the knight had to leave to dispense justice.

Shortly after the harvest festival, the bastard son of Lord Bolton supposedly murdered and raped several girls on the Hornwood lands. A few days later Lady Hornwood, who feared for her life, asked for Bran’s help. Thus Ser Roderik set out a day later and has yet to return.

As always, Arya’s arrow hit the middle of the target.

“Well done,” Daenerys complimented. Arya grinned and jerked her head at Nymeria, who lay sprawled on the ground, observing their training.

“Did you see, Nym?” Arya asked the wolf.

“I suppose she is more interested in getting her breakfast,” Daenerys replied and her gaze darted to the sky. The sun had barely risen above the horizon, painting the sky in streaks of pink and velvet.

Arya nodded her head, disappointment showing on her face.

“Aye, but I wish we could train longer,” she complained. Daenerys would have liked to fulfil the girl’s wish, but Lady Ysilla needed her help. 
Someone also needed to take care of Rickon. Maester Luwin tried to find a maid to care for the boy, but none of the girls was able to endure his anger.

“Both Rickon and Lady Ysilla need care,” she replied.

“Don’t fret about it,” Arya replied quickly and stroked Nymeria’s furry ear. “I will feed Nym and then we will try to get Rickon out of bed. Maybe I can even convince him to take a bath. Still I don’t understand why Theon can’t offer a helping hand. All he does is complaining and tumbling the kitchen maids. I understand why Ser Roderik wants to keep him here, but he is behaving like a whiny little girl.”

“He is angry, because Robb forced him to stay with us,” Daenerys remarked and nodded her head in understanding. “I share his anger. I also hate sitting here while Robb and Jon are fighting. It makes me feel useless.”

“True,” Arya agreed and graced her with a mischievous smile. “We could just drop everything and join them, though my mother would lock me up until my wedding day.”

“Probably,” Daenerys replied and felt the urge go along with the girl’s suggestion. It was a ridiculous idea, but the waiting was beginning to grate on her nerves.

“Still, I am thankful for your help,” Daenerys added and together they put the weapons back where they belonged.

Daenerys found Ysilla fully dressed, but said dress didn’t quite fit her current state. She had spent the last moon in bed and it seems the Lady simply outgrew her dresses.

Ysilla looked just as helpless as her maid.

“I don’t think that will work,” Daenerys remarked matter-of-factly and couldn’t help but to laugh.

“You are not helping,” Ysilla replied while Daenerys began searching through the Lady’s wardrobe. Most of the dresses were made in the southron style; tightly cut and not exactly fit for a woman carrying a child.

Daenerys preferred her simply-cut dresses. They wouldn’t earn her much respect at court, but at least they allowed her to breathe.

“Well, I supposed you will have to take one of my dresses,” Daenerys said at last and graced Ysilla with an amused smile.

“I suppose you are right,” Ysilla agreed, a hint of a smile crossing over her lips. “Well, we should hurry. Maester Luwin and Lord Brandon are expecting us.”

Brandon Stark looked worse than yesterday. His face was pale like candlewax and the dark rings underlining his eyes spoke of another night full of nightmares.

Maester Luwin fed him herbal teas, but his remedies have yet to work. Every night she heard his whimpers.

Whenever Daenerys dared to ask him about the nightmares he evaded her questions. Not even Maester Luwin was able to get through. Arya made several attempts to speak to Bran while Rickon avoided Bran due to his newfound friendships with the Reed siblings.
Lord Howland Reed’s children attended the harvest festival to renew their vows to House Stark, but Brandon Stark took a liking to them and asked them to stay.

Daenerys knew Meera Reed from Howland Reed’s last visit, but her brother turned out to be a very strange boy. He had the body of a young boy, but the way he spoke was reminiscent of an adult.

*My brother can help Bran*, Meera Reed had assured her not long ago, but Daenerys didn’t know what to make sense of the girl’s words.

How could this strange boy help to cure Bran’s nightmares?

“There you are, my Lady,” Maester Luwin greeted Lady Ysilla, before inclining his head to look at Daenerys.”We have already heard all the petitioners…just two bickering farmers and an accusation of theft that turned out to be a mistake.”

Disappointment showed on Lady Ysilla’s face.

“But we have news from Lord Robb,” Measter Luwin added, which returned a smile to Lady Ysilla’s lips .”They recently passed Moat Cailin and are now marching for the Twins.”

“Why the Twins?” Lady Ysilla asked and frowned.”Walder Frey is the kind of man who would sell out his own mother and one of his son’s is even wed to a Lannister.”

“I can understand your concerns,” Maester Luwin replied.”Yet I am sure Lord Robb knows what he is doing.”

“Maybe,” Ysilla replied, worry marring her soft-featured face.”What about Lady Stark’s travel to the Vale? Was she successful?”

“Lady Lysa refused to join our cause, but it seems your Lord Father is making his displeasure known,” Maester Luwin replied and handed her the letter over the table.”You may read for yourself, my Lady.”

“Robb and Jon send their greetings,” she added at last, a soft smile curling on her lips as she read the last lines.

Daenerys returned her smile, but the letter didn’t help to ease her worries. That Lady Lysa refused to join their cause didn’t surprise her. The Lady was far too paranoid to get involved in a war.

“That is not all,” Maester Luwin added, his voice taking an ominous tone.”I received concerning news…from the Stony Shore.”

“The Stony Shore?” Daenerys asked and tried to recall the location of this place.”Is that far away?”

“Far enough,” Maester Luwin answered and granted her a grandfatherly smile.”But that doesn’t mean we can simply ignore the matter. It seems a few stray Ironborn raiders are making use of the war to plunder our coasts. It seems Balon Greyjoy forgot that his son is still our hostage. “

Daenerys may dislike the Theon’s attitude towards Jon, but she understood what it feels like to be a hostage.

“Maybe it was a one-time incident,” Daenerys suggested.

“I hope so,” Maester Luwin replied and shifted his attention to Bran, who had been silent throughout the whole exchange. His permanent silence was beginning to worry her, yet Maester
Luwin demanded her attention.”Leobald Tallhart assured me that his men are going to handle these raiders. Still, I am hoping for Ser Roderik’s quick return. For the time being, I think it is best to keep this to ourselves. Especially, Theon Greyjoy mustn’t know about this. Is that clear?”

Daenerys swallowed hard.

”My lips are sealed. I promise.”

“Of course,” Lady Ysilla agreed.

Bran remained silent and simply nodded his head.

…

Daenerys was woken by the touch of something wet and warm on her cheek. Rubbing the sleep from her eyes, she found Summers’ golden eyes piercing her through the darkness of her chamber. Half-asleep she crawled out of bed and lit an oil candle.

“What are you doing here?” she asked the wolf and leaned down to stroke his ear, before inclining her head to take a look at the open door.

Daenerys couldn’t help but to chuckle.

“Well, I suppose I have to escort you back?”

The wolf yawned and Daenerys went to retrieve her cloak. Then she fastened the garment over her shoulders and stepped out of her room. Luckily, the wolf followed after her.

She expected to find Brandon Stark asleep, but that turned out to be another misconception.

Brandon Stark was fully awake, Jojen Reed and his older sister hovering next to his bed. He looked very afraid, his eyes red and glazed.

“I am sorry to interrupt your nightly gathering,” she explained, Summer still following after her.”But I think Summer got lost and ended up in my room. Maybe he was searching for Ghost.”

A hint of a smile hushed over Brandon Stark’s lips.

“I thank you for showing him the way. I am sorry that he disturbed your sleep.”

“Don’t fret about it, my Lord,” Daenerys replied and graced the boy with an assuring smile, her gaze flickering to the Reed siblings and then back to Bran.”You are lucky to have such good friends to keep you company. Did you have a nightmare?”

Bran paled and grew silent, but Jojen Reed proved less hesitant.

“Brandon Stark has no nightmares, but green dreams. He is a green seer,” the boy explained to her. “Once he learns to master his abilities his nightmares will cease.”

Daenerys never heard of such a term, but was determined to find out more.

“What exactly is a green seer?”

“A green seer can experience visions of the future, the past and the present. I am also a green seer, though Bran is much more powerful than me.”
Daenerys was stunned and tried to find an appropriate answer, but failed miserably.

“Oh.”

“I read doubt in your face, Princess Daenerys,” Jojen Reed remarked, the hint of a smile showing on his pale lips.”That surprises me, because certain members of your family supposedly had a similar gift.”

“You are right,” she admitted and sat down on the bed next to Bran.”I assume these visions are very frightening?”

“I saw…” Bran stuttered.”I saw the sea swallowing Winterfell.”

“The sea?” she asked, trying to make sense of Bran’s visions.

The sea is far away. It didn’t make sense. Yet Bran looked utterly frightened.

“What else did you see?”

“I saw the guards drown,” he added and shuddered visibly.

Daenerys didn’t know what to say and leaned down to touch his head in a soothing gesture.

“Whatever you saw…not all visions become true,” she assured him, but the expression on Jojen’s face spoke of disagreement.

“Nobody can escape fate,” Jojen Reed told her in a chiding manner, his green unblinking eyes still fixed on her.”You and all the others will have to play your assigned roles.”

“I don’t understand…,” Daenerys stuttered, but the strange boy took her hand and led it to the candle placed on the bedside table.

“What…,” she wanted to protest, but the boy’s unyielding gaze had an almost hypnotic effect on her.

“Trust me,” Jojen Reed prodded softly. She closed her eyes against the inevitable pain, but the fire didn’t burn her. The touch of the flame was almost pleasant, a strange tickling sensation that left her wanting for more…

The incident made no sense to her. She burned herself before and even had a scar to prove it.

“Why?” she asked Jojen Reed.”How?”

Jojen pulled her hand away and grinned. His smile frightened her more than his strange green eyes.

“Magic is returning to the world. The signs will soon become apparent to the world.”

…”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay, but I was not feeling very well. The next chapter should come out this week.
Rhaenys

Her dress was red like crimson and her hair was bedecked with rubies, yet she took not as much joy in her upcoming wedding as she expected. She had been waiting for this day for years, but she couldn’t brush away the guilt clenching around her heart. That she threw Eddard Stark to the wolves gnawed on her mind more than she wanted to admit.

The old Rhaenys, or that is what she wanted to believe, would have sacrificed Lord Stark without hesitation, but it seems her time with her brother and aunt softened her.

“Your dress is beautiful,” Margaery Tyrell remarked, garbed in a dress of pale samite. Renly was still a hostage and she visited him daily, but he remained stubborn as ever.”My seamstress’ finest work…What do you think, Lady Sansa?”

Sansa Stark, who sat perched on the window sill, was also garbed in a pale dress, her red hair falling freely around her shoulders and decorated with flowers. She looked like the maiden reborn, but the forlorn expression apparent on her face worried Rhaenys.

She wasn’t there to pay witness to Joff’s death, but the young girl was still rattled by the event. After the news of Eddard Stark’s imprisonment had reached their ears, Sansa Stark closed herself in her chamber and refused to leave unless she was allowed to go home.

Margaery tried her best to console the girl, but Sansa Stark remained distant and lost. Rhaenys didn’t blame her for her worry. They haven’t heard anything about Eddard Stark since she made Jon’s parentage known to the world…

“Sansa…,” Margaery prodded gently and the girl finally turned around, her blue gaze sweeping over her dress with a blank look of disinterest.

“A lovely dress,” she complimented, her smile feigned.

“Thank you,” Rhaenys replied, her gaze flickering back to Margaery.

“Could you leave us for a moment, Margaery?” she asked her friend.

“I will see you later,” Margaery said, a smile curling at her lips as she regarded Rhaenys.”Don’t let my brother wait.”

“Of course not,” Rhaenys assured her and Margaery closed the door, leaving only Rhaenys and Sansa.

“I know it is not much of a consolation, but Tywin would be a fool to kill your father. He needs him to keep your brother off his back,” she tried to explain, but her words didn’t show much effect on the young girl.

“Why did you do it?” Sansa Stark asked, a cold expression taking hold of her soft face.”Why did you kill the Prince and why did you spread such lies about my brother and father?”

“I killed Joff, because he was a monster,” she answered.”He hurt me and other people to satisfy his need for cruelty. He would have been a like the Mad King.”
Sansa nodded her head, but her face was full of disbelief.

“And the lies you told about Jon and my father?”

“I didn’t lie,” she insisted and moved closer, coming to stand next to the window sill.”Outside she saw the banners of House Redwyne and Rowan carried by the soldiers parading over the courtyard. Like promised Lord Mace Tyrell called for his lords, but only Lord Redwyne and Lord Tarly have followed his call to the fullest. Lord Hightower remained hesitant, though he sent several thousand men and Lord voiced his concerns about the Dornish troops meant to join them in a week. The fact that the Lannisters hold the Redwyne twins captive made the use of the Redwyne fleet impossible, unless they find a way to convince the Lord to sacrifice his sons, something she doubted Lord Redwyne would agree to do.”And what I revealed about Jon is true. He is my father’s…,” she continued, but Sansa Stark cut her off.

She hid her feelings well, as every lady ought to do, but the anger was there, written all over her innocent face.

“And yet you told the Lannisters?” she asked.”They will think my father a traitor. The Queen wanted to kill Lady for a minor thing…I don’t even want to know what they will do him. Why did you do that?”

Rhaenys sighed deeply and tried to touch her shoulder, but Sansa brushed her hand away.

“I had my reasons…I was afraid your brother would join Stannis Baratheon,” she explained. Realization showed on Sansa’s face, but that didn’t help to ease the girl’s anger.

“And now?” she asked.”Do you really think my brother will join your cause? His lords will not forgive you and Jon…What if they demand his head? Have you even considered this possibility?”

“I have…of course,” she threw back, frustration stirring inside her.”I met your brother Robb. I doubt he would sell out Jon to the Lannisters. That is why…,” she continued, but Sansa cut her off again.

“That is why you threw my father to the lions!” Sansa shouted, tears brimming in her eyes.

Rhaenys exhaled deeply, before addressing the younger girl in a calmer voice.

“Listen...last I heard that Jon is riding in company of your brother to drive Tywin Lannister out of the Riverlands.”

“And I heard that the Kingslayer laid siege to Riverrun,” Sansa countered.”What if they die? And the fact that my brother has yet pledged his men to your cause means that he will not support your claim. What will you do if he refuses to bend the knee? Will you poison him as well?”

The last words hit the hardest, but the old Rhaenys would have probably considered such measures.

“No,” she assured the girl.”I have no intention to harm Robb…I even intend to legitimize Jon and make him my heir until I have children of my own. And if I fail it will be up to Jon… He will be forced to fight for the crown if he wants to survive. That is another reason I revealed his parentage. Jon would have never considered staking a claim unless he is forced. “

Now hint of pity showed on Sansa Stark’s face.

“And have you ever considered asking Jon’s opinion on the matter?” the girl asked, her voice
brimming with renewed anger.” I don’t know him as well as Arya, but he is not the kind of person to strive for power.”

“No, he is not,” Rhaenys admitted weakly, tears burning in her eyes.” And what about me? Have you ever considered my position? You witnessed the Queen’s cruelty with your own eyes. The woman hates me. She has been planning to murder the King for years and my death was inevitable. It was Cersei who poisoned me…I was also fighting for survival…I have been fighting my entire life. It might be hard for you to understand, but you have never known true fear, growing up in your cosy castle with your happy family. Life is not a fairy tale and people do not always act honourably…you should learn that.”

“Maybe,” Sansa replied weakly.” But my brother Robb will never forgive you if my father dies.”

“I know that,” Rhaenys replied more softly and brushed the tears away.” And I am prepared to face the consequences. I would be prepared to accept Jon as King as long as the Lannisters are removed from power.”

“And yet I have to remain here,” the Sansa countered stubbornly.” Send me home to show your good-will. I will speak for you before my brother.”

“I can’t do that,” Rhaenys protested.” It is too dangerous travel to the Riverlands…I want to keep you safe.”

“Another lie,” Sansa threw back.” I am a hostage like Lord Renly, though nobody says it openly.”

“No, you are not, though I hoped you might consider marrying one of Lord Tyrell’s sons?”

“And what if I don’t?” Sansa asked daringly. „Will you force me like you are forcing Jon to fight your war?”

“No,” she replied quickly.” Of course not. Lord Tyrell may think of you as a hostage, but he is…”

“I think I have heard enough,” Sansa replied defensively and rose to her feet, making her way to the door, but stopping herself before stepping outside.” I am feeling sick…I don’t think I will be attending.”

The wedding was a simple ceremony, but Rhaenys never cared for pomp and splendor. She was happy like this, wearing her crimson dress, her mother’s rubies woven into her hair. Willas could have been dressed in a sack and he would still look beautiful to her eyes. Others only saw the twisted leg when they looked at him, but to her he was just as beautiful as his brother Loras.

“Father, Mother, Maiden, Warrior, Smith, Old Man, Stranger…” the Septon’s words echoed in her ears as he wove their hands together with a silken cloth of gold.

Then came the part she dreaded: The cladding. Willas assured her more than once that he would be fine if their children would carry the Targaryen name, but they couldn’t tell that Mace Tyrell. The vain Lord would have never agreed to the marriage if he knew. She promised him that a Tyrell grandchild will one day sit the Iron Throne.

Even that was a shaky promise. Both her Lady mother and her Grandmother had problems in the birthing bed.

Then Willas leaned down and placed a gently kiss on her lips, but it was not enough to wash away
the unease she had felt since her argument with Sansa.

What the girl told her was true, but there was no way of return for her now.

*No, if I look back I am lost.*

The wedding feast was also rather plain and the mood of the guests dimmed by the approaching war.

Only yesterday Willas informed her about Tywin Lannisters last movement.

It seems the old Lion is preparing the capital for a siege while Stannis Baratheon is still gathering his troops.

“You have been frowning all morning,” Willas remarked calmly.”What is the matter with you?”

“I worry about Lady Sansa,” she admitted.

Willas nodded his head in understanding.

”Margaery told me about your argument. I don’t want to question your judgement, but I think you should send her home…that could help to win Robb Stark’s favour.”

“Maybe,” she replied, starting to doubt her plans for the girl. She displayed so much enthusiasm about marrying a knight that she thought it would be easy to convince her. She thought Sansa Stark a naïve little girl, but it seems she was proven wrong.”I will think about it, but I am sure your father will voice his objection.”

“Leave my father to me,” Willas replied and gave her a gentle smile.”Tell Lady Sansa the happy news and she will warm up to you again.”

“She will never forgive me…I threw her Lord Father to the lions,” she whispered back.

“So far my informants heard nothing of a planned execution for Eddard Stark.”

“I hope you are right,” she replied and squeezed his hand.

…

The wedding chamber was too dark for Rhaenys’ taste and she opened the shutters to lighten up the dark room.

Willas frowned and narrowed his eyes against the bright sunlight. She knew why he bid the servants to close the shutters. To hide his shame.

Rhaenys wanted to tell him that there is no reason to feel ashamed for his twisted leg, yet she knew such words would only help to darken the mood.

Instead she worked on the bindings of her dress, slipping it off in one quick shove. Then she started to pick the rubies from her hair and placed them on the nearby table.

There was no bedding ceremony and thus Willas was still dressed.

Yet when she wanted to pull off his cloak he stopped her, his golden eyes piercing her through the darkness. The look he gave her was reminiscent of his grandmother.
“I kept silent, but I think we need to address this matter, before we continue,” he explained, brushing his hand through her dark locks.”About your brother…Why didn’t you tell me about his existence?

“I apologize again,” she replied hesitantly. „I feared you might see him as a threat…,”

“Threat?” he asked, his voice laced with a hint of bitterness.”You should know me better than that. It is my father who cares for the crown, not me. I would have married you even if it meant going into exile.

She knew all this, but hearing it from his mouth gave her great comfort.

“And what use would that have been?” she asked.”Robert Baratheon would have haunted me to the end of the world.”

“I know,” he replied, his voice taking a sadder tone as he brushed the back of his hand over her cheek.”But it would be preferable to this farce…You are trying to hide your thoughts from me, but I know you better than that. You intend to give the crown to your brother, don’t you?”

She lifted her arm to squeeze his hand, resting on her cheek.

“You know how the game is played. We have to adapt to every situation. I doubt Robb Stark and his allies would support my claim without a fight, but my brother is one of them. He may be a bastard, but he is preferable to a stranger that endangered their Lord’s life. The question is if my brother is willing to do it. He cares little for the crown and power. He is probably very angry with me right now.”

“Nothing is sure,” Willas remarked and pulled the cloak from his shoulders.”A King or a Queen… It only has to be a Targaryen, right?.”

“Indeed,” she replied with a smile and helped him to open the buttons of his doublet.”And that is why we need to take the capital as quickly as possible. Once the capital is taken we can pose the question of succession.”

“What about my father and your Uncle?” Willas asked and slipped off his doublet.”How will you convince them?”

“Once we have we have children of our own we could wed them to my brother’s potential children. Then your father’s dream could still come true. And My Uncle will be happy as long as he gets the Mountain’s head.”

Willas smiled, his warm breath tickling her cheek.

“Well, then I suppose we shouldn’t disappoint my father,” he added cheekily, his hands skimming down her hip.

“Indeed,” she replied and leaned in to kiss, him casting away all her doubts…

Joffrey didn’t die through poison. He died now with all the dark memories he left inside her…
Jon

Jon shivered as a cold gust of wind blew through the canopy of trees. It was dusk, the dark sky covered in colours of velvet and red. On the distant horizon he spotted the Ice Dragon, a constellation he knew well.

*The Ice Dragon points the way home*, he thought and smoothed his hand over Dark Sister. His sword was more precious than jewels and gold, but the thought of using it in battle made Jon feel unworthy.

This blade was once wielded by Aemon the Dragonknight.

*How can I compare to a person like him?*

“I see nothing,” Eddard Karstark remarked, his grey-blue eyes fixed at the wooden landscape spreading before them.”Maybe the Kingslayer saw through our plans.”

“I trust in the Blackfish’s abilities,” Robb replied, his blue sweeping over the wooden and the river snaking it’s way through the valley ahead.

On the opposing side he saw the movement of their men under the command of Lady Mormont and Lord Mallister.

West from them sat Lord Karstark, hidden in the thick foliage, waiting for Robb’s command.

Ghost lay beneath his feet, his ruby eyes following a rabbit rushing through the grass. It seems he was eager to hunt.

“Don’t fret about it, boy,” he told the wolf and patted his head.”You will get your chance to fight.”

Greywind appeared equally tense, his head raised as he observed the river below.

“Something is coming! I can hear it!” Olyvar Frey’s hushed whisper broke the silence around them.”Horse…I hear horses, my Lord.”

Jon straightened himself in his saddle and angled his head to look at the young man. He was older than Robb but now serving as his brother’s squire.

The promised marriage to Edmure Tully was not enough for the Lord of the Crossing. Making Olyvar Frey his squire and fosterage for two of his grandsons was part of his toll.

*All this for a stupid bridge.*

Olyvar Frey’s suspicions proved right. The sound of the horse hooves’ sounded like rolling thunder, coming ever closer.

Then the first horn started to roar. The echoing sound ringing through the valley made it hard to make out the source. It could be either. It was either Lady Mormont or Lord Karstark.

