A Song Inside the Squared Circle

by PointingAtTheMoon

Summary

What happens when it's on everybody's mind to go see professional wrestling in Westeros? When absolute artisans make you forget it's a show? When they have you crying, trembling because they've persuaded you that it's real? When you're not only sitting on the edge of your chair but you're getting up to throw things and joining in on the drama? A whole lot of madness happens.

Notes
They say write what you know and I know wrestling. I started watching when I was about five years old but unfortunately, or maybe, fortunately, I lost my enthusiasm for it almost ten years ago. However, I know a lot of crazy, funny, and inspiring stories told by people who were and still are in this insane world. And I think you'll enjoy reading them even if you know nothing about wrestling. Yet the first few chapters will have parts that you might find boring. It's exposition so things in the future aren't too confusing.

There may be something to learn beyond wrestling from these stories, but that's up to you. This isn't purpose-driven. It's really practice for me. I'm a very inspired writer but I'm just now learning the technique to express my inspiration. So I apologize if I'm not fastidious in surroundings, clothing, and appearance. I'm not crazy about grammar either so I'll probably make common mistakes until I warm up to this.

This is long as fuck. It was even longer but I shortened it. I promise the other chapters will be much shorter. Maybe.
"My dad says wrestling is fake."

"Well, tell your dad he's an idiot."

Jon chuckled softly at the memory. He was maybe seven or eight years old when he spat back at a soon-to-be former friend at recess for daring to besmirch the thing he cherished so dearly. It sounded absolutely ridiculous in his mind to question the legitimacy of wrestling back then. After all, when his friends would put him in wrestling holds, it would hurt. How could it be fake?

"What's so funny?" Yoren asked, as his hands clutched the steering wheel.

Jon cleared his throat. "Um, nothing."

"Go on boy, don't be shy."

He shook his head. "I was just...

Jon's eyes met Yoren's hard stare in the rearview mirror. Something about those eyes told him that not even if he weaved a brilliant tapestry for storytelling was he gonna be fooled. "I was remembering when I was a kid and a friend of mine tried to convince me that wrestling was fake."

Yoren was silent for a moment before he replied. "Some people might be smartened up to the business being a work, but not necessarily how it works."

Jon rubbed his beard. "Does that really matter?"

"It does if you're married. When you leave home every day, sometimes you might be going to a wrestling show and sometimes you might not. I have a friend that often leaves and goes wherever he wants to go on a day off, and before he shows back up at home to his wife at about one in the morning, he stops at a gas station and goes in the bathroom and wets his trunks and socks down so it looks like he sweat."

Jon broke into a grin while the three other boys in the car chuckled.

Yoren continued. "I'll tell you what Qorgyle, the man who trained me, once said. 'If you ask any successful magician what it is that makes their magic act successful, the answer is always that the audience wants to be tricked. Everyone knows that magic is a work, and even if they appear to try and catch your sleight of hand, a physiological part of them still wants to get fooled to experience the fascination of being subject to an inexplicable magic trick. People always want more out of life. They lose their sense of awe and turn to Gods. They watch movies and read novels that they know are fake with tears in their eyes and laughter on their lips'."

"They know that something is going on somewhere in this madcap world, populated with these outlandish personalities. They don't know how much is manipulated or called. They don't know who does it. They don't know a hierarchy--if there's a booker and a promoter. And they don't know about finishes. You can create some question, and once you got question, then you have them
emotionally, and then you can convince them you are either the second coming of Baelor the Blessed or you are the most horrible human being that has ever walked the face of the earth, whether it be on tv or just be in the moment."

Sense!

For Jon, there was not necessarily any one huge revelation, there was just a series of evidence that piled and mounted up. He wasn't sure or maybe he didn't want to believe it. But there was one sparkling moment when just early young.

There was no cable television in Wintertown, so they would at times accidentally get a mixture of live studio shows from Barrowton, Deepwood Motte, Bear Island, White Harbour, and maybe Karhold. And they did all these Saturday morning TV shows in these studios all across the North.

One week, Ned Stark, William Dustin, and Ethan Glover were in a big feud with Rickard Karstark, Helman Tallhart, and Roose Bolton. And Ned came out on the microphone and told the audience that William and Ethan weren't there that day. The bad guys then came out and surrounded him and said 'Did we hear you say William and Ethan aren't here today? 'Yes'. Ned replied. Roose Bolton then looked at his toadies and said 'Get em, boys'. The three bad guys then jumped Ned Stark...and then out came William and Ethan with boards and wooden shoes and they beat the shit out the bad guys. An ingenious plan, right?

Well, it might not have been a week or two later, then another one of the TV studios shows aired, instead of from Deepwood Motte it might have been from Barrowton or from wherever. And Ned Stark came out and talked on the mic because they were supposed to have a big match with two other bad guys and their manager. And Ned told the announcer on that show that William and Ethan weren't there that day, and then those bad guys came out and you'll never guess what happened...

Jon remembers thinking that those bad guy wrestlers were not only stupid but if they'd just watch the TV shows, they'd know all of the good guys' tricks. But all of the doubt didn't stop him from watching. On the contrary, he would've cursed the fates that conspired to deny him the indefatigable talents inside the squared circle.

Of course, nature doesn't give a big red baboon’s ass if you curse it or not. The wrestling bug was looked at by a pretty girl, and it stopped dancing. He went from wanting to wear sparkly robes and championship belts to taking off his pants and wanting to take off tight dresses and mini skirts.

Wrestling was his first crush. It was the first time Jon experienced the rush of living vicariously through people cut off from him by a glass wall. But wrestling wasn't his first love and heartbreak.

When Jon started high school he wasn't very successful in attracting girls. It's not like he had a face you could chop wood on, but he was a bit awkward and he lacked self-confidence. Still, he was enthusiastic in their pursuit. There was a particular raven-haired beauty in his math class that really had his blood flowing. And one day he decided to follow her after school--some could have misinterpreted it as stalking, but he considered it harmless observation. He observed as she went straight to a local amusement park and got in a batting cage. Jon didn't think much of it until she went again the next day, and the next day, and the next day.

It was rather strange because not many boys in the North were into baseball, much less the girls. Time passed, but he still couldn't work up the courage to even talk to her. But then in late January, he saw a flyer at school for baseball tryouts and a light bulb appeared over his head.
Jon wasn't a love letters and sweaters with leather seams kind of guy, so he thought that by joining the high school baseball team he could maybe cause attraction in his unrequited crush. But after his first experience on a baseball diamond, that girl, and most girls in general, became an afterthought.

Baseball became his passion. It wasn't just a game for him, it filled his life. It wasn't just the nine innings of a game throughout the week, it was the leading up to it. He dreamed of a long career in baseball in various aspects. From player to off the field as a coach or manager.

Jon was a starting pitcher for the team, and he doesn't want to blow his own horn, but toot toot! He had a pure power arm that could already touch 93 mph at the age of sixteen. Some opponents refused to bat against him, and he once broke one of his catchers' fingers. His only issue was control, but it wasn't something he couldn't improve over time. Any scout would have told you that the future looked bright for Jon Snow.

Going pro out of high school was the plan, but he had to also entertain the idea of an athletic scholarship. His mother, Lyanna Snow, never went to college. By choice, she worked her way up to become a horse trainer. She's had a passion for horses since childhood and loves her job. But the role of horses in the North has reduced more and more each year, so they've had to learn how to live on a limited budget. His father died just a few weeks before his birth, so she had to raise Jon on her own. She insists that he should do what makes him happy and not live for her, but he would like to have a good job and earn good money to make her life easier. So he wanted to make the right career choice.

The fatal flaw in seeking a degree was that Jon didn't have any interests outside of a baseball field. And as a result, he showed poor results in every subject but gym class. For some reason, however, his teachers kept grading him unfairly well...

Of course, tomorrow and his plans for tomorrow had no significance, because it turned out that Cupid struck him with a poison arrow.

A week before Christmas 1979, Jon injured his shoulder in a fight at McDonald's with a black lung motherfucker who was being an asshole to another customer. He fell hard on his back and the damage was massive--he had a torn capsule and a torn glenoid labrum in his shoulder, forcing him to miss the rest of the junior year season and some of senior year.

He was fit to return to the mound a year and a half later, but his velocity wouldn't return and his control problems were even worse. By the end of high school, his scholarship chances were shot and no team in the majors defied common baseball sense and drafted him. If only he had listened to his mother who had warned him of the drastic effects fast food restaurants have on your physical well-being...

Jon now questions whether he ever truly loved baseball. No, he is certain that he never did. They say the line separating love from hatred is very thin, but he thinks otherwise. Love is not the opposite of hate any more than humility is the opposite of vanity. You can't love something one day and then hate it the next. And that's what he felt after the mirror cracked. He didn't want baseball to exist in his world.

For the next several months after graduating, his emotions were on the edge. The voice of fear made his mind dull to the point where he built a wall around himself and became isolated. Baseball was the only thing he was good at, the only thing he ever wanted to do for a living. Now, what was he going do for the rest of his life? Would he have to punch clocks? Would there always be conflict
between what he and is what he should be according to a system? He may have never seen himself in college, but he never imagined a life that was a drag.

His mother was patient, but when she saw the iceberg ahead, she took the ship's wheel and steered him away from self-destruction to self-production. She didn't want him to feel dutiful to a social structure, because she wasn't, but she wanted him to at least get up and hit a lick at a snake. She told him that he shouldn't exist only for the expression of a talent, or for her, or for anyone or anything, because if he does loneliness will cover him. It will always be there waiting and watching, withdrawing only to approach again to cause ache.

She also reminded him of something incredibly motivating that his father once told her. That whatever one does, whether it be something that appears harassing like driving a bus all day or repellent like cleaning toilets, you should make a music of the whole thing. If you have it in your head that something is work, it will be hell. An occupation doesn't have to be useful or achieve anything that everyone would call purposive work, and if you don't want to be miserable with passing joys in your life, it should give you the same feeling that one may have if you were playing the harp or dancing. Make what you're doing fun, then you won't be tired at the end of the day, you will be full of energy. And this is why his father decided to be a harpist. He didn't have enough time to be what is conventionally considered a "successful" harpist, but he was a completely happy man when he died, and that is what matters.

Jon decided to apply this new insight to his fitness workout regimen. To battle his depression, he sought satisfaction by living in the gym, thinking that being intensely active he would drown his loneliness. But, he only temporarily evaded it. With a new attitude, he felt he didn't have any limitations in what he could do in the world of fitness or in anything.

He believes fully in strength training, but he doesn't strive to have muscles in places most people don't have places, as has become the new groove. Instead, his routine consists of whole body exercises that are out of place in today's world. The dedicated regimen and consumption of only proper food produced a razor sharp physique and caught the attention of Mikken, the owner of Mikken's Gym. He offered him a job as a personal trainer and Jon decided to give it a shot.

He taught his clients how to keep things simple, to split their sessions into smaller chunks, and to embrace roadwork. It didn't really feel like a job and that's why he liked it.

Then one afternoon, about four months after he started the job, a man named Harwin walked into the gym. Jon spotted him as he bench pressed and the two got to talking. It turned out that Harwin was a professional wrestler from Winterfell. Wrestling is the second most famous sport in the North after hockey, so it shouldn't have been such a shock to meet a wrestler in his workplace, yet it was a bit surreal.

Harwin became a regular at the gym, and though not being one of his clients, the two became good friends. For Jon, it was the first time he was truly aware that real people wrestle. Like it's an actual profession, it isn't just the fantasy world he would see on television. Harwin invited him to a show in Winterfell and just like that his interest in wrestling returned.

He bought a VCR and VHS tapes to record every wrestling program he couldn't catch on TV, and he read all the magazines that dominated the racks. Since he still doesn't own a car, Jon would take a bus to go to some of the shows in the North. He would be around total strangers, but it felt like he was part of a community. The people hugged, cried, and screamed bloody murder because men made them believe everything happening in the arena, or convention center, or high school gym, was real.
And for some odd reason, Jon started to think that wrestling would be a great career. Thus, he began badgering Harwin about the industry, since it isn't easy to get trained. And eventually, Jon ended up half-talking him into giving him somebody's number. From that number, he got a list of different numbers and one was for a school on the other side of Winterfell that was run by the semi-retired Rodrik Cassel. Of course he knew about Rodrick. Who didn't? Those whiskers make an impression on you from the second you see them.

So Jon went home and asked his mom if she didn't mind the idea of him going to the Rodrik Cassel School. After he explained that it was wrestling, she cautioned him that it wouldn't be easy, but if he wanted to do it, now would be the best time in his life to try it.

Once again, his mother was right. Rodrik agreed to train Jon but only after he would set up the wrestling ring at the school all by himself. He'd take the subway to the school, go up all the way to the eighth floor of the storage building, and take each piece of the ring out of the storage unit, piece by piece, put it into an elevator, piece by piece, and bring it down, and unload it, piece by piece. The first night was a twenty-two-hour process that earned him twenty-five dollars and his first wrestling lesson, which really just consisted of Rodrik testing his will. He pushed him and kept saying 'You want to be a wrestler? So you want to be a wrestler?'

Despite all his training expertise in the gym, he was breathing harder than Darth Vader by the end of the day and almost had to be carried out like a dead fish. But, he fell in love after the first time he hit the ropes. When he was in the ring he wasn't worried about where he was going or where his destiny was, because he was completely alive. Wrestling felt like the most natural thing he's ever done for the second time in his life.

Yes, it's a work. You are simulating a contest where two people are beating the fuck out of each other. But for a smartass to know and not understand the art and the punishment and the effort it takes, is very irritating. His mom would get really upset when he got home looking like a hamburger because of the bumps--with welts and parts of his body purple, black, and blue. But he assured her that he still wanted to do it.

Great emphasis was given to the skill set of an in-ring technician--to executing everything properly, to getting his footwork right, to different sets of holds and locks. But just as much or more time was given to the skill set of a worker, aka psychology. To not being so smooth and pausing in between the moves sometimes like you're thinking of them as you do them, rather than executing a routine you have in your mind. To making a more surprised reaction to the counters or to the missed moves instead of just flowing through to the next thing. To making it look like a struggle and picking your spots. Not only how to sell, but how to sell and show your face when you're doing it. How to show excruciating pain, joy, agony, glorifying in the crowd, and a wide-eyed I'm gonna kill you face.

He only could begin to learn things the right way after being "smartened up" to the business. Unlike some traditionalists who let the wrestlers they train have their first couple of matches without being made aware of the theatrical and scripted nature of the business, Rodrik lets the cat out of the bag after his students reach a certain level in their training. As Yoren said, a lot of people know the truth, but no one in the business admits it. Well, a couple have, but no one validates it. There's a mystery to the thing.

They don't know about the promoter--the boss, the person on top who...well promotes. They promote towns as the business mind in charge, they sign the contracts with the buildings, check up on the box office, and place the advertising. They're usually someone with many years of
experience who have a strict control over everything that is presented and they lay the law down. All promoters universally agree on the basic principle of not letting the boys make the business look like a joke. They make the wrestlers money while they themselves make money.

The booker--the second in command, the puppet master, the key to any successful promotion. Under the umbrella of the promoter, he is in charge of the talent and creative performance side. He decides the outcome of a match, who wins and loses, and other important aspects of the show. Basically, what he dreams the boys build. He should have an eye for talent and a knowledge for what the matches are supposed to look like and maybe what the fans might want to see. He can be a former wrestler or even at times a current wrestler in the promotion.

The epitome of drawing money in wrestling lies in the game of black versus white. It's the audience knowing who to boo strongly and who to cheer strongly. If you don't play the game they're gonna be apathetic. The "good guys" are called babyfaces and the "bad guys" are heels. And they need to be talented enough to figure out ways to make people think there are shades of grey in them. They may be having a phony match, but they really are a prick or vice-versa.

Then there's kayfabe, a term that goes all the way back to the carnival days and is sort of what you call the wall between what's real and what's not that protects the business. Not protecting the wall could lead to the ruination of the profession. Kayfabe also means a secret language that wrestlers use to communicate with each other in and out of the ring. There are a bunch more carnie terms that Jon is still trying to commit to memory.

He was kept very busy for the next three months, training four days a week with Rodrik, and having been promoted to a manager at the gym while consulting for another. It was difficult, but it never felt like a monotonous routine.

Jon is convinced he's ready for his first real match in front of a paying audience. He can go out and wrestle until the moon goes to sleep if he has to and he's learned all that Rodrik can teach him about aesthetic arts that go with an athletic performance. But for some reason, Rodrik doesn't think he's yet ready for the public. Jon isn't expecting a match in an arena setting, a flat building will suffice--a mall, school gym, barn, etc. He just wants to get much-needed experience in front of live crowds. Other students who came in at the same time, and even after him, have already had their first match and then some. He doesn't think Rodrik is trying to smother his initiative or anything silly like that, on the contrary, Jon senses that he's really trusted. However, he does feel like a flat-footed student in dancing school watching the ballet dancers attack.