“There!” Robin Flint exclaimed and pointed ahead. Jon’s grip tightened on the pommel of his sword as he spotted the familiar banner of house Tully fluttering above a group of mounted riders. It was the Blackfish and as promised he had lured the Kingslayer here.
The Kingslayer was easily discernible through his golden armour and he snow-white cloak, fluttering behind him like the plumage of a bird.

“Well done!” Robb said, a satisfied smile curling on his lips. Suddenly, a second horn roared and Robb’s smile grew wider. Then, a third horn roared and the archers placed near the river bed made their position known. Without hesitation they unleashed a volley of arrows on the enemy.

Within seconds horses reared, men cried out and several of them collapsed like puppets without strings.

It was time to attack.

Jon exhaled deeply, kicked his heels into the side of his horse and followed Robb down the hill, towards the trapped enemy.

Jon didn’t hesitate to cut down the first man that came into his view, Dark Sister cutting through the man’s armour like cake. Ghost jumped a man left from him and buried his sharp teeth into man’s body.

Even from the distance he was able to hear the man’s pleading cries.

The battle raged on as their enemy continued to die, yet the Kingslayer showed no sign of exhaustion. Left and right, he cut down their men, freeing himself from several encirclements. As promised Jon stayed close to the rest of Robb’s guard, but he felt the urge to rush forward and to bury his sword in the golden knight’s horse.

Capturing Jaime Lannister could help to save Lord Stark’s life.

Moments later his wish came true. Jon didn’t know how, but the Kingslayer managed to break through the lines and urged his horse towards Robb, his steel blade glimmering in the moonlight.

Daryn Hornwood and Torrhen Karstark were quickly at his Robb’s side, but the Kingslayer proved faster and opened Torrhen Karstark like a pig for slaughter. Daryn Hornwood nearly suffered the same fate, but Robb parried the Kingslayer’s blow, which bought the young man enough time to slip away.

Jon didn’t waste another moment and urged his horse forward, Ghost following behind him.

Robb met the Kingslayer’s blows with great eagerness. Up and down, the blades met while Jon had to cut down another Lannister man, before urging his horse up the hill, closer towards Robb.

As his horse continued to struggle up the hill he spotted Robin Flint, driving his sword into the Kingslayer’s horse.

The animal reared, it’s cries joining the sound of battle. Surprisingly, the Kingslayer managed to get back to his feet and dealt Robin Flint a deep cut.

The man’s cry made Jon shiver, but was soon drowned out by another cry. The Kingslayer had buried his blade in Robb’s horse and sent his brother rolling in the mud.

Jon’s heart nearly jumped out of his chest when he saw the knight’s raised blade, but Jon was quicker.

He urged his horse towards the golden knight and parried his blow. He moved backwards and swung his sword, barely touching the knight’s shoulder. Blood splattered his white cloak, but that
didn’t stop the Kingslayer.

The man’s savage blows frightened his horse, but he was able to climb down before the animal crushed him.

The Kingslayer gave him no opportunity to rest. The golden knight bombarded him with another barrage of bows that left Jon gasping for air.

Left and right he met the man’s quick strikes, his even-shaped face a grimace of rage.

It was true what they said about him. The Kingslayer was an excellent swordsman and much better than Jon. Yet Jon noticed his trembling arm. It seems Robin Flint’s blade went deeper than expected.

Jon decided to make use of his weakness and parried another blow to his left, before gathering all his strength to deal the man a savage strike to his weakened sword arm.

The knight parried his blow, teeth clenched in pain. Jon didn’t wait for another moment and gave the man a hard shove, which sent him tumbling to the ground.

Somehow, the knight’s sword had slipped out the man’s hand. Jon pushed him to the ground and was soon joined by Eddard Karstark, who helped him to restrain the struggling man.

“I will have your head, Kingslayer!” he cursed, blood running down his cheek and neck.

The Kingslayer spit into Eddard Karstark’s face and Jon saw an expression of pure anger washing over the young man’s face.

“No!” Jon shouted, pushing all his weight on the struggling man beneath him.”He is our hostage!”

“He killed my brother…,” Eddard Karstark grumbled angrily, but was silenced by Robb’s return.

“Jon!” Robb exclaimed and a moment later he saw Ghost hopping through the grass towards him."I see…you got him!”

Jon nodded his head in confirmation. Robb smiled and stumbled to his side.

Robin Flint joined them moments later, his arm drenched in blood. Daryn stumbled after him, face bloody, but otherwise unharmed.

“Grand-Uncle!” Robb exclaimed after he saw the Blackfish riding towards them, accompanied by Lord Mallister’s and Lady Mormont’s men.

The old man nodded his head, a smile spreading over his weather-worn face as he climbed from his horse.

“Well, it seems we caught a lion!” he jested and earned himself a curse from the Kingslayer.

Jon and the others were barely able to restrain the struggling men, but Lord Mallister’s men saw their need and gave him a helping hand.

“He is in need of a Maester,” Jon explained and sheathed his sword.

Robb nodded his head in confirmation, his gaze wandering over the assembled group of people.

“Jon speaks true,” Robb agree and shifted his attention to the Kingslayer.”Nobody is allowed to
harm him or I will have his head.”
Jon sighed in relief, hope blooming in his heart.
Maybe Tywin Lannister would be prepared to exchange Lord Stark for his beloved son.
“Jon!” Robb’s hoarse voice snapped him out of his thoughts.”Are you hurt?”
“I am fine,” Jon replied and smile as Ghost started to lick his hand.”We should move on.”
“Aye,” Robb agreed and returned his smile.”We move on to Riverrun.”
...
Theon

Theon

“I want you to stay in the castle. Run away and I will hunt you down like an animal. This I can promise you, Greyjoy.”

“I understand,” Theon replied through gritted teeth. He was barely able to contain his rage, knowing what his Lord Father did. He dared to break the peace and for what? To raid the Stony Shore.

The betrayal cut deeper than a sword. He was still unable to believe that his lord father valued his life so little.

“Good,” Ser Roderik added, his face grim and determined. He returned a day ago, but without the Bastard of Bolton. This failure seemed to displease the man even more than the attack on the Stony Shore. „Leave me, Greyjoy. I need my dire rest if I am to depart for Torrhen’s Square. Lord Tallhart is waiting for me to join him.”

“I understand,” he replied and closed the door behind him. Then he crossed the corridor leading to his chambers. Suddenly, he stopped, feeling disoriented and lost.

*I need wine*, he thought and made his way to the kitchens. *Something to dull my anger.*

“Oh, it’s one of the High Lords!” one of the kitchen wenches exclaimed and showed her pearl white teeth. Her words were laced with mockery, but he ignored her. A good tumble will make her forget her insolence. „What can we do for you, M’Lord?”

“A bottle of wine,” he demanded. „I have need of wine.”

“Aye, we have wine, M’Lord,” the kitchen confirmed and made her way down the steps, leading to the larder.

A moment later she returned, a seductive smile plastered on her lips. „Here…enjoy your wine, M’Lord.”

“You have my thanks,” he replied and patted her ass, before making his way out to the courtyard.

As expected, he found Arya Stark running about in company of young Rickon, their dirwolves following after them wherever they went.

It was not even midday and Arya was already drenched in dirt, her hair a wild nest of tangles. Lady Stark would have thrown a fit, but she has yet to return.

That Robb took his mother and the bastard to accompany him on his campaign irked him only more.

Angry he leaned against the wall and continued to observe the children. The two girls were also there. Lady Ysilla was seated on a chair, doing her daily needle work. The Princess, or Daenerys as she preferred to be called sat next to her and pretended to read. She looked just as bored as him and now and then she lifted her head to observe the children.

She was a true beauty, tough her bust was rather small. Theon preferred them fuller, but he was
sure about one thing. Jon Snow is a lucky bastard and he hated him for it.

Fuck him, he thought and opened the bottle. The taste of the wine was sweet, but was unable to wash away his Lord Father’s betrayal.

Robb could take my head for this, he knew and tried imagine his execution. The thought scared him, though he would have never admitted it openly.

Come midday the bottle was nearly empty.

“Arya!” Lady Ysilla called. “I think it we should go back inside…it is almost time for supper and you need to get a proper wash.”

The girl frowned, but didn’t protest. Instead she whistled and her direwolf joined her side. Then she shifted her attention to Rickon Stark, who continued to run his circles.

“Rickon!” she shouted. „Come along, it is time for supper.”

“I want to play!” he protested loudly. Yet Arya Stark wasn’t easily fazed and picked the boy from the ground, despite his angry protests. His direwolf Shaggy growled at Nymeria, but the female wolf was bigger and bared his teeth. Shaggy gave a miserable howl and lowered his head, before following after her sister.

“Don’t you think a bottle is a bit too much,” someone remarked and snapped him out of his reverie.

He looked up and found Princess Daenerys looking down at him with a look of concern. „Jon needs only tree cups and he starts puking.”

Theon scoffed.

“Snow has the drinking capacity of a girl.”

“And you are an ass, Greyjoy,” the Princess threw back and crossed her arms in front of her. ”All you do is laze around and whine. You could lend us a helping hand, you know?”

“And do what?” he asked. „Help you with your disastrous needlework?”

The Princess looked as if she was about to throttle him, but he was glad that she refrained from doing so.

“No, but simply offering your help would be a good start,” she snapped back, unbothered by his mockery.

“I am no nursemaid!” he threw back and earned himself another frown.

“No, you are not,” the Princess said and sighed in frustration. „You are whiny little child.”

“I am not!” he threw protested.

“Yes, you are,” she insisted. „Why else this silly rivalry between you and Jon? Both of you are the outsiders in this household and yet you treat him like an enemy.”

Her words stirred his anger.

“Snow and I have nothing in common. He is a bastard and I am the heir to the Iron Islands. I should be home, but I am stuck here and my life means so little to my Lord Father that he endangers me for a raid on the Stony Shore.”
His words softened the Princess’ features.

“Your Lord Father deserves your anger, Greyjoy,” the Princess admitted. „But the Starks were nothing but kind to you. Believe me, I know what I am talking about. I spent most of my life as a hostage.”

He couldn’t help but to scoff. How could she compare herself to him?

“You know nothing,” he replied. „Jon Arryn spoiled you rotten, didn’t he?”

“Aye, Jon Arryn was good to me,” she confirmed, a wry smile showing on her lips. „But my life was hell when he left me alone with his wife. Lady Arryn is not the kind of person you want to spend your time with.”

“What did she do?” he asked in a mocking tone. „Take away your dolls?”

“No,” the Princess replied. „She hit me for stupid reasons, locked me up and tried to kill me when I was a babe, though that happened only once and she never dared to repeat her actions.”

“She tried to kill you?” he asked in utter disbelief. „Why would she do something like that?”

“My nursemaid told me that the deed was caused by her fragile mind. She suffered a miscarriage and couldn’t stand having another child living around her.”

Theon was speechless.

“You don’t sound like you hate her?”

“I dislike her,” the Princess confirmed, her brimming with subtle resentment. „But why should I hate her? She is a pitiful woman who never once knew a moment of happiness in her marriage to Lord Arryn. I respected him, but she was only ten and five when she was forced to wed him. Who wants to marry an old man like him?”

Theon didn’t like her answer. She should curse the woman for her actions.

Frustrated, he rose to his feet.

“Well, thank you for regaling me with your tale of woe,” he added and stumbled away.

Arriving back in his chambers he vomited out his breakfast, before going to sleep.

Hours had passed when he woke, the horizon outside his window painted in a soft hue of pink.

Disgusted by his smell, he washed himself and put on fresh clothes, before leaving his chambers behind.

He missed supper and went straight to the kitchen, to fill his empty stomach.

There he found the kitchen wench who had organized him the bottle of wine. She was quite beautiful, lean and long-legged, though her dark hair was cut too short for his taste.

“Are you hungry, M’Lord?” she asked and graced him a wicked smile. There was something familiar about it, but Theon was unable to place it.

“Very,” he confirmed. „But not only for food. You understand my meaning…”
“Oh, I understand your meaning, M’Lord,” she replied softly and placed a plate of cheese and meat on the table. Then she opened the buttons of her dress and revealed her breasts. They were small, but she had a bigger bust than the bastard’s Princess.

_Take that, Snow_, he thought and devoured the food eagerly.

“Did the supper please you, M’Lord?” she asked after he finished his meal and moved to sit in his lap, her hands snaking their way downwards.

“Not here,” he told her, a smile curling on his lips.”Or Maester Luwin will complain about me to Lady Stark.”

“We can go wherever you want, M’Lord,” she answered and leaned down to kiss his cheek. Then she climbed off his lap and moved to the door.”Shall we go?”

“Will your Mistress not complain?”

She grinned wickedly.

“Oh, don’t fret about it, M’Lord. I know how to handle the old dragon and I don’t want to miss my opportunity to get a taste of the heir to the Iron Islands.”

“I bet you do!” he replied and pulled her up the stairs, back to his chambers.

Once he had locked the door behind he started to discard his cloak, but the sight of the girl, lounging on his bed made him stop.

“What are you waiting for?” she told him and stared to pull off her dress, revealing a slender and well-trained body. Several scars littered her shoulder and neck, but that didn’t take away from her beauty.

“For you to get naked,” he told her and pulled of his cloak, before starting to get out of his boots.

She grinned and winked him closer. He obeyed eagerly, one of her hands moving under his tunic. She knew what she was doing and her touch left him gasping for air.

“Now your turn,” she told him and lay back down on the soft bedding. He wasted no moment to follow her wishes and leaned down to squeeze her breasts and to kiss her neck.

He was so lost to his desire that it took him too long to notice the sharp blade at his neck.

How and where she hid it was a mystery to him, but it was there, biting into his skin.

“Well met, dear brother,” she told him and grinned.”It seems you don’t remember me?”

Theon felt as if someone cut off his balls and ate them.

“What?” he stuttered, but didn’t dare to move.”Who are you?”

“Dear brother…,” she cooed and ruffled his hair. „Did you forget your little sister, Asha?”

“Gods…!” he shouted, disgust washing over him. Seeing her face this close he noticed the resemblance. _Her dark eyes. Their mother’s eyes. _ „What madness possessed you to something like this?”

“How else would I be able to get to you?” she asked and finally removed her blade. Theon let go
off her, pulled up his breeches and put a good amount of distance between them.

*Gods, I nearly fucked my sister.*

“You look shocked,” she remarked and started to put on her dress. „But it was necessary. I am here to save you.”

“Save me?” he asked, still unable to comprehend what was happening. „Ser Roderik would find me before we are able to reach the next ship.”

“The attack on the Stony Shore is meant to distract them. A few days ago my men and I took Deepwood Motte and our Uncle Victarion went to take Moat Cailin. The Northmen are still unaware of our actions, which means we have to move quickly.”

“Move quickly?” he asked. „To do what?”

“To take the inhabitants of this castle hostage,” she explained quickly and sheathed her dagger. „Tywin Lannister offered our father a good price for their heads.”

Theon couldn’t believe his ears.

“And Father honestly thinks that the Old Lion of the Rock will keep his promise?” he asked. „The man is using him. Robb captured the Kingslayer, Princess Rhaenys has the Reach and Dorne behind her and Stannis Baratheon is mobilizing his troops. Tywin cannot win this war. Attacking the North makes no fucking sense.”

“I know,” she agreed with him. „But it was the only way to free you. Our Uncle Victarion would agree with you…our father is no longer capable to lead us, which is another reason I came here. I want to bring you home and then we can remove our father from power. Even his Maester admitted that his mind is growing weak. You are his rightful heir.”

Theon nodded his head in understanding. It was what he always wanted, but betraying Robb was another matter. The Princess’ words had angered him, but she was not wrong. Robb was always kind to him.

“I have a better idea,” he replied, his minds reeling. „We should attack the Westerlands. Thus I could come with you and remain loyal to Robb.”

“Why do you care so much about the Stark boy’s opinion?” she asked, her voice laced with anger. „You were his hostage and nothing more.”

“Maybe,” he replied. „But I can tell you this: Tywin Lannister will lose this war and Robb will hunt you down like an animal if you harm his family. There will be nothing left of the Iron Islands if you hand the Stark children to his enemies.”

“It will not be hard to convince Uncle Victarion to stab Tywin in he back,” his sister agreed. „The Westerlands are rich…”

“Exactly,” he confirmed. „And Tywin will be unable to defend them now that he has three other enemies to contend with.”

“Then we should make it four,” she agreed enthusiastically and patted his shoulder. „But we will have to leave tonight. Then we will ride for Deepwood Motte to join up with my men and return to our Uncle.”
Theon was torn, but he doubted that Maester Luwin would trust him.

“Aye,” he replied. „We will leave tonight.”

…
They rode through the night and arrived at dawn.

Riverrun proved as beautiful as expected. Bordered by the Tumblestone to the north and the Red Fork to the south the castle oversaw a massive ditch filled with water, which gave the castle the appearance of an unassailable island.

Around the castle stretched a sea of tents, the banners of the Lord of the Westerlands proudly displayed.

*We will wake them from their slumber,* Robb had told his men not long ago. They cheered and laughed.

Jon decided to keep his laughter to himself until the battle is won. This time he intended to stay close to Robb. The fight with the Kingslayer was too close.

The sun was rising in the east drenched the Tumblestone in a blood glimmer as they continued their silent approach. For Ghost this tasked proved easy enough, but Greywind was growing impatient.

Finally, the silence was pierced by the sound of approaching horses. Led by the Blackfish the riders stormed through the camp, the banner of House Tully fluttering above their head.

Cries of shock and the clinking of steel woke the Lords of the Westerlands from their slumber. Robb kept their men back and continued to watch the enemy movements. He was waiting for the right moment.

Anxiously, Jon leaned down to touch the pommel of his sword. The gesture never failed to calm him, though he felt the familiar feeling of excitement rushing through his veins.

Chaos reigned in the enemy camp ahead. The Blackfish continued to storm through it like a wolf assaulting a stable of chickens. Panic-stricken the enemy soldiers crawled out of their tents and tried to locate their weapons. Some died before they were even able to find them and others tried to flee. One Lord ushered his men towards the rafts and tried to cross the river to help his men camped on the other side.

It was a folly, but Jon knew how easy it was to lose one’s wits during battle. He even felt a hint of pity for the men. They came here to serve their lord only to end up butchered. It was a cruel fate.

“Time to join them!” Robb shouted and called Jon back to the present. Then, Robb freed his blade and urged his horse towards the camp.

Jon’s first victim carried no weapon and another man looked half asleep, but he had little time to waste on these poor fellows. It took not long before resistance began to form among the Lannister men. The brave ones tried to form a line.

Robb reacted quickly. They urged their horses towards them, but it was the sudden appearance of Lord Blackwood that led to the final dispersion of the enemy.

Quickly, Jon buried his blade in the neck of a man and barely escaped the sharp tip of a spear. Yet he had no time to relish his escape. Suddenly, he heard the sound of snapping arrows and kicked
his heels in the sides of his horse. The arrows hit some of their men, but none of them was unhorsed, their armour thick enough to protect them.

Then, another man, armed with a sharp pike tried to drive his weapon in Jon’s horse, but Ghost made quick work of him. In the blink of a moment the man was sprawled on the ground and his shoulder torn apart by Ghost’s sharp teeth.

Jon sighed in relief and whirled his horse around, trying to find Robb in the raging battle. A heartbeat later he found him, engaged in battle with a mounted knight. Lord Blackwood was not far, his men occupied with Lannister men left and right.

“Let’s go boy!” he told Ghost and whistled. Obediently, his loyal beast followed after him. „Let’s go!”

Suddenly, he heard the roar of a horn. Not ours, knew at once and angled his head in the direction of the sound. There, far off in the distance, he spotted around sixty mounted riders. The leader was a mountain of a man and carried a familiar banner; three black dogs on a yellow background.

House Clegane, Jon knew a once and felt panic washing over him as the enemy descended upon them.

The ground started to shake and the mounted riders rushed through their lines like a strong current over a ship.

Within the blink of a moment Lord Blackwood was unhorsed by the Mountain of a man, blood spilling on the ground beneath in a river of crimson.

Jon didn’t waste another moment and urged his horse towards his brother. His sword was sheathed and along the way he picked up a discarded spear. Beyond fear and anger he rushed his horse towards the Mountain of a man.

He had practiced this numerous times yet his stomach turned to jelly and his heart nearly jumped out of his chest.

With gritted teeth, he buried the tip of his spear in the Mountain’s horse. The animal reared in pain and the giant slipped from the horse’s back.

As swiftly as possible, Jon threw the spear away and unsheathed his blade. In the same breath climbed from his saddle and parried the man’s blow.

The strength of the blow made him stumble like a man too deep in his cups.

Another blow followed and Jon was barely able to move out of the way. How a big man like him was able to move this quickly was a mystery to him, but he had no time to waste, for Robb decided to join the fold.

Two Stark men, armed with spears, were at his brother’s side and rushed towards the Mountain. The massive man grabbed the first man’s spear and pulled him from his horse. The other one hit the target, but it was no use. The thick armour protected the giant.

“Ghost!” he shouted when he spotted his wolf’s approach.”Keep away!”

Ghost obeyed, but Greywind knew no bounds. His brother’s wolf bared his teeth and hauled himself at the giant of a man.
Robb made use of the moment and dealt the knight a blow to the back. Blood drenched his yellow cloak, but he kept moving.

Angrily, the man kicked Greywind away and wheeled around.

The Mountain’s savage shove surprised Robb and he was thrown from his horse.

Jon made use of the moment and whistled.

“Now!” he ordered and Ghost hauled himself at the Mountain. The giant of a man floundered under his wolf’s assault and Jon buried his blade in his shoulder.

An ear-bleeding roar filled Jon’s ears, but he continued to twist the blade deeper and deeper.

Die! Die! Die!

Yet it was no use.

The monster grabbed his arm and pulled hard. A sharp pain surged through his shoulder and he lost the grip on his sword. Jon desperately tried to entangle himself, but the giant pulled harder and soon the sound of cracking bones filled his ears.

Jon cried out, the pain burning under his skin like needles. He tumbled to the ground like a puppet without strings, the giant looming over him like an executioner. The world around him was blurred, blood running down his cheek. His sword was gone and he was barely able to move his shoulder.

In that moment, Robb drove his blade in the man’s back. Finally, the giant stopped moving and fell backwards, his growls mixing with the sound of battle.

“Jon!” Robb cried out and stumbled towards him, several guardsmen and Blackwood men following after him. “Gods, what happened to you?”

“I am well,” he assured Robb through gritted teeth. “My arm…it hurts.”

...
Rhaenys

Rhaenys

Whatever Ser Barristan thought of her, it didn’t show on his face.

“Princess Rhaenys,” he greeted politely and rose to his feet. He was dressed in the simple garb of a nobleman since they had to take away his armour and weapon. “What brings you here?”

His voice was laced with anger, but she ignored it.

“Good news,” she informed him and graced him with a smile. She never hated him like Robert Baratheon or Joff, but he was still a traitor. He bent the knee to King Robert while his brothers died honourable deaths. “I have good news for you, Ser Barristan.”

Yet it would be unwise to harm him.

No, I will put his abilities to good use.

Surprise showed on his marred face.

“You will free you if you are prepared to accept an important task.”

“Important task?” he asked and wrinkled his brows. His clear blue eyes were alight with curiosity and mistrust.

“Lady Sansa Stark needs to return her brother,” she explained. “I also want you to deliver a letter to Robb Stark. You served King Robert, but he is dead and gone. I have need of your service, Ser Barristan. Do you accept?”

He fell silent and stroked his beard. He looked torn, his blue eyes fixed on his boots.

“First I need to know the truth,” he said and exhaled deeply. “Are these rumours true? Did Prince Rhaegar father a child on Lady Lyanna Stark?”

“Aye,” she confirmed without hesitation.”Eddard Stark’s supposed bastard son is my father’s son. His parentage was partly the reason I asked the King to arrange the marriage between him and my Aunt Daenerys. The letter I want you to deliver is also meant for my brother’s ears. I cannot entrust it to Mace Tyrell’s men.”

“I saw the boy numerous times, but never noticed the resemblance,” he muttered and leaned back on his bunk, his blue eyes fixed on her. “How long have you know about his true identity?”

“Since the tourney celebrated in honour of my wedding,” she answered. “The boy has my father’s smile. Bastard or not, he is my brother. He is a good person and he treats my niece with utmost respect. We will soon march for the capital, but it won’t be easy to convince Robb Stark and his allies to accept my Queenship. May brother may be a bastard, but I know that many a high lord would prefer him over me. I am a woman, I killed my husband and I left Eddard Stark to the lions. That is why I intend to legitimize my brother and make him my heir until I have children of my own. I even am prepared to accept him as my King. All I care about is that the Lannisters are removed from power. My letter will explain everything.”

Ser Barristan nodded his head in understanding.
“I assume Lord Tyrell doesn’t know about your true intentions?”

“No,” she replied. “He knows nothing of my true intentions. I am using him…he wouldn’t have supported me for anything less than a crown for his son.”

“Maybe,” Ser Barristan said and sighed deeply. Then he fell silent and remained like this for a long time.

“Very well,” he agreed at last. “I will do it. I want to meet Rhaegar’s son and I will deliver your letter.”

Rhaenys felt relieved.

“I thank you, Ser Barristan,” she replied and graced him with an honest smile. “I know you disapprove of my actions, but I am prepared to forgive your transgressions if you are prepared to forgive mine.”

“I understand,” was all Ser Barristan replied. “I will return Sansa Stark to her brother’s side.”

…

A sad smile showed on Sansa Stark’s lips as she enclosed Maegaery in a tight embrace. Then the two girls kissed each other’s cheeks and Ser Barristan helped Sansa Stark climb on her horse.

Rhaenys exhaled deeply and moved closer.

“Ser Barristan will keep you safe, my Lady,” Rhaenys said and smiled tightly. „I hope you will have a quick and safe travel.”

“I am thankful for this honour,” the girl replied stiffly. “I am sure Ser Barristan will fulfil his task to your utmost satisfaction. I also intend to keep my promise to you. I will speak for you before my brother, but I cannot promise that I will be successful. I wish you luck in your endeavours, Princess Rhaenys.”

Rhaenys was disappointed by the girl’s politeness, but she expected her reaction.

“I thank you, Lady Sansa,” she replied politely and then Lady Sansa shifted her attention to Willas.

“I thank you for your hospitality, Lord Tyrell,” she added politely and received one of Willas’ charming smiles.

“The pleasure was mine, my Lady,” he said and lowered his head. “I hope you will grace us with another visit. My sister will miss your presence.”

“I will visit again, my Lord,” Sansa Stark assured Willas and led her horse away.

Rhaenys continued to watch as the column of riders grew smaller and smaller, before they disappeared behind the green hills of Highgarden.

“We should speak to my father,” Willas said and pulled on her arm. “A raven came this morning…from Stannis Baratheon.”

“Of course, “Rhaenys agreed and together they made their way to Lord Tyrell’s study. The Queen of Thorns was also there, her golden eyes narrowed in concentration as she continued to read the letter in her hands.
Mace Tyrell was not far and seated in a large armchair. One of Margaerys’ puppies sat in his lap and slept.

“There you are, child,” the Queen of Thorns remarked and graced her with an affectionate smile. “It seems your brother and his cousin Robb Stark won a great victory. The Kingslayer is their hostage. Tywin Lannister must be seething with anger.”

Rhaenys felt relieved to hear about her brother, but they needed to take the capital to win this war.

“Good news,” she agreed and tried to appear indifferent. “Another step towards victory.”

“Maybe or maybe not,” Mace Tyrell huffed. The unhappy look on his face told her that he hoped for a different outcome. “We also received a massage from Stannis Baratheon. He is moving towards Bitterbridge and intends to block our way unless we hand over his brother. He has the full support of the Stormlands behind him.”

“I see,” she said and took a seat next to Lady Olenna. Willas remained in a standing position, his gaze resting on his Lord Father. “I will ask my Uncle to move the Dornish troops towards Bitterbridge. There they can join our host and we can fight Stannis together.”

“I think not,” Mace Tyrell replied and placed the dog on the floor. “I will not shed the blood of my men unnecessarily. Maybe we will be able to reach an understanding with Stannis. Why else would he offer a parley?”

“Parley?” Rhaenys asked and narrowed her eyes in confusion. *Trap*, was the first thing that came to her mind. *Stannis knows he cannot win. No, we cannot agree to this.*

“My Lord,” she said and tried to remain polite. “King Stannis will not reach an agreement with unless we bend the knee. And I doubt he came here out of love for his brother. I am sure he came, because the Stormlords pressured him into it. This is a trap.”

“Nonsense!” Mace Tyrell huffed. “Surely, Stannis is reasonable enough to understand that he cannot win this struggle and my Margaery is wed to his brother. I only ask that we parley with him. We can still fight if his demands prove unreasonable.”

“Mace!” the Queen of Thorns chided her son. “Do you even listen to yourself? Stannis will cut off Margaerys’ pretty head and give our lands to his Florent relatives. There will be no agreement, only blood and steel can decide this war.”

“I value your council, dear mother,” the Lord of Highgarden replied, his face flushed. “But I am the Lord of Highgarden. Princess Rhaenys is young and inexperienced. She never held a sword in her hands…What does she know of war?”

*More than you,* she wanted to snarl at the man. She saw things Mace Tyrell would never be able to understand. She knew it was wrong, but her anger stirred her to thoughtless actions.

“I know war, my Lord,” she said and met his gaze. “I was there when Tywin Lannister sacked King’s Landing. I was there when my mother and brother were murdered. And where were you, my Lord? You spent your time besieging Storm’s End while my Lord Father was slain at the Trident.”

Mace Tyrell looked like she slapped him. She was too blunt, but it felt so good.

“You dare…,” he grumbled and balanced his massive girth on the table in front of him. “Taking Storm’s End was of utmost importance to our war effort. What do you know about it, girl?”
No, it was your way to keep out of battle, she wanted to say but kept her true thoughts to herself.

“Nothing,” she replied instead and exhaled deeply. She needed to salvage the situation, even if she wanted to strangle the man in front of her. “You are right, I know nothing of war. I agree to this parley, but I want your promise that we will fight if the discussions fail. Do you understand, my Lord?”

Mace Tyrell frowned, but nodded his head in understanding.

“I understand.”

…
They had travelled for three weeks, though Ned hardly saw anything other than the narrow walls of his bunk. Only the rocking of the ship and the occasional bouts of sickness betrayed the fact that he travelled on a ship.

He expected to dock at Gulltown or Saltpans, but when he emerged from the belly of the ship he found himself on the other side of the world.

The sight left him gasping for air. Before him rose a city of massive, high walls and square brick towers made of red stone.

“Pentos is a beautiful city, isn’t it, Lord Stark?” asked Lord Varys. Devoid of his silken robes and only garbed in a simple brown cloak he looked like a completely different person.

“It is a beautiful city,” Ned agreed hesitatingly. While he wanted nothing more than to go home, he savoured the feeling of sunlight on his skin and the sight of the blue sky spreading above him. Three weeks in the bunk of a ship nearly stole away his sanity. ”But why bring me here? I thought you wanted to speak to Jon. He is in Riverrun.”

“I am well aware of this fact, my Lord,” Lord Varys replied, unperturbed by his words. ”But there is someone I want you to meet.”

“Who could it be?” Ned asked, but Lord Varys remained silent and graced him with a knowing smile.

“You will see, my Lord.”

The heat of Pentos proved worse than King’s Landing, the cool breeze coming from the sea enough to lift his spirits, though Lord Varys secrecy was beginning to grate on his nerves.

Yet he remained polite. The man saved his life and Ned Stark didn’t want to appear ungrateful, even if he distrusted the Master of Whisperers.

Hours later they arrived at beautiful manse, almost as big as a palace. Inside he found even more splendour. Marbled walls and tiled floors betrayed the wealth of the owner. Whoever this friend was, he certainly was an important person; perhaps a merchant or even a Prince.

Inside they were greeted by two heavily-armed guards and a servant, dressed in a green robe and bedecked in golden rings.

“Welcome, Lord Varys,” the man said and bowed deeply. ”Magister Illyrio expects you.”

“I thank you, dear Rasham,” Lord Varys tittered and smiled at Ned. ”Please lead us to your Master.”

“Of course, of course,” the man replied and led the way. High-ceiled walls equipped with Myrish carpets and gilded furniture greeted him in every corner. The gardens proved even more lavish.
Everywhere he looked he found exotic trees and flowers. The heavy scent of lotus filled his nose as they passed a small pond filled with water. Small fishes were swimming circles and a servant boy was dipping his feet in the water.

“Magister Illyrio,” Rasham announced their arrival to a big-bellied man, lounging on cushioned seat. “I bring to you Lord Varys and Lord Eddard Stark of Winterfell.”

“Welcome! Welcome!” the fat magister exclaimed and clapped his hands together. “It has been too long, old friend.”

Then he cocked his head and regarded Ned with a strange smile, baring his yellow teeth.

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Lord Stark.”

“The pleasure is mine,” Ned replied curtly and sat down on the gilded chair provided by a servant boy. “Though I don’t understand why Lord Varys brought me here.”

The fat man chuckled and sipped from his jade cup.

“Varys was always fond of his secrets,” he said and clapped his hands together. Instantly, a servant boy came forward and the fat magister started to whisper in the boy’s ears. The servant boy lowered his head and slipped away while another servant boy offered Ned a bowl of fruits.

Hesitantly, Ned took the fruit and took a bite. The taste of the fruit was sweet like summer wine.

“Ah, finally!” the magister exclaimed and snapped Ned out of his reverie. “Meet our guest, my Prince.”

Ned nearly choked on his fruit when he noticed the presence of a young man and woman. The young man was tall, sharp-featured and his hair was painted in a bright blue colour. His long velvet silk cloak gave him a regal appearance, but he paled next to the lovely young woman at his side.

She had a shapely figure, a lovely face and golden hair that fell well beyond her waist.

Following after them like a dark shadow was a man garbed in a red cloak. His face was weary and his hair grey like ash. Only his beard showed hints of red. He was slightly familiar, but his blue eyes betrayed deep mistrust. Whoever he was the man held no love for Ned.

“May I introduce Prince Viserys of House Targaryen and his wife Lady Tamaris of House Tagaros.”

Ned felt as if all air had been drained out of him. The blue hair was distracting, but the young man’s lilac eyes betrayed his true identity. Ned saw the Mad King only once, but the young man shared his Lord Father’s sharp-featured face, though Ned found no madness in his lilac eyes, only bitterness and rage.

“Lord Varys,” the Prince said, his voice full of displeasure. “I was surprised when Magister Illyrio informed me about your intention of bringing Eddard Stark here to Pentos. Does that mean you believe the rumours my brother’s supposed bastard son?”

“I do,” Lord Varys replied and smiled at Prince Viserys. “But let me correct you. The boy is no bastard.”

“Impossible!” Viserys snapped. “Even my niece called him thus, didn’t she?”
“Well, it seems she didn’t have all the necessary information,” Lord Varys answered, unaffected by the boy’s hostility. ”Lord Stark confirmed it to me. Your brother Prince Rhaegar wed Lady Lyanna and made her his second wife.”

“Then you are a fool!” Prince Viserys snapped and angled his head to regard Ned. ”Stark must have fed you lies to escape his rightful punishment. He probably fears that my niece will take his head.”

“I did no such thing;” Ned answered and met Prince Viserys’ gaze. ”It was your niece who revealed the Jon’s secret. I have been protecting the boy all his life. It is true…I hated your Lord Father and I hope he rots in hell for the murder of my father and brother, but I have no quarrel with you, Prince Viserys or with any other member of your family. In truth, I don’t even know why Lord Varys brought me here. I wish for nothing more than to go home.”

“As do I,” Prince Viserys replied sourly. ”I have been waiting for almost sixteen years to return home.”

“And you will, my Prince,” Lord Varys added, his eyes resting on the grey-haired man, looming behind Prince Viserys. He had been silent throughout the whole conversation, his face pale like snow. ”I noticed your silence, my dear Lord Connington.

Connington, Ned muttered to himself, realization washing over him. This is the man who lost the Battle of the Bells and the former Lord of Griffin’s Roost. No wonder he is looking at me with so much hatred. It must be humiliating for him to be here.

“It is possible,” the man replied in grim and cold voice. ”The birth of Prince Aegon rendered Princess Elia unable to bear further offspring and Prince Rhaegar was very taken with Lady Lyanna. It is not out of the question that Prince Rhaegar wed Lady Lyanna and got her with child.”

Then he paused and turned to look at Ned. ”But it is hard for me to believe that one of the Usurper’s most trusted friends would hide away Prince Rhaegar’s son. Is that why you helped to slay Prince Aegon, Lord Stark? Did you hope to place your sister’s son on the throne?”

Ned was stunned by the man’s words.

“I never condoned the murder of Prince Aegon!” he countered and tried not to flinch under the other man’s piercing gaze. “As I said before…nobody was ever supposed to find out about Jon’s true birth. It was Princess Rhaenys who revealed the truth not me. I never harboured any ambitions to place Jon on the Iron Throne. I only wanted to keep him safe.”

It was only subtle, but Lord Connington’s hard features softened.

“Do you have proof for the boy’s legitimacy other than your word?”

“I do,” Ned replied. ”My sister birthed Jon in a Tower in Dorne. When I and my companions arrived there we found Ser Arthur Dayne, Ser Oswell Whent and Ser Gerold Hightower guarding my sister. Only I and Lord Howland Reed survived the fight. Back then I thought my sister raped and abducted, but when I found her in her bed of blood she confessed the bitter truth. She ran away with the Prince to escape her betrothal to Robert Baratheon. With her last breath she asked me to protect the boy. I and Howland Reed burned the tower, but we kept Prince Rhaegar’s belongings: A wedding cloak and a dragon egg. Believe me or not, but I know the truth.”

“A dragon egg?” Prince Viserys asked, his voice laced with rage.”You dare to steal…,” he began, but his wife interrupted. She spoke in High Valyrian, a language foreign to Ned, but words seemed
to calm the young man enough to still his rage.

Lord Connington remained deadly silent, but Ned believed to read understanding on his face.

“My Prince,” Lord Connington told Prince Viserys. “Prince Rhaegar possessed such eggs. I saw them with my own eyes. I don’t know how he acquired them, but I know that he did his best to keep them hidden from your Lord Father’s eyes. He intended to gift them to his children. It seems Lord Stark is speaking the truth, though I won’t believe him until I have seen the boy with my own eyes.”

Prince Viserys frowned, his gaze fixed on Lord Varys.

“Yet there are those who will always question the boy’s legitimacy,” Prince Viserys countered coldly. “But your enthusiasm is no surprise to me. Once I was your intended puppet and now you chose another. I pity my nephew, bastard or not.”

The Prince’s words were enough to cast a shadow over Lord Varys’ features.

“I am acting in the interest of the realm,” Lord Varys replied snidely. “Your nephew is half a Stark and half a Targaryen. We could rally both the North and the South around him. Your niece may have the loyalty of Highgarden and Dorne, but Mace Tyrell is too greedy for power and the Dornish are too weak to keep the Iron Throne in the long run. More importantly, your nephew is wed to your precious sister. People may question your nephew’s claim, but any child of his and Princess Targaryen’s union would undoubtedly be a Targaryen.”


“True,” Lord Varys replied happily and showed his white teeth. “But you are also the Mad King’s son who spent half his childhood in foreign lands and chose to wed a foreigner. Your claim may be stronger, but your sister was fostered in the Vale and is well-liked.”

“I wed someone of Valyrian blood!” Prince Viserys replied defensively. “A highborn Lady of Volantis. Other Princes of my house did the same, but you criticize my actions, because I refused to be your puppet. Why are you here? Are you trying to mock me? Well, it matters not. My niece will take your head once she is finished with the Lannister traitors. I am sure she will show more courtesy to her Uncle than you.”

Lord Varys’ face remained unreadable.

“A pity and here I hoped you would rejoice to get your revenge on the Lannister traitors,” he tittered and graced the Prince with an amused smile, before shifting his attention back to Lord Connington. “That leaves only you Lord Connington. I thought a man so devoted to Prince Rhaegar would be prepared to help his last living son.”

A violent expression washed over Prince Viserys’ face, but his wife’s touch on his shoulder stopped him.

Lord Connington remained silent, his gaze resting on Ned. He looked torn, as if he didn’t know what path to choose.

A moment of silence passed, before he gave his answer.

“I am prepared to accompany you. I want to see the boy with my own eyes.”

Lord Varys smiled happily and Prince Viserys trembled with rage.
“Lord Connington!” Prince Viserys snarled at the elderly man. "Do not allow the Spider to ensnare you in his net. You once swore to serve me. Did you forget?"

“No,” Lord Connington answered, his gaze still fixed on Ned. "But my vow to Rhaegar is older. If the boy is Rhaegar’s son he is the rightful heir, no matter how much you want to deny the truth."

Pain was written all over Prince Viserys' face. Ned felt almost pity for the young man. He expected another outburst of anger, but nothing of the sort happened. Ned didn’t understand what his lovely wife was whispering to Prince Viserys, but it helped to calm the bitter Prince.

In the end he even smiled.

“Very well, Lord Varys. I think I changed my mind. I will be pleased to meet precious sister and my nephew. We will accompany you.”

Lord Varys’ tight smile spoke volumes. It seems he didn’t expect the Prince’s decision.

“Very well, my Prince. It would be a pleasure to count you as our travelling companions.”

“Wonderful! Wonderful!” the fat Magister exclaimed and lifted his goblet. "But tonight we shall feast."

Ned frowned, still unable to comprehend this new development. He only knew that he was treading a dangerous path.

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Chapter End Notes

Viserys had a very different upbringing in this story than in the books. He is not mad like his father, only very bitter. He is hostile towards Varys, because he mistrusts him.
Theon

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Theon

Two years ago Theon last visited Deepwood Motte, the seat of House Glover.

It was not a particularly strong castle. The longhall sat on a hill with a flattened top, along with a watchtower rising about fifty feet high. It was no surprise to him that his sister was able to take the castle without much bloodshed. At least that is what Asha had told him.

Yet it he saw no hint of Glover men, only Ironborn men were there to greet them as they crossed the drawbridge. Theon took his time to take in their weather-worn faces. He believed to some of them, but he was unable to recall their names. Hat his sister Asha had to tell him their embarrassed him, but he tried to hide it behind a feigned smile.

“What did you do with Lord Glover’s family?” he asked his sister as they passed the baily situated below the hill. Theon recalled that it contains the stables and a sheepfold.

“They are my honoured hostages,” Asha assured him with a smile.” Lady Glover, her son and her babe remain unharmed. I doubt even Robb Stark treats his hostages with so much affection.”

Her words relieved Theon, though alone the taking of Deepwood Motte will anger Robb.

I will make Robb understand, Theon thought and led his horse towards the stables. A young stableboy took care of their horses and then Asha led him to the Keep. He knew the way, but Asha insisted on leading the way.

Curious looks followed him as they made their way along a muddy trail. Theon tried to appear indifferent, but deep down he felt fear.

Do they recognize my face, he wondered not for the first time and straightened himself.

As they entered the Great Hall they were greeted by Asha’s men. Asha sensed his discomfort and flashed each of them a disarming smile.

“This is my brother Theon,” she declared bluntly and patted his shoulder. ”He has my Lord Father’s ugly nose. Well, we both have the same nose, but just by looking at him it should be clear who he is. Now stop the staring and bring me a flagon of wine. I want to celebrate my brother’s return. Then we will talk. Theon and I have grand plans.”

Theon tried not to squirm as all eyes in the room were fixed on him.

“Grand plans?” a beardless and pink-cheeked man asked, his sandy blond hair fluttering around his handsome face as he moved. ”I think that will have to wait, Captain. Yesterday the Cleftaw and two of his men arrived here half-dead. His men were brutally killed.”

Fuck, Theon thought. It seems Ser Roderik made his move.

“You never fail to ruin my day, Quarl,” Asha replied calmly and furrowed her brows.

Then she patted Theon’s shoulders.
“If you haven’t realized it by now…this is Theon…my Lord Father’s heir,” she informed the young man.

The young man dropped his head.

“Lord Greyjoy,” he replied politely, his eyes still fixed on his sister. ”I am Quarl.”

“Quarl the Maid,” Asha corrected him with a bashful smile. ”Though I intend to change that soon.”

The young man flushed a little, but kept his composure.

“Maester is taking care of the Cleftjaw. I am sure that he is already back on his feet, emptying the wine I brought him not long ago.”

“Of course,” Asha replied and grinned from one ear to the other. ”We will see him at once.”

“Very well,” Quarl said and led the way. Theon noticed a few broken windows, destroyed furniture and blood stains on the floor.

They found the Cleftjaw in company of the Maester when they entered the small narrow chamber.

Theon was surprised how little the Cleftjaw had changed over the last years. His hair had turned completely white, but he was still the fierce warrior Theon recalled. Especially, his scar was hideous as ever. As a young child someone splintered his jaw, smashing his front teeth and leaving him with four lips instead of two. Even his beard, though littered with grey streaks, was shaggy as ever.

Suddenly, Theon felt like a young boy. It was the Cleftjaw who trained him in arms and boatmanship. As a young boy he spent more time with the Cleftjaw than with his own father.

“Cleftjaw,” Asha greeted him with a bright smile. ”Quarl told us your men were butchered?”

“I suppose so,”The man replied and grinned, despite the wound on his neck, covered in wool bindings. ”We were ambushed by a host of several hundred Northmen, riding under the Flayed Man. True to his name the leader flayed our surviving men. We were able to reduce his numbers, but they outnumbered us, Captian. It was a shameful fight.”

“The Flayed Man?” Theon asked and tried to make sense of the Cleftjaw’s words. The Flayed Man is the sigil of House Bolton. What are Bolton men doing at the Stoney Shore? And what happened to Ser Roderik?

“Aye,” the Cleftjaw replied and lifted his head to regard Theon more closely. ”A Flayed Man…,” he trailed off, his eyes wide in realization.

Theon couldn’t help but to smile, despite the grim news. It felt good to see a familiar face.

“Have I changed so much, Uncle?”