Grease was added to the gasoline a few days ago when Rodrik received a call from Jeor Mormont asking for some extra talent. In other words, job guys that will be shredded like cabbage by a star in quick order, with no comeback and no question about who the better man is.

A jobber is most times the lowest position you could have on the card, but it is respected. They use to be called carpenters because they couldn't draw you a house, but they'd help you build one. Some guys make names for themselves by just losing on TV most of the time. Jon thinks he can offer more than that to the business. But who is he to reject that spot?

That is if Rodrik had asked him. He instead chose three other students--Albett, Rast, and Halder. And he asked Jon to be part of the ring crew for the event. Sounds like a rib to him, but Rodrik says it's to introduce him to the territory. Mormont runs his promotion in the far, far north. On the moon in comparison to everything else going on in this region of Westeros. It's so geographically isolated that it doesn't get a lot of publicity in the national magazines and there's no cable television. So Jon has never seen the product.
According to hearsay, it's an area in the North where you can do what the fuck you want to do, whether it's ring rats, or drugs, or just hobbies. As for the territory itself, many place it on the same level as an outlaw promotion, as it's not a member of the Westeros Wrestling Alliance, and it has been known to accept wrestlers that have been blackballed. But it's also said that a lot of great talent works there and they like Jeor Mormont personally.

So on a positive note, he'll get a glimpse of a promotion that most people will never see, for free, and maybe have a chance to go backstage and kind of hang out with the boys.

The bright lights of a gas station broke Jon's network of thought. Yoren, an old sour-smelling scout for Mormont, hauled them in his 71 Choq Staegone hardtop at around 5 pm at Rodrik's school for this 8 o'clock show. Jon looked down at his quartz wristwatch and saw that it was almost 6:20. He's been told it's a rule that you always arrive an hour before the show no matter where you are on the card, but he's not sure about people in the ring crew.

Yoren drove into the forecourt and pulled up to an available pump. He turned off the ignition and reached into his back pocket to pull out his wallet. He took out a ten dollar bill and handed it to Albett, who sat in the passenger's seat. "Tell em we want five gallons."

"You," he glared at Halder who sat to Jon's left. "Go get the red plastic gas can in the trunk and fill it up. But don't do it close to the car. Do it slowly and don't fill the can all the way to the top. If you spill a single drop you pay for all of it. I'll be watching."

The four students looked at each other completely nonplussed for a moment before Albett and Halder exited the car. "Can I go to the restroom?" Asked Rast, a few seconds later.

"No, I want you to piss and shit in my seats. Go!" Rast left the car hastily.

Yoren looked to Jon. "What about you, don't have to go?" Jon shook his head.

"Sometimes the bathrooms at Castle Black ain't working. And it's like what the Old Bear says about flat tires when you're late, you should fix your flat tires before you leave for the trip," Yoren said.

"No, I'm fine." Jon croaked out.

He really didn't need to go, but his reluctance was more to do with the climate outside. The sun goes down Gods know how early this deep in the North, but it's always infamously face-numbingly cold. They're all northerners who are intimately bound up to these sort of harsh conditions, but this was something else. Jon came prepared by dressing warmly from head to toe, but even with stiff gloves his hands still cringe.

Yoren continued. "It's not something we normally have to worry about. In an athletic endeavor like this if you're sweating your really not gonna need to piss. But at one point or another, the guys have all gone through it. Because you ate something, or you're sick, or whatever. And you take a hard enough bump or somebody lands on you and you soil yourself. I once got a horrible food poisoning, stomach flu, I don't know what it was, on the afternoon before a match in Goldgrass in front of seven or eight hundred people. I had been able to refrain from shitting or puking for about an hour and a half from the time I left my hotel room till I got to the show and got dressed. But then I went out in the goddamn match and every time I fall down I shit myself. Every time--I'm on the offense, if I just fucking kick, I shit myself. Any motion, especially on my opponent's comeback--I
took like three bumps and it was a pudding blast down my Y-fronts.”

Jon for the first time that evening laughed out loud and felt at ease with Yoren. “Gods.”

"Then he body slammed me and when he body slammed me he got shit all over his arm. And then I shit again when he slammed me and went for the cover. It was just horrible. I had to throw those tights away."

Jon couldn't stop laughing.

Yoren had been closely watching Halder through the side-view mirror the whole time he told his story, and as he finished he opened his car door half-way. "That's enough!" He hollered, before opening the glove compartment to take out a small rag and stepping out of the car.

Jon turned his head to watch through the rear window as Yoren knelt down and wiped off the outside of the can with the cloth and then secured the cap tightly. He could see Halder mouth something to Yoren before he sprinted back inside the car.

"It's colder than a witch's tit out there," he said after breathing into his gloved hands. "Where are Albett and Rast?"

Jon looked over to the gas station until his eyes found Albett slamming his fist at the restroom door, visibly freezing his ass off. "It appears that Rast is dropping possums in the toilet and Albett looks like he's ready to dig a tunnel with a shovel in the floor to get into the restroom," Jon replied.

"Why doesn't he just go piss in a bush?"

"Probably afraid his dick will freeze. Can't say I blame him."

Yoren returned to the car with the filled canister and sat it on the empty passenger seat. Jon was more than curious about this whole ordeal, but he knew better than to ask. Rodrik told them to just be attentive, to keep their tongues relaxed and enjoy the pleasures of the senses. If Yoren needed them to know why he required this fuel he would tell them. A few seconds later Rast finally returned from the restroom and settled back into the seat next to him. "You better have wiped," Yoren told him hoarsely.

Two minutes later, a trembling Albett was running back to the car. He opened the passenger's door and Yoren grabbed the can to let him slide back in. "We all set?" Yoren asked. They all looked at each other and then nodded. "Good."

What Yoren did next stumped them even further. He turned the crank handle of his window until the glass was completely down, allowing the bitter cold into the vehicle. "Open all the windows," he declared.

The four students' eyes widened. They all looked at Yoren like he had a steaming turd coming out of his mouth.

Yoren huffed. "From which holes do you perceive sound, your fuck holes or your ears? I said open the windows!"

Albett and Halder proceeded to roll down the windows next to them, but Rast was stock-still. His brows furrowed in confusion and his lips curled into a sneer. "Are you fucking mad? It's freezing
"Don't be a fool! Out there!" He bristled.

"Just do it, boy," Yoren said impatiently.

"No," Rast protested.

Yoren gave him a cold, hard stare. "If you inhale the gas, shit might shoot out of your mouth, and lightning out of your dick!" Yoren said sharply, cutting his eyes at Rast.

"Yeah, and If we have the windows open we'll freeze to death!" He replied matter-of-factly.

"Boy, your fixing to work for Jeor Mormont, and if he wants you to wear a chicken suit and cluck like a duck on Broadway or walk through hell with gasoline britches on, your gonna do it."

Rast wouldn't relent. "Why do we even need..."


Rast's eyes darted back and forth between Jon and Yoren. His grey eyes were trying to advise him to not be a fool, while the scout's penetrating stare was challenging him to shake the tiger's cage.

Slowly the tense expression on Rast's face flickered and he let out a huffy breath before giving in and rolling down his window.

Once the windows were completely down on all four doors, Yoren carefully positioned the gas can between Jon's feet on the floor mat and narrowed his eyes at him. "Snow, neither of us will feel anything between our legs till' we get to the damn arena, but until we get there, consider this can your pecker. Keep it upright, don't let it drop."

Yoren's gaze lingered until Jon nodded and put both gloved hands on the handle. Yoren then stuck the key in the ignition and drove out of the gas station.

Thankfully, they reached their destination some ten minutes later without any problems, other than the shudder of chills that were sent down his spine. Yoren pulled into a parking space in the back of the building and turned off the engine. He grabbed the gas can between Jon's legs and exited the car with the students following him out. Yoren went to open the trunk and they each grabbed the respective duffle bag they brought with them.

They began walking up to the big building while Jon really took it in for the first time. He did some research and discovered that the Castle Black Coliseum was an 11,500 seat arena that was built in the early 1900s. It's the oldest multi-purpose athletic building still in use in the known world, and it shows. At least from the outside, it looked like it needed to be refurbished.

As Jon passed by several vehicles, he noticed that a number of them had locking gas tank lids. He was tempted to ask Yoren about it, but before he could think it further they arrived at the back door entrance. "You three go inside, but wait by the door. I'll be right back. Give one of them your bag to look after and follow me," He said to Jon before walking away at a brisk pace, leaving him to follow.

He quickly handed Halder his bag and chased after the scout. Yoren led Jon around to the main entrance of the arena, and once inside the building, they were met by several lines to the gate. Yoren shouldered them through a line until they were close to the station.
"Owen!" Yoren shouted. A tall blond man behind the admission gate looked their way. "He's ring crew!" He gestured to Jon. The ticket taker nodded. Without another word, Yoren showed him his back and began scurrying back outside. Jon walked past the rest of the line until reaching the gate where Owen let him through.

He walked a bit until he went through the kind of curtain that fans use to walk to their seats in the first deck. The building looked like it was deteriorating. The seats appeared decades old and were terribly cramped. He looked ahead and could see that people were already putting the ring together. He did not want Rodrik to hear that he didn't do the job he came to do so he rushed through the seats until stopping in front of the security railing-- if you want to call it that. It was just a rope tied to a pole and the pole was stuck in a cement thing, and the rope ran down the length of the side of the ring and then around the three sides. And you had a walkway for the wrestlers to enter into-- just a corner, where the rope broke.

"Hey, hey, who are you?" An old lantern-jawed man approached him. Most likely the guy in charge of the ring crew.

"I'm Jon Snow. I came from Winterfell with Yoren to help set up the ring," he replied.

"Why the hell would they bring somebody all the way from Winterfell just to be part of the ring crew?"

"I don't know, you can ask Rodrik Cassel or Jeor Mormont," Jon answered truthfully.

The man gave him a measuring look. "We already had people carry shit."

"I know how to actually set up a ring," Jon told him.

The man just stared at him. Jon didn't really understand the mistrust. I mean, who the hell is gonna lie to help set up a wrestling ring? "Whoever you are, you can help finish up, but you can't go backstage," the man finally replied.

Jon sighed "Okay."

He still seemed a bit hesitant to give in but relented and held up the three-foot-high rope to let Jon through. "Hurry on."

Five building maintenance guys had already done most of the job, but he got in the ring in time to help tape the ropes with colored duct tape and then tape the turnbuckles.

To be quite honest, the ring looked like shit. It appeared like it had been years since they cleaned the canvass and it felt like a sure-fire way to get rope and mat burns. It gave a gritty, rough feel and that was probably what they wanted, but he can't imagine anyone would like to be thrown into such shabby turnbuckles.

He was fully concentrated on the job when a tall, blonde, buck-toothed boy who was helping him tape up a turnbuckle spoke up. "My name's Hareth, but some people call me Horse." He looked at Jon expectantly.

"Jon Snow."
"Where you from?" The boy asked.

"Winterfell. Well, Wintertown really."

"What are you doing all the way over here."

"My teacher, Rodrik Cassel, wanted me to come."

Hareth's eyebrows crawled up his forehead while the rest of his body froze. "The Rodrik Cassel?"

Jon nodded.

"So you're a wrestler?"

"Yes. Well, I'm trying to be." Jon corrected. "I haven't had my first match yet."

"But you're trained and... you know about the business?" He asked, with the last part coming out slowly.

Jon eyed him curiously. Did he mean is he smartened up? Jon cleared his throat and felt uncomfortable. "Uh, yeah," he replied.

Hareth's eyes swept their surroundings. "You don't have to be careful around me, I know the scoop."

Jon was taken by surprise. He knows? Are the arena workers privy to such information? He didn't think they would be but it's not impossible. Better to play it safe anyway. "What do you mean?"

"Come on man, I've been working here for a while and I know..." Hareth looked around again and whispered. "I know that the promoters always tell the good guys to win, but sometimes the bad guys win just to fuck up their plans. Because they're assholes that way."

Jon pursed his lips together to keep from laughing. "Yeah. Right."

Once they were done, and the old man in charge of the crew inspected their work, Jon was a spectator again. The other guys went backstage and he was sent to the other side of the rope and told to remain on that side. He'd be lying if he said he wasn't disappointed. Jon knows that the only people that set foot in the locker rooms are the wrestlers and the referees, but there has to be more to experience in the backstage area. Something to not feel like a stooge who set up the ring to get into the building for free. No, actually he feels lower than that. At least a jacket carrier gets to be around the wrestlers.

Jon glanced down at his watch and it was now 7:05. The building must be letting the people in the seats now. He knows from the shows he's been to that the fans take their places an hour before bell time.

And with that hour to spare Jon decided to wander around the arena, use a somewhat functional bathroom, and buy a small bag of popcorn.

The building ushers had helped fill the first deck when he returned to his third-row seat some thirty minutes later. But when it was ten minutes before bell time it was clear it wasn't gonna be a sellout. Castle Black was only maybe two-quarters full.
The event was a spot show. A spot show or house show is a live card that isn't televised. Every city of any size and some without any size have regular wrestling whether it is every week or every month, or certainly a few times a year in Westeros. And Rodrik says that without house shows, in front of big numbers of people, small numbers people, or any numbers of people, you don't learn how to wrestle.

Jon looked down at his watch again and saw it spin and spin and spin. If his mother saw how bored he was right now she would admonish him. When he was a kid, she told him that someone who is bored with simply being has a superficial and narrow awareness of their own existence. Sometimes when he would get home from school, she would ask him what he did that day, and she expected more than a thin, sketchy outline of the few things that he noticed and what he thought worth remembering. She would ask what he saw, heard, smelled, touched and tasted. It would always lead to discussions that seemed to last for hours.

Lightbulb. Maybe it could help now to kill time.

What is he doing? He's sitting down on a chair. A movable chair. Wait a minute. Jon scanned the other seats in the arena and only then became aware that only the ringside seats were temporary seating and everything else was fixed. And these weren't metal folding chairs, these were like plastic static prom chairs, almost like lawn chairs.

What does he see? He sees kids, he sees middle-aged men, and curiously a numerous amount of elderly people. He could only glance maybe two or three people around his age. It's incredible that anyone would come to a wrestling show with the current climate outside. Thankfully, he can also see the winter coats they favor.

What does he hear? Multiple conversations. To his right people talk about wrestling, to his left people talk about wrestling. He smiled at that. He could also hear his stomach rumbling. He would've bought more snacks but they didn't look promising.

What does he smell? Jon sniffed the air. Nothing. He's had had a weak sense of smell for several years now, he needs to take several whiffs to really smell something. It probably isn't that terrible considering the activities that happen around him, but he really should take action to improve it or tell a doctor about it. But that reminds him of the independent contractor status he'll be under if he's a wrestler. With his mother being in that boat he knows he won't be eligible for insurance, for benefits, or for retirement plans. Rodrik says that you'll definitely get banged up in this profession. You see a lot of stitches, fat lips, or trips to the dentist, but you see no crippling debilitating injuries. It's certainly not ballet, but there's nobody going to the hospital with brain damage or spinal injuries. Still, if anything serious does happen, he may take an interest in medical tourism. There's no escape from taxes, however. That is what stinks.

What is he touching? A bag of now empty popcorn. Which is also what he tasted. The popcorn was very buttery. He's heard conflicting reports about butter, but corn is a high glycemic grain, which means it raises blood sugar, which in turn raises insulin. And if you are raising insulin you are storing fat. Damn it! Why didn't he think of this before he bought the popcorn? Though he could be even hungrier now if he hadn't.

Before he knew it, the ten minutes had passed and the announcer had come out to welcome the crowd and start the show. Here we go.

The first match of the card was between the charismatic, happy go lucky Clan Norrey and Jon's fellow trainee Rast. Each came out without any entrance music, which wasn't that surprising. He's
heard that even some territories in the south still don't use that cool feature. The referee signaled for the bell to ring and the match began.

Everything started normally, with a lockup as almost every match does, but things soon took a crazy turn. Rast drew Norrey into a corner and gave him a chop. This would be his only offensive move for the entire match. Norrey countered with brutal palm strikes to his chest and back before throwing him against the ropes and giving Rast the stiffest clothesline Jon had ever seen. It had murderous intention on it and made Rast fall like a sack of potatoes, which left him unable to tuck his chin when taking his flat-back bump. Norrey continued pounding on him while Rast was trying to figure out which way was up so he could get there. Norrey tried to pick him up while striking him, but Rast appeared to lack the strength in his arms to push up off the mat.

Rast would roll around the ring and sit up, only to lay back down. It probably didn't help that he wasn't given any time to recuperate, it was just continuous punches and kicks. Norrey even walked on him, literally walked and stomped on his back. You would think he was the heel by the way he was handling Rast. When he finally let him up he gave Rast a brainbuster. Thank the Gods, he protected him on the move.