He grinned, spittle escaping his splintered lips. ”You have grown, boy. I hardly recognized you. You are much prettier than your Lord Father…you are even prettier than your sister.”

Theon knew he was joking, but he hope for a different remark.

Asha howled with laughter.

“He is a true beauty, isn’t he?” she asked and ruffled her hand through his hair.
“Stop that, sister!” he chided her and brushed her hand away. “This is not the right moment to fool around.”

Then he shifted his attention back to the Cleftjaw.

“Was the Flayed Man the only banner you saw? Was there perhaps a wolf banner?”

The Cleftjaw shook his head and furrowed his brows.

“They had a wolf banner and several captives dressed in Stark livery. They were flaying them like our men. I don’t know what happened to them, because we fled soon after.”

“Fuck!” Theon muttered, a terrible foreboding taking hold of him. “Did the leader of the Bolton men state his name?”

The Cleftjaw shrugged his shoulder.

“The cunt insisted to be called Lord Bolton, but the Stark men refused to comply. One, an elderly knight, called him the bastard of Bolton. He died a painful death.”

“Fuck!” Theon muttered a sick feeling settling in his stomach. “Then Ser Roderik is dead and with him the whole Winterfell garrison.”

“Isn’t that good for us?” the Cleftjaw asked and gave Asha a confused look. “That will make it easier to take hostages.”

Theon ignored the Cleftjaw and turned to Asha.

“We have to return to Winterfell,” he replied, his head pounding painfully. “The bastard will kill them all.”

“How can you be so sure that he will go to Winterfell?” Asha asked sceptically.

“I know,” Theon assured her. “Ser Roderik, the Castellan of Winterfell was hunting the bastard, because he raped several girls. That is why the bastard killed him. He wants to escape his punishment and now he will do the same in Winterfell. He will probably try blaming it on us.”

“Blaming it on us,” Asha repeated, realization washing over her face. “I understand what you are trying to say, but I have only two hundred men at my command. You heard the Cleftjaw… the bastard of Bolton commands several hundred men. He outnumbers us.”

“True,” Theon agreed unwilling, an idea blooming in his mind. “But Castle Cerwyn is not far from Winterfell. I doubt Cley Cerwyn sent all his men with Ser Roderik. We could ask him to join us…” he trailed off.

“This is madness. He will cut us down on first sight,” Asha countered quickly and Theon wanted to curse her. He balanced himself against the table, the fearful Maester moving out of the way. He was an elderly man, garbed in a black robe, the sigil of House Glover embellished on his breast: a silver fist on a scarlet background.

The idea hit him like thunder and he broke out in laughter. Asha and the Cleftjaw were giving him strange looks, but Theon kept pointing at the sigil as if it answered all their questions.

“Glover livery,” he explained. “No one in Castle Cerwyn will harm us if we are dressed in Glover livery and carry the banner of House Glover. Cley Cerwyn knows me… he won’t fuck around once
he hears about the Boltons. The Boltons may be Northmen, but they are not trustworthy.”

Asha nodded in understanding and the Cleftjaw continued to frown in confusion.

“Have you lost your wits, boy?” he asked Theon in a grim tone. ”You want us to bedeck ourselves in enemy garb and fight at their side?”

Then he turned to Asha.

“What about our previous plans?”

“It is called deception,” Asha explained and came to his defense.”But that was not the only change in our plans. We won’t take Winterfell. Theon gave me an idea. We are going to attack the Westerlands…once this matter is settled. Theon is right…if the bastard kills he inhabitants of Winterfell it won’t matter what we do next.”

“This goes against our orders…,” the Cleftjaw protested, but Asha cut him off.

“Fuck our orders!” she snapped and jerked her head at Theon.”The only reason I even agreed to my Lord Father’s foolish plan was, because I wanted to free Theon.”

“Asha speaks true,” Theon replied and met the Cleftjaw’s gaze. ”What is there to gain by plundering the North? Tywin thinks he can use us as his puppets to fight his enemies. Are we not Ironborn? What right does the Lord of the Rock have to command us? The Westerlands are rich and the North is nothing more than a barren wasteland. That is why I suggested Asha to attack the Westerlands. But before we leave we need to take revenge on the bastard of Bolton. He butchered our men and to achieve this goal we need to fool Cerwyn into helping us. Sometimes you need to let go of your pride to achieve your goals.”

“The plundering of the Westerlands I can get behind and I want revenge,” the Cleftjaw answered, his dark eyes piercing into Theon’s.”But I refuse to fight at the side of Northmen. That goes against everything I am.”

“Think about it, Uncle,” Theon said and decided to voice it differently. “Robb Stark will owe us if we save Winterfell. Wouldn’t that be far more of a humiliation than to plunder his lands?”

“Theon speaks true,” Asha added her voice. ”Think about it. Robb Stark will have to kiss our feet. Or are you afraid?”

The Cleftjaw looked at Asha as if she kicked him in the balls.

“Say that again and I will cut off your head, girl!” the older warrior grumbled. ”You have my axe, but don’t make me regret my decision. I am only doing this because I want the bastard's head.”

Asha grinned.

“Never.”

“There is another thing we could do,” Theon added and turned around to look at the Maester.”We could ask Lady Glover to send a warning to Winterfell.”

“Sadly, that is not possible,” Asha remarked apologetically and pointed at the Maester.”We killed all the ravens.”
Chapter End Notes

Not really happy with this chapter, but I re-wrote it several times. Sorry for the lengthy wait, but my anxiety was affecting me a bit more than usual. It happens when I have a lot of stress, but everything is better now. There are not that many chapters left and I will focus on finishing this fic so I can then concentrate on finishing the others. Next up: Daenerys. And no I would never allow Ramsey to touch Daenerys or any other female character in my stories. I could barely read the Reek chapters in the books without wanting to strangle his character. His fate will be appropriate....Let me put it in the immortal words of Lady York from Richard the Third "Bloody thou art; bloody will be thy end. Shame serves thy life and doth thy death attend."
Daenerys

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Daenerys**

It was late evening, a pale light falling through the shutters of the Library Tower. Maester Luwin was sitting over a thick tome while Daenerys was re-reading a letter from Robb. *Jon was hurt*, Robb wrote and assured her in the same sentence that he will recover. Why and how it happened he left out. *Stupid men.*

*Is that supposed to make me feel better,* she wondered and put the scroll away. She had read the letter a hundred times, but every time she felt the same kind of frustration. She hated sitting here like a duck while other people went to war. Rhaenys at least was doing something, even though she doubted her niece would have to take up a sword.

*Rhaenys has no need for swords. She has her sharp tongue.*

“Is the book not what you were seeking for?” Maester Luwin asked her and jerked his head at the book before her. *The History of Dragons,* the book was called. It was interesting, though it held no information on how to hatch dragons. However, it was a detailed record of famous dragons.

Yet Dany couldn’t stop fretting about Robb’s letter.

“The book is really interesting…I thank you for your effort to find it,” she replied and rose to her feet. Then she pulled her shawl over her neck and rubbed her shoulders. It was pleasantly warm in Winterfell, but the Library Tower was the only exception. It was the only room without a hearth. The only source of warmth was a brazier placed near the wall.

Longing for warmth, she placed her hands over the sizzling fire. Her pregnancy made her crave warmth more than usual. She always liked scalding baths, but yesterday even her maid gave her a mad look when she stepped into the steaming water.

*I carry dragon,* she knew and smoothed her hand over the swell of her stomach. Again she watched the flames glowing beneath the coals. It made her think of the dragon eggs kept in her chambers and what her Grand-Uncle Aemon had told her about the Tragedy of Summerhall.

*Aegon the Unlikely tried to hatch dragons and burned down Summerhall,* she recalled. *It nearly wiped out my entire family.*

Yet she couldn’t help but to be curious about the incident. *How did it happen? How did Aegon the Unlikely know what to do? Or maybe he just grew desperate and mad.*

She had scoured every single book in the Winterfell library, but not a single one of them answered her question. The only thing she was sure about is that the eggs need warmth. Whenever she put them in the hearth or close the hearth they started to pulse like a beating heart. Jon was astounded when she showed him and she hoped that this was a sign, but sofar nothing had happened.

*Maybe I need something hotter,* she wondered, but wasn’t able to finish her thought process when one of the guardsman stepped into the room.

His face was familiar, but she forgot his name.
“Alebelly,” Maester Luwin greeted the man with a smile. “What is going on? Is something amiss?”

“Nothing amiss,” he replied and lowered his head.”But there are Bolton men at the gates. They bring good and bad news.”

Maester Luwin frowned and tried to rise to his feet.

“Start with the good news,” the old Maester asked as Dany wound her arm around his shoulder to steady him.

“It seems the Bolton men helped Ser Roderik to squash the Ironborn men at the Stoney Shore,” Alebelly explained.

Relief showed on Maester Luwin’s face. Dany was equally relieved. Bran’s vision worried her, but hearing that the Ironborn men were vanquished helped to ease her fears.

Yet she also wondered if Theon was among them. She held not much love for the arrogant boy, but Robb was fond of him and she didn’t want to see him dead.

Why did he have to run away? Did he even try to understand what she told him during their last conversation?

“And the bad news?” Luwin asked.

“It seems Ser Roderik and most of his men were butchered by the Ironborn…at least that is what the Bolton leader told us. He brought survivors. It is true…I recognized their faces.”

“But how did the Botlons get involved in this?” Maester Luwin asked.

“Ser Roderik apparently asked for reinforcements and House Bolton heard his call. I don’t know more, but I saw our men among their rows. They look bad, but they are alive.”

Maester Luwin nodded and sighed deeply.

“Then we should open the gates. They will need our full attention,” he explained and winced in pain. His back was getting worse and he didn’t even protest when Dany led him out to the courtyard, where they found the rest of the guards assembled. They were waiting for Alebelly.

Dany shuddered when a cold gust of wind blew over the courtyard.

The gates opened with a groan, revealing several mounted men-at-arms. Above their heads fluttered the banner of House Stark joined by the banner of House Bolton; a red flayed man, hanging upside-down on a white x-shaped cross, on a black background.

Leading them was a knight in dark armour, wearing a rounded helm atop his head and a pale pink cloak around his shoulders.

“Who are you?” Maester Luwin asked the leader.

“I serve House Bolton,” he explained and winked at one of his men. ”And I bring gifts for you, good Maester.”

The men came forward and dropped several dead corpses before Maester Luwin’s feet.

The golden kraken displayed on their clothing identified them as Ironborn. Dany gasped and flinched at the sight. Someone flayed them.
Then the Bolton leader started to laugh. It was a hoarse laughter that made Dany uncomfortable.

“Forgive me…I didn’t realize that we have a Lady among us,” the man apologized, but to Dany he sounded very amused.

“I thank you for your efforts,” Maester Luwin said and let go of her arm. Dany made a few steps backwards and tried to avoid looking at the corpses. “But I would like to see the wounded men Alebelly informed me about. Where are they?”

“Oh, of course,” the man said and clapped his hands together. At once two men came forward, leading several men dressed in Stark livery.

They looked bad, their faces blue and bruised. Dany didn’t know them, but then she was barely able to recall all the guards.

Yet what confused her were their horrified look. One of them even whimpered and shook his head as if he was desperately trying to speak.

“Why does he not speak?” Maester Luwin asked, his grey eyes taking in the man.

“Because we cut out his tongue,” one of the leader’s companions declared and buried his blade in Maester Luwin’s back.

Dany gasped while Alebelly dragged her backwards and the other guards unsheathed their blades.

The song of steel rang in her ears as the plump guardsman dragged her backwards. Dany shivered from head to toe. It felt as if she woke to a nightmare and she was only snapped out of her frozen state after Alebelly had slapped on the cheek.

“Get to the fucking stables and leave through the postern gate…they keys are hidden in the wine bottle next to the hearth!” he shouted at her. ”Now go!”

“But…what about Arya and Rickon…and Lady Ysilla,” she stuttered, but Alebelly gave her a hard shove and she nearly tumbled to the ground.

“I said go…go to Castle Cerwyn…White Harbour…it matters not, but go!”

She stopped questioning and did as she was asked. She steadied herself and rushed off to the stables.

She didn’t look back and tried to ignore the cries of the men. They were dying and she couldn’t do anything.

_I am just a little girl_, she thought and never felt more anger. _No, I am the blood of the dragon._

Breathless, she arrived at the stables and opened the door. The stablemaster was nowhere to be seen, but that was no surprise. It was close to sunset and he usually spent the late evening with his family in Wintertown.

_Fuck_, she thought, panic washing over her. Exhaling deeply, she made her way to the anteroom and grabbed one of the saddles. Quickly, she made her back to the stables to place the saddle on the first horse she found. It was a brown palfrey horse that belonged to one of the guards.

The horse reared, as if it shared her fear.

“Calm,” she whispered and brushed her hands over the animal’s head. Finally, it stopped and she
was able to place the saddle atop the horse. Then she put her feet in the stirrup and lifted herself into the saddle.

“Quick!” she muttered and kicked her feet in the sides of her horse. ”Quick!”

Yet it was already too late.

They came upon her with raised pikes. She expected them to bury them in her horse and kill her, but they did no such thing. They simple circled around her, as if to play a game with her.

One of them dragged her from the horse.

She squirmed, but he was stronger than her.

“I think we caught ourselves a little dragon?” the leader of the men asked. It was the same one who fooled Maester Luwin. His strange hoarse laughter was unmistakable.

“How do you know that it’s her, Lord Ramsay,” one of his companions added. He seemed equally amused.

Lord Ramsay. Like the Bastard. The one that Ser Roderik was searching for…

Gods be good, she thought and tried to keep her composure. It can’t be him!

“You are really as stupid as a pile of shit, Alyn!” the man, called Lord Ramsay, snapped back and pulled off his helmet. ”Who else has silver hair and purple eyes?”

He was an ugly man, his pale face framed by dark greasy hair. His eyes frightened her the most. They were pale like the surface of a winter lake.

“I once had a whore with silver hair…said she was from Lys,” another man added.

“Nobody gives a fuck about your ugly whores, Yellow Dick,” Lord Ramsey snapped back and smiled at her. ”This one is the Mad King’s daughter…a Princess. Did you ever have a Princess? I think not.”

Then he grinned and bared his teeth to her.

“Tell me, sweet Princess. Where are the sweet children?”

This revelation gave her hope.

The seven be blessed. I should have known that they would be able to get away.

“Are you deaf?” he asked, obviously unhappy about her silence. Angrily, he crawled down from his horse and grasped her face between her hands. It hurt, but nothing she couldn’t manage. At least she told herself that. ”Where are Eddard Stark’s whelps?”

She shivered, her mind whirling. I need to distract him. If Arya or Bran got away it is only a matter of time until they get help. Castle Cerwyn is only a few hours away.

“What do I care about Eddard Stark’s whelps?” she asked, trying her best to sound cold and distant. If he came here to kill the Starks she needed to make him belief that she didn’t belong with them. "I hope they all die. Did Eddard Stark care when he helped the Usurper murder my family. Say… Did you come here to burn Winterfell?”
A strange expression washed over his face and a smile curled on his lips.

“What if I told you that I came here to kill everyone,” he replied and grinned viciously.

Dany tried her best not to tremble as she met his gaze. *I am the blood of the dragon.*

*He needs to die,* she knew but she didn’t know how. *She had no weapon, nothing.*

“I would gladly watch Winterfell burn…Fire is the champion of House Targaryen,” she replied, trying to sound bitter and angry. Inside she clenched with guilt. ”Did you know that?”

*Fire and Blood,* she thought as she met his gaze, an idea blooming in her mind. *Of course. Fire and Blood.*

A moment of silence passed, before the Bastard of Bolton started to laugh.

“Either you are as mad as your father or you are a very good mummer,” he remarked and brushed his hand over her cheek. She wanted to bury her teeth in his flesh, to hurt him, to kill him.

Suddenly, it was easy to appear angry.

“Why would you think that, my Lord?” she asked and forced herself to use his self-assigned title. *That will flatter him.*

“Everybody knows that Eddard Stark protected Lyanna Stark’s whelp from the Usurper’s swords. Why would you hate the man who protected one of your own? Not to mention…you are wed to him.”

“And you think I had a choice?” she asked bitterly. ”I would have never wed him if it was my choice. Why would I want to wed the boy whose birth caused the downfall of my family? The Stark whore bewitched my brother Prince Rhaegar…everyone knows that. My niece Rhaenys would tell you the same thing if she was here. Maybe your Lord Father told you about my niece? She has Highgarden and Dorne behind her. She might even forgive your crimes if you return me unharmed. I recall that your Lord Father Roose Bolton advised Robb Stark to support her claim. Of course he didn’t listen. He wants to puts Lyanna Stark’s whelp on the throne.”

He frowned. It seemed the mention of his Lord Father roused something inside him.

Yet all her hopes were banished away when he grabbed her hair, tearing hard.

A whimper of pain escaped her and she gritted her teeth.

“Do not try manipulating me by trying to bring up my Lord Father,” he snarled, but Dany didn’t flinch away. *I need to convince him, somehow.*

She didn’t know what brought it on, but she started to laugh. It was the giggling of a girl that soon turned into maniacally laughter.

She laughed and laughed, though her scalp hurt. It was her fear that spurred her on.

“Stop that!” he snarled and pulled again, though less painful than before.”Stop it!”

It was only subtle, but there was a strange glint in his eyes. Was it amusement? Was it curiosity? She was unable to place it, but it was all she could latch on.

“Wait a bit longer, before you burn down Winterfell…inside is something very valuable the Starks
took away from me…my dragon eggs. I can show them to you if you want. They are alive…I am sure they will hatch soon.”

Lord Ramsay said nothing. He only stared at her for a long time, his pale grey eyes piercing into hers.

“The girl is really mad,” the man named Alyn said again and laughed, but Lord Ramsay turned around and hit him hard.

He groaned in pain and rubbed his nose. Blood trickled on his armour, but he made no sound.

“Shut your bloody mouth, fool!” Lord Ramsay snarled and finally let go of her hair. Instead he patted her cheek and gave her a sweet smile. ”And who told you this secret? Even here in the North we know the story of Summerhall.”

“My Grand-Uncle told me…he lives at the Wall…I fooled my husband to take me to the Wall. My Grand-Uncle told me how to do it…he read it in an old scroll.”

“Well, then tell us…Tell us how it is done. I am all ears,” Lord Ramsey prodded.

This earned him a round of laughter from his companions.

Dany swallowed hard and spun a lie.

“Fire and Blood…you need the blood of a Targaryen…the words of my house…that is the way it is done. I wanted to try it a long time ago, but my husband took away the eggs and keeps them for himself.”

She didn’t dare to breathe, the bastard’s pale eyes inspecting her closely.

She felt his warm breath on her cheek and tried not to wince.

“A pretty story you made up there, little girl. Well, Lord Ramsay likes to play such games, but know this: Lying to Lord Ramsay has consequences beyond your darkest nightmares. First I will cut out your tongue and then…I think it is better if I don’t tell you about it.”

And I will burn you before you are able to do it, she thought and exhaled deeply.

“Then let us go,” she said and tried to appear confident. “The eggs are in my husband’s chambers. I have the blood of the dragon…all we need is fire, but a hearth won’t suffice. We need a brazier. There is one in the Library Tower.”

Lord Ramsay laughed gleefully and rubbed his hands together. He looked like a little boy, a very vicious little boy.

“Wonderful!” he exclaimed and jerked his head at his confused companions. ”Did you hear what she said? All we need is Fire and Blood.”

Lord Ramsay and two of his companions watched her closely as she pretended to search for the eggs. She knew where they were, but she needed to keep up appearances and to clear her head.

“I am growing impatient, girl!” Lord Ramsay snarled at her and she stumbled over to the strongbox, kept under the bed. She opened the box with feigned clumsiness and smiled when she saw the eggs. This smile was honest.

“Here they are,” she explained proudly.
A hint of wonder showed on the bastard’s face. He appeared fascinated and touched his hands over the surface.

“Well, then you are only half a liar,” he remarked and pulled out a dagger. ”Then let us find out about the rest of your story.”

“The Library Tower is not far,” she replied as calmly as possible and pointed at the door. Slowly, she led them to the Library Tower. Only an hour ago she and Maester Luwin were reading there and now he was dead and gone.

Pool old man, she thought and gathered her courage. If have to go then at least after putting up a proper fight.

The brazier was cackling when they entered and she found her book where she left it.

Carefully, she placed the eggs in the brazier and stirred the fire. To strengthen the flames she picked the discarded papers from the table and threw them into the flames.

“Can you see the flames, my Lord?” she asked, half mad from fear.

Then she turned around to look at him.

”They will bring forth dragons. Now …the blood of the dragon,” she added in a sing-song voice and stretched out her hand. ”I need the dagger.”

Lord Ramsay grinned, obviously amused by her mummery.

Whatever he thought, this was her only chance.

“Here,” he said mockingly and handed her the dagger.”Show us what the blood of the dragon can do.”

She smiled and pulled out the sharp blade. Then she smoothed it over her hand and drew blood. It didn’t hurt all too much, but she wished it was his lifeblood.

Still smiling, she turned around and sprinkled the blood on the eggs.

Then she gathered all her courage and picked a handful of coals out of the brazier to throw them at the nearest bookshelf. Hungrily, the flames spread over the paper.

“Fuck!” she heard Lord Ramsay exclaim, but she was much quicker and kicked the brazier. The coal and the flames spilled over the dusty carpet and wooden floor. It took only a brief moment and the sea of flames spread around the men.

Suddenly, Lord Ramsay’s cloak was on fire and Dany didn’t hesitate to stir the flames.

She grasped another handful of coals from the ground and threw them at the bastard’s face. He had been occupied with his cloak and didn’t see it coming.

He screamed in pain as his two companions tried to help him. Dany grasped another handful and threw it at the shelf placed behind them. Instantly, the books and papers caught fire and fell atop the two Bolton men.

More and more shelves started to burn, the flames hopping from book to book, devouring the ancient knowledge that was kept here.
Maester Luwin will curse me from his grave, she thought and gasped another handful of coals at a distant shelf, filled with ancient scrolls. The flames danced and roared.

Her eyes burned and yet she searched for the eggs.

Where are they, she muttered to herself as she crawled on the ground, a wall of flames rising behind her.

“There!” she gasped and found them under the half-burned remains of the shelf. Then she clutched them closely. “There you are.”

The flames rose higher and higher, sweat running down her brows. In the blink of a moment her hair and her dress dissolved. She felt the flames tickling on her skin.

She should be nothing, but scorched bones, but she was still alive. Her heart was still beating and she felt the eggs in her arms pulsing with life.

She felt so warm, like being embraced by the flames.

Fire and Blood, she had told the Bastard of Bolton. The champion of House Targaryen.

Soon she heard only the roar of the flames, filling her ears and opening her eyes.

Images formed before her very eyes. Rhaenys was weeping bloody tears. A mighty fleet was devoured by green fire. A mighty lion was slain by a boy wearing a golden rose. A King with blue eyes and a crown of ice stared back at her through the darkness. A young man took a seat on a throne fashioned out of pale wood, his silver hair falling around his face in gentle locks. Yet his eyes were wrong. She expected purple eyes like her own, yet the young man’s eyes were dark grey. Jon’s eyes.