Norrey then knelt and began pinning him with his knee. After the ref counted one, Rast slightly lifted his head and Wham! Norrey slapped the snot out of him, I mean he just smacked him across the face as hard as he could. The ref slapped his hand on the mat two more times and the bell rung. Norrey quickly left the ring with the ref having to stalk after him to raise his hand.

_Fuck me. That was almost a live murder._

Jon couldn't be sure but knowing Rast, he wouldn't be surprised if he did something to piss this guy off. Whatever happened, Rast couldn't put two feet in front of another when he made his way to the back.

The follow-up match was Albett versus Alliser Thorne. Thorne was the experienced heel veteran while Albett was having only his fourth real match. Thorne roughed him up a bit, but Albett looked as safe as a baby in his mother's arms compared to the previous match. Albett was greener than a pepper tree and it showed. But he wasn't completely lost out there. He knew how to be taken in holds and he knew how to sell. The match was what it was supposed to be and the fans booed in a good way.

Three longer matches took up the next hour until it was time for Halder to have his match against the beloved Iron Emmett. Jon knew that unlike with Rast and Albett, this wasn't gonna be a squash match. Halder would work as a villain whose purpose was to threaten and harm the babyface, who would eventually fight back and bravely secure the victory, thus increasing the fans' admiration and respect for him.

Halder had more experience than any of Rodrik's other students, and he had potential. Not because of his technical ability in the ring, the last thing you wanted to do was see him wrestle very long. But because he's huge and he looked incredible, which every promoter loves. Jon really wished him all the success in the world. He's really a kind and gentle person away from the ring, so much so that it almost kills his gimmick. To avoid hurting anybody because of his freakish strength, he holds back on his working punches, and they don't look very real. Rodrik would even let Halder punch him for real at school to get him to hit harder.

The small crowd was really alive by this point in the show, screaming, whooping and hollering when Iron Emmett made his entrance. Jon couldn't really tell you what happened in this match as a
few minutes after the match began his role in the show changed.

"You Jon Snow?" A voice said behind him, causing him to almost jump out of his seat. Jon turned his body to meet the voice. The man knelt behind him was slender with fat red lips and blonde hair that was worn in a tumble, down to his shoulders. "Are you Jon Snow?" He echoed. His tone was impatient.

"Yeah, why."

"I'm Sweet Donnel, they sent me for you," he replied.

"Who did?"

"The boss. Come on." He stood and motioned for Jon to follow him. Jon shot to his feet and let Sweet Donnel lead the way.

His heart and mind were racing as he exited the arena a few feet behind the blonde messenger. What was this about? Did someone no-show? Was it a wrestler? a referee? a security guard? the guy who mops up the floor? Whatever the case, his belly was forgotten.

He could still feel the cold, however, which had the pair skipping like colts to the dressing room entrance. Once through the back door, they were met by two policemen who stood guard. They jerked back and eyed him curiously before turning back around.

Sweet Donnel strode through the backstage area with Jon trailing behind desperately trying to read his surroundings. The whole area was dimly lit with orange/yellow lights, and all he could really make out was dark figures wandering around, some in groups, others on their own, some sitting, some standing. A few gave him quick glances as they passed by.

They walked briskly down a hallway, passed an intersection, and continued forward until arriving at the staging area just behind the curtain where wrestlers come out to the ring. Sweet Donnel paused behind a small crowd of men who gathered around a broad-shouldered, immensely bald-headed man who sat at a monitor watching the match between Halder and Iron Emmett. One of the crowd, a man with sharp features and blue eyes, craned his neck and gave Jon a long look. He then leaned down to the old man in the chair and the two muttered something to each other. The blue-eyed man then approached Jon.

"Hey, I'm Benjen Stark," he said, sticking out his hand.

Jon felt his heart pick up again while his breath stopped. "H-hello, sir. I'm Jon Snow." He stammered and shook his hand, hoping to not appear flustered.

Holy Shit! It's Benjen Stark. Of the Stark family!

"How long you been training with whiskers?"

"About four months."

"And he hasn't let you wrestle in public yet?" Benjen asked with a wry smile.

Jon frowned a little. "No."
"Don't feel so dispirited, I started off as a gopher boy for my own brother. We all have to pay our dues. You work for a gym, right?"

"Yes, I'm a personal trainer and a manager and a consultant."

Benjen's brow furrowed and he studied Jon again. "How old are you?"

"I just turned nineteen two months ago."

Benjen snorted. "You're almost an embryo. Don't ever shave or you'll look like a character on Leave it To Beaver."

"Or like a babyface." Jon retorted.

Benjen chuckled softly. "Yeah...It's good you have a backup plan. I'm not trying to piss on your dream if that's what this is for you. It's almost impossible to get in this business, but once you get in it you can probably make a decent living doing something pretty much anywhere."

"Working for the gym is an easy job mentally, you know, almost effortless, but who's to say a year from now. If someone wants to pay me to do something I intensively enjoy, I won't stop them. But I'll never do unpleasant work in order to make money." Jon liked giving people any advice and guidance about exercise and fitness that he can offer, but Mikken had been trying to put him in a suit recently, and going behind the scenes at the gym doesn't sound appealing at all to him. He hates business, he hates everything to do with it--accounting, figuring, adding up numbers. It's not his deal.

"You may be in luck, though that depends on what you consider unpleasant. Wrestlers are the textbook example of independent contractors. If we don't like a territory we're working for we give a two weeks notice and we can leave and go anywhere else we want to go. And that's only if you want to stay in good graces with the promoter, if not you just go. We provide our own attire, our own intellectual property, we come up a lot of times with our own gimmicks. We are not employees. We can do pretty much what we want to do as long as we show up to the matches and wrestle for however long and finish the match according to the booker's direction." Benjen continued. "And that's why you're here right now."

Jon blinked. "Why's that?"

"The booker has directions for you."

Jon looked around. "Who's the booker?"

"I'm the booker."

Jon's eyes went wide for a second. For the first time, he noticed that Benjen was holding a belt in his hand. Not a championship belt, but like a pants dress belt. He made himself swallow. "What do you need me to do?"

"The main event match is myself versus Red Jack Crabb of the Brazen Beasts. You heard of them?"

"Yeah, of course, I've seen them in magazines. They wear masks with the faces of animals."
"That's probably the original Ghiscari version with the Shavepate. This is more of a bootleg version of the Brazen Beasts. But they can work. They're the hottest heels in our territory at the moment. The five thousand people that came tonight, came to see them get their asses kicked. The only problem is that Rusty Flowers, the other Beast, hasn't shown up yet, and we're only thirty minutes away from bell time. The good thing is Crabb brought Rusty's mask with him. So we can send someone else out there under the mask and the fans won't know any better."

"And you want me to be that someone," Jon said knowingly.

Benjen nodded. "You're about the same height and body type. All you have to do is be at ringside antagonizing the crowd, convincing them with body language that you're a smug not-to-be-fucked-with heel. Trying to add to the match, but not overdoing it. And when Crabb gives you the signal you toss him this belt so he can get a minute of heat on it." Benjen showed him the belt. "Or we can just send someone else out there and make some shit up if we have to. But the Old Bear is offering this job to you as a favor to Rodrik. You want it or not?"

It was rather strange that they were asking him to fill in for someone who's not even wrestling. It's only a spot show, can't they just change the spot or not do it all? But Jon wasn't about to question an opportunity to be apart of the show. If they want him to manage a goddamn bucket of soap, he'd do it. "Yeah, I'll do it. No problem."

Benjen smiled. "Good. Donnel, show him to the dressing room so he can get the mask from Crabb. The belt will be here for you after you get dressed."

He traced Benjen's line of vision to Sweet Donnel who was waiting a few feet behind them. Jon had forgotten that he was even on the same planet as the blonde man. Jon was about to turn to leave, but then remembered an important detail. "What am I supposed to wear? Just the mask? I have boots, trunks, tights, kneepads, elbow pads, and wrist tape in my bag," he said all in one breath,

"What color are the tights?" Benjen asked.

"Black."

"Just wear your tights and boots with the mask."

Jon nodded and then followed Sweet Donnel back in the path they came, but this time they turned right at the intersection. He took a few gulps of air as he tried to process everything. This was the first time he would be in a professional wrestling locker room. It felt like he was truly getting inside this closed society. Not even the announcers, photographers, ring crew, or the cops were allowed in the locker rooms. Only the wrestlers, managers, refs and the promoters. Jon already had knowledge of the inner workings of the business that some would kill to acquire and others kill to protect, but this was different. You could drop a tarantula into his pants right now and it wouldn't stir him.

His excitement grew when he saw them approaching an open door. Here we go.

They reached the door and Jon edged forward after Sweet Donnel. He let his eyes sweep the room. It was no question then, the Castle Black Coliseum was a complete shithole. I mean we're talking holes in the wall big enough to throw a cat through in the locker room. Don't let him spoil the romance of it with more specifics. Please. You can say it's a room of such a past that the past is ever-present.
It isn't lifeless and without meaning and that's what matters today. And he really needed to stop letting thought cloud this experience. "Crabb isn't here, I'm gonna go look for him. You get dressed, I'll be right back," Sweet Donnel said in a bored voice before leaving. Jon began scanning the room for his duffle bag trying to figure out where Halder might have left it. There was a lot of space and few bags so it wasn't hard to find it under a chair close to Halder's bag.

Slumped in the chair a few feet next to that one was Rast. He was still in his trunks and boots and his eyes were closed. If one couldn't see the movements of his belly and chest wall, you would think he was dead. Jon sank into the chair and unzipped his bag. He was thankful that Rodrik had insisted he come prepared.

Jon stripped off his warm clothes and slipped on his black tights over his briefs. As he was lacing on his boots, Sweet Donnel returned, following on the heels of a man in a jackal mask. A crab mask would be more ridiculous, he supposed.

Red Jack Crabb walked across the room and reached into his bag. He then approached Jon with what he could only see was a white colored mask in his hand. It's hard to interpret the expression of a man in a mask, but he could feel that he was being studied. After what felt like a minute he finally tossed him the mask. "Do anything stupid out there and you'll end up worse than him," said Crabb as he jabbed a finger at Rast's face, forcing his eyes to fly open with a small startled shriek.

Crabb then turned to make his exit with Sweet Donnel trailing behind. After they left, Jon held up the mask to his face to regard it for the first time. The animal motif was a wolf. A white wolf.

It was a full face cover mask, with four pieces of fabric sewn together to create the shape that covers the entire head. It had openings for the eyes and mouth, and there were artificial ears attached to the design. The back of the mask was open with a "tongue" of fabric under the laces to keep it tight enough to not come off accidentally during a match.

Jon put on the mask and adjusted it properly for his eyes and mouth. After fiddling with the laces for over a minute, he finally decided to cris cross lace it like a shoe. He wanted to know if he tied it the proper way and how it looked with no mirror in sight, but Rast had settled back into sleep faster than a speeding roadrunner, and he did not want to ask some stranger and feel like a mark. And it didn't seem like it mattered anyway.

He got up and walked around the room aimlessly for a bit, testing his vision in the mask. Then Jon looked over at Rast and decided it was time to wake him up again. He leaned down into Rast's face and let out a loud howl, jolting him so much this time that he fell off the chair and wailed. He stared up at Jon with his face switching back and forth between terror and pain and his breath coming out in panicked pants.

He should have felt more sympathy for him, but Rast would bully some of the new untrained students in Rodrik's school, so it was his own doing.

"What's going on in here?" A familiar gruff voice asked behind them. Jon turned to see Yoren approaching. He moved beside him and frowned. "Snow, stop horsing around."

Rast was stunned. "Snow?"

Yoren gave Rast a sharp look. "You still haven't showered? Get up! You're not getting in my car.
stinking like that." Maybe he should take a shower too, Jon thought.

"I can't! The pain is too much," Rast whimpered.

"Stop bitching. Norrey kicked the shit out of you in a working way. He wasn't shooting trying to hurt you, he just didn't give a fuck if he potatoed you or not."

"Wasn't trying to hurt me!?” He said in his clenched teeth.

"He protected you on the brainbuster, didn't he? Now I'm not gonna say it a third time, get up and hit the showers," Yoren exclaimed in a raised tone.

Jon offered his hand and Rast slowly staggered to his feet, wincing on his way up. He wobbled into the communal showers and Yoren made his exit. Jon sat back down and reached again into his bag. He noticed that Crabb was wearing wrist tape and decided to do the same to match. Once that was done, he left the locker room and made his way down the hallway. But before reaching the intersection, he ran into a sweaty Halder. "Hey, how'd you do?" Jon asked keenly.

Halder knitted his brows in confusion. "Um, good, I think."

Jon chuckled. "It's me, Jon."

Halder narrowed his eyes quizzically. "Jon?" His face cracked into a wide smile. "What are you doing here? And what are you doing in the mask? Did you sneak in here?" He whispered the last question.

Jon chuckled again. "No, I'm filling in for Red Jack Crabb's partner. But I'll only be a cheerleader at ringside. Anything is better than nothing, though right."

"Yeah, man, are you kidding me, that's big. You're in the main event!"

"I guess. How was your match? They grabbed me just when it started."

Halder shrugged. "I think it was good. The crowd was really mad at me. They sounded like I was trying to beat up their family member."

He grinned. "Well, I think you did your job then. I'm gonna go see if they have any more orders for me. You should hit the showers so you don't miss me looking like a fool out there."

"Yeah, yeah," he clapped Jon on the back and darted eagerly into the locker room.

Jon made his way back to the staging area where he stood waiting for any further instructions, but Benjen was now gone and no one else came to him. The next-to-last match was Endrew Tarth versus Cotter Pyke. It lasted about ten minutes, but it felt like thirty. Jon was watching the monitor, but he couldn't concentrate on the match, he was too busy being self-conscious.

Most people think if they don't watch themselves they'll make a mistake. But all it causes is second thoughts about everything. It had him worrying whether he ought to be somewhere else. Was he sure that he thought this out sufficiently carefully? He felt like a kind of gas balloon that kept wanting to wander up. He wasn't really there...

But even if he was as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs, he had to do the
deed. Not because they'd probably drag him out there at this point, but for himself.

The sound of the bell and the announcement of Cotter Pyke's victory brought his mind back to the state of reality. Now his senses were operating and he was responsive to whatever may be around.

Mormont removed himself from the table and walked up to Jon with the belt that Benjen had earlier. The Old Bear, as they call him, was a gruff old man with a shaggy grey beard and stern gaze. "Put it on, and keep it a bit below the waistline," he commanded.

Jon received the belt and wrapped it around his waist. It was a kind of long, fairly wide supple leather belt. It felt like it had some bend to it instead of being really stiff. And it looked like something that could be used in the bedroom as well as wrestling. After buckling it, he looked up and was met with a long shrewd look from Mormont. "Try not doing anything stupid, boy."

The Old Bear then returned to the monitor and a few seconds later Crabb moved beside Jon. The two stood behind the curtain and when they got the signal they made their entrance.

The crowd began to jeer as soon as they saw them. He gave quick glances at the faces in the audience and saw hatred and disgust. But his main focus was the movements of Crabb, letting him lead them down the aisleway so he could imitate his intimidating way of walking and his threatening gestures towards the crowd.

All you could hear in the arena was booing and booing, but curiously, in his mind there was silence, a silence that was blissful. Words can't properly explain how it felt.

No one told him if he was supposed to enter the ring with Crabb or not, but having seen managers do it on TV, he thought it seemed right. They antagonized the crowd from the ring for a short while before Benjen Stark made his entrance to a roaring crowd.

The genial Benjen Stark he had met backstage became a different person. This guy looked at them like he was Dracula and they were a plate of liver. The announcer made the introductions, Jon exited the ring, the sound of the bell hit everyone's ears, and they were off and running.

As the match was underway Jon did his best to react to what happened in the ring. Raising a threatening clenched fist at the fans, nodding and grinning villainously when Crabb was beating on Benjen, and showing frustration when Stark was making his comebacks. The type of things he always saw heel managers doing.

The pace of the match kind of slowed down for a while and it reflected in the audience. But Jon looked back and realized that something that he did made this old woman in the front row mad because she stood up and shook her fist at him. She was a frail and diminutive women who couldn't have been five feet tall with snow-white hair and wrinkles that he could see clearly even under his mask. If she wore long earrings she'd look like a set of Venetian blinds.

Jon decided to really heel up and point his finger at her with mock and derision. And this started to get the people back into it. They even got more excited when Benjen started kicking Crabb's ass for several minutes, only to be cut off.

Jon turned to look at the old woman again and he could tell she was getting madder and more worked up. You could almost visibly see that she needed a walker to get around by the feeble way she stood.
Crabb and Stark went back and forth until something happened that led to the referee being "unintentionally knocked out". Crabb then took Benjen down and waved at Jon. He knew this was his cue so he quickly unbuckled the belt and slid it through the bottom rope. Crabb received it and held it up for the crowd to see and "pop" for. He then took it by the buckle and started savagely slicing Benjen up. Every hit across his back was louder than the last and got the fans lit up. For a third time, Jon looked back to point at the old woman. "What do you think of that grandma?!!" He boomed.

The old lady leaned over and put one hand on the back of the plastic prom chair and one hand on the seat and picked it up. She could barely get this two-pound chair over her head, but she somehow she did, and Jon is thinking she's gonna throw it at him. But no, she starts walking over to the corner where that fucking three-foot high rope breaks, where the aisleway is, and starts coming at him down the side of the ring with this plastic chair over her head at one feeble step after another, and the people start noticing it and begin to cheer.

*What the fuck!*

If he runs away from this old woman he's gonna look like a pussy. No, Rusty Flowers is gonna look like a pussy and that'll kill the gimmick. His career will end before it begins and Crabb or Mormont will have him by the chest hairs in the shower. And on the other hand, if he somehow hurt this old lady these people will murder him! Riots in the North are infamous. Seven Hells! Certainly, somebody's gonna grab this woman or the security is gonna come. Right!?

*Nobody came...*

She gets to him and as she feebly goes to hit him with the chair she has over her head, Jon just reached up and stopped the chair. He didn't hit her, he didn't grab the chair away, he just blocked her from hitting him. And it knocked her on her ass...

Now the people are standing up and pounding out a raucous tune. With a motherfuck here, and a motherfuck there, here a motherfuck, there a motherfuck, everywhere a motherfuck!

*NOW here came the security...*

So the old woman has fallen out from under the chair and now Jon is holding the chair up over his head and she's at his feet making the scene look like something straight out of the comics, you know when Hulk is about to SMASH! He looked at the faces in the crowd and saw eyes that regarded him with much much much hostility.

*Shit! Shit! Shit! These people are gonna kill me!*

Without a second thought, Jon quickly put the chair down and rolled into the ring. He had stopped paying attention to what was happening in the match a long time ago, but now he had inserted himself into it more than he was supposed to. He only had his eyes on the fans until he felt Crabb nudge him.

"Kick him, kick him!" He shouted as he continued whipping Benjen with the belt. It took a second before realization hit Jon and he understood what Crabb meant for him to do. The referee was already "recovering" from his bump, but once Jon got in the ring he sold a cramp and was back on his ass. So, he could help Crabb instead of just standing there looking like an idiot.

Benjen was whipped and stomped on while security came to help up the old woman. After they
succeeded, she once again shook her fist at him. Unbelievable. They helped her right back over to the other side of the barrier with her chair and put it back in the same place. Jon breathed a sigh of relief and rolled back out of the ring. The ref soon got to his feet, Crabb threw the belt out of the ring for Jon to get, and the match continued.

It was a struggle to refocus on what was happening in the ring, Jon had to keep peeking over his shoulder to make sure none of the Hornets he pissed off came out of their nest and went for a sting. But thankfully it wasn't long before Benjen mounted his final comeback. He laid out Crabb and then went outside the ring ropes, to the apron, to perform a diving crossbody on Jon. He was a bit startled by the spot, but it had the crowd throwing babies in the air so he didn't care.

Benjen then slid back into the ring, hit Crabb with his finisher, and got the pin. Over a minute passed before Crabb slowly rolled out of the ring to join Jon. He leaned on him, selling pain as the two made their return backstage while Benjen celebrated with the crowd.

_Wow, that was a close shave!_

They passed through the curtain and Crabb drifted off in the direction of the locker rooms. Jon went over to Mormont with the belt, and he took it and handed it off to some guy standing on the side. "Follow me, Snow." He said gruffly as he grabbed two chairs and led him to a corner. He positioned them facing each other and the two sat. "Can I take the mask off?" Jon asked him.

"No, wait until you get to the dressing room." Jeor crossed his arms and frowned.

Jon inwardly sighed. He wasn't sure what the right thing to do out there was. He thought he accumulated all the knowledge one could accumulate in Rodrik's school, but no one told him what to do when old ladies attack. He was prepared to take the ass chewing, nonetheless.

"You really had Old Nan vibrating out there," Mormont finally said.

Confusion flashed in Jon's eyes. "Old Nan?"

For a moment he looked amused. "The women who tried to tattoo your face with the chair."

"Y-you know her?"

"Everyone does, she's been coming to shows in the North for 30 and 40 years...or more. As have many of the old people you saw in the audience. Old Nan tries to attack the heels quite a bit in this town. So don't worry, none of the boys will rib you for something they go through almost on a weekly basis."

"And she's never caused a riot?"

"Oh, a bunch of them. It just depends on the day or night, the babyface and heel, and the buildup to the match. I didn't smell a riot tonight." How comforting, Jon thought. "Even if my nose had deceived me if everything Rodrik says about you is true, then you would've known what to do."

Jon's face scrunched up. "What has Rodrik said about me?"

"He's been banging a drum about you. He thinks you might really move the needle. He even sent me a tape of you wrestling with the other students, a video of only you, which he never does. And from what I saw he may be on to something. To be a star you have to have a really charismatic
striking look, as one person standing there, not as part of a team, not as with a manager, but just
standing there, to be the guy, in a variety of ways--physically, cosmetically--you have to have the
talent, you have to have the personality, you have to have the talk, you have to have the whole
thing.

"You're not someone that should hide under a mask, women would consider it a crime--your gonna
have them swooning, babyface or heel, the girls, women, grannies, are all gonna love you. You're
on the smaller side for a wrestler, but that won't stop any promoter except maybe Tytos Lannister
from booking you as a top guy. But even he will be licking his chops when he sees that body. You
look chiseled out of granite.

"It's in-ring work that matters most to me and that's what impressed me about you. All your stuff
looks good and snug--timing, positioning, it doesn't look like you fuck up, even when you fuck up.
And your psychology--your body language and facial expressions are just right for any situation.
You know not only how to sell, but how to sell and show your face when you're doing it.
Believably and sympathetically for a babyface, and overselling, as is the province of the heel.

"Outside the ring you don't have any extracurricular habits, you're not highfalutin. Rodrik says your
only satisfaction is in doing your work. You don't bitch, you don't gripe, you don't complain. These
kinds of things go far on whether guys get top spots or not.

"I saw your promos, as well. You'd have a good voice if it ever came out of your throat." Jon felt
his face redden. Thankfully he was still shielded by the mask. "You could have fans thinking
you're the best wrestler in the world in only your rookie year. All this is supposition, of course.
You're not even green yet. You need to learn by working in front of different crowds in different
territories in front of people who like different things and in places where wrestling is presented
different ways with different opponents of varying degrees of experience, usually more than you."

That's what he's saying.

Mormont stared at him. "Rodrik was hoping to give you to Ned Stark, but his friend is reticent to
fast-tracking a kid. That's why he's been hesitant to give you your first match."

Jon was still trying to process all of this and he could barely form a thought after hearing the name
Ned Stark, but somehow words came out of his mouth. "I appreciate you giving me this
information, but why are you? Shouldn't Rodrik be telling me all this?"

The Old Bear scratched under his chin. "Guys who wrestle in my territory have to want to come
here or have no other choice. Emmett, for example, is here because he can spend a lot of time
home with his family, Cotter Pyke because he can do basically whatever the fuck he wants, and I
still have no idea why Benjen Stark wants to be here, but he does and I'm not gonna question him.
Sometimes guys come to work on gimmicks, to get experience, or to try shit out. You don't make a
lot of money here, but you make good money, especially if you're on top. I always pay my talent
based on the houses that we draw. That's the agreed upon payment method between every
promoter and the boys, but if you make it in this business, you'll find out there's a lot of facts
separated from fiction. It's cold all the time, but one can have a good quality life here." Mormont
paused. "Do you understand where I'm getting at?"

Jon nodded. "Rodrik is still holding out hope that Ned will take you, and I probably shouldn't tell
you this, but he's confided in me that's he's arranged for you to go to the Stark Den for a hands-on
training session with Ned," Mormont said very casually. Jon's eyes widened and his mouth opened
and then closed.
"Maybe he will make space for you in Winterfell after he meets you, but if he doesn't, just know we wouldn't mind having you here with a good spot to go out and embolden yourself. There are many better places out there, but here there would be less pressure."

Silence followed and Jon meant that to mean it was his turn to speak, but he didn't know what the fuck to say. He shifted uncomfortably. "Can I ask you something?"

"Please," he replied.

"Your family is very well known and distinguished in this business, from what I've heard they've been around since the carnival days." Jon had to be careful with how he asked this. "Why did you give up your family territory on Bear Island to come here?"

Mormont's face turned solemn at the question. "I think you know the main reason, but there was also something a great uncle of mine once said, and I don't want you to think I'm still selling you on this territory, but he said that the great workers don't look to go to the territories that are on fire--the great workers want to go to a territory that is on their ass, because they can build it up."

Mormont rose to his feet and Jon did the same. "Yoren will give you my number, in any case. Whatever happens, just know that if you work your ball's off your eventually gonna get a shot. Good luck." The Old Bear offered his hand and Jon shook it. Mormont then walked back to his table with the chairs and Jon made his way to the dressing room.

As he did, a couple of heel wrestlers were en route to the back exit, with a referee standing like a guard in front of the hallway leading to the babyface dressing room, probably to prevent "black" and "white" from crossing paths.

Jon saw not only Crabb, Halder, and Rast when he walked inside, but also a wrestler who was on the card named Stonsnake, and the two men who were making the only noise in the room--the small, lean, and pox ravaged Cotter Pyke, and an old bald man in a police uniform who looked sort of familiar.

Jon crept to the chair next to Halder. "Yoren told us to wait for him here." Halder kept his voice low so only they could hear.

"You were hot shit in the 40s, you old motherfucker, but don't think you can walk in here and tell me how to do my fucking job. And if I did want advice, I wouldn't ask a former wrestler who's more famous for playing 'parts' and reading off 'scripts'." Pyke said hotly.

The old cop sighed. "You still can't get over what happened. Listen, you may think I just want to slow you down, that I'm jealous, that I didn't do all the things you're doing, in my day. But I'm only giving you my input because I want you to have a long of a career as I've had."

"Who is this guy?" Jon whispered to Halder. "Denys Mallister" he replied.

That's why he was familiar. Denys Mallister is a retired wrestler and movie star from the 40s who moved to the North and ran a few promotions during the late 50s and 60s. There is a funny story that Rodrik said about him that he remembers above everything. One night, some wrestler got into a fistfight with a police officer after a match. The officer called for backup and the guy locked
himself backstage barricading the door. While the police pounded on the door, Denys Mallister, who was the promoter for the event, saw that an incident like this could give his show bad publicity. So he grabbed a hockey stick and beat the guy on the back with it until he crumpled to the floor. Mallister then opened the door to allow the police to come in and arrest the wrestler. Jon couldn't remember the name of that wrestler, at first. But then it hit him. It was Cotter Pyke...

"Long career? You wrestled for less than a decade and then failed at being a promoter. And now you work at a county jail as the gym guard."

"It's my choice to work in the Sheriff's Department, it's not out of necessity."

"So you enjoy watching men work out? It makes you itch to watch a thick finger of sweat trickle slowly between a man's nipples? You must be whistling Stranger in Paradise in your head right now." Pyke said between a fit of laughter.

Jon didn't like the direction this was going and thought it was rather nonsensical to take a shower. So instead he started to quickly change back to his civilian clothes.

Mallister huffed. "You don't give anybody the respect they deserve for what they've accomplished in this business. I shouldn't expect less from an Ironborn."

Pyke shot to his feet, the smug look on his face had flickered. "Watch it Mallister, there's nothing to say for whipping someone who should be committed to the old folks home, but keep talking about my people and I'll incarcerate your fate in the Drowned God's fiery sea," he said angrily.

Mallister chuckled humorlessly. "I may not be a spring chicken, but I'll be damned if I get my ass handed to me by a fireplug, who in every other territory, including his own peoples, was the guy who would sell and give the bigger guy the tag." He spat to the side. "And I spit on your false God!"

Pyke lunged at Mallister but the old man was quicker to unleash the slap jack in his pocket. The two grappled, with Pyke trying to get the takedown. But his attempt was thwarted by the hits over his head. This struggle didn't last long as Crabb, Stonesnake, and Halder worked to pull them apart. It all happened so fast that Jon didn't have any time to react.

And then Pyke went into his bag and pulled out a gun.

What the fuck!

While Jon freaked out, a new struggle kicked off with Crabb and Stonesnake attempting to gain control of the firearm from Pyke. They went as far as using body holds, but it wasn't until Yoren walked in to help that they were able to pry the gun out of his hand.

Pyke seethed after freeing himself from the restriction. "You fought dirty again old man!"

"It's how I deal with punks who don't comply with my idea of peace and decency."

"It's how you scrap when you know you're overmatched!" Pyke reached down to snatch his bag and then eyed Yoren. "Give me my gun," he demanded.

"You can get it back from Mormont, I'll let you explain to him why he has it," Yoren replied. Pyke growled and then stormed out of the dressing room. Mallister apologized for the incident and
followed suit with Stonecrow shadowing him. Crabb retrieved the wolf mask from Jon and then he was gone as well.

"I'm gonna go give this to Mormont, after Snow's done, you guys can leave and wait for me by the back door," Yoren told to the three students.

Halder exhaled a heavy sigh once they were alone. "Fuck me."

"Yeah," Jon agreed.

"Old people are dangerous." They exchanged a look and then burst out laughing.

"Mormont sent me away after the match ended, what did he say to you?" Halder asked once the laughter died down.

"I'll tell you later." Jon finished bundling up against nature and then he and Halder yanked Rast out of his chair and made for the door.

They were met outside by yet another elderly person. This man was a tiny thing, wrinkled and hairless, shrunken beneath the weight of many years. He was carrying two satchels. "You must be Jon Snow," he said with a smile.

"Yeah, how can I help you?"

"This is Aemon, he's the bagman of the territory," Halder informed him.

"Thank you for the introduction, Halder."

"Bag man?" Jon didn't know what that was.

"Yes, there is a bag man in every territory. We are in charged by the owner and the boss of the whole territory to collect the money from the box office, among other things," Aemon said slowly.

The bag man reached into one of his satchels and brought out an envelope, which he then handed to Jon.

Jon blinked. "Your pay for tonight," Aemon said to answer the puzzled look on his face.

Jon was a bit flabbergasted. The thought of getting paid for tonight was never in his head. He took a moment to let it sink in. It's the first time he has been given money to wrestle. Well, sort of wrestle. But the first time he's been given money to do something he would do if money was no object. There were a lot of perks in being a high school baseball star, but he never actually got a paycheck for it. He liked working for the gym, but the fact that there was an obligation attached to it never escaped his mind like tonight. He was about to open the envelope when Rast spoke up "Can we go already," he whined.

Jon thought it best for later, so instead, he shoved the envelope in his coat pocket. "Um, thank you, Aemon. It was nice to meet you."

Aemon smiled at him again. "I hope we see you here again Jon Snow," he said softly.

Jon nodded his goodbye and the three trailed off. They waited by the back door until Yoren joined
them to make their departure. If it was colder than a witch's tit when they got there, it was now colder than a banker's heart. Without any hesitation, they all hotfooted it to the car. Already in the back seat waiting for them was Albett. Though you could barely tell it was him. He was wearing his hood and a scarf wrapped around his nose and mouth, hiding everything but his eyes.

"If not for those ugly boots I wouldn't have recognized you," Jon snickered as he slid next to him.

Albett lowered the scarf from his mouth. "That's the point. Babyfaces can only travel with babyfaces, and heels with heels. I can't risk anybody seeing me with you guys."

Halder spoke up from the passenger's seat. "In that case, we should cover up Rast too, he sure as hell didn't look like a heel tonight."

Yoren started the engine on his Staegone and pulled out of the parking lot.

It was the hour of the wolf when they reached the bridge to go across Long Lake into Winterfell. Or at least he thought it was the hour of the wolf, it might have been the eel, or the bat, or the ghosts, he couldn't remember the old names for specific parts of the nighttime. In school, he wasn't very good in history, but after he became a pitching star he was great on dates...The point is it was midnight.

"Is it just me or are we not moving? Please tell me it's not me," said Rast groggily.

"Traffic is backed up. An accident looks like." Rast grumbled.

A silence followed in the car, but there wasn't a silence in Jon's brain. It was the very opposite of what he felt a mere few hours ago when he made his first wrestling entrance to a hot crowd. As much as he would like to hold on to the fanciful romantic image of the events tonight, the son of Lyanna Snow could not be so gullible, not even if he tried. He had a theory that needed to be confirmed or debunked. And he saw that opportunity in front of him.

He cleared his throat. "Yoren, can I ask you something?"

"Go ahead," he replied with a flat voice and without tearing his gaze away from the windshield.

"Why did you need that gas when we were going to the show?"

That got him to glare at Jon through the rear-view mirror. "Why do you want to know?"