He smiled back at her, a heavy crown of thorns resting on his brow. His smile was sweet, but the vision was chased away by a cracking sound.

A second crack rang in her ears and the flames exploded before her eyes in a burst of colours.

When she woke she saw a glimpse of the stars. It was night, she realized. Carefully, she sat up, covered in ash and dust. Smoke was rising from the tower, but she was still there. All was gone, but she was still there.

Then she heard it.

It sound like the chirping of a bird, but the scales and wings of the small creatures told her otherwise.

Dany could only gape. Two dragons crawled over heaps of ash. One was black as onyx and the other pale like snow, his scales flecked with blue.

The black one eyed her for a brief moment and hopped on her arm. She felt the dragon’s hot touch on her skin as he crawled up her arm. The white one remained hesitant and rubbed his head against her leg.

This one is Jon’s dragon, she knew and smiled.

…
Chapter End Notes

I know...Ramsey deserved getting fed to the wolves, but at least his sacrifice achieve something positive.
King Stannis' crown was made of red gold with points fashioned in the shapes of flames. His clothing was almost plain in comparison, consisting of a leather jerking, a quilted doublet and worn-out boots. Above him flattered his banner: a red heart surrounded by a blaze of orange fire. The woman next to him couldn’t be anyone else but the famous witch from Asshai, Lady Melisandre. Rhaenys heard rumors about her beauty and it turned out that they were true.

She was a woman of great beauty, graced with red hair and garbed all in red silks.

“Princess Rhaenys,” the King greeted icily, his blue eyes piercing hers. Rhaenys never held anything but scorn for King Robert, but she couldn’t deny that King Stannis was of a different breed than his two brothers. Robert was a fat fool, Renly was a child and this one at least carried himself like a King.

“Lord Stannis,” she greeted him and tried to appear indifferent.”It is a pleasure to meet you.”

“I came here to see my brother,” he answered bluntly and clenched his teeth.”I want to see him.”

“Of course,” she answered and jerked her head at Ser Loras. The young man didn’t waste time and asked one of his men to lead Lord Renly before his brother. He was not chained, but allowed to ride on a horse.

Yet he was flanked by several Tyrell guards, their swords ready. She saw Loras fearful gaze and she gave him an assuring nod.

“Brother,” Renly greeted. It was hard to determine whether he was pleased to see is brother or not. They never held much love for each other.

“Did they treat you well?” Lord Stannis asked and eyed his brother from head to toe.

“Aye,” he replied and nodded his head. Then he was led away and King Stannis spoke again.

“I care not that you murdered Cersei Lannister’s spawn of incest, but the truth remains: The Targaryens lost their right to the Iron Throne after my brother took the crown by conquest. My brothers’ supposed children are bastards and thus I am the rightful heir. I have no quarrels with you, Princess. Bend the knee and I will forgive your treason. You and your Aunt may go into exile and your brother can take the black. No further bloodshed is necessary.”

She had listened in silence and met his gaze.

“Do I wear a crown?” she asked him bluntly.

He furrowed his brows and clenched his teeth. Then his eyes darted to her head.

“No,” he said grimly. ”Is this some sort trick question?”

“You said that my family lost the crown because your brother claimed it by conquest, but I haven’t even crowned myself nor do I call myself Queen. I will only do so once I have taken back the
capital by conquest. And there is another fact you failed to mention. Your brother was chosen King because of his Targaryen blood. It was his Targaryen blood that gave him a claim. And even if I fail…there is still my brother.”

“A bastard,” Stannis sneered.

“Your house descends from a bastard if I remember correctly,” Rhaenys countered.

“Stop twisting my words, girl. I have no patience for this nonsense. Look at your knights of summer and your Dornish spears. They will not be able to win against Tywin Lannister. And your bastard brother sits in Riverrun. Who would support him other than Robb Stark? No one I say, for if they did they would have declared him King by now. Yours is a lost cause, but as I told you before: I am not a man without mercy: I will give you this night to rethink your treason. My other offer still stands, despite your previous mockery of my person and family. Refuse and I will destroy you.”

Rhaenys saw no hint of fear on the grim man’s face.

It scared her and only confirmed her fear. There is something amiss.

“My King is not only destined to be King,” the Red Witch added then after a moment of silence had fallen over them. ”He is Azor Azhai reborn and will save us from the coming darkness. I saw his fate in the flames as I saw yours.”

“My fate?” she asked, trying to hide her amusement.

“What are you? Some sort of a seer?”

“I can read the flames. Soon you will find yourself chained before the mighty lioness. Soon the golden rose will join hands with the lion.”

Rhaenys didn’t know what to say. She had the urge to laugh, but whatever trap Stannis Baratheon laid out for them, she had no intention to stir him to more rage than necessary.

Thus she remained cool and polite.

“Keep your prophecies to yourself. We will see each other tomorrow, Lord Stannis.”

Then she wheeled her horse around rode away.

…”

“What a grim man,” Loras remarked after they had returned to join the others.”Renly didn’t lie when he called his brother lacking in humor. I wonder if his face would crack if he tried to smile.”

Loras laughed like a child and brought the goblet to his mouth, but Willas gave his brother a chiding look.

“Lord Stannis is a prideful man,” Willas added and watched the shadows dance against the silken walls of the tent. ”You shouldn’t have mocked him thus. He is dangerous too. Our Lord Father may think him harmless, but he held Storm’s End for a whole year. He is nothing, but stubborn. We have more men, but the Stormlords stand united while the Dornish and Tyrell men continue to eye each other with mistrust. We have to be careful.”

“Of course,” she replied more softly and gave Willas an assuring smile. ”We shall be careful. You
should have joined me…” she added, but Willas cut her off.

“I can hardly sit a horse…It would have been a display of weakness,” he brushed her concern away and cast his gaze to her Uncle Oberyn. He was sipping on a goblet of wine, his spear close to his hand. He looked unhappy and she knew why.

*The Mountain was killed by my brother’s hand.*

Rhaenys couldn’t be prouder, but her Uncle took it badly.

*I will speak to him,* she knew and graced him with a smile. *Soon.*

“Did you hear what Willas said, Uncle?”

He frowned and forced a smile over his lips.

“I did, sweet niece. I did,” he replied and straightened himself. ”I promise you…I will keep the Dornish in control if Lord Tyrell’s men are prepared to do the same. For this battle and the battles to come Dorne will consider the Reachmen their brothers in blood. I swear it.”

Willas frowned.

“I wish Tarly would say the same,” he added sarcastically. Rhaenys nodded her head, knowing very well what Lord Tarly thought of Willas. To him he was nothing more than a cripple that should have been sent to the Citadel. A man like him only respects strength.

“I will speak to him,” Loras assured gently. ”He likes me, because I made his son my page. According to Samwell Tarly he also thinks that I am interested in his daughter, because I danced with her during your wedding.”

Willas stifled a laugh.

“Truly?”

“Truly,” Loras confirmed.”Not that I dislike the girl. She is sweet and kind, but almost everyone knows that I intend to join the Kingsguard.”

“And you will,” Rhaenys confirmed, though whether it will be a King or a Queen remains to be seen.

Loras smiled and wanted to pour Rhaenys a cup of wine, but Rhaenys shook her head. She had yet to share the happy news, but now was as good as a moment as ever.

“I fear the Maester advised me against it,” she replied and smiled. ”My constitution is rather delicate…you know.”

Loras frowned and eyed her from head to toe.

“You look a bit pale…Are you sick?”

Her Uncle Oberyn laughed in amusement. It was the first laugh in a long time.

“You are really dense, my boy,” he remarked and pointed at Rhaenys.”She is not sick…she is with child.”

“Oh,” Loras said and blushed in embarrassment. Willas didn’t share their amusement. He stood
frozen to the ground, his gaze fixed at the shadow cast against the walls of the tent.

“Willas…,” she called out to him, but stopped when a sudden gust of wind flung the flaps of the tent open.

Rhaenys shivered and rose to her feet. When did it get so cold?

Willas didn’t move, his gaze still fixed at the shadow. Rhaenys moved towards him to join his side, but then she saw it. The shadow started to move on its own accord, ripping itself from the wall and turned to look at her. The face was unmistakable…It was nothing more than black mist, swirling and flowing, but it carried Stannis Baratheon’s face.

\textit{I can’t be}, she thought, her heart threatening to jump out of her chest. It happened all too sudden as the shadow raised his shadow blade and she was shoved to the ground.

She heard herself whimper and closed her eyes to the pain. She was bleeding on her neck, fresh crimson blood running down her chemise. She was coughing, the taste of blood in her mouth. At first she thought the creature had cut her throat, but the wound was not as deep as she pressed her hand on it. She bit into her tongue. Yet the wound burned as if someone marked her with a poker.

\textit{I am burning}, she thought before the darkness took her. \textit{I am burning alive.}

...

When she opened her eyes she found herself in a familiar place. It was the throne room she had visited a thousand times. Usually, it was filled with petitioners, but not now. It was completely deserted, which was no surprise.

It looked as if someone ripped out the roof, a dreary sky visible through the ruined ceiling. Above her loomed the barbed ugly chair once occupied by her grandfather the Mad King.

Now the seat was empty and covered in snow.

“Snow! Snow! Snow!” she heard the cry of a raven, sitting atop the snow-covered chair.

“I grim sight, isn’t it?” another voice, both familiar and so very sad, asked. Rhaenys knew the voice and angled her head to find the owner, standing in the shadows of a large stone pillar.

She blinked once, twice and a third time. There was no mistake.

“Father,” she said, her voice raw with emotions. ”Is that you? Did I die?”

He chuckled and stepped forward, the sound of cracking snow beneath his feet the only sound.

He looked as she recalled him. Tall and lean, his even-shaved face framed by long silver hair. Yet it was his smile that was unmistakable, both sad and happy.

It was a smile she wanted to capture in time.

“I don’t think so,” he added at last and came to stand before her. ”There is much you need to do.”

“I am already doing what I can to retake the crown,” she replied, keeping her tears at bay. ”I will take back what is stolen from us.”

“The crown is only part of it,” he said and sighed deeply, his gaze fixed on the Iron Throne. ”It is an ugly chair, don’t you think? It is a symbol of our families’ greatness and cruelty. I swore to
myself that I would destroy the Iron Throne once I am King, sadly I wasn’t able to realize this goal.”

“You doomed yourself when you took Lyanna Stark as your lover. You betrayed my mother and my brother…you left us;” she replied, not able to hold back her anger.

He gave her a sad smile.

“I was doomed on the day I was born,” he replied solemnly. ”Did you hear about the Tragedy of Summerhall? Do you know what happened there?”

“Of course I do. Aegon the Unlikely tried to hatch dragons and nearly wiped out our entire family.”

“It was far more complicated that. Hearing the truth changed my life.”

“What did you hear?”

“My Lady Mother confessed the truth to me when I was a boy of nine. I should have known better than to ask her, but I was a stubborn child. King Aegon indeed tried to hatch eggs, but no one knew of the sacrifice that should have been given to the flames. The sacrifice should have been my Lady Mother and her unborn babe.”

Rhaenys shuddered violently.

“But King Aegon…they always said he was good.”

“He was an old man and dying. He was desperate to return House Targaryen to its’ old glory and the Red Priests that whispered in his ear made use of that. Yet in the end…in the end he proved himself a good man. He wasn’t able to do it…and the Red Priests took revenge on him. They burned down Summerhall. Ser Duncan the Tall was barely able to save my Lady Mother. I still recall her tears.”

“Yet that doesn’t justify you actions…that you left my Lady Mother in the hands of our grandfather…he was a monster…you should have known better,” she stuttered, still shocked by this revelation.

“A monster he was,” her Lord Father agreed and touched her shoulder. ”But you ascribe more power to me than I had. I wanted to depose him, but my plans were foiled. And your mother…I loved her in my own way. I asked her to travel to Dragonstone, but again my Lord Father destroyed my plans and took her hostage.”

“You could have returned to court and put an end to this madness. Instead you remained with your lover,” she shouted, tears streaming down her face.

He sighed and touched her cheek.

“I would have lost my head had I returned to court. My Lord Father was on the verge of banishing me. He wanted to make Viserys his heir. And Lyanna was more than a lover to me…she was my wife.”

The truth cut deeper than steel.

“What?”

“I am not lying to you,” he told her and pulled his hand away. ”And you have every right to hate
me, but let me tell you this…your mother was good and kind, nobody can deny that, but we were never meant to be. I knew it and she knew it. We tried our best.”

She didn’t want to hear it and shook her head in disbelief.

“But Uncle Oberyn said that she loved you!”

“Prince Oberyn is a good man and has every right to hate me, but he knows nothing of my relationship with your mother... Your birth kept her to bed for nearly a year... and I wanted to refuse to father another child on her, but my Lord Father insistent. ‘Take the Dornish whore to bed or I will do it myself!’ he used to tell me. So I did... and soon Aegon was born, but your mother was unable to have another child. I needed a third one... her desperation was so great that she told me to find a women to father a child on her. I found this woman, but I didn’t expect to come to love her as dearly as I did.”

“Lyanna Stark,” she replied in a hollow voice. ”My mother gave you two children... Why couldn’t you be satisfied with two?”

“The dragon needs three heads, but I had other reasons,” he explained. ”I loved your mother in my own way, but sometimes I also resented her. She was another thing my mad father imposed on me. I hated my father... oh how much I hated him.”

“Why are you telling me all this? I don’t understand... Why did you need three children?”

“It is part of a prophecy. Soon the true enemy will show its face to the world. The Others.”

She was speechless and he chuckled sadly.

“I knew you wouldn’t believe me. Wait and see.”

“Are you trying to mock me? Do you think I will forgive you if you justify your actions with flimsy prophecies?”

“No,” he said and jerked his head at the Iron Throne. ”I am telling you this, because there is no use in hiding the painful truth from you. You needed to hear it to make peace with the past. The Lords of the Seven Kingdoms need to stand united to face that coming enemy. It is the only way of survival.”

“Stand united?” she asked and searched his gaze. ”Tell me... Who shall have the crown? Do you know? If my brother is trueborn as you say...”

“It matters not... important is that the realm stands united against the coming enemy,” he explained and leaned down to place a kiss on her cheek.

“Now go... it is time to wake the dragon.”

His words worked like spell. Suddenly, the world grew blurred and her father disappeared into nothingness, as did the throne and the Red Keep.

...

Her head felt heavy and the wound on her neck burned. Slowly, she opened her eyes and felt a soft hand touching her brow. It was Margaery who graced her with a sad smile. She was dressed in black, her eyes red and wet with tears.
"I am not dead, she realized. Was it all a bad dream?"

“What happened?” she asked, trying to sit up. Margaery had to help her.

“Careful…,” she chided her. ”You need to be careful."

“I know,” she replied impatiently. She only recalled the shadow. ”Where is Willas?”

“It is better if you rest…the Maester said so,” Margaery protested and touched her shoulder. Rhaenys didn’t want to rest. She needed answers and to wanted to make Stannis pay. The shadow carried his face. It was the work of his witch. It is the only possible explanation.

Wake the dragon, her father had said. Wake the dragon.

What was he trying to say, she wondered and turned around to at the cushion placed the on the table. There was her dragon egg.

Was he talking about my egg?

“Maegaery…What about my child? What about Willas? Why is he not here?”

Margaery remained silent for a long time and touched Rhaenys’ stomach.

“I wasn’t there…Loras said…he said the shadow killed him…he tried to save you and child,” she stuttered, tears running down her cheek.

Anger stirred inside her.

He will make him pay for this!

“And my child?” she asked and winced at her trembling voice. She had no time for tears. She needed to think. ”Does it live?”

“Yes,” Margaery confirmed, a ghost of a smile tugging on her lips. ”I suppose that is a comfort.”

“Where is my Uncle? Where is Renly?”

“Your Uncle is with his men and Renly…Renly fled. Stannis attacked our camp after the attack. Someone freed Renly. It was a trap. We should have never come here. Stannis is now riding for the capital.”

"It is not over,” Rhaenys replied and shuddered as the candles started to flicker. ”Where is Willa’s body? I need to see him…now,” she added and rose to her feet. She was still weak, her feet wobbly like pudding as she made her way to the table. She touched the egg, taking comfort in its usual warmth.

“Gods!” she gasped. The egg was hot like a brazier.”Could it be?”

“We gave him to the Silent Sisters,” Margaery explained and came to stand beside her.”Loras is with him.”

“No,” she replied, tears burning in her eyes. It took all her composure not to cry. ”He was my husband…his child is half a Targaryen. He will be burnt.”

“But my father…,” Margaery protested, but Rhaenys felt only hatred for the Lord of Highgarden.
“Your father made me come here,” she snapped. “I have enough of bowing down to his whims. I will decide what is to be done with my husband. Is that understood?”

Margaery swallowed hard.

“Of course,” she said. “What shall we do?”

“A pyre,” she said and averted her gaze. “I need a pyre.”

*Wake the dragon*, her Lord Father’s words echoed in her ears. *Wake the dragon.*

…

Chapter End Notes

In regard to Mel's visions: they will come true, but not in the way she expects.

Next: Jon
The Maester wanted him to stay in bed, but Jon wanted to hear nothing of it. The moment he heard about the sighting of the Tyrell men he left bed.

Not even the pain in his arms mattered anymore as he joined Robb in courtyard. Like Jon he looked as if just jumped out of bed, his red locks disheveled and his clothing crumpled. Greywind was also there and wagged his tail in an anxious manner.

Ghost yawned and followed Jon in silence, his ruby eyes fixed at the gate. Lady Stark joined them soon after, her hair braided and her expression hopeful.

A moment of silence fell over them as they watched the column of riders pour through the castle gates, the banner of House Tyrell fluttering above them. They all wore polished armor and silken green cloaks embellished with the golden rose of Highgarden. The knights of House Tully looked almost like peasants compared to these shining knights.

Yet two people stood out among these gallant knights. There was Sansa, clad in a blue travelling cloak and the other person was an elderly knight Jon remembered all too well.

*Ser Barristan Selmy. Ser Barristan the Bold.*

“Robb! Jon! Mother!” Sansa’ bright voice echoed over the courtyard.

“My little girl!” Lady Stark exclaimed and pulled Sansa in a tight embrace. They remained like this for a long time, tears rolling down their cheeks.

“Robb!” Sansa added and let go of Lady Stark’s shoulder. Robb embraced her tenderly and kissed her cheeks, a smile curling on his lips. It was his first real smile in weeks.

“You look well, sister,” Robb replied and brushed his hand over her cheek. ”Was your travel hard? Are you tired?”

Sansa shook her head and graced Jon with a hesitant smile.

“My travel was indeed dangerous, but your sister Princess Rhaenys sent good men and Ser Barristan Selmy to protect me from our enemies. Our travel was surprisingly uneventful. I am still thankful to be here and I bring a massage from your sister,” she added and pulled out a letter from the pocket of her cloak.

Jon had yet to decide what to make of Rhaenys’ actions, but to hear this soften his stance towards her.

“Of course,” he replied and leaned closer to place a kiss on her cheek. Then he picked the letter from her hand. ”But first you need to rest, sister.”

“But…,” Sansa wanted to protest, but Ser Barristan added his voice.

“You should listen, my Lady. You endured the travel admirably, but you look rather pale around
the face.”

“Ser Barristan speaks true,” Lady Stark added and graced the elderly knight with a smile. "I don’t know how I can thank you for bringing my daughter home.”

A hint of a smile hushed over Ser Barristan’s lips and he lowered his head.

“It was no bother,” he assured her, his gaze flickering back to Jon. He knew what the elderly knight was searching for. He was searching for his father, Prince Rhaegar.

Jon swallowed hard and felt as if he lost his ability to speak, but Robb came to his rescue.

“Ser Barristan,” Robb addressed the elderly man."I think we should speak alone. There is much we need to talk about.”

“It would be a pleasure,” Ser Barristan replied, his gaze still resting on Jon.

_Did he find what he is searching for_, he wondered and exhaled deeply.

Robb chose his grandfather’s solar for their talk. It was a spacious room, draped with rich tapestries and trophies of hunt. Shortly after, a servant girl joined them with a flagon of wine and candles.

Robb lightened the candles while Jon was reading Rhaenys’ letter for the third time. It was nothing more than a few lines, but it confirmed what he already knew.

Rhaenys revealed the truth to keep Robb away from Stannis Baratheon. She even apologized, but that didn’t justify her actions.

They have yet to hear news of Lord Stark and Jon couldn’t help but to fear the worst.

“Princess Rhaenys’ letter doesn’t bring you much pleasure, does it?” Ser Barristan asked.

He nodded his head and folded the piece of paper.

“She explains her reasons. She also offers to legitimize me and install me as her heir. She didn’t say it openly, but I think she wants me to bring the Riverlands and North to her cause.”

“I agree with your assessment,” Ser Barristan added and brought the cup to his lips, his eyes flickering to Robb. ”But I doubt your Lords will be satisfied with this, will they?”

Robb nodded his head in agreement.

“Not as long as my Lord Father’s fate remains unknown. And her offer of legitimization is not necessary. Jon is no bastard…Prince Rhaegar apparently wed my Aunt Lyanna Stark.”

Ser Barristan nearly choked on his cup of wine.

“He wed her?” the elderly knight asked and put the goblet down. ”Are you sure? Do you have proof for this?”

Again Jon felt as if he lost his ability to speak.

_What is happening to me? Am I turning into a dimwit?_

“We have the word of Howland Reed and Prince Rhaegar’s. My Father told us that he found my
Aunt Lyanna in a tower guarded by Ser Gerold Hightower, Ser Oswell Whent and Ser Arthur Dayne. He and my father’s companions killed them and found my Aunt in a bed of blood. She asked my father to protect Jon and thus he named him his bastard,” Robb answered for him.

Ser Barristan didn’t speak for a long time, his hand stroking over his silver beard.

Then he exhaled deeply and poured himself another cup of wine.

He drank deeply, his blue eyes wet with tears.

“I should have been there with them, but it seems Prince Rhaegar didn’t trust me with his secret. Deep down I always knew that he didn’t rape Lady Lyanna, but this…I didn’t expect this. I bent the knee to King Robert…,” he continued in a trembling voice and fell silent.

Jon was surprised to see his tears and he felt the urge to comfort him.

“I am sure my father had good reasons for his actions, but I doubt it had anything to do with his lack of trust in your abilities. And I don’t fault you for wanting to save our life. Most men want to keep their heads and there is nothing wrong with that.”

“I thank you,” Ser Barristan replied at last, a warm smile curling on his lips. "I don’t know what to say."

“We have to thank you, Ser Barristan. You brought Sansa home,” Jon returned and graced him with a smile. "Is it true what Sansa said? Was all this Rhaenys’ idea?"

“Indeed,” Ser Barristan confirmed. ”Princess Rhaenys tasked me personally to accompany Lady Sansa here. I agreed, because I wanted to meet you. Now I am glad I came here.”

“Are you?” Jon asked, unsure what to make of his words.

“Of course,” Ser Barristan assured him and bobbed his head enthusiastically. "But there is something that confuses me. Why is Princess Rhaenys not aware of the truth?"

Fresh guilt washed over him.

“It was my fault. I didn’t tell her, because I thought the truth might upset her. I never had any intention to stake a claim and thought it unimportant. I didn’t know what she was planning to do. Now I regret that I didn’t tell her. Maybe she wouldn’t…,” he continued, but Ser Barristan’s shaking head silenced him.

“The Princess Rhaenys despised her husband and I do understand her reasons…the boy was of vicious character.”

“I know that,” Jon replied.”Daenerys told me that he mistreated Rhaenys, but…she still sold out Lord Stark. Tell me…Do you think she will win this struggle on her own?”

“I don’t know. Time will tell, but I do know one thing…that your claim surpasses hers.”

Jon frowned and sighed deeply.

“Maybe among our allies, but the Dornish and the Tyrells won’t accept me. I also don’t have any intention to wage war against my own sister. What she did was wrong, but I owe her greatly and hold affection for her.”

“You owe her nothing!” Robb snapped angrily and rose to his feet. Jon was momentarily perplexed
by her brother’s outburst. "She started a war to satisfy her need for revenge. Her actions endangered my Lord Father. I care not for her excuses.”

“But was she wrong?” Jon asked him. "Your Lords would have expected you to support Stannis.”

“Maybe,” Robb admitted and frowned. "But that doesn’t mean I would have supported him. I hardly know him. I would have preferred to support you…something I am still prepared to do.”

“And that is why I owe her. She gave me Daenerys and I refrained from telling her the truth. She might have entrusted me with her plans had I told her the truth…,” he trailed off.

It was a knock on the door that interrupted their exchange.

It was Sansa, who entered the room with a hesitant smile. She had changed her navy blue dress to a green one.

“T think I feel better,” she declared and dropped a curtsy. "May we speak now?”

“Of course,” Robb replied and pulled out a chair for Sansa. "Come here, sister. Do you care for wine?"

“No thank you,” she replied, a confused expression showing over her face as Ser Barristan rose to his feet.

“The wine made me tired,” he explained and lowered his head. "We should continue our conversation tomorrow.”

“It would be my pleasure,” Jon assured him politely. "Rest well, Ser Barristan.”

“I hope he didn’t leave because of me,” Sansa remarked worriedly and folded her hands in her lap. "I also hoped to meet the Blackfish and Uncle Edmure.”

“The Blackfish went to secure the borders and Lord Edmure is taking in the damage caused by the war. I don’t know if you heard about it, but we slew the Mountain and long after Harrenhall was abandoned. Tywin Lannister called the majority of his troops to King’s Landing,” Robb explained.

“But I doubt you came here to hear about the war, sister,” Jon added with a hesitant smile. "I know it is much to ask, but I hoped you would be able tell me about Rhaenys… and I don’t mean state of her armies. How is Rhaenys? Is she well?"

“I am not sure,” Sansa replied sadly. "I hardly know her…it is hard for me to describe it, but I think she was conflicted about her actions. I don’ know her very well, but I don’t think she wanted to harm father. I think she acted out of desperation. It is not much, but that is all I know.”

Jon leaned over and squeezed her hand.

“Don’t fret about it, sister. You did your best. Now go and rest. You need your sleep.”

Jon didn’t sleep that night. He dreamed that he was a wolf and buried his sharp teeth in a young stag. When he woke the taste of blood lingered in her mouth.

It was not the first time. Whenever he allowed Ghost to run free he woke with the taste of blood in his mouth.

Disoriented, he pulled on his boots and donned his cloak. The morning air was cool and the sun was barely visible on the distant horizon. The gates stood open and the guards greeted him as he
The sudden appearance of his sister Sansa was enough to wake him completely. He blinked once, twice and then a third time. She was really here.

“What are you doing here in company of the guards?” he asked her. She looked still pale, a warm pelt draped over her shoulders.

“I apologize,” she muttered. ”But I had a silly dream about Lady…that is why I came here. It felt so real. Nothing happened…the guards were kind enough to keep me company.”

Jon frowned, unable to make sense of her words.

“I don’t understand…Lady…,” he began, but Sansa explained what she meant.

“Rhaenys and I set her free to protect her from the Queen. She should be here in the Riverlands…I thought she might come home. It seems I was wrong. I should go back.”

Jon wanted to agree with her, but her sad look changed his mind.

“Sansa…wait,” he said and exhaled deeply. ”I need to find Ghost. Would you care to join me?”

She beamed.

“Nothing would please me more, brother.”

Brother, he thought and felt a swell of happiness wash over him. She never called me that before. What happened to her?

He couldn’t help, but to smile.

“Then come. We need to return before the whole castle wakes.”

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In hurry they saddled two horses and set out. The air was still chilly, but it was pleasantly warm compared to the North.

They spoke little, but that was no surprise. They tried to find Ghost.

Now and then Jon stopped and called out his name, but it was no use. Even after hours they found no trace of his wolf.

“Maybe he has already returned to Riverrun. He knows that the leftovers are waiting for him.”

“I suppose you are right,” he explained and jerked his head at his bandaged arm.”Besides, the Maester will have a fit once he realizes that I am gone. I am supposed to keep to bed.”

Sansa gave him a disapproving look, though the smile curling on her lips told him that she was not really upset.

“Then let us return or Robb will be angry with me.”

“As you say,” he replied and pulled on the reins of his horse. He was about to wheel his horse around when he heard it. It sounded like the growling of an animal.
“Did you hear that?” Sansa asked and smiled. "It seems we found Ghost.”

“It seems so,” he replied and whistled repeatedly.

Then he heard another growl, different like the first one; softer and gentler.

More than one wolf lingers here, Jon realized and grabbed for the pommel of his sword as he heard the rustling of the underwood.

Jon was about to free his blade when he spotted a pair of familiar ruby eyes.

“Ghost!” he exclaimed and grinned. "Come here boy!"

His wolf obeyed without question, but he was not alone. There was another wolf.

He had soft grey fur. Yet the wolf’s golden eyes were not fixed at Jon, but at Sansa.

“Lady!” Sansa exclaimed and nearly fell from her horse as she climbed from her saddle. "Lady!"

Quickly, Sansa bridged the distance and fell to her knees. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she touched the wolf’s neck. Jon felt a hint of apprehension, but when the wolf started to nuzzle Sansa’s neck he knew that everything would be alright.

They were in exceptional good spirits when they returned, but their smiles died when they found the castle overrun by Mallister men.

Lord Mallister left barely a week ago, Jon recalled. Something is amiss.

“Jon!” Robb’s voice greeted him across the bustling courtyard. "Jon!"

Yet it was not his brother’s appearance that made him stop in his tracks.

The man standing next to Robb should be dead. Lord Stark was a little pale around the face, but he was certainly no ghost.

“Father!” Sansa Stark exclaimed and a moment later she was in his arms. "Father!"

Jon was unable to form a sentence. He only smiled.

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Chapter End Notes

Next: Daenerys
Daenerys

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Daenerys

Daenerys shivered when she heard the clinking of steel. Somewhere off in the distance she heard the cries of men. She felt the urge to remain in the burned tower, but the cold was almost unbearable.

Trembling, she made her way down the steps. They were black like coal, but the walls of the tower were still intact. She held the dragons close, trying to block out the battle sounds.

*I only need something to dress*, she thought and shivered again. *Then I will flee through the postern gate.*

She found no one blocking her way as she stepped into the dark corridor below. She had no candle, but she knew the way. She came here often enough to recall the way.

Yet she couldn’t deny that the darkness frightened her. She wished for a torch, something to lighten the darkness.

As if able to read her mind one of the dragons started to throw small plumes of smoke in the air. Sadly, they were still too young to produce flames.

Thus she continued her way through the darkness and slipped down another staircase. There sprawled on the steps she found a dead servant girl. Her back was turned to Daenerys and the blood splattered on the ground was already dry.

The sweet smell made her want to retch, but her stomach was empty. As swiftly as possible, they slipped down another corridor and climbed another pair of steps. Her breathing was labored when she arrived at the top. From there it was not far to her chambers and she was glad to find it whole. Carefully, she placed the dragons on the bed and went to retrieve a simple wool dress and one of her warmer cloaks. The dragons started to shriek loudly as she pulled on the dress and cloak. At last she put on a pair of stockings and her old riding boots. To cover her burned-off hair she pulled up the hood of her cloak. Everything looked mismatched and out of place, but she had other things to worry.

*I need to get away*, she knew and wished she still had her dagger. *I need to go to Castle Cerwyn.*

Again the dragons shrieked and she couldn’t help but to smile.

“I can’t carry you both when I am riding,” she told them and crawled under the bed to search for her bag.

“I know you will hate this, but one of you needs to go in there,” she explained and picked up the pale-colored dragon. He was calmer and didn’t protest when she placed him in the bag. The other dragon she carried on her shoulder, his hot scales digging into her skin as they rushed down the stairs.

Every now and then she stopped, watching out for potential enemies ahead.
Yet she only found death. Everywhere she looked the sweet smell of death filled her nostrils.

Outside she still heard the fighting and the cries of men. The sounds made her shudder and it took all her courage to step outside

*Please, she prayed to all the gods and new, Let me get away.*

Exhaling deeply, she wandered through the darkness, trying to calm her dragon. One loud shriek and it could be over.

Yet her body betrayed her.

Her heart felt as if it wanted to jump out of her chest.

Slowly, she walked along the wall, the darkness her only protection. Arriving at the end of the wall, she found the courtyard, littered with dead corpses.

The sight startled her. She recognized the Stark livery, but the majority of the men were Bolton men, easily discernible by their pink cloaks. There were other men, garbed in the livery of House Glover and Cerwyn.

How did they get here?

She closed her eyes and listened to the distant sounds of the battle.

The battle was beyond the gates.

*I matters not,* she thought and gathered her courage. *I need to get to the stables.*

Thus she brushed her fear away and stumbled over the dead men, towards the stables.

Relief washed over her when she found most of the horses alive. The bastard of Bolton didn’t have the time to burn the castle.

*I burned,* she recalled and retrieved a saddle. Yet the dragons started to fuss and she needed a moment to calm them.

She put the first saddle on the first horse. Yet the change of transport upset the dragons and they started to shriek.

“Be quiet!” she whispered, but it was no use. *I need to go,* she knew and kicked her heels in the sides of her horse. She had barely made it out of the stables, when the black dragon hopped from her shoulder and tried to fly. He didn’t get far and dropped on the ground like a stone. He whimpered in pain and Daenerys stopped her horse at once.

“Be quiet!” she whispered as she picked the dragon from the ground. ”Please be quiet!”

Yet it was already too late. She spotted the men from afar. There was no way of escape. Not this time.

Daenerys gritted her teeth and clutched the dragon to her chest as the men approached. They carried torches and bows, but none of them shot her down.

“Who are you?” one of them asked, his voice strangely familiar, but in her fear she was unable to place it.”Friend or foe?”
“Friend,” she replied, her voice strained and rough from the lack of use. ”Please…I mean no harm.”

“Gods…it can’t be true!” the man gasped. Quickly, he demanded a torch and held it to her face.

Finally, she was able to see him. It was a familiar face, but she was unable to recall his name.

“It is me…,” the young man said and smiled.”Cley Cerwyn.”

She gasped and felt as if a heavy weight had dropped from her shoulders.

“It is me…Daenerys,” she replied. ”I remember your face…you attended my wedding.”

Then she laughed and nearly stumbled over her own feet.

“Who called you here?” she asked, but the dragon in her arms made his presence known.

Cerwyn gasped and backed away. He nearly stumbled to the ground and his men stared at her in wide eyes.

“Please…the dragon is harmless,” she assured them, her tears forgotten. ”I promise.”

“Is …is that…Is that a dragon?” Cley Cerwyn stuttered as if she he didn’t even hear what she just said.

“Aye,” she confirmed and nodded her head. ”I have two of them. I will explain everything to you if you let me, but we can’t stay here. The Bolts took the castle.”

“The Bolts fled the castle,” one of Lord Cerwyn’s men answered. ”Our men are fighting the last remnants in Wintertown. It will soon be over, my Lady.”

“But how….,” she stuttered unbelievingly and searched Cley Cerwyn’s face. ”How did you find out that Winterfell is under attack?”

He was still pale, but he quickly regained his composure.

“It is complicated. I think it is best if you hear the story from Theon Greyjoy’s mouth.”

Daenerys shook her head in disbelief.

“Theon is a traitor….,” she began, but Cley Cerwyn cut her off.

“No…he fought with us. As I said…it is complicated. Please come with me, my Lady. I am sure the others will be relieved to see you. We thought the bastard of Bolton carried you off.”

“The bastard of Bolton is dead,” she replied coldly and wanted to hear no more. ”Please lead me to Theon Greyjoy.”

...

The Great Hall was filled to the brim. Half-dead man and wounded littered the ground. Among them were servants, guards, Lord Cerwyn’s men and men garbed in Glover livery.

Yet they didn’t linger for long. Cley Cerwyn led her to the guesthouse, which was heavily guarded by a good hundred men armed with spears and swords.
“I found Princess Daenerys,” Cley Cerwyn explained to the guardsmen and pointed at her. At once they parted and they were allowed to enter.

Daenerys was barely able to take in her surroundings. A familiar voice caught her attention.

“Daenerys!” Arya Stark shouted and rushed down the corridor. Daenerys hardly recognized her. She was dressed like a boy and her untidy brown hair was not longer than a small finger. “You are alive!”

Then she stopped in her tracks, her eyes wide in shock as they darted to the dragons.

“What is that?”

“A dragon,” she explained and smoothed her hand over the dragon’s head. “The dragon won’t harm you.”

Arya grinned and clapped her hands together.

“The eggs…they finally hatched!”

“Aye,” she replied tiredly. She longed for sleep, but there was so much to do.

She opened her mouth to speak again, but someone interrupted their exchange.

“Gods be good!” Theon Greyjoy shrieked. Daenerys hardly recognized him, because he was dressed in Glover livery. "What the fuck is that?"

“Are you stupid?” Arya asked teasingly. "That is a dragon…," she added and pointed at the bag slung over her shoulder. "And look…there is another one."

“Aye,” Daenerys replied for the hundred time. "These are dragons…Why did you return to Winterfell?"

Theon swallowed hard and tried to regain his composure.

“It is a rather long tale, but know this…I am your ally. We came here to save Winterfell and to take revenge on the Bolton men. They butchered our men. Believe me or not, but Lady Ysilla and Bran will confirm it to you.”

“It is true!” Arya added her voice and pulled on her arm.”Bran knew that they were coming and we went down to the crypts to hide. Lady Ysilla…her water broke and Meera Reed delivered her baby. Rickon wailed more than Lady Ysilla.”

“The Seven be blessed,” Daenerys whispered and turned to look at Arya. ”Where is Lady Ysilla? Is she well?”

“I suppose,” Arya said and frowned. "It looked rather painful.”

“She is well,” Theon assured her quickly. ”Lord Cerwyn called for his Maester. He should join us soon. I am sure he will be able to take care of her. She is upstairs…I think it is best if you join her. You look tired and we can speak later.”

“Of course,” Daenerys replied and relaxed. ”But I can’t take the dragon with me. Surely, that would be too much for her rattled nerves. Is there an empty room…a place where I could place them?”
“There is an empty chamber,” Arya confirmed quickly. “Come along.”

The dragons were as tired as her and didn’t even fuss when she placed them in the empty chamber.

They will need food, she knew and tried recall what dragons eat. She read several books about this topic, but her head hurt and she needed to make sure that Lady Ysilla was well, before she could allow herself to rest.

“Daenerys…,” Lady Ysilla greeted her in a whispering voice. She looked incredible pale, but the smile on her lips was true. ”The Seven be blessed…we thought you dead.”

“It told you…Bran knew that she would return,” Arya added proudly.

“I know…I know…,” Lady Ysilla whispered and put a finger on her mouth. ”Be quiet or you will wake your nephew Edric.”

Instantly, Arya grew silent and gave Lady Ysilla an apologetic look.

Daenerys couldn’t help but to smile as she regarded the babe.

He was rather small, but that was to be expected. He came a bit early, but he looked otherwise healthy.

“Edric?” she asked and graced Lady Ysilla with a trembling smile. ”Jon was sure you would name him Eddard…”

Lady Ysilla chuckled tiredly and shook her head.

“Robb told me that his Lord Father is not very fond of his name. That is why he prefers to be called “Ned”. It was supposedly Robb’s Aunt Lady Lyanna who gave him this nickname. Edric sounds similar enough.”

…”

Chapter End Notes

Next: Rhaenys
Rhaenys

Rhaenys watched in silence as the men continued to build a pyre for her beloved husband. The thought of burning Willas made her heart clench, but he deserved a burial worthy of a Targaryen King.

*It was my fault,* she knew and brushed away her tears. *I should have told Mace Tyrell to fuck himself.*

Now it was too late to change the past.

*I won’t make the same mistake again.*

The Queen of Thorns’ announced her arrival and Rhaenys knew what she had to do. It would be a risky gamble, but the only way to defeat both the Lannisters and Stannis Baratheon.

*I will make them pay,* she swore to herself and stepped back in her tent. Inside she found her Uncle Oberyn, his expression unnaturally serious.

“They are nearly finished,” she remarked in a quiet voice and made her to the table where she had placed her dragon egg. Again she smoothed her hands over the rough surface and felt the heat touching her bare skin.

*Wake the dragon,* her Father had told her. *Wake the dragon.*

“I know you are determined to stay, niece,” her Uncle Oberyn said and rose to his feet. “But I still think it would be best for you to travel to Dorne. You are with child…you need be protected.”

She knew he meant well, but the vision of her father changed everything. It felt so real.

“I am your Queen,” she told replied softly and squeezed his hand. “Or have you forgotten, Uncle?”

He smiled sadly and touched her cheek.

“I have not forgotten, but your safety is of utmost importance. I failed Elia…I won’t fail you too, Rhaenys.”

“There is the risk that I die in child birth or that my child will be a girl. I need to make sure that the crown is given to someone who can bring stability to the realm. My personal wishes and the wishes of Dorne are of no importance in this matter. That is why I want your approval…I want to name Jon my heir.”

Her Uncle stared at her in disbelief and dropped his hand.

“The bastard…you want to name Lyanna’s Stark’s bastard son your heir?”

“Bastard or not,” she insisted and met her Uncle’s gaze. “The boy is my brother…a Targaryen. He is a good person and I trust him.”

“Maybe he was trying to fool you with his false kindness,” her Uncle insisted stubbornly. “The boy was the reason your mother died. You owe him nothing.”
“Tywin Lannister’s greed for power was the reason my mother died. Jon avenged her by killing the Mountain. I am not speaking to you as your niece, but as your Queen. I expect you to give up your grudge and forgive my brother. My Mother was a Queen and she wouldn’t have resented my brother for the mistakes of my father. She stood above such matters and you should as well. All I wanted was to remove the Lannisters from power and to marry Willas. The crown itself was only a tool and nothing more. Now tell me…Will you accept my decision?”

Her Uncle sighed deeply and stared at her for a long time, before he finally answered.

“I don’t understand,” he said at last and swallowed hard. ”I fear I don’t understand you at all.”

“Still,” she insisted determinedly. ”This is my wish.”

Her Uncle gave a hesitant nod.

“I won’t disobey your command,” he grumbled his agreement. ”Is there anything else I can do?”

“Yes,” she confirmed. “I want you to meet Lady Olenna along the way. Explain to her what happened and show her that the Dornish and the Tyrells are still allies.”

He frowned, but lowered his head in acceptance.

“I will do as you ask, niece.”

She graced him with a sweet smile and leaned closer to place a kiss on his cheek. At least we had a chance to say goodbye, Uncle.

“Thank you.”

…

Rhaenys sent everyone away, but Loras and Margaery. Both of them wore black. Margaery a simple black dress and Loras a flowing black cloak.

Margaery gave her a helpless look as Rhaenys gaze fell on the pyre. What she was planning to do was madness, but whenever she felt doubt she was reminded of her father’s words.

It is time to wake the dragon, she knew and pulled off her cloak, before handing the garment to Margaery. In her other hand she held her egg that seemed to pulse with life. It is time.

“Hand me the torch!” she told Loras, who suddenly appeared much younger than his years. His eyes were red-rimmed and his hand trembled as he handed her the torch.

Rhaenys gave him a warm smile.

“I thank you,” she added gently and leaned closer to place a kiss on his cheek. ”For everything.”

Then she shifted her attention to Margaery.

The girl swallowed hard and Rhaenys leaned closer to place a kiss on her cheek.

“It will soon be over,” she assured her and turned around to move towards the pyre.

People will call me the next Aerion, she mused and touched the pyre with her burning torch.
The proved hungry and feasted on the wood, swallowing up her heart. All her life she had fought for the crown and now she felt only emptiness.

Higher and higher the flames rose and lightened the darkness around her. The egg in her hand pulsed with life.

She knew what she had to do, but she felt also fear. She swallowed hard and took another glimpse at the flames.

They crackled loudly. It sounded as if they were calling for her, beckoning her in their warm embrace.

*It is time*, she thought and stepped towards the flames. She heard Margaerys’ distant cry, but it was already too late.

She expected pain, but she only felt heat. Sweat was rolling down her face as the flames danced over her sin. The fire devoured her dress, feasted on her hair and tickled her skin.

*Wake the dragon*, the cackling flames seemed to whisper. *Wake the dragon.*

By now she had shed her fear and stepped further into the flames. Her heart was pounding in her chest and the egg in her hands pulsed.

*It is alive,* she knew with certainty and the flames washed over her body like a strong current. *Alive.*

Her heart skipped a beat when she heard it. It was a loud cracking sound that chased away the whispering voices and her lingering consciousness.

She was naked when she woke. Her eyes hurt, but she was still alive.

She shouldn’t be here, but above her head spread a starry night sky.

It was a strange chirping sound that roused her out of her lethargic state. She snapped her head aground and noticed a small creature, crawling up her arm.

Her heart stopped.

It was a dragon, his hot breath touching her skin. He was so small, not bigger than a bird.

Tears of relief filled her eyes.

*I woke the dragon,* she wanted to shout, but her mouth felt too dry from the smoke. *Can you see me, father?*

Slowly, she rose to her feet and stumbled through the plume of smoke.

The smell of the surrounding woods filled her nostrils as she left the flames behind her.

She shuddered as the icy night air touched her skin.

“Rhaenys! Rhaenys!” she heard Margaerys’ shrill cry. She had barely turned around when someone threw a cloak over shoulders. In the last managed to clutch the dragon to her chest.

It was Loras who stared back at her with wide eyes. Margaery was less hesitant and was quickly at her side.
Tears ran down Margaery’s face as she took in Rhaenys’s appearance until she noticed the creature.

“Gods!” Margaery gasped and backed away. “What is that?”

“A dragon,” Loras stuttered, his face pale as ash. It looked as if all blood had left his pretty face. ”A dragon.”

…

The Queen of Throns arrived with dawn. Rhaenys donned a black dress. Her hair was gone, but that mattered little when she thought of her dragon.

She had yet to choose a name, but that didn’t lessen her affection for the small creature.

By now everyone knew about it. She felt their burning looks as she stepped forward to greet the Queen of Thorns.

Someone attempted to help the elderly woman from the wheelhouse, but she nearly broke her crutch over the boy’s head.