"It was in case somebody tried to fuck up your gas tank, wasn't it?"

Yoren frowned through his tangle of beard. "It doesn't matter anymore."

"True," Jon agreed. "But I don't want to let misbelief from the past dictate my future. So I have to ask, this was all planned, wasn't it?"

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

"I'm saying Mormont set everything up tonight. You didn't just bring me along to be in the ring crew and it wasn't a no-show, me going out to ringside in a mask was the plan from the beginning to test me."
Yoren snorted. "Boy, if Jeor Mormont wanted to test you he'd have you taking bumps in that ring that's harder than Yi-Ti arithmetic."

Jon doesn't doubt it. "Maybe, but I don't think Rodrik would've been too happy about that." Jon wasn't about to reveal everything Mormont said to him. "But by figuring me at ringside, he could see me work in a way that wouldn't get him heat with Rodrik. That is if he wasn't in on it too, he did insist I bring my bag."

"What does this have to do with the gas?" Halder asked.

"In case I fucked up and did something that caused a riot, which I almost did," Jon replied.

"Maybe he needed the gas because of Halder, he was a heel tonight too," Albett muffled.

"Halder wasn't supposed to get any real heat on himself. I, on the other hand, helped to get Benjen, the top babyface, whipped viciously by a belt. And I could've gotten mauled for what happened with Old Nan."

"Old Nan?" Both Halder and Albett asked.

Yoren gruffed. "Nobody can know what will send Old Nan into epileptic seizures, and nobody forced you to fill in for Flowers, the Old Bear gave you a choice didn't he?"

"Yes, an opportunity that only a fool with a big head would turn down."

Yoren laughed. "Listen to yourself, you are a fool with a big head. You're a mark for yourself, boy. You should be needing to walk sideways with that disproportionately large head."

It was obvious he wasn't gonna get any clear answers from Yoren, or from Mormont, or Rodrik, or anybody else that could've been involved in this conspiracy theory. That's right conspiracy theory. Because if he's right then they intentionally put his life at risk. Maybe even Old Nan was in on it.

Yoren had a point though, nobody really forced him to do anything. He willingly put his life at risk. And he believed what Mormont said about not sensing a riot. Maybe he is just overthinking. Either way, all the panic and disbelief that reeled in his mind tonight comes with the territory.

_Gods be damned. The effort to still his mind had only addled it further. Getting some shut-eye might help. If only they could get out of this traffic._

"What the fuck is that?" Yoren suddenly blurted.

Jon looked out the window to see what had startled him. And there came a guy a running down the bridge and... HE'S ON FUCKING FIRE!

"Holy shit!" They all exclaimed in a chorus, Rast included.

The human torch was running in their direction with his arms waving around like a windmill until some guy appeared out of obscurity like fucking Batman and tackled the frantic man to the ground using a blanket.

_Unreal. Unfucking real._
If they had left the arena sooner they could've been right in the midst of this wreck. In case more madness ensued and Jon didn't make it back home alive, he had to know something. He reached into his inner coat pocket and opened the pay envelope. He got twenty dollars...

He saw a man screaming on fire, a fight between two badasses involving weapons, he could've been in a flaming deadly wreck, and he'd been attacked by an old ass lady in a business he knows almost nothing about. Only one thought came to Jon Snow's mind... he couldn't wait to do this again.

Chapter End Notes

Credits:
Credit to Jim Cornette for the wrestling knowledge and for most of the stories I will be sharing with you.
Credit to Alan Watts, J.Krishnamurti, D.T. Suzuki, and Lao Tzu for anything you read that sounds philosophical. I have committed a lot of their knowledge to memory or I have it in my notes but I can't always remember who said what. But yeah, anything that sounds mind blowing is probably an offshoot of something they said.

Details:
1. Jon's story going forward will not really be based on any particular wrestler. But personality wise he's kind of like Bruce Lee.
2. The story of Jon's first night in wrestling is based on Bobby Heenan's first wrestling trip to Louisville in the 70s. I only changed a few things around. Heenan actually was in the match but he just stood in the corner. The Brazen Beasts = The Assassins. Somebody in the crowd did try to grab Heenan but it wasn't an old lady. That actually happened to Jim Cornette in the 80s. As did the shitting your pants part that Yoren talked about. The fight between Cotter Pyke and Denys Mallister = Johnny Valentine and Wee Willie Davis. I'm not actually sure if anybody helped the guy on fire from the car wreck...
3. Rast getting the shit kicked out of him = Koko Ware vs The Patriot in 1985.
4. Jon working at a gym and meeting a wrestler that helped him get connections = Triple H's backstory.
5. Having to bring each piece of a ring up and down an elevator and setting up to get trained = Mick Foley.
6. Jeor Mormont's territory is somewhat based on the Portland Wrestling Territory/Big Time Wrestling.
7. The Westeros Wrestling Alliance (WWA) = National Wrestling Alliance (NWA)
9. Choq Staegone = Subaru Leone

If there's something you didn't understand it'll probably be explained later.
Next chapter is Sam.
From the time Samwell Tarly saw his first wrestling match on TV, at the formative age of 9, he was hooked for life. He'd watch on Saturday nights after Sammy Terry was off the air...or it may have been after Science Fiction Theatre. Unbeknownst to him, he accidentally found wrestling right during a boom period.

At age 12, he begged his mother, Melessa Florent, to take him to Highgarden for his first live match. But she refused to even hear of it. At the time he didn't understand why she was so against the idea, but later it riddled him with guilt to ever have even once watched wrestling. As it would turn out that her husband, his father, broke up their family for the business.

When Sam was seven, his father, Randyll Tarly, left he and his mother for reasons unknown to him at the time. And he sent his three sisters to all-girls boarding school and dragged his little brother away from his tearful mother's arms to raise him on his own. Splitting up a fifteen-year marriage didn't seem enough for him, he wanted to cut the family apart and make them into confetti.

His father had a lot of friends in Horn Hill, his circle even stretched into law faculty, which helped him win full custody of Sam's four siblings. While his friends in the civilian sector devised calumnies against his mother to explain his actions and protect his public image. As a result, no one in their town wanted to have anything to do with her. Up until then, Sam had gone to a Sunday Faith school and to Sept. But then the people at Sept said something that angered his mom to the point where she said 'You guys can just take this Sept and shove it up your ass. I'm not coming back here because you guys have pissed me off.' She probably didn't exactly use those words but she no longer required Sam to go to Sept.

Sam would never admit it to his mother, but selfishly he felt relieved to see his father out of the picture. Of course, he was saddened by the separation from his siblings, but he thought he and his mother were better off far away from his father. The shrewd man was never around much anyway, but when he was he was effortless in trying to change Sam's nature.

Randyll Tarly was ascribed to the theory that the woman was taken from the man's rib, and that man should look upon their family as a patriarchal sovereignty in which he himself is both king and septon. And he felt his wife was turning Sam into a tottering fen sucked sherbet.

Melessa Florent worked in the newspaper industry and started reading to Sam when he was only three, possibly even sooner. And when Sam entered first grade he was already reading at a fourth-grade level, but the teacher was mad because his mother didn't teach the method that the school was teaching. His father wasn't too pleased with her either.

He tried to impose on his son a daily program that included rigorous exercise and sports. He cared little for formal schooling or if Sam was academically inclined or not. From age four until he left, Randyll forced him to play every peewee sport available--football, baseball, hockey, etc. But Sam frustrated his father at every opportunity, and only became the object of making the other boys laugh. He didn't have a fraction of his father's natural aptitude for sports. And let's just say his level and layers of flab and cellulite were not that of an athlete.
It's any wonder how wrestling reeled him into a relationship like a fish on a line. Believe it or not his father never made him watch wrestling, he actually forbade his mother to let Sam watch him on television. He probably was waiting for Sam to attain a certain level of age so he could tell him what he did for a living and at the same time explain the nature of the business.

If Sam never heard the truth about his famous father from people outside their home it was because Randyll Tarly wrestled for most of his career under a mask as Mr. Westeros. A patriotic babyface gimmick that was sort of a take-off on the Batman story, where Mr. Westeros was the son of a famous professional wrestler that was killed in the ring by an evil heel menace.

Ironically, comic books might give an inkling into Sam's liking of wrestling. Sam was a huge comic book aficionado when he was early young. He'd go to the local drugstore where the comics were twelve cents a piece and he could get twenty new books for two dollars and fifty cents. He has runs of every Marvel and DC superhero boom from 1962 to 1975.

Despite his mother refusing to take him to the wrestling, luck would have it that the wrestling would come to him. In 1976, the Tyrell family finally brought wrestling back to Horn Hill after a spell of twelve years. Tyrell Promotions ran weekly events in every city in the Reach wrestling territory, and now every Tuesday night there was a show in his city.

He knew pleading with his mother would be a waste of time, so Sam instead did the unthinkable and lied to her. He came up with a simple plan, he would ask her if he could go to a sleepover at a friend's house on a Tuesday night when in reality he would go to the wrestling show. The only problem was that Sam didn't have any friends. He could make one up, but knowing his mother she would probably want to meet him. So Sam decided to buy a friend.

His mother came from a wealthy family and was left a healthy inheritance after her parents passed away. And she would give Sam a monthly allowance to give him some independence, and make a smart spender out of him. Samwell Tarly has never known any smarter way to spend your money than for wrestling. And on that account, he bought the services of Dareon, a boy from his school who liked to sing to girls to swell their hearts and to adults to unswell their pockets.

Sam had a feeling if you offered that kid money he would attempt to pin down a kangaroo on a trampoline. He wasn't wrong.

Sam brought Dareon to his house a few times to meet his mom because as they say, schemes are like fruit, they require a certain ripening. And once he felt confident enough, he asked about the sleepover and she gave him her permission.

Everything was off to a banner start, his mother drove him to Dareon's apartment building, she insisted on meeting the singer's mother, as he predicted, and then she left. What should have happened next was that Sam would abruptly "fall asleep", and Dareon would distract his mother so he could sneak out and take a cab to the show. Except Dareon had other plans.

He thought the show was a great opportunity for a crowd to listen to his harmonies and throw him a pretty penny. Sam, obviously, objected but Dareon threatened to foil all his plans if he didn't let him join. He tried to explain the overwhelming mathematical probabilities of getting caught, but Sam's equations apparently only created a chemical alteration in Dareon's head. Because he took it as an incentive to spike his mother's tea with sleeping sedatives...

By the time he confessed to Sam the drivel that filled his head it was too late, you could already hear what sounded like a chainsaw down the hall in the living room.
Sam was completely disgusted with Daeron, but even more disgusted with himself. So disgusted that he puked, literally vomited right on the living room floor.

He felt more wicked than the characters in Tales of Voodoo, or Witches' Tales, or any of those other horror magazines from Eerie Publications. He wanted to call home and make an excuse so his mom could come pick him up and then he would come clean about everything, he knew that was the right thing to do. But somehow, Dareon convinced Sam to continue with his plan.

Maybe Sam thought this would be his only chance to go to a wrestling show before becoming a grown adult with so many responsibilities and little leisure time. And that if his mother hated wrestling before she was gonna hate it even more if she found out it made her boy lie to her.

Whatever the case, his emotions were too foul for sense and instead of calling his mother they called a taxi.

Luckily, the show wasn't a sellout and the ticket sellers didn't seem to have a problem with pocketing cash from a couple of teenagers. It was annoying to see Dareon singing, or as Sam would phrase it, wagging his little wackadoodle, to get money and attention before the show without a spike of shame for what he had done only an hour ago, but Sam was too excited to bang the gavel.

After seeing his first match live Sam knew that wrestling was all he wanted. It just came right at him--an instant pleasure, a tidal wave of emotion. He felt completely with this universe. He felt profoundly rooted in it and connected with it.

Some people think wrestling is just running, hitting the ropes, and giving people tackles. But it's more than that to Sam. It's art. And these artists connect the dots to make a Seurat painting. They attempt to wring as much as possible out of every moment and do so in creative and surprising ways.

Admittedly, he was so emotionally invested that night he forgot about his sins. Forgot his poor mother who was tucked into bed deceived by her son's egotistical impulses. Forgot Dareon's mother who was in deep sleep after her own son drugged her. Forgot the color of the skies shining up above. He was enjoying THAT night so much that he forgot to be concerned about tomorrow.

The time of biological rhythm cannot be prevented, however. And when they returned to Dareon's apartment after the show ended, the rhythm of the waves splashed them right in the face. Sitting on the steps of the apartment building was none other than Sam's mother.

She apparently called to check-up on Sam and was worried when nobody answered after a half-dozen attempts, so she came back. And when nobody answered the door she asked the clerk on the first floor and he told her that he saw the two of them leave the building on their own and get in a taxi.

Sam was prepared to spill everything and face the consequences, but before he could, Dareon spoke up and told a version of the night's events that blurred the immorality of their devious scheme. Specifically leaving out of that he was paid by Sam to be his friend and that he put his mother to sleep. Sam was too frazzled to form a cogent simile, so he simply nodded to his mother and hung his head in shame.

They then went up the second floor to Dareon's apartment and woke up his mother. He explained that she had a narcoleptic sleeping disorder, and to Sam's surprise, Dareon's mother verified the story. Apparently, this wasn't the first time Dareon slipped something in her menu, and he
somehow convinced her that she had a kind of sleeping problem.

Now, Melessa Florent was the most polite woman you could ever meet. She was such a nice and wonderful lady that was loved so much by everybody. She never harmed anyone, she never stole, she never even talked bad about anyone, especially if they didn't deserve it. BUT if you presented her with rudeness, stupidity, or dishonesty, then you awaken her sleeping sword of war.

After Sam and his mother went back home, he was having to pick that sword out. Considering the things she didn't know it was a kick in the seat that he more than deserved. But when she unplugged his television set and made for the front door, Sam had to fight back. His mother had lost her temper a couple of times with him up until then--for trailing off and getting lost at the shopping arcade, for forgetting to close his pet tarantula's cage and letting it loose in the house, and for trying to build a robot and causing a small explosion in his room. But Sam had never felt bridled by her authority, and he never ever raised his voice at her--not out of fear but out of love. When he did that night she knew the situation was serious.

Sam was quick to apologize but he was still determined not to make the concession without a fight. With his eyes glistening he delivered a finely hewn promo in the style of his favorite wrestling heroes to put the sport over--explaining why he went this far, explaining why he would lie to the person he cared most about, and explaining that wrestling drove him, he didn't drive IT.

His promo worked but not in the way he was hoping for. His mother broke down and finally purged herself of her secrets. And she didn't let just any cat out of the bag, she let out a big puma. As tears filled her eyes she revealed that his father was a wrestler, that he left them for wrestling, and that wrestling destroyed their family.

It was like someone threw a blow dryer in the bathtub and shocked Sam into delirium. Once he came to his senses he ran to the bathroom to throw up for a second time that night.

After locking himself inside for over an hour, he looked in the mirror and told himself that he would quit on wrestling. That no matter how much he loved it, he loved his mother more and wasn't gonna torment her any further. He could just think of new sources of enjoyment, right?

A month later on a Tuesday, his mother came back from work with a new television set and two tickets to the wrestling show that night. She couldn't take it anymore, she said it was torture to see HIM in a state of torture. That by trying to force voluntary cooperation from him, she was no different from his father. And she would not let him become a cauldron of repressed anger, like herself. Sam tried to rebut but who was he fooling, that month saw him descend from the top of the wheel to the bottom. He wasn't enjoying his music, food, and other soft pursuits. One of his junior high teachers even called the house to ask if anything was wrong.

Seeing how much he loved watching the matches live and enjoying the reaction of the crowd herself, she agreed to keep taking him every Tuesday night thereafter. From then on they became part of a community at the Horn Hill County Armory, a community characterized by affection, seriousness and a sense of history.

There were three generations of some people. The Armory opened in the early 1900s and wrestling matches appeared there going back to the 20s and 30s. It had its dark ages in the 60s where nobody was running it until the Tyrell's brought it back. But Tuesday nights was a tradition back from the 30s and 40s. It was the wrestling night in Horn Hill.

In fact, the people they got their first front row tickets from, after nearly a year of attendance, was
this woman and her niece and her son-in-law.

After a while Sam wanted more than the pictures he had taken with his cerebral camera, so he started taking physical pictures of the matches with his Kodak Instamatic w/flash cube. Sam took lousy pictures—even from the front row he was probably fifteen feet from the ring and it wasn't professional equipment. But it led him to an interest in photography, which led to him asking and receiving a 35mm camera for his 16th birthday.

And the first night he had it Sam took a picture of a wrestler called Alester Florent. Alester was just in the ring and he turned around and saw someone with a camera and posed for him. A few weeks later the photo caught the eye of Olenna Tyrell.

The "Lady Olenna", or the "Queen of Thorns" was not only the promoter of Horn Hill, she was the widow of the late Luthor Tyrell, the founder of Tyrell Promotions, and the mother of Mace Tyrell, who took over in 1973.