“I am old, but not helpless!” she snapped sourly. Like Margaery she was dressed in black silk, but her golden eyes were as sharp as ever.

Even grief was unable to break the Queen of Thorns.

“I wish the circumstances of our reunion were better,” Rhaenys declared and lowered her head in greeting. ”But there is much we need to talk about.”

The Queen of Thorn’s golden eyes widened when she noticed the dragon. A brief moment of silence passed and the expression of surprise was gone from her face.

“I don’t even want to know!” she snapped quickly and jerked her head at Uncle Oberyn, who gasped when he noticed the dragon. She saw that he wanted to speak, but the Queen of Thorns gave him no opportunity. ”Is it true? You are with child?”

“It is true,” she confirmed and smoothed her hand over her flat stomach. She feared that the fire might have harmed the child, but the Maester gave her the assurance she needed. ”I carry Willas’ child.”

The Queen of Thorns smiled sadly.

”Not once did the boy disappoint me. Sometimes I loved him more than my own son. We will make sure that his death was not in vain.”

“I hope so,” Rhaenys answered quietly and squeezed the Lady’s hand. Showing weakness was not something the Queen of Thorns allowed herself, but Rhaenys noticed her trembling hand. “I have an idea.”

The Queen of Thorns gave her an expectant look.

“Speak and I will listen, child.”

Rhaenys smiled wryly.

Then she dropped to her knees and clutched the dragon to her chest.
“I am your prisoner, my Lady.”

Even the all-knowing Queen of Thorns seemed confused.

“My prisoner?” she asked disbelievingly. "Have you gone mad, child?"

Rhaenys shook her head and met her gaze.

“No, but it is time to give Tywin Lannister a taste of his own medicine…”

I am going to fulfill the Red Witch’s prophecy.

…
Daenerys

Daenerys

Daenerys woke when she heard the chirping of the dragons. Slowly, she straightened herself and rubbed her eyes. She still felt exhausted, but the few hours of sleep helped to clear her mind.

Golden light was falling through the shutters. It was early in the morning.

Again one of the dragons chirped. It was the black one, who built his lair beneath an armchair. He flapped his wings, trying to fly.

The pale dragon was different. He watched his brother in silence, his spiky tail curled around his slender body.

Daenerys chuckled when the black one made another attempt to fly. Again he failed and whimpered painfully when he hit the floor.

“Careful, sweetling!” she chided and climbed out of bed. The stone floor beneath her feet felt freezing cold and thus she tiptoed to the dragon’s side. Ever carefully, she picked the dragon from the ground and put him on the soft bed. He seemed to appreciate her gesture, for he snuggled his head against her hand and chirped.

“You have to be more careful,” she whispered and jerked her head at the pale one. The black dragon’s antics had roused him from his sleeping place and he was trying to get to her.

“Wait, I will help you,” she declared quickly and leaned down to pick him up. He gave a soft chirp and hopped on her arm, crawling all the way up to her shoulder.

Daenerys chuckled in delight and opened her mouth to speak, but a knock stopped her.

“Daenerys,” Arya greeted her as she poked her head through the open door. She smiled when she noticed Daenerys. “Oh, you are awake.”

“Aye,” Daenerys replied and climbed out of bed. By the time she had pulled a robe over her shoulders, she realized that Arya wasn’t alone.

Rickon was also there, but didn’t even greet her. He was too fascinated by the dragons.

Lady Ysilla even brought her son. This surprised Daenerys, because this was the Lady’s first encounter with the dragons.

The Lady seemed to sense her confusion and flashed Daenerys a reassuring smile.

“Arya told me about the dragons,” the Lady explained and sat down in a nearby chair. ”Did we wake you?”

Daenerys felt only relief and waved with her hand.

“I am well-rested,” she lied and returned Lady Ysilla’s smile. ”I was just surprised by your lack of fear. Even Theon was afraid when he first laid eyes on the dragons.”

The Lady chuckled and rocked her sleeping son.
“I got used to Greywind. The dragons are quite adorable compared to my husband’s mighty direwolf.”

The black dragon chirped as if to voice his protest.

Arya grinned. Rickon laughed as well, his eyes glued at the black dragon.

“Do you want to touch him?” Daenerys asked.

“Can they burn me?” Rickon asked in return.

“Oh, no,” Daenerys assured him gently and patted his curly head. “They can barely fly.”

Rickon gave her a disbelieving look.

“But they are dragons!”

They all laughed and Arya rolled her eyes and placed the small basket she head carried in her arms on the floor. Then she leaned over and touched the dragon’s head.

“See, I am still alive,” she declared proudly. “They are babies. Just like you.”

“I am no baby!” Rickon exclaimed and leaned over to touch the dragon’s head. The dragon seemed to like it and rubbed his head against Rickon’s hand. “Look! I am no baby!”

“We saw it, little lord,” Lady Ysilla replied and jerked her head at Arya’s basket. “Did you forget about our purpose here, Arya?”

“Oh, yes!” the Arya exclaimed. Then she gave Daenerys an apologetic smile and picked the basket from the ground. “We brought food for the dragons.”

Daenerys felt a hint of warmth washing over her as she noticed the thinly-cut meat.

“I am grateful,” she replied and picked a piece of meat from the basket. It was raw and bloody, but fresh enough.

Carefully, she dangled the piece of meat before the pale dragon’s head. He eyed it curiously and even sniffed at it, but refused to eat.

Arya wrinkled her brows in confusion.

“Why won’t the dragon eat?”

Daenerys was also confused.

“I don’t know,” she admitted honestly. “Dragons are supposed to like meat.”

“The meat is bloody…it’s smells icky!” Rickon remarked and wrinkled his nose in disgust. “You should roast it with onions like father likes it.”

“Roast …roast,” she muttered and moved towards the heart. Rickon gave her an idea. “Of course.”

She picked up the poker and stuck several pieces of meat on it. Then she held it in the fire until it was properly roasted.

“And you really think this is going to help?” Arya asked skeptically.
“It is worth a try,” Daenerys replied and picked the meat from the poker. Then she made her second attempt to feed the dragons.

The black dragon showed no hesitation. He snapped the animal right out of her hand and devoured it greedily.

Arya gasped and Lady Ysilla chuckled. Rickon was very proud and stuck out his tongue at Arya.

“Whatever, but you are still a baby,” Arya mumbled and crossed her arms in front of her.

Daenerys felt only relief and they spent the rest next hour feeding the dragons.

“You also need to eat,” Lady Ysilla reminded her. ”Lord Greyjoy is breaking his fast and told me to send you to him.”

Daenerys nodded her head in understanding. She was hungry and she wanted to speak with Theon.

“Sure, I will speak to him,” she confirmed and turned back to Arya. ”By the way…Where is Bran? And the Reed siblings…Are they well?”

Arya frowned.

“They are well, but Bran is acting strangely.”

Daenerys found Theon alone. He wore a black cloak, embellished with the golden kraken of House Greyjoy.

His men also resided in the castle and she couldn’t help but to notice the tension between them and Cley Cerwyn’s men. Theon helped them to defeat the Boltons, but the Ironborn were still the enemy.

“You look much better,” he remarked when he laid eyes on her and ushered her to a nearby table, where she found bowl of broth and bread waiting for her. ”But you need to eat…given your delicate state.”

*I am not delicate, she wanted to return, but stopped herself. And Cley Cerwyn’s Maester assured me that the little dragon is well.*

“I thank you for your concern,” she replied gratefully, though she didn’t know what to make Theon Greyjoy’s change of character. Gone was his smug smile. He whole demeanor could even be described as serious. ”I am ravenous.”

He smiled weakly and even pulled out the chair for her.

She settled down and Theon took the opposing seat.

The smell of the warm broth made her mouth water, but she still ate slowly and mindfully.

“Now tell me...,” Theon said after a moment of silence had passed between them. ”Where have you been hiding? We couldn’t find you…I thought you were carried off by the Bastard of Bolton.”

She took a bite from the bread and washed it down with a hearty gulp from the cup of milk.

She decided to get straight to the point. There was no point in sugar coating the event.
“The Bastard of Bolton is dead,” she replied and met his gaze. ”I killed him… I burned him and his friends… the Library Tower is gone… all those precious books were destroyed because of me.”

“Who cares about these old books” Theon muttered in disbelief and shrugged his shoulders. “Important is that you are alive.”

Then he paused and his eyes wandered to her covered head.

“And your hair…,” he said and met her gaze. ”I don’t know how to make sense of all this. How did you even get out of there? I saw the tower, but there is nothing left, but ashes.”

I didn’t burn, she wanted to tell him, but she doubted he would believe her. He would think me mad.

“It is as you said,” she replied. “What matters is that I am alive. I will tell Jon and Robb that you saved us. I promise… no harm shall come to you or your men.”

Theon gave her a doubtful look.

“Robb might understand, but not his Lords. My sister took Deepwood Motte and my Uncle Victarion holds Moat Cailin. The Starks were kind to me, but this is not my home. I will leave tomorrow to join my sister and Uncle.”

Daenerys was alarmed by his words.

“But this would only worsen your position,” she countered, but Theon’s determined expression told her that he had no intention to change his plans.

“Not if I made clear that we are allies of the North,” Theon explained. ”It was my foolish father who ordered my people to attack the North. Tywin Lannister supposedly offered him a great amount of gold for delivering Eddard Stark’s children and Princess Daenerys Targaryen. My sister and I intend to depose my father… and then we will attack the Westerlands. This should drive home that we are not enemies of the North.”

“Clever,” she complimented. ”But how do you intend to depose your father? Do you intend to kill him?”

“The Ironborn have other ways,” Theon explained and frowned. ”But my real concern is Robb and to wider extent Jon. He hates me and you know how stubborn he can be.”

Daenerys couldn’t help but to agree. Jon could be very stubborn.

“Don’t fret about Robb and Jon,” she assured him again. ”I still think you should stay, but I can see how determined you are to pursue this course of action. I won’t stand in your way.”

Relief washed over his face and a familiar smile crossed his lips.

“You called my idea clever…,” he began and rubbed his beard, but Daenerys silenced him with a warning look.

“I was trying to be kind,” she replied and rolled her eyes. ”But don’t get ahead of yourself. I still think you are an ass for tumbling all those girls.”

He chuckled.

“I should have known that my charm wouldn’t work on you. Well, I am sure the ladies of the Iron
Islands will show me more appreciation.”

Daenerys stifled a laugh.

“Dream on.”

…
Jon didn’t know what to thinking of the men seated at the opposing side of the table.

Lord Varys was short, bare-headed man and garbed in a black travelling cloak. Lord Connington was an elderly man, graced with red hair and bright blue eyes. Yet the greatest surprise was the third man.

_Targaryen_, was the first thought that came to his mind when he laid eyes on the young man. His sharp face, lilac eyes and long silver hair marked him as one of his relatives, but only after he had introduced himself did Jon realize who he was.

_Viserys Targaryen_, he knew and took a sip from his cup to calm his nerves. Daenerys hardly spoke of him, but Jon always had the impression that she believed him dead.

And now he was here in company of these strange men.

Especially, the appearance of Lord Connington was a surprise for Ser Barristan. He was one of his father’s friends and supposedly died in exile.

Jon remained hesitant. He doubted their goal was a simple family reunion.

The piercing look Prince Viserys was giving him across the table didn’t help.

“"You travelled a long way, my Prince,” Ser Barristan said and broke the silence that had fallen over them. They were having supper, but to Jon it felt more like a parley.

“I have,” Prince Viserys replied icily and met Ser Barristan’s gaze. ”And I am surprised my niece didn’t kill you for your treachery. The rest of the Kingsguard did their duty, but you are still alive. You bent the knee to the enemy, didn’t you?"

Shame washed over Ser Barristan’s face and he lowered his head.

“I know,” he said admitted in a grave voice. "But I abandoned my old allegiance. Princess Rhaenys pardoned me and tasked me to return Lady Sansa in the hands of her brother. I fulfilled this task … and I am prepared to accept my punishment.”

“Nonsense,” Jon added and exchanged a silent look with Lord Stark. ”No harm will come to you, Ser Barristan.”

Then he shifted his attention back to Prince Viserys.

“You heard what Ser Barristan said. Rhaenys pardoned him and he helped Sansa,” Jon replied sharply. He was Daenerys’ brother, but he had no right to insult Ser Barristan. ”There will be no punishment.”

“He betrayed your father,” Jon Connington added bitterly. ”Arthur Dayne, Oswell Whent and Gerold Hightower died for you and your father while Ser Barristan bent his knee to the Usurper!”

“So did I,” Lord Stark added solemnly. ”But I still protected Jon. Ser Barristan was trying to stay alive. Nobody denies the sacrifice of the Kingsguard, but not every man wants to throw his life
away needlessly. The Mad King was no good master.”

“My father was still the King!” Prince Viserys snarled and slashed his hand on the table. ”Ser Barristan swore a vow to serve till death and he broke that vow!”

“And yet it is my sister Rhaenys who pardoned him. What right do you have to questions her actions? Besides, it is not the blood that gives one a crown, but armies. And Rhaenys has an army. Even I have men ready to support me. What do you have to offer other than crude speech, Uncle?”

Viserys’ lilac eyes were alive with anger.

“And you look more a Stark than my brother’s son,” Viserys snapped back. ”What proof do you have other than the word of traitors? None, I say. You might have fooled my sister, but I am no such fool,” he added and rose to his feet, his face deeply flushed. “I heard enough!”

The last thing they heard was the slamming of the door.

“Forgive him,” Lord Varys tittered softly. To Jon he sounded like a lady, trying to seduce him with sweet words. ” His exile made him bitter. He is no danger to you, your Grace.”

“Your Grace?” Jon asked and wrinkled his brows in confusion.”I am no crowned King.”

“You are Prince Rhaegar’s last living son,” Jon Connington added more calmly, his blue eyes taking in Jon’s appearance. ”Prince Viserys is wrong. You do show some resemblance to Prince Rhaegar…you have his eyes. I apologize for his harsh words, but Queen Rhaella crowned him on the day of her death. He always thought himself the rightful King. The original plan was to wed Princess Rhaenys to Prince Viserys, but all this was foiled when Prince Viserys took another bride.”

“I see,” Jon replied and pondered the man’s words, before continuing to speak. ”My sister is marching towards the capital. The Dornish have every right to hate my existence and I doubt the Reach would give up a chance to place one of their own on the Iron Throne just because of my appearance. Besides, most of the realm thinks me a bastard.”

“That may be so,” Lord Varys answered. ”But you have the North and the Riverlands at your side. We could also try bringing the Vale to our side. You may be a Targaryen, but you once served as Lord Nestor’s squire. Dorne and the Reach are powerful, but they dislike each other. Not to mention, there are quite a lot of people who would dislike the idea of a Tyrell King. You could unite both sides under your banner, your Grace.”

“The Stormlords…,” he began, but Lord Stark cut him off. ”Would rather accept you than a girl who dared to imprison Lord Renly. All this depends of course on the outcome of the battle between Stannis Baratheon, Princess Rhaenys and Tywin Lannister. Only time will tell. I regards to the Vale…I could write to Lord Royce. I heard Cat’s last attempt failed, but Lord Royce is my friend. He would not abandon me, no matter how much Lady Lysa protests.”

Jon was surprised by Lord Stark’s words.

“But Stannis and Renly are King Robert’s brothers… he was once your friend…,” he began, but Lord Stark serious expression silenced him.”Stannis Baratheon is a proud man. He would kill me for my treachery. I fooled is brother. There is no turning back. Promise Renly the Stormlands and he might be prepared to bent the knee and wed Stannis’ daughter to someone loyal to you. This ought to please the Stormlords, though I am not sure if it will be enough. As I said…it depends on the outcome of the next battle.”
“Indeed,” Lord Connington added his voice. "But Prince Viserys remains a problem that needs to be dealt with…the Night’s Watch…,” he began, but Jon wanted to hear none of it. He held no particular attachment to Viserys, but he was still Daenerys brother.

*She would never forgive me*, he knew and shook his head.

“Prince Viserys might change his mind once meets his sister,” Jon replied and furrowed his brows. ”And I never said that I agree with your suggestions. I need time to think.”

“Time is not something we can afford,” Robb added, who had observed their exchange in silence. They had spoken about this topic numerous times, but Jon felt only more confused.

Jon exhaled deeply, but it gave him no relief. He felt as if someone was curling his finger around his neck, trying to strangle him.

“Not much time,” Jon assured Robb. "Give me a day. That is all I ask.”

…

Jon watched the guards through the window. Ghost was not far and sat next to his wooden chair, his ruby eyes observing him with a wondrous look.

Jon sighed deeply and scratched the wolf’s neck.

“Can’t you tell me what to do, boy?”

Ghost cocked his head to the side and yawned. It was not the answer Jon desired to hear.

He never wanted this. For most of his life he wanted nothing more than to carry the name Stark, but then he found out the truth. It was hard enough to make peace with the past, but now they wanted him to go against his own sister.

*Even Lord Stark agrees*, he thought and felt a hint of bitterness stirring inside him. Lord Stark did everything to hide the truth from him. Years of lies stood between them, though Jon still loved him. Jon also doubted Lord Stark would have been prepared to support him if Rhaenys hadn’t revealed his true birth.

*He is doing it to protect his family*, he knew and brushed his hair out of his face.

Suddenly, he heard the creaking of the door. He expected to find Robb, but it was no other than Prince Viserys.

“What are you doing here?” Jon asked and found his blade resting against the hearth. *Too far away. And my arm is still hurt.*

Ghost also made his discomfort known and bared his teeth at the silver-haired man.

“Tell your beast to stop his snarling!” Prince Viserys replied coldly. Jon believed to see a flicker of fear in his lilac eyes, but he had no intention to start a quarrel with Daenerys’ brother. ”You are also quite foolish. Why are there no guards at your door?”

It was a good question.

“I have no need of guards,” Jon answered at last and patted Ghost’s head. "I have Ghost.”

“I see,” Viserys replied and came to stand in front of him. ”A gracious beast, but not comparable to
a dragon. My Lord Father used to show me the dragon skulls in the Red Keep. I knew the name of every single dragon, but that was a long time ago. What you said before is true...I have no army and no dragons. In truth, I am a beggar."

Jon didn’t know what to say.

He was only more confused when Prince Viserys started to laugh.

"I fooled you all, didn’t I?" he asked after he had regained his composure. "I played the role of the Mad Prince well, didn’t I?"

"I don’t understand…," Jon said and met his gaze. He looked almost like a mischievous boy.

"Of course you don’t," Viserys said and jerked his head at the nearby chair. "May I sit down?"

"Please,” Jon answered and nodded his head in agreement. "Sit down."

Thus he sat down and leaned on the table.

"Do you know the play the Mad Prince?" Viserys asked, a smile curling on his lips. "It is a popular play from Braavos. It tells the story of a Prince who finds his father murdered and his mother wed to his Uncle, who also dared to steal his father’s crown. To fool his Uncle, the Prince pretends to be mad and later takes revenge on them. A silly tale, but my wife is quite fond of such plays. Well, I allowed myself to be inspired by this play. I am not mad nor do I hold a grudge against you, nephew."

"But why?" Jon asked. "Why was this mummery necessary?"

"To fool Lord Varys," Viserys explained and craned his neck to look at Jon. "He claims that he is acting for the good of the realm, but all he wants is a puppet...it is his way of taking revenge against the Targaryens. I was supposed to be his puppet, but I rebelled against him when I wed my wife. It was my way to free myself from his web of lies."

"He wants to take revenge?" Jon asked. "Revenge for what?"

"He is a Blackfyre...the last Blackfyre," Prince Viserys replied in a low voice. "He had a sister too...Sarra was her name. She was the lover of his friend...a certain Magister Illyrio. They even had a son, who followed his mother into an early grave. Varys cannot father children of his own. Ruling through a puppet is his only way to take revenge against the Targaryens."

"How do you know all this?" Jon asked skeptically. Maybe that was just another mummery of his.

"My wife...her father knew Magister Illyrio when he was a young man," he explained. "Lord Connington can confirm it to you. He is a bitter man, but not prone to lies. Above all, he loved my brother Rhaegar. He would never dare to harm my brother’s son...," he trailed off and fell silent.

Jon was about to open his mouth when the door opened.

"Jon!" Robb’s anxious voice echoed across the room. "A raven came... from Winterfell," he began, but stopped in his tracks when he saw Prince Viserys.

"What happened?" Jon asked, fear rising up inside him.

"Winterfell was attacked," Robb explained in a breathless voice and handed him the folded letter. "But they are well...thank the gods. Read."
Jon did what Robb asked of him and unfolded the letter. That the letter was written by Daenerys’ hand relieved him greatly.

He read quickly and lifted his head to look at Prince Viserys.

“It seems Daenerys is going to join us soon, Uncle.”

...
Daenerys

They had left Winterfell three weeks ago in company of handful of guards. The crossing of the Neck proved easier than expected and soon they were able to leave the cold winds of the North behind them. All in all, it was a pleasant journey until they reached the Twins.

Daenerys felt great discomfort when setting foot in this grim castle. As expected of them, they paid the toll and explained the purpose of their travel. They had hoped this would help to hasten the proceedings, but in the end they were invited to stay for the night.

Daenerys heard about the Freys through Robb’s letters to Lady Ysilla, but now she understood why said Lady wrinkled her brows when Robb informed them about a possible match between Lord Edmure and a Lady of House Frey. The Crossing was a grizzly place, but the Freys proved even worse. They stared at her constantly, not realizing how uncomfortable it made her.

Yet they could hardly refuse their hospitality and thus they spent the night in the dusty halls of the Frey lords. While the Frey lords proved ghastly, the women were not unpleasant. The majority looked like weasels, but she found no malice in them. One of them, a rather pretty Frey girl named Lady Roslin even made time to befriend her. She showed her the castle and introduced her to her younger sisters. Daenerys also soon found out that this sweet girl was the intended bride for Lord Edmure Tully. Shyly the girl inquired about her future husband, but Daenerys had never met Lord Edmure in person.

Still, Daenerys was more than relieved when they were allowed to leave the Twins behind them. As expected, only Lady Roslin came to see her off.

Only a few days later they reached Seaguard, the Seat of House Mallister. Lord Mallister. Lord Mallister was kind enough to harbor them in their halls and even offered to send guards to accompany them the rest of the way to Riverrun. She refused at first, but the Lord insisted and thus Daenerys felt inclined to agree.

Daenerys soon learned why Lord Mallister was so insistent. Most of the towns they passed were deserted and the fields scorched. The smallfolk informed them with a grim demeanor that this was the work of the Lannisters.

Daenerys had swallowed hard when she heard this, but kept silent. There was nothing she could have said to make it better.

They moved quickly and soon they passed an old ruin called Oldstones. Daenerys didn’t like the place and her dragons seemed to share her feelings. They shrieked all night.

At dawn they moved onwards to Riverrun. A landscape of green hills and lush meadows greeted them along the way, before she was finally able to see castle Riverrun. Its outer walls were made of red sandstone and the castle itself was bordered by two massive rivers, the Tumblestone and the Red Fork.

The dragons started to shriek as they passed the castle gates, where they were greeted by familiar faces.

Robb was there and a man who showed a great resemblance to the heir to Winterfell. He was older
and taller, but it was impossible to ignore.