She already knew Sam really well. One night he and his mom were shopping at the merchandise stand and Lady Olenna recognized her from a wrestlers wedding that she attended years ago with his dad. The two became good friends from then on.

Lady Olenna thought the color 4X6 photo Sam had taken of Alester Florent might sell better than the old-fashioned 8X10 Black & White publicity photos they were selling. So she asked him if he could get 100 copies of it by next week. Sam had no idea whether he could or not, but he was gonna by the next week, one way or the other, so he said yes.

He did some searching and found a photofinishing place in town that could make 100 color prints for about 20 cents each, and it only took them 2 days! It turned out that the fans did like the color photos better, as Lady Olenna sold all 100 the first week.

The Queen of Thorns could see the dollar signs and started asking him for more and more pictures, and gradually Sam kind of transformed the merchandise business. Before they would sell those Black & White 8X10s for $0.50 and they weren't that attractive. But when all of a sudden these color pictures hit the tables of Alester Florent, Baelor Hightower, Paxter Redwyne, Mathis Rowan, the Green Apple Fossoways, etc. They sold thousands, sometimes thousands a month--the 3.5x5s a dollar a piece and a color 8x10 for three bucks.

Sam was far too scared to ask for any money, afraid he would lose what little involvement in this world he was privileged to. Plus, he felt that helping transform something to generate more money for the boys was a fair exchange for them transforming HIS world. But after it became more than just the first hundred, Lady Olenna began exchanging the photos for 30 or 35 cents each. She took out 20 cents on the dollar as commission for one merch seller and gave the particular wrestler about 50 cents.

After a few months of efficient work, Lady Olenna set him up to shoot posed photos of all the top talent, and gave him ringside access for match photos!

It wasn't just a dream come true, it was a wet dream of orgasmic proportions come true. He exchanged words with some of the most extravagantly gifted practitioners of the art. That is when he could avoid tripping over his own tongue like a dithering fool.

The wrestlers saw how well they were doing on merch money from Horn Hill and began buying from him to sell at the merch stands in the other towns in the Reach, including Highgarden, which
more than doubled his market. The amount of money Sam and the people involved made overall was ludicrous. The pictures were cheap and they had buildings where there was three, four, five, six thousand people attending weekly, and everyone would go home with one.

If his father saw him in action in the Armory he would likely think he never did a lick of real work, that he was just goofing off. And external observers would have considered his work too tedious if they knew how everything was done. Especially in Summer of 1977, when school was out and Lady Olenna asked him to travel to the other towns in the Reach.

Sam would shoot the matches in Horn Hill, show the guys the albums, right down what they wanted, and then get back to the house to start the real work. He'd be up until daylight the next day, eating frozen pizza at four o'clock in the morning because he'd be looking through all the negatives, putting them in sleeves, marking how many copies of each needed to be, putting them in envelopes, and getting them ready to take to the photofinishing place the next day. Because if he dropped them off on Wednesday they would be ready hopefully by the time he saw the guys at a spot show that weekend. Then he'd go to Brightwater City on Wednesday night and shoot three or four more rolls of footage--Black & White action stuff. Every Thursday night the Tyrells ran Oldtown, either at Battle Island Arena once a month or a spot show in smaller venues. Whichever the case was, he would take the albums and go shoot four or five more rolls of film, mostly of action stuff. Saturday nights were split in the Reach, there was always a show somewhere in Highgarden and another show in Ashford. Because his father was the booker in Highgarden, he chose to avoid that city and instead always went to Ashford. Then finally he would have to go home and turn all that stuff in to be developed. Also if Lady Olenna ordered more material afterward, he'd need to have that stuff ready by the following Tuesday in Horn Hill...

People who have no comprehension or interest in wrestling or photography might wonder how he kept up the pace. How could he possibly do this that and the other? Sure he encountered days that were difficult, like a marriage, like a person who cooks every day out of true adoration. But somehow the overall love of the art helped him get through those days.

Chapter End Notes

This was more of a preview chapter, that's why there's no dialogue. The next Sam chapter will be loaded with some funny shit.

Details:
1. Sam's story will be somewhat based on Jim Cornette and Bobby Eaton. With his personality more like the latter and like canon.
2. Most of Sam's backstory is based on Cornette's, except for the personal stuff (father leaving, mother not liking wrestling, etc). Cornette did have a parent who was in the newspaper industry, but it was his father, who died when he was a kid.
3. But how Cornette got into the wrestling business and everything he did as a photographer is true, with some slight changes.
4. Also true was his liking of comic books and those prices!
5. The Horn Hill County Armory = the Louisville Gardens, which was previously called the Jefferson County Armory.
6. Tyrell Promotions = Jim Crockett Promotions/Mid-Atlantic territory.
7. Luthor Tyrell = Jim Crockett, Sr. Mace Tyrell = Jim Crockett, Jr.
8. Olenna is based on Christine Jarrett who was the promoter of Louisville and at least
2 other cities each week in the area for her son, Jerry Jarrett/the Memphis territory.

9. Randyll Tarly = The Patriot and George Scott. Not at all in their personalities, as far as I know. For Scott because he was a successful booker for Crockett/Mid-Atlantic, and for The Patriot because of Mr. Westeros.

10. The gimmick Mr. Westeros was the original idea for The Patriot that came from a comic strip drawn and written by Jerry Lawler for Wrestling Monthly Magazine in 72/73. While the name Mr. Westeros is a conglomeration of Mr. Wrestling and The Patriot.

11. Alester Florent = Bill Dundee

Next Chapter is Jon II.
Jon II

Chapter Summary

Jon meets the Starks.

Chapter Notes

I was anxious to get this out after two weeks without an update, so I didn't really proofread it much. I feel kinda meh about it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"This is it, the Stark house," the cab driver said.

Jon looked out the window to see that they had stopped before a pair of gates with a direwolf woven into their wrought-iron design. On the right gate pillar, the words "STARK HOUSE" were engraved on a metal plaque.

"How much do I owe you?" Jon asked.

"$5.20."

Jon fished the money out of his pocket to pay. "Good luck in there," said the cabbie idly.

Jon raised an eyebrow. "Why do you say that?"

The cabbie looked back at him and grinned. "You're not the first kid with a duffel bag that I've brought here."

Jon wanted to grab a light bulb and shine it in the cabbie's eyes to force him to elaborate. But he was running late, so instead, he grabbed his bag and exited the cab.

He walked up to the gate and pushed and pulled in a fruitless attempt to open it. The cab driver rolled down his window. "You have to press the buzzer!" He said, pointing to the left pillar.

Jon moved to his left where he was faced with some kind of machine on the pillar. It had holes on it and a button which he guessed was the buzzer, so his finger poked it.

Twenty seconds later a young girl's voice came out of the machine. "Who is it?"

Jon leaned close to the machine. "I'm Jon Snow, I came to see Mr. Stark!" He shouted back so she could hear him.

"You don't have to yell at me! I'm not blind!"
Jon blinked. "Blind?"

"If you're here for your IQ test results, they came back negative."

"What?"

"You're a few fries short of a happy meal, aren't you?"

"Happy m...McDonald's can shove it!"

The girl laughed out loud. "Arya that's enough," an older woman said.

"Hello, this is Catelyn Stark. The gate will open for you shortly."

"Thank you!" He shouted back.

Jon stood in front of the gate and waited for someone from the house to approach. But seconds later, to his surprise, it began to swing lazily open all by itself!

*It's true what they're saying, the computer is coming up in the world. It can do almost anything man can do.*

Beyond the gates a long walk led toward a huge stone house that seemed to grow the closer he got. Jon didn't know how you measured the square footage of a house, but it indicated greater grandeur than the norm. And it sat on a land that could hold almost two football fields.

The design of the mansion followed the past and out-of-date fashions of houses in the North. Simple, wintry yet with great strength and a sense that within those walls a man might feel safe. It overlooked downtown Winterfell and had an outbuilding behind the main house which was joined to it through a greenhouse.

As Jon approached the main house porch the front door opened. He was ushered inside by a beautiful woman who appeared to be in her early 40s with long auburn hair and blue eyes.

"Welcome. Let me take your coat." The posh southern voice confirmed she was Catelyn Stark.

Jon removed his warm winter coat and handed it to Mrs. Stark. "Thank you."

As she hung it on the coat rack and led him through the house, Jon took in the environment. Like the exterior, it was simple, yet free from the dark and somber Northern atmosphere he felt outside. It wasn't the magic carpet ride into a world of exuberance and luxury that Jon was expecting. And nothing looked cheap and shoddy, by any means. But this was down to earth. A very pleasant earth.

"Would you like a glass of water? The walk from the gate to the house is very long." She asked as they entered the family room.

"No, I'm fine. I'm used to being on my feet. I try to tell myself it's for the exercise, but it's probably because I'm too cheap to buy a car."

Mrs. Stark smiled. "My husband is quite penurious himself. I know a twenty-two room house says otherwise, but..."
"Penurious? What the hell does that... Wait did she say..."

"Twenty-two rooms?" Jon blurted out.

Mrs. Stark nodded. "Twenty-two rooms, four fireplaces, two porches, and a coach house. Oh, and 30 acres atop Branfield Hill."

Jon was speechless.

She continued. "But Ned bought this mansion with the idea that we would have as many children as the mother gifted us. Alas, we've had only five beautiful children. Instead, the rest of all this is housed by other wrestlers as well as an abundance of family pets." There was a slight stiffness in the way she said the last sentence.

"Did you guys have it built?"

"No, it was built in the early 1900s by a brick baron. When his children were grown, the house became a refuge for orphans, run by the Faith until it gave up the lease. It then switched hands a few more times until it was put on the market in 1960. Ned fell in love with the estate on first sight and bought the house when I was carrying our firstborn. He paid $28,750.00, which is more than 85 thousand today. Ever since then he's been so careful about money, he won't even tip a canoe." That made Jon chuckle.

"Now, I'm assuming by your bag that you're a wrestler as well? My husband and I have a long-standing open-door policy, everyone is invited and welcome. But if he isn't expecting you, he may ask you to come back another day."

"Uh, no... I mean yes, he is expecting me. I'm a student of Rodrik Cassel, he said I should be here by 8 o'clock but there were service disruptions on the subway system so I'm a little late." Jon gave a quick glance at his wristwatch. It was almost 8:35!

"Oh, Rodrik! I felt like I haven't seen him in ages. How is he?"

"He's fine, just absorbed in the school and on Beth."

Mrs. Stark looked at him questioningly. "Do you know Beth?"

"Yeah, she sometimes comes by the school. She's a great kid."

"Please send them my best. And tell Rodrik it's past due that he pays us a visit."

"I will."

"As for you, now I know why Ned went into the coach house at precisely 8:01. He believes very seriously in time management and doesn't allow anyone to waste it. I'll go tell him you're here, but he'll probably make you wait a while."

"That's fine."
"Please, sit down, lean back and relax on the sofa until I return."

Seeing her hesitance to leave, he did just that. After her departure, Jon threw his head back and groaned.

He looked around the family room. It was filled with standard living room swag -- end tables, artificial flowers, random paintings, and a family photo wall.

Jon's curiosity got the better of him and he got up and walked over to the picture wall. It was very unique with the framed photos spread behind a weirwood wall decor displaying the Stark family saga -- Ned and Catelyn when they were younger, their wedding, close relatives, and their five children.

The youngest child was a boy, maybe seven or eight years old with bright eyes and an appearance that favored his mother. His elder looked eleven or twelve with features that also likened Mrs. Stark. The youngest girl took after her father with a long face, grey eyes, and brown hair. Her age was hard to put a finger on, the face said teenager, but the small skinny body was a bit prepubescent. Her older sister, however, looked almost twice her age. She was tall, maybe even taller than Jon, and was a carbon copy of her mother. High cheekbones, vivid blue eyes, and thick auburn hair. He would even say she was more beautiful, with a face off the cover of a magazine.

The eldest son, of course, was the Young Wolf, Robb Stark. Being an avid follower of Winterfell Wrestling he felt like he knew him personally. He broke into the business a year or two before Jon started re-watching, and considering what Mrs. Stark said, he must be only a year older than him. You would think it was impossible for Robb to live up to Ned Stark, but he was thickly wrapped in potential.

Suddenly, Jon became very aware of himself. He was really truly in the home of the Starks. It was just as Mormont said, a week after his crazy trip to the far North, Rodrik informed him that he had set up a workout with the one and only Ned Stark. To settle his nerves, he put the meeting on the back of his mind and didn't allow thought to take on such inordinate importance for the following two weeks. He was only half-nervous and apprehensive when he woke up this morning, the other half was excited and motivated. Then the subway had to get backed up and fuck up the equation. Now, he not only made himself look bad in the eyes of the most important wrestling figure in the North but also Rodrik.

Jon turned around and his heart stopped for a moment. Sitting on the sofa where he was just a few minutes ago were two of the Stark kids from the wall. The younger girl and the second youngest boy. They stared at him in silence.

Jon finally spoke up. "Hey."

The girl turned her head to the boy. "So?"

"Fifteen minutes." He replied.

"That long?"

Jon recognized the girl's voice. It was the same one that came out of that machine outside.

"Well, dad will probably talk first."
"No, the clock doesn't start when they walk in, it starts when they lock up."

"Oh. Well, then three minutes."

The girl shook her head. "Still too long, he won't last more than a minute."

"Fine, then a minute."

"Too late, you already locked in at three minutes."

"What? No, I didn't!"

"Yes, you did."

"No, I did not. I never said that was my locked guess," he said sharply.

"You can't guess a minute Bran, I already locked in at a minute."

"No, you didn't!"

"Yes, I did."

His voice rose. "No, you didn't! You never said that you locked in at a minute."

"Okay, I lock in at a minute."

The boy shot to his feet. "You can't do that, Arya!"

"I just did it."

The two began talking over each other arguing for a moment. This is what having siblings must be like, Jon thought. He smiled to himself. "Hey, hey!"

The two stopped and looked at him. "What are you guys even arguing about?"

"We're making a bet for how long you'll last before my dad takes you to the top of the mountain."

The boy answered.

"We've made a bet for how long you'll last before my dad takes you to the top of the mountain," she corrected.

"No, we haven't!"

"Yes, we have!"

"Okay, okay!" Jon shut them down again. "What do you mean by take to the top of the mountain?"

He asked curiously.

"It's dad's word for screaming and pleading and begging for your life."

Jon half-smiled. "And what makes you think he'll take me to the top of the mountain."
Arya snorted. "He takes everyone to the top of the mountain. Wrestlers, football players, strongmen, big farm kids. He even made my brother Robb squeal, and he's taller and stronger than you. He'll take you to the top."

Jon nodded in agreement. "Nobody can take an ass-kicking like Robb Stark."

Now Arya jumped to her feet. "Robb began training when he was nine. He won important amateur wrestling championships in tournaments throughout the North, including the city championships in Winterfell three years ago. He'll be the best there ever was!"

"Um, okay." I guess she didn't understand that he was complimenting her brother. "So... how will you know if I... get to the top of the mountain? I've heard the den is in the basement. Does your dad let you guys go inside during workouts?"

"He sometimes lets me watch. Robb sent me in once to tape record this one guy who was screaming and weeping through the whole thing."

Arya snorted again. "He was pathetic."

The boy smirked. "But he never lets Arya watch."

"Shut up, Bran." She elbowed her brother in the gut. "You don't have to see it, you can hear it through the living room." There's a hole in the floor where the pipes have to and it goes straight through to the gym." Her voice was now low and intense. "When we bring friends over and dad is stretching some fool in the den, they hear all the groans and think this is a haunted house or we have a torture chamber in the basement."

"When our parents first moved here, mom wasn't accustomed to dad stretching guys in the gym, so when she heard all this screaming and banging on the walls, she phoned the police," Bran said with a breathy chuckle.

"Have you already started training?" Jon asked him.

Bran nodded with a bright smile. "I started at the same age as Robb."

Arya rolled her eyes. "He wrestles like a baby. He couldn't tell you the difference between a wrist lock and a wristwatch."

Bran huffed. "I could too!"

"No, you can't. If you could we wouldn't be grounded for the next two months."

"That wasn't my fault! What was I suppose to do?"

"Win the fight before a teacher saw," she said very obviously.

"He was bigger than me!"

"So was the kid Robb fought!"

Seven Hells. Being an only child doesn't sound so bad now.
"Alright, alright!" Jon was quick to calm the storm again but was intrigued by something they mentioned. "Who did your brother fight?"

"Some big kid who was bullying Sansa when they were in primary school."

"Sansa?"

"Our older sister."

"The kid had two years on Robb and was much bigger than him, so he always tried to bait him into a fight. And one day after school he decided he was gonna go at it again with Robb."

"Robb said he sat and he thought about it and thought about it all afternoon and finally decided he could beat the kid."