*This has to be Lord Edmure,* she realized and smiled. *Lady Roslin will be pleased.*

Yet these impressions were forgotten when she spotted Jon.

He looked pale and his bandaged arm bothered her, but the smile curling on his lips washed away all her fears.

“*I thank you all for the warm welcome,*” she declared and flashed them a bright smile.

“*Lord Mallister sent word,*” Jon informed her with a smile and helped her to climb from the saddle. She was thankful for his help, because her growing belly made it hard for her to move. “*We expected your arrival.*”

Then she turned around and the man she believed to be Lord Edmure lowered his head in greeting.

“*It is a pleasure to meet you, Princess Daenerys,*” he said and smiled. “*I am Lord Edmure Tully.*”

Daenerys imitated the gesture and lowered her head.

“The pleasure is mine.”

“We heard about Winterfell,” Robb added and mustered her from head to toe. “*Is it true?*”

“Aye,” she confirmed. “*There is much we need to talk about, but there is another matter I need to address…in private would be best,*” she informed them and called for one of the guardsmen, who had guarded the cart in which she kept the dragons.

Jon gave her a confused look, but didn’t protest.

“I think we can speak later,” Lord Edmure added. “*Lord Stark and my Uncle the Blackfish will join us as well.*”

Only Robb remained, his blue eyes filled with curiosity as she led him to the cart.

“What secrets are you hiding behind this cloth?” he asked her, his voice laced with amusement.

“Dragons,” she informed him plainly and pulled down the cloth. The expression on Robb’s and Jon’s face could only be described as shocked.

“Seven Hells! Robb muttered and moved closer towards the cage. “*How did you manage to hatch them?*”

“Fire and Blood,” she answered and met Jon’s gaze. Then she pulled down her head covering.

Jon paled even more and continued to stare at the dragons in disbelief.

“I put the dragon eggs in brazier,” she explained. “*And I burned Ramsay Snow alive. He was the one who attacked Winterfell, but I already informed you about this in my letter. Maester Luwin is dead, but Arya, Bran, Lady Ysilla and little Edric are safe.*”

“You burned him alive,” Jon stuttered and stepped closer, his unharmed hand smoothing through her short hair. “*Is that how you lost your hair? Is Winterfell badly damaged?*”

“It could be worse,” she informed him and squeezed his hand. Then she smiled and jerked her head
at the dragons. The black one was still shrieking and the pale one was staring at Jon. “One of them should be yours.”

“Mine?” he asked and brushed his hands over the thin bars of the cage. ”Are you sure?”

Yet his question was promptly answered when the pale dragon pressed his head against the bars. Daenerys didn’t hesitate to open the cage and freed the dragons. The black one escaped through the hole and crawled up her arm. The pale dragon did the same, but more hesitant.

Seated on her arm, the pale dragon took flight and soared towards Jon. Jon stumbled backwards, but caught the small dragon before he dropped to the ground.

“Careful!” he told the dragon and cradled him in his unharmed hand. ”Careful!”

“Does he have a name?” Jon inquired.

“I haven’t even named my dragon,” she informed him with a smile and smoothed her hand over the black dragon’s head. ”And pale one is yours. It should fall to you to name him.”

“I see,” Jon replied and held the dragon as if he was made of glass. The creature thought otherwise and crawled up his arm to come to sit on his shoulder.

“He looks a bit like Ghost,” Robb remarked with great fascination.

“Indeed,” Jon agreed and touched the dragon’s head. He didn’t shriek, but pressed his head against his hand. He seemed to like the attention.

Daenerys couldn’t help but to smile. She wanted to do nothing more than to take Jon to their chamber and celebrate their reunion, but they had more important things to take care of. It also didn’t escape her that Lord Stark was residing in the castle. This made her conclude that he was able to escape.

Lady Stark was also missing. Surely, she would like to hear about Winterfell?

“Say Jon,” she said and smiled when she saw that he was still focused on the dragon. ”You mentioned Lord Stark…Does that mean he escaped? And where is Lady Stark?”

“It is true. My father escaped,” Robb answered for Jon.”And my Lady Mother left for Winterfell. Hearing from the attack she couldn’t bring herself to wait anylonger. She took Sansa with her to Winterfell.”

This was another surprise.

“Sansa is here? Did Rhaenys…,” she began, but Jon cut her off.

“Aye,” Jon confirmed with a strange smile. ”She freed Sansa and sent her here in company of Ser Barristan Selmy.”

“That is good, isn’t it?” she asked when she noticed Jon’s lack of happiness.

“Aye,” he confirmed again and he even smiled a little. ”But there is more…well, first you should meet our visitor.”

Daenerys lifted her head and gave him a curious look.

“A visitor?”
Jon didn’t tell her more than that as he led her along the corridor, towards a closed door.

“Wait wait!” she chided him and grasped his unharmed arm. ”Where are we going? Can’t you just tell me about this visitor?”

He stopped, but didn’t let go of her hand as he shook his head.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” he answered and open the door. ”Now come along.”

She exhaled deeply and rolled her eyes.

It was a spacious chamber, filled with polished furniture and rich tapestries and one visitor.

It was a young man, so far she deduced from his stature. She couldn’t make out his face, because his back was turned to her, but the sight of his silver hair tore a gasp from her lips.

It can’t be true, she thought and shuddered, but when the young man turned around her suspicions were confirmed. The young man had a sharp faces, but they had a similar nose and though his eyes were lilac instead of purple, she knew that this young man was her long lost brother.

“As I promised,” Jon explained gently. ”I bring you Daenerys, Uncle.”

Her long lost brother didn’t speak. He simply stared back at her, his lilac eyes wide in wonder.

Daenerys herself was unable to speak and felt the urge to kick Jon for his deception. He should have prepared her for this.

She opened her mouth, but no sound came out of it. It felt as if she lost her ability to speak.

It was her long lost brother who finally broke the silence that had settled over them.

“Forgive my lack of words,” her brother explained with tears in his eyes and rose to his feet. ”But you do look like a ghost…you look so much like our Lady mother.”

Again, Daenerys was unable to speak, her tongue in knots as her gaze darted from her long lost brother to Jon.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she asked and steadied herself against the wall. She felt slightly dizzy and would have collapsed if her brother didn’t bridge the distance to catch her.

“Careful,” her brother said and graced her with an apologetic smile. ”Forgive our nephew. I told him to keep it a secret. I didn’t know that it would upset you so much, sister.”

Sister, she repeated and had a hard time keeping her tears at bay. She never thought anyone would call her that.

“I am not upset,” she assured him and touched his cheek. ”I am just surprised…that is all. And now I am weeping like a little girl.”

Tears shone in her brother’s lilac eyes as he leaned closer to enclose her in a brief embrace.

“Our lady mother was crying the last time I saw her,” he told her with a trembling voice. ”I wanted to stay with her, but they carried me off to safety. I hated them for leaving you behind.”
“It was for the best,” she assured him and entangled herself from his tight grip, before taking in his face. "Lord Arryn treated me kindly and so did many others…and I found our nephew.”

“I see that now,” Viserys replied and graced her with a sad smile, before retreating back to a strongbox placed next to his chair. Ever carefully, he opened the box and picked out an object covered in crimson silk. And ever carefully, he pulled off the cloth, presenting the object to her.

It was a crown made of silver and engraved with colorful runes.

Viserys graced her with a warm smile as he held the crown out to her.

“This is our lady mother’s crown,” he replied in a trembling voice. ”I kept it all these years.”

She took the crown and held it close as she turned back to Jon.

He was utterly silent, a sad smile curling on his lips.

“It’s a beautiful crown,” Jon declared and bridged the distance to touch her cheek. ”But there is more…it concerns Rhaenys.”

“What happened?” she inquired fearfully.

Jon swallowed hard, but remained silent.

“Tell me,” she prodded impatiently.

“They say the Tyrells changed sides, took Rhaenys prisoner and are now riding for the capital…”
Rhaenys

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Rhaenys

Rhaenys didn’t expect to return in chains to King’s Landing. She always imagined riding on a black stead, a golden crown with golden rubies resting on her brow, but then she had learned from an early age that the game was always changing, be it good or bad. She always imagined that Willas would be at her side and her Uncle Oberyn, but now she was here, playing the prisoner of war.

This shall be my last mummery, she thought as she rode through the deserted streets of King’s Landing.

Rhaenys hadn’t been there to pay witness to the battle, but she had seen the green flames of wildfire that had swallowed Lord Stannis’s fleet as if it was made of paper. Then the Lannisters and the Tyrell’s had joined the battle and gave King Robert’s grim brother the dead blow.

Nobody was quite sure how he had died, but the Lannisters made sure that everyone knew about it. Rhaenys didn’t care and her only consolation was that Willas was avenged. She only hoped that the Red Witch, who had sent this vicious shadow after her beloved husband found a similar fate.

May they both rot in hell, she thought as they rode up Aegon’s Hill. Fear and happiness were quarreling inside her chest for dominance.

She felt fear and happiness to return. She trusted the Tyrell’s to keep their word, but there was still so much that could go wrong. What if the Lannisters realize see through my ploy, she thought and looked down at her body. They had taken great care to garb her in a simple dress that made her appear like a peasant. Her short hair only reinforced the impression of a prisoner of war, but then she also feared that Cersei might cut her the moment she laid eyes on her. Yet the person she feared the most was Lord Tywin Lannister. He was a clever man and might see through her mummery.

If he does this city will be drowned in blood, she thought and touched her stomach.

If I were to die my brother could still take the crown, she told herself to calm her nerves.

The bells tolled as they passed the Great Sept of Baelor, the first signs of sunlight creeping over its crystal towers.

A flock of birds soared over them as they continued towards the Red Keep. Behind her and before her rose the banner of House Tyrell, but on the walls she spotted the golden stag of House Baratheon, though the city was filled with crimson cloaks belonging to House Lannister.

And if the rumors are true my brother will soon bring the falcons, wolves and trouts to our cause.

“All will be well,” Ser Garlan Tyrell, who had been tasked to guard her, assured her in a calming voice. His arm was heavily bandaged from battle, but his smile was true. He had been grief-stricken about his brother’s passing, but she was sure that Lord Stannis’s defeat gave Ser Garlan a measure of peace. “I promise.”

Don’t make false promises, she wanted to reply, but she couldn’t bring herself to be unkind to him.
These could be her last hours and they shouldn’t be wasted on bitter words.

“I know,” Rhaenys replied and braced herself to face Queen Cersei.

The bells tolled again when they entered the Throne room. Rhaenys wasn’t surprised to find Queen Cersei seated standing beside the Iron Throne, her golden-haired son seated on the spike throne of her forbears. She had even donned a red silk dress and had placed her golden crown on her head. Her triumphant smile was so bright it cut have cleaved steel, but then Rhaenys didn’t expected anything less. This vile and self-important woman had always overestimated her own importance. Rhaenys’ real enemy was standing at the bottom of the stairs leading up to the Iron Throne, namely Lord Tywin Lannister. It was this man who had given the order to murder her innocent bother and mother and it was this man’s head she wanted to hang from the ramparts of the Red Keep.

There beside Cersei was young Prince Tommen…no King Tommen, who looked very fearful as he watched the men-at-arms of House Tyrell marching through the Throne Room.

“Bring the whore! Bring her!” she heard Cersei’s shrieking voice, but Rheaenys ignored her as she had done so many times throughout her youth.

Rhaenys counted a good hundred gold-cloaks and maybe another hundred Lannister men-at-arms that had assembled in the Throne Room. Many of them will die today, she knew and stepped forward, her head cast to the ground. She was not good at playing humble, especially now that Cersei Lannister was smiling down at her as if she had already won this game.

“Your Grace,” Ser Garlan Tyrell addressed the Queen Cersei. “On behalf of my father I bring you Princess Rheaenys Targaryen…our promised gift of reconciliation.”

“Come along,” she heard Loras whispering voice and the pull on her arm as he yanked on the chains that they had bound around her thin ankles. “And kneel before the rightful King!”

Rhaenys gritted her teeth as she knelt down. A Princess of House Targaryen shouldn’t kneel to anyone, she thought and lifted her head to meet Cersei’s gaze. Cersei will learn that soon enough.

Cersei grinned.

“You murdered my precious son and you shall find an even worse death…this I promise you,” she began, but was cut off by Lord Tywin Lannister.

“There will be a trial,” Lord Tywin declared in an iron tone as he made his way towards Ser Garlan and Ser Loras Tyrell. “But today is a day of victory…and forgiveness. House Tyrell shall be forgiven for its treachery against their rightful King.”

“Rightful King,” Rhaenys remarked in a mocking tone. “My brother Aegon was your rightful King and you murdered him, my Lord. It is not House Tyrell that needs to ask for forgiveness, but you!”

Silence reigned and Lord Tywin’s gaze met hers for the first time. The expression on his face could only be described as disgust, but it was already too late when he saw the smile curling on her lips.

Ser Loras had long buried his sword in Lord Tywin’s guts when Cersei’s shrieking voice rang through the Throne Room.

“Guards, seize them! Kingsguard, protect your King!”

Rhaenys didn’t care about Cersei or the fighting that had broken out around her. Even when Ser
Garlan was dragging her backwards to safety she continued to stare at Lord Tywin’s collapsed body. Blood as red as summer wine tainted his golden robes. It was a beautiful sight.

For my mother, she thought and couldn’t help but to laugh. She laughed and laughed, a touch of madness overtaking her as the battle around her continued to rage.

The sound of clinking steel and the cries of fear soon drowned out her laughter. It felt as if everything around her was no longer real. Only when the men around her loosened their stance and gave her room to breathe was she able to regain a calm mind.

By then the fighting was over. The Kingsguard was dead. Most of the gold cloaks and Lannister-men-at-arms were dead as well. They had lost men too, but both Ser Loras and Ser Garlan were alive. This was the greatest relief.

I am also alive, she thought as she took in Queen Cersei, held down by two Tyrell men. Prince Tommen had long been captured and brought to safety. Rhaenys held no love for the Lannisters, but she didn’t come here to butcher innocent children. She would prove better than Lord Tywin. For her child’s sake she intended to make her peace with the past.

And yet she couldn’t help but to smile at Queen Cersei.

“Joffrey was a monster,” she told her. “I am glad that I killed him and I want you to know that it was me. Had you ever tried being kind to me I might have forgiven your family, but instead you chose to be my enemy and now you have to pay the price for that.”

“Kill me then!” Queen Cersei snarled. “Kill me and be done with it.”

“Killing you would be far too kind of a fate,” Rhaenys replied. “No, I will imprison you. I will have you watch how I take everything you hold dear.”

Then Rhaenys turned around and cast her eyes to the Iron Throne. An “ugly chair” her father had called it and he was right. She always dreamed of winning this “ugly chair”, but now she felt no satisfaction. Even her gained revenge couldn’t bring back Willas or her brother and mother. It was true what they say about revenge. Revenge is like a two-headed snake. While you watch your enemy go down, you get poisoned yourself.

I have tasted enough of this poison for one lifetime, she thought and turned around to face Ser Garlan and Ser Loras. It is time to make peace with the past.

“If the rumors are true, my brother is riding for the capital. I want you to send out riders to meet him along the way. There is much we need to talk about.”

Ser Loras gave her an assuring smile.

“All will be done according to your wishes,” he replied and dipped his head. “My grandmother and father should also arrive in time. I suppose this will be a difficult meeting.”

“Aye,” Rhaenys confirmed and kissed Ser Loras’ cheek. “But it if all goes well we will soon have peace. Renly will live…this I promise you.”

Ser Loras gave her a heartfelt smile and kissed her hand.

“I am thankful,” Ser Loras stuttered. “I am thankful, your Grace.”

Rhaenys didn’t correct him and shifted her attention back to Iron Throne. While she didn’t know
who would wear the crown in the future, but she was sure about one thing.

This “ugly chair” needed to go.

...

Chapter End Notes

Revenge is like a two-headed snake. While you watch your opponent go down, you get poisoned yourself.

This quote is from the character Aang from the show Avatar the Last Airbender.

And Merry Christmas!
Jon

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jon

Jon felt Dany’s warm breath against his neck as she moved to the other side. She was garbed in white nightgown, her silver hair in complete disarray as she sat.

It was the shrieking of the dragons that had woken him.

When he angled his head to take a look at them he found them fully awake, their small heads pressed against the cage bars.

“They are hungry,” Dany remarked, her nightgown slipping up her thighs as she hopped out of bed.

Jon’s cock stirred at pretty sight, evidence of their long separation. They had celebrated their reunion all night, but it seemed that was not enough.

“How can you tell, Dany?” Jon asked and banished his lusty thoughts from his mind.

“By the sound of their shrieking,” Dany explained and knelt down before the cage. Carefully, she opened it and the two small beasts hopped out, spreading their wings.

Jon nodded his head, though he couldn’t make much sense of Dany’s answer. It must be a girl thing to know when babes were hungry.

Brushing these thoughts aside, he stirred the fire to life. Once he had finished this task, he put meat on the poker and roasted it over the small brazier.

“Here, your supper,” he declared after the meat had turned black and dropped it on the ground.

The two beats didn’t hesitate to devour it.

It seemed Dany was right. They feasted upon it as if they had gone hungry for a whole year.

“Ghost is jealous,” Dany remarked with amusement and jerked her head at his loyal wolf. He lay sprawled on the ground, his ruby eyes watching the dragons. “We needs his supper.”

“Ghost got all the leftovers from last night,” Jon agreed and pulled the furs back over her shoulders. “Overfeeding him will make him lazy.”

“I am not cold,” she assured him and leaned in to kiss his cheek. “That child of yours makes me feel as if I am boiling alive. A true dragon.”

Jon nodded his head and touched her stomach. He felt nothing, but mayhaps it was already too early.

“The babe is sleeping. He hardly ever moves in the morning,” Dany assured him and allowed the dark dragon to crawl up her shoulder. The pale one remained on the ground, feasting on the remains of the blackened meat. Suddenly, the little beast lifted his head and looked at him.

“He?” Jon asked in confusion. “How can you be so sure that the babe will be a boy?”
“I saw our babe,” Dany explained with a knowing smile and stroked the dragon’s head. The little beast seemed pleased by this and rubbed its head against her shoulder. Jon half expected him to purr like a cat. “When I was in the flames I saw a vision of him. He has your eyes.”

Jon didn’t know what to say. Looking at her short hair it was hard to deny the truth, but he was not the kind of man who believed in visions.

Yet Dany seemed utterly convinced and he didn’t want to dim her happiness.

“We don’t even have a name for him,” Jon added and jerked his head at the two dragons. “And for the dragons either.”

“I already have a name for my dragon,” Dany informed him promptly and patted the black dragon’s head. “Meet Balerion.”

Jon was surprised by her choice.

“Why Balerion?”

“He looks like a Balerion,” Dany insisted. Her smiled only intensified when the dragon gave a chirping sound. “See, he likes it. Speaking of names…both our son and your dragon are still in need of a name.”

“Vhagar,” Jon replied as he watched the pale dragon curl its spiky tale around its slender body. Vhagar had looked different than this dragon, but Arya had always admired Visenya Targaryen. Thus, it had been the first dragon name that came to his mind.

“Vhagar,” Dany repeated in amusement after her dragon had done the same. “That means the trio is nearly complete. Sadly, we don’t have a third dragon.”

“The third one is here,” Jon countered and pointed at her stomach. “But I doubt it would make a good impression if we called our child Meraxes. I have another name if you don’t mind.”

Dany nodded her head and leaned closer, her warm breath brushing against his neck.

“What name do you have in mind?”

“Aemon,” Jon replied without hesitation. “I used to admire Ser Aemon the Dragonknight, but the real reason…It think it is only fitting that we name our child after Maester Aemon. He deserves so much.”

Dany chuckled in obvious delight and kissed the tip of his ear, before planting light kisses on his cheek.

Jon shuddered and turned his head to lean his brow against hers.

“How about we make use of this last moment of peace, before we…,” he trailed off.

“Before we meet Rhaenys,” Dany finished for him and kissed him deeply. Jon returned the kiss and felt frustration when she suddenly pulled away. “You are still angry with her.”

She liked teasing him.

“I am,” he admitted openly and swallowed hard when she pulled the nightgown over her head, leaving her bare. “Is that wrong?”
“Endangering Lord Stark’s life was wrong,” Dany returned as she crawled into his lap, her nimble fingers pulling on the bindings of his breeches. “But Rhaenys must have had her reasons. Neither you nor I know what she went through with Joff. We both had people who cared about us, but Rhaenys had no one to depend on other than herself. She must have felt desperate to do what she did.”

“She is my sister and I won’t harm her,” Jon promised and leaned back, a soft gasp leaving his mouth as she touched him. “But Lord Stark’s bannermen might not be as understanding. I wish I could just give her the crown and be done with it, but there is still Lord Renly. The Vale and the Riverlands might declare for him if I hand Rhaenys the crown. They are only supporting me because I was raised in the North.”

“First we must speak to her,” Dany insisted after Jon stilled her hands. “Then you can make a decision.”

“I agree,” Jon replied and urged her to lay back down, his hands parting her thighs. “We should wait until we have spoken to her.”

Dany’s answer was a deep sigh and turned halfway into a moan as he continued kissing her between her legs.

When she started to squirm beneath him, he stopped and lifted his head to grin at her.

“You are cruel,” she jested and crawled back on top of him. A sweet smile curled on her rosy lips as she placed herself above him. “But you are forgiven.”

“I am glad,” Jon gasped when she guided him inside her. “That you are not angry.”

They were still breathless when he heard Viserys’ voice outside of the tent.

Jon’s cheeks burned with embarrassment as laced up his breeches and hastily pulled on his boots. He knew why Viserys came, but he had completely forgotten about it.

“Why are you suddenly in such a hurry?” Dany asked him after she had put on her summer dress. “I am sure Viserys can wait.”

“He might have heard us…Gods, I do not even want to think about it!” Jon exclaimed and watched as she placed the dragons back in their cages. They were already half asleep. “Come along, Viserys is waiting for us.”

…

Chapter End Notes

The reason for my long absence: My mother was very sick and died.

As for the show: I never expected much after season 7. The only thing I liked about season 7 was the fact that Dany and Jon got together. I didn't watch season beyond season 8 ep 3. Bless the leakers for sparing me this nonsense.

The only thing I find funny is that people think ten or twenty more episodes could salvage this bullshit ending. Dany would then still go mad and Jon would still kill her.
Princess Brexit (Sansa) would still be Queen in the North after doing nothing but bitching and whining how she knows so much better. I also don't care that it is George's ending and how he will supposedly write in such a way that it makes sense. Not that I believe that he will ever finish his books, but his ending is still deeply insulting to women and people who have a history of mental illness in their family. It is also sexist and downright nonsensical. So according to HBO Dany was evil for killing slavers? I am no fan of violence in any way, but sometimes you need to kill people to make a change. Slavery would have never been abolished if there was no fucking civil war over it. The fucking Nazis would have never stopped killing if the allied forces didn't bomb the shit out of their cities. The Japanese wouldn't have surrendered unconditionally if the USA dropped two atomic bombs on their cities. Open a history book, before making judgements. War is brutal and kills people. Thats a sad truth.

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