"It came down to one big showdown at the alley behind the school."

"Robb threw big wild punches so the big kid got his hands up to defend himself and Robb saw the opportunity and took him down and hammered him into the ground."

"They say he really beat the crap out of him."

"And when it was over the crowd cheered and hoisted him up on their shoulders."

The back-and-forth way the story was recited gave Jon the inkling that it wasn't the first time they proudly told it.

"But Bran here couldn't beat up a bully fast enough before a teacher came over and broke it up."

"That was different! We actually fought inside the school and everybody was making too much noise, of course, a teacher was going to catch us."

"Excuses, excuses."

"It's not fair. Robb said that before he had his fight there was a teacher that wished him luck."

"It doesn't sound like you guys are very popular around here."

"We have friends," Arya said firmly.

"But for most of the other kids were this weird wrestling family, and they love to taunt us," Bran added.

"They say that our dad is a fake, a phony. And that the wrestling business is a fraud and a joke. That's always the one thing that gets us started."

"Arya gets teased terribly, so did Sansa. She was often in tears when she got home from school."

Arya shrugged. "I don't want idiots to like me anyway. But Sansa was really miserable, she was crying just about every night. Her whole life was being ruined, she didn't want to go to school."

"The last straw was when they started calling her Big Bird."
Jon's brow furrowed. "Like from Sesame Street?"

"She's not even that tall, she just likes to wear high heels all the time," Arya refuted.

"They only started calling her that because some boy saw her and Arya standing next to each other and said they looked like Big Bird and Elmo."

A small chuckle escaped before Jon could stop it.

*Don't laugh Jon it's fucked up... Dammit, but he can't get the image out of his head. High heels or not their height difference does look pretty significant.*

"That uh, that sucks."

"Dad was so worried that he was convinced to let her go to a private school in the south."

"She shouldn't have cared, those kids are all dumber than a bag of rocks. All you have to do is walk into our living room and hear the sounds that come out of the den to know that wrestling is real."

Jon didn't want to get into that subject. "So how much are you guys betting?"

"Twenty bucks."

Jon rubbed his beard. "Well, I like a challenge so how about this, if I beat both your times then I get the money."

The two looked at each other for a moment. "Deal."

"But I haven't given my time yet," Bran said.

"Yes, you have."

"No, I haven't!"

*Gods...*

"Arya, Bran." A familiar deep, stern voice said behind Jon, sending a shiver down his back. "Don't bother our guest. Go to your rooms." The two kids swiftly crossed the room and walked upstairs.

Jon slowly turned around and was face-to-face with Ned Stark.

Jon Snow had fallen in wrestling love with several of the most gifted in this profession. Arthur Dayne, Barristan Selmy, Oberyn Martell, Rhaegar Targaryen, Robert Baratheon, etc. Those cupid arrows that hit your heart are rapturous and leave you with a wound that happily never heals. But the man who sank his wolf jaws, not an arrow, into his sublime engine was standing right in front him. With a long face, long brown hair, and a closely trimmed grey beard.

Mr. Stark frowned. "You've already wasted forty minutes of your time, boy, come on," he said before walking off. Jon swooped up his bag and quickly followed after him. They went through a door and he flicked on a light revealing a staircase.
Jon found his courage as he was led down into the basement. "I'm sorry for being late, sir. The subway had some issues."

No reply.

"I hope you don't hold Rodrik accountable for my bad punctuality."

Still no reply. Jon got the hint.

They went down and then walked through another door to enter the den.

It was not what he was expecting. The den was just one little tiny cement room with low ceilings and two windows that were broken, possibly by baseballs. It was dark, damp, and cold.

"Get on your gear, I'll be back in three." Mr. Stark said before leaving.

Like a kid in a candy store, Jon wandered around, looking at the wood-paneled walls, the green mat attached to three sides that felt as hard as the floor, and the free chrome weights with the name Stark engraved in them. Everything looked simple but there was a mystery about the room.

After perusing, Jon quickly opened his bag and stripped down to his gym clothes and got on his shoulder and knee pads. Shortly afterward Mr. Stark came back in.

"Sit down." He said, pointing to the mat.

Jon did as he was instructed while Ned got on one knee a few feet in front of him. He stared at Jon and it felt as if he was peering into his soul and was absolutely aware of everything phony about him. That he read him like a book.

"Do you really want to be here?" He asked.

"Yes."

"Why?"

Alright, Jon, that's easy. Just be honest.

"Because I want to be better."

"Better? How can you get better when you've never even had a match? When you don't have on-the-job experience? When you don't know your strengths and weaknesses?"

Fuck Me

"You should be here because you want to learn how to wrestle and you want to know how it works for real."

"But Rodrik has already..."

"Rodrik is a great teacher, I learned a lot from him. He knows how to create the illusion of a wrestling match. To work holds to build the drama or the tension or further the conflict or escalate
the emotion of the match. Not just sitting there on your ass in a hold but having the expression on your face of the pain and conveying what's going on through body language. Waving your arms because it's a leg hold, kicking your legs because it's an arm hold, looking like you're trying to struggle to get out of it and the guy that's applying it is really cranking down trying to make you give up. There's no one better in the North that can teach you that art. But pain is no illusion. And you have to be able to take a lot of abuse in this profession. There's also an art to dealing with pain, and some seem to think I'm a master at it.

"My father, he was a tough and stubborn man, and in a dispute over land he wound up in jail, and my brothers and I ended up in a foster home. It was there that I discovered wrestling. I fell in with a club of shooters. You know what that is?"

"I think Rodrik basically said it was guys who are so tough that they can back up the working stuff by beating the tar out of anyone they want to," Jon replied.

"It's real wrestlers. Real submission wrestlers. Some call it catch wrestling because you try to catch a hold anywhere you can. These shooters had a great time stretching me and grinding me up. They would crank me up as tight as they could make me without actually separating life from the body. The idea of the game was that they would give you so much punishment that you'd just give up and not come back. But I never gave up, and it wasn't long before I was giving all the punishment.

"To dish out that kind of pain and to see that kind of pain is sort of what makes a man out of you. You survive by taking that pain in. Getting hit, hitting back. Letting out all your aggression. Being a good shooter makes you a good pro wrestler because you really get how to work in a realistic fashion."

Mr. Stark rose. "Get up."

Jon pushed himself back up on his feet.

"Now get ready to lock up."

The two got in position. "Let's see what you got, boy."

When Jon was nine years old he was stung by a bee and experienced the sharp burning pain that comes with it. But instead of giving him medicine or some home remedy his mother just washed the sting site and iced it. And she said he should deal with pain by meeting it. He didn't understand what she meant so she simplified it and asked him how do you meet noise? If a train rushes by how do you receive it? Do you resist it or do you let it go through you and then it's gone? The previous sounded like the clear answer, but as he was walking up the stairs to leave the Stark den it was hard to pull-off.

Jon killed himself almost every day in the gym and in the ring, but this was a completely different animal. He was slap-dab blown up and could barely speak. He thought his first day at Rodrik's school was the most painful experience he had ever been through. But now it was second. At one point he couldn't feel his arms and in another, his throat muscles got so tight he thought something was gonna burst. He was squeezed so hard that it felt like the blood vessels behind his eyeballs broke. And the voice of Ned screaming 'You've breathed your last breath' will ring in ears for
several nights.

Mr. Stark didn't kick the shit out of him, he actually taught him shoot holds which you may actually consider a life skill if you know how to use them. But he was taken to the top of the mountain and it was as brutal as the two Stark kids made it out to be. He couldn't tell you if he won the bet or not, once Ned Stark applied the first hold, time stopped existing. He couldn't think, he couldn't remember, he could barely see where Mr. Stark was leading him.

Thankfully, he was directed to a chair at a small kitchen table with a water bottle brought to him a moment later. He hastily removed the cap and chugged it all down in probably a record time.

"Would you like another?" a familiar voice asked close at hand.

Jon glanced up to see Catelyn Stark. He scanned around for her husband but he was nowhere in sight. He could see the gourmet kitchen that surrounded him, however.

"Yes, thank you," he murmured.

She went into the refrigerator and brought him another bottle. As Jon swallowed it down Catelyn went around the counter to chop some vegetables.

"You know some people think Ned takes great pride in torturing guys down in the den but that's not altogether true at all. He loves teaching wrestling, he just wants to make you the toughest guy that you can be."

She eyed him and Jon simply hummed in response. He was not really in the shape for a long conversation.

"He won't like me telling you this, but he's really a big gentle loving guy. He just came up in a time when wrestling was much more shoot based, almost real like the carnival days.

Mrs. Stark paused.

"Listen to me, I'm defending the thing that keeps me up at night. I once asked Ned how long we would be in this business, and he said about two years. Twenty years later, we're still in it." She started chopping again. "I told him I didn't want any of the boys in it, and now Robb is traveling to Yi-Ti to wrestle, Bran is training two days a week to wrestle, and Rickon writes a paper in school saying that his dream is to wrestle. Even Arya loves it." Mrs. Stark's voice had grown a bit tense and she was now chopping the vegetables aggressively. "But I was adamant with Ned that I didn't want the girls dating or marrying wrestlers, above all."

The mood in the kitchen and the knife in Mrs. Stark's hand was making Jon a little uncomfortable, so he decided it was time to bail.

"Mrs. Stark, do you mind if I use your phone to call a taxi?"

"Why are you in such a hurry? And please, call me Catelyn or Cat."

"I just want to go home and get some rest."

"Why don't you go upstairs and lay down for a bit. Like I told you before we have plenty of rooms."
"No, I don't want to impose. And with how bad the subway service is today it's better if leave now or I might not get home for dinner." Jon said with a nervous laugh.

"All the more reason for you to get some rest before you leave."

Jon sighed. "It's very kind of you but..."

Catelyn walked around the counter with the kitchen knife at her side and approached him. "Please, I insist."

Jon jumped from the seat. "Which room is it?"

She smiled. "I'll show you." She put the knife on the counter, thank the Gods, and led the way.

They went up the spacious staircase until arriving at the fourth and final floor of the mansion and going into one of the bedrooms. It was a fairly simple small room with two beds and two windows.

"I'll only lay down for a bit," Jon said.

"Rest as much as you need. The bathroom is across the hall and If you need anything I'll be downstairs."

"Thank you, Mrs...Catelyn."

She smiled again. "You're welcome, Jon.

She left the room and closed the door on her way out. Once alone Jon threw himself on the bed and finally let out a long groan that he had suppressed up until then. He looked down at his watch and it was now 12:40.

*It felt like he had two birthdays during that workout.*

Usually, Jon would wish that the days were longer, but he wanted this day to end now. It was just too much input. He wanted to digest, and while he's digesting it, he doesn't want any more input or any more information. He wanted to get away from the bombardment of awareness and forget. He wanted to be turned off.

After deciding to close eyes momentarily, Jon slowly started to feel more comf... He started to feel more... more com... more comfor.. table...

Chapter End Notes

I didn't want this chapter to be too long so I decided to make it a two-parter. I'm still not sure if I'll write the second part next or Sam II.

Credits:
Hitman Hart: Wrestling with Shadows Documentary (really really good doc)
Everything about the Stark house and its history is based on the Hart house in Calgary.
Same thing with the Stark Den/Hart Dungeon.
Since there were actually twelve Hart children, not every Stark is particularly based on a Hart.
Winterfell Wrestling = Stampede Wrestling.
Ned's origins = Stu Hart's origins.
The Stark children being bullied because of wrestling was the life of the Hart children growing up.
Sam II

Chapter Summary

A night on the roof and a fatal wedding.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sam's eyes popped open at the sound of his mother calling his name and soft knocking on his bedroom door. He rolled his eyes over to the clock on his bedside table. It was 9:43. For a second Sam panicked, until he remembered it was Sunday. There was no school and he didn't have to work.

In fact, he was up all night developing the photos from the show in Ashford that took place a few hours earlier, so he was terribly exhausted. Not as exhausted as he would be if it were still summer, but a boy needed his sleep.

"Sam, open the door," his mother kept repeating.

There was no urgency in her tone so Sam wasn't in any urgency to get out of bed and open the door. He barely had the energy to form a reply. "M'sleepin, mom." He muttered, knowing perfectly well that she couldn't hear him.

After a beat of silence, Sam thought she had felt some compassion for her lovely son and let him have some much-needed rest. But a few seconds later he heard the sound of a key turning in a lock. He opened his eyes again and sat up from the bed as his mother came through the door.

"Sam, why didn't you answer the door, or at least give some sign of life?" She chastened him.

"Mom, I just got into bed like three hours ago," Sam said querulously.

Her face became sympathetic. "I know, honey, but you have a phone call."

Sam frowned until a thought came to mind. "Is it Olenna?" He quickly climbed out of bed.

"No, it's Rosey."

"Rosey?" Sam wrinkled up his face. Rosey is a girl a little older than him from the other side of town. She and her mother Emma go to the matches every week at the Armory and they've even traveled to some of the out-of-town matches with Sam and his mom a time or two. She's an okay girl but he wouldn't go as far as calling her a friend. So he had no idea why the heck she was calling him now. Sam sighed. "Can't you tell her to call me back later?"

"I did, I insisted, but she said it's important, and she doesn't know if she can get a hold of you later."

Sam grunted and made for the hallway to grab the touch-tone telephone. "Hello, Rosey?"
"Sam? Thank the gods."

"Is everything alright? My mom said it was something important."

"Yes, it is. I'm getting married."

Is she serious? "Are you serious?"

"Yes, his name is Garrett. I don't if I've talked about him to you before, we've been dating for almost a year. He's tall with beautiful messy brown hair and deep blue eyes--hard with muscle. He works at a lumber yard with his father but his goal is to...

"No, no, I mean...I've heard about Garret, many times. And I'm very happy for you. But why are you...Is this why you're calling me?"

"No. Well, no and yes. See, we need someone to take pictures of the wedding. But as you know we don't have a ton of money, so we can't afford a professional wedding photographer. And my Mom and I were wondering if we could hire your services. We could offer you a hundred bucks?"

More than pondering her request Sam was wondering why she couldn't wait until Tuesday to ask him this.

"I would've waited until Tuesday to ask, but I know how busy you are and I wanted to make sure that day was open. We know that you can get the job done, Sam."

Sam sighed again. "What day is it?"

"The first Saturday of next month."

"At what time?"

"The ceremony starts at 1, but I'd prefer you be there an hour before. You know, to calm a bride's nerves."

"How long would I have to be there? I've never been to a wedding, I don't know what exactly happens after the ceremony."

"We'll have a reception that will last three or four hours, but you'd be free to leave after the second hour."

"Where's it gonna be at?"

"It's five blocks from our house. I can give you the address on Tuesday."

Okay. He could leave at 3, go back home and shower, and be on the road in less than an hour for the show in Ashford.

"Okay, I'll do it."

Rosey cried out. "Thank you, Sam! Thank you, thank you!"
"Yeah, you're welcome. Listen, I have to go now I haven't..."

"Oh Sam, if only you would've been there to photograph Garrett's proposal, it was SO sweet. First, he took me out to dinner at this wonderful..."

Sam hung up the phone. He wasn't usually so bold but lack of sleep always made him not himself. "Mom, I don't care if Angie Dickinson calls, I'm not in."

His mother smirked. "Angie Dickinson? I've done my job."

Sam rolled his eyes and went back to the cocoon to give himself up to sleep.

One hour later

Sam jerked awake and scowled. Now what woke him? He swore he heard a noise. He strained his ears and glanced around the bedroom to find the culprit. Nothing. Then a moment later...

tap

He rubbed the sleep from his eyes and got out of bed.

taptap

There it was again. It was coming from the window. Sam walked over and opened the curtains. He peered down into the front garden and saw Dareon.

Gods

Sam slid the window up and cleared his throat. "What do you want?"

"Come down here," was his reply.

"No, I'm sleeping!"

"Not anymore."

"Dareon, I've only had four hours of sleep. Go away!"

"C'mon Sam, it's important!"

Sam narrowed his eyes. "Tell me."

"I'll tell you down here."

"No. What I consider important is apparently not on the same wavelength to what other people consider important, so spill it."

"What if I say I know a way we can watch wrestling in every city of Westeros. Live in action."

"I'd say you were crazy."

Dareon smiled slyly. "Would you call Roone Inchfield crazy?"
Sam’s frown flickered. Roone Inchfield was one of the really smart kids from their high school. He could create sophisticated robots out of garbage, much to Sam's envy. "What does Roone Inchfield have to with this?"

"He's the one that told me."

That changed everything. If it was possible to watch wrestling live in faraway cities, Roone Inchfield would know how to do it. "If you're yanking my chain, I'm not taking you to Oldtown anymore," Sam threatened.

"I swear on my mother's life."

Sam blinked. "I mean it Dareon, you'll need to find someone else to take you."

"Let the Gods take my voice if I'm lying."

"I'll be down in a minute."

Sam closed the window and pushed the curtains back. He then went into his closet to grab a jacket and a pair of shoes. He planned to go back to sleep once he spoke to Dareon so he didn't see any point in removing his pajamas.

He left his room, got down the stairs, and opened the front door. Dareon stood there waiting with something he didn't have before. "What's with the fan?"

"It's my mom's. She bought it last week but she didn't like it. So she wants me to return it."

"Whatever, tell me what Roone Inchfield told you."

"I'll tell you on the way to Western Auto."

Sam's eyebrows pinched in confusion. "Western Auto? Did Inchfield say we have to buy something?"

"No, that's where my mom bought the fan."

Sam looked at him sharply. "Dareon..."

"You're mom won't mind if we use her car to do me a favor." He said quickly. "She likes me."

"Why don't you just walk there it's not that far," Sam said peevishly.

"I've never been in Western Auto and I don't like going to strange places alone."

"Strange places...You're not going to a planet where carrots monsters are threatening to take over, Dr. Smith."

"I have no idea what that means, but knowing you it's probably something nerdy. Do you want to know what Inchfield said or not?"

Sam drummed his fingers on his thigh and thought about it. "Fine. Let me get changed." He closed
Moments like this reminded Sam why he could never consider Dareon a true friend in a conventional way. A frenemy was more appropriate. They couldn't agree on what to have for lunch but at least they could agree that they both gotta eat.

If you told him Dareon would have any part in his life after the incident a couple of years ago at his apartment, he might've committed suicide right there and then. But to his shock, when his mother first took him to the Armory, they ran into Dareon and his mother in the crowd.

Apparently, taking him to that show had sown the seeds for him to become a wrestling fan. And so he urged his mother to take him to the Armory every Tuesday thereafter.

The only reason Sam gives him the time of day is cause Dareon promised to not meddle with the substances that enter his mom's body anymore. Oh and maybe also because Dareon's apartment building is on a hill and his TV can get great signals for wrestling, especially from Nightsong in Dorne, which is part of the Martell's territory.

When Sam came back downstairs, Dareon was inside his house in the living room talking to his mother. "Sam, Dareon was just telling me that you offered to give him a ride to Western Auto. That's so nice of you."

Sam forced himself to smile. "Yeah. But if you need the car we can go another time."

"Oh no, it's fine. The keys are on the counter."

"We should be going then, right Dareon?"

Dareon gave him a challenging look, but Sam countered with a glare that could kill. "Right," Dareon complied.

"Oh, okay. Dareon, please look after him. And Sam." She fixed her son with a disapproving stare. "Try not to get him in any trouble."

*Unbelievable. His mother really thought Dareon was the good one. If only she knew...*

Sam grabbed the keys on the counter and the pair made their exit.

A few minutes later they were on the road and Sam was determined to get the payoff for this "favor". "What did Inchfield say?"

No reply.

"Dareon, what did Inchfield say!" Sam fumed.

"Alright, don't get your big panties in a bunch. I was just trying to memorize word for word so you don't blame ME if it doesn't work."

"Just tell me what he said."

"Okay, listen. He said if you take that antenna wire that's attached to your TV and you put it in the phone receiver in some fashion--tie it around some of the wires, and then you make a long-distance
call to a particular city, you'll be able to pick up those local cities TV station."

Sam was incredulous. "That won't work."

*Will it?*

Dareon shrugged. "I don't know, maybe you're right. But this is Roone Inchfield we're talking about. I think it's worth a try."

Sam scratched the back of his head. "Even if we knew for sure that it worked, my mom will never go for it. Our phone is the latest model, she won't let me take it apart."

"I can try to convince my Mom. Though there is another method that wouldn't require her approval."

Sam knew what he was implying and gave him the stink eye.

Dareon held his hands up. "Fine, we'll try the beggar's way."

A short while later they pulled into the Western Auto parking lot and went inside.

There was a long line to the counter which Dareon didn't seem too interested in joining. "Where are you going?" asked Sam.

"I'm gonna look around till the line shortens."

"Oh no, you're not. I know you, we'll end up being here for hours. I already got what I wanted. If you want to stay here and browse the whole store, fine. But I'm leaving."

"Alright, I'll wait in line. Gods."

Dareon took his spot in the back of the line while Sam went to do the browsing.

He wanted to pay special attention to the automobile parts. For a while now Sam has been thinking about buying his first car to free himself from the shackling dependency on his mother for transportation.

After obtaining his driver's license last year, she offered to buy him a car with two conditions--that he buy it from her when he had saved up some money, and that she pick the car. The first seemed fair but he was having none of the second stipulation. Sam already knew what car he wanted--a Pontiac Firebird.

He already had some money in the bank but he wasn't entirely sure he wanted to spend it on a car. Because there was something just as important on his wish list--a machine to record wrestling.

He's had a vision of the future and in it, Samwell Tarly has a library stacked of wrestling tapes from everywhere in the known world and from different points on the timeline.

With that beautiful apparatus in his possession, he could finally enter the tape trade. He wouldn't need to depend so much on his subscriptions to magazines that were 8-12 weeks behind to follow the territories and wrestlers outside the Reach.
He could trade back and forth for tapes of the territories in the North, the Riverlands, Stormlands, Dorne, and all of Westeros, and maybe even Essos. Any true wrestling fan would be stroking themselves at the thought.

At the moment there's a videotape format war between VHS and Betamax. And Sam isn't picking a side but he's got his eye on a brand new VCR at Buford's Furniture Store that costs a thousand dollars and can record up to four hours on a two-hour tape.

Plus, there was already a VHS machine in his house that his mother bought in 77. Olenna would often ask him to make a cassette tape or bring a clipping if the local news did a story on the matches in Horn Hill. But you needed two recording machines to make a copy, and Sam will unwilling to give up his originals in a trade.

Sam's thoughts were stilled by the sounds of whooping and bells ringing and a party horn coming from the front counter of the store.

"Congratulations, you're are ten thousandth customer!"

He walked to the aisleway and approached the cash register to learn that it was Dareon who was being checked-out, of course, as always, at the center of whatever was going on. He went to him. "What's going on?"

"I'm the ten thousandth customer!" Dareon exclaimed.

"And...what does that mean?"

"They're giving me some kind of prize."

Of course they are.

The female cashier came back to the counter carrying something. "Here it is, sir, a battery-operated black-and-white twelve-inch television!"

You gotta be kidding me... And did she just say battery-operated black-and-white twelve-inch? That doesn't sound right.

"Seven gods, are you serious? Thank you! I love Western Auto! This has been my favorite store for years! I always tell everybody to come here. 'Run to your Western Auto store.'

"It's come to your Western Auto store, you idiot."

"Really? It's a bit harsh to call your customers idiots. But I still love ya guys."

Sam really wanted to slap the daylights out of him.

He looked at the cashier. "He doesn't deserve that, this is his first time... He didn't want to... I'm the one who..." Sam was too irritated and fatigued to rip a new one. Instead, he cursed under his breath, turned around, and bolted out of the store.

Dareon rushed after him, probably fearing he would drive off leaving him behind. Which he intended to do. "What are you so upset about?" He said as he slid into the passenger's seat holding his brand new TV. "You should be just as happy as I am."
Sam huffed. "You woke me up after only getting four hours of sleep and then extorted me into driving you here so you could get a free TV. Why the hell should I be happy?"

Dareon snickered. "Think about it, Sam. This is a portable television. If we can watch Dornish wrestling from the second floor of my building, can you imagine what we can find from say... the roof."

_Huh... Maybe he was on to something._

"If we can't put the phone back together, I'll buy you a new one, ma. A better one."

"No, Dareon. I like my phone and I don't want a new one!"

"You prefer an old dusty ass rotary dial phone to a brand new touch-tone?"

"I don't care if you buy me a phone that doesn't need to be touched, I want my phone!"

"Fine, then I can just buy you the same one."

"Dareon, my answer is no and there's nothing you can say to change my mind."

Sam felt a little nosy listening in on the conversation between Dareon and his mother, but this had to do with wrestling, so it affected him.

It was now Friday but Dareon had forgotten to ask her about the phone line idea because he was so wrapped up on his new television. He was planning on reminding him Tuesday at the Armory after he was done working, but then Sam was frizzled by the information that Dareon received from a fellow regular.

Dareon returned to his room to join Sam. "Well... she's gonna think about it."

Sam rolled his eyes. "What did she say about taking the TV up to the roof?"

"As long as it has nothing to do with her phone, I don't think she cares," Dareon said bitterly. "Did you remember to bring warm clothes? I'm telling you I was freezing my ass off when I went up there."

"Yeah, I have it all in my sleeping bag. Are you sure you got the signal up there?"

"For the umpteenth time, yes. I tried it yesterday, the day before, and even Tuesday night after I came back from the Armory. It works, and the quality is solid."

At 8:55 PM Sam and Dareon were heading up to the roof with the television and a couple of chairs, while covered up in warm-up suits, jackets, and hats.

They sat the television on a chair and turned it on. Dareon went to channel 62, adjusted the antenna until he could gain a signal, and then the two made seats for themselves.
When the twenty-first hour of the day began, Sam glued his eyes to the television.

A song started playing and a logo appeared on the screen with the words Brotherhood Without Alliance Wrestling (BWAW).

*YES! YES! YES!*

*And that song is it...? Yes, it's the theme song of the Midnight Express movie.*

It was just as they told Dareon. If you could get great signal strength you could possibly watch the most infamous program on the wrestling planet today.

As the one minute intro with a montage of past events continued, Sam began to wonder if he should feel guilty?

The territories of wrestling are monopolies, and the wrestling business is controlled by a cartel of promoters across the country that are under the governance of the Westeros Wrestling Alliance, an organization that was created in the late 40s. Some would argue that these authorities were created by necessity to screw over the outlaws.

An outlaw promotion is a secondary promotion in town that's opposition to the established promotion and might be determined to put them out of business. It's usually in the form of a bunch of guys who couldn't get booked in most places because for one reason or another they got sideways with enough promoters that just quit using them, and so they got a grudge and decided to work for the outlaws because at least they'd pay them.

All wrestling today is done on a low-budget, but it's said that outlaw wrestling is in a lot of cases no-budget and it looks like it. In general, they make wrestling look bad.

The BWAW was formed by Beric Dondarrion, the man who did 6,033 sit-ups in a row. The story whispered in Sam's ear is that Beric started his career working in a variety of places--Storm's End for Argilac Durrandon, Starfall for the Dayne's, Riverun for the Tully's, etc. But Beric didn't like the way he was being booked and decided to go into business for himself and run opposition to the established territories, which got him blackballed. He specifically founded his company last year as a rival to the Tully's in the Riverlands. But he has extended into the Stormlands, which is now owned by Rhaegar Targaryen, and into the Reach, which is owned by Mace Tyrell, Sam's boss.

Dondarrion moved his headquarters to Blackhaven, his hometown, a few months ago. And since then his guys have knocked the top talent of all the nearby territories on television, and he's even taken out these big ads in the Highgarden newspaper to challenge them to a match.

All the boys and people on top have ignored Dondarrion and his crew of ragtags, but needless to say, they aren't the apple of anyone's eye in the business.

So Sam asked himself again, should he feel guilty? Heh...He can evaluate his thoughts, feelings, and actions after the show is over.

Like every other fan, Sam watches wrestling to see a conflict, not a performance. He would rather see the crappiest match ever and the guy he loves wins than the greatest match he's ever seen and the guy he hates win.
But this being the first time he's ever seen this show and the wrestlers in it, he doesn't really care who wins or loses, and instead, his mind has graded the matches.

An hour into the program and Sam could say that they have really high-quality matches. And while guys like Anguy, Lem Lemoncloak, Harwin, and Likely Luke know what they're doing, the two that stand out the most are Dondarrion and Thoros of Myr. You could tell that they are world-class talent in an ever-shrinking pool of local talents.

Beric has skill absolutely coming out of his fingernails, but Thoros is without question the most colorful and intense. I mean Sam legitimately thinks he's a crazy wild man on heavy drugs that is gonna snap and do anything at any time. And the fact that he carries his own confetti and throws it up in the air for himself is just gold.

Freak out man yeah! March 13th, 1979 island of Skagos when Thoros the Red Wizard of Myr defeated the Lightning Lord Beric Dondarrion for the BWAWS World Heavyweight Championship man, guaranteed, personified dig it! Freak Out! Celebrate!

That being said, the show does look very outlaw and a lot of things don't make any sense. They also spend an absurd amount of time talking about and challenging the guys in the established promotions.

As a match between wrestlers named Beardless Dick and Notch was underway, Sam and Dareon almost jumped out of their pants at the sound of a man on a megaphone. "Hey!"

Sam and Dareon exchanged bemused glances.

"Hey, come down from there!" The voice continued through the megaphone.

The two finally got out of their seats and walked to the edge of the roof. Down below there were two guys in police uniforms. The one with the megaphone and another shining a flashlight in their faces.

Dareon cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted. "What's the matter?"

"Come down from there!" The officer repeated through the megaphone. Sam couldn't see his face but the voice sounded sort of familiar.

"What should we do?" Dareon whispered, as though he would be heard if he didn't.

"Let's jump off into the goddamn inky blackness of night," Sam said sarcastically. "I'm thinking we should listen to the guys with the guns, Dareon."

The two left the roof and went down the staircase until arriving at the ground floor. There they were met by the two cops.

"Oh, it's you guys."

Just as Sam suspected, the voice belonged to someone he knew. Ben Bushy. Bushy worked off-duty at the Armory every week for Olenna and knew he and Dareon pretty well. "What are you doing up there?" He questioned.

"What do you think we're doing on the roof, we're watching wrestling on TV," Sam replied.
"Gods, you two are so covered up we thought you were trying to break into the building from the roof," Bushy said.

Sam and Dareon shared a chuckle. "So... can we go back up or what, there's still an hour left to the show."

"You boys need to find yourselves girlfriends," Bushy quipped as he and his partner turned and left the building.

"Are you Sam Tarly, the photographer?"

Sam held up his camera. "That's me."

"Thank the Gods. I'm Byren, I'm helping with the wedding. Follow me, please."

Byren began leading him through the house. "The bride was worried you weren't gonna show up."

"I thought the wedding wasn't starting for another forty-five minutes."

"Yes, but Rosey's body clock is a bit disrupted at the moment. She wished you'd be here sooner."

Sam glanced around as they walked. "This is a pretty big house."

"It's pretty old house. A pretty old house that wasn't so pretty a few years ago."

"Who's pretty old house is it?"

"Don't you know? This manor is very historic. It was built by the sons of a king a few hundred years ago and is still in possession of the family. But the latest heir had no interest in living here, so he made renovations and turned it into an event venue." Byren stated as he brought Sam to the room where the reception was gonna be held.

All the guests were spruced up and milling about in this kinda big women's club type of room. A few of them, including Emma, the mother of the bride, we're sitting on some benches.

"You can set up wherever you feel is best for you. I'll let the bride know you're here." Byren said.

"Thanks." Not being one to waste time, Sam found a spot and started getting his equipment ready.

A few minutes later as Sam was making sure his flash batteries were charged up, he heard a big commotion.

He looked over to the side and saw a bunch of people beginning to gather around something in the benches. He slowly moved toward the scene until seeing what it was all about and freezing on the spot.

"What happened?" One of the guests shouted.
"Emma fell off the bench," someone else replied.

"She had a heart attack! Somebody call an ambulance, she doesn't have a pulse," another guest said.

A minute later Rosey came storming into the room in her big wedding dress and clung to her unresponsive mother in hysteria.

Thirty minutes before the wedding was supposed to begin, the paramedics arrived and got to doing...whatever the hell it is that paramedics do in this situation.

Rosey was off with her friends in the corner in a state, while some guests were weeping and others had pity in their eyes.

Meanwhile, Sam is standing there realizing that he doesn't know any of these people except the girl that's having a mental breakdown right now and the woman's that's just died! He's never met any of these people!

Suffice it to say, Sam was feeling uncomfortable.

He felt bad for Rosey but the wedding was clearly off and he was anxious to get the hell out of this environment. Did that make him a horrible person? Heh... It's another one of those things to think about later.

Sam found Byren and walked over to him. "You know, obviously I'm just gonna, you know..."

"Oh, yeah go ahead, nothing's gonna take place here."

"Oh, yeah go ahead, nothing's gonna take place here."

Without further comment, Sam collected his camera equipment and tried his best to casually leave the house.

Once he got outside he walked up the hill that led you down to the wooded area and got inside the car to drive off.

As he was on the road, Sam's actions were disrupted once again.

What the hell does he smell?

Sam sniffed all around the car until his nose led him to his feet.

What the hell.

Apparently, on his way up the hill, he stepped in dog shit. And now it's all over the break and the gas.

Sam slowed the car down and stopped on the side on the road. He carefully got out of the car and took off his shoes, then went back inside and grabbed a rag from the glove compartment to wipe the dog shit off the brake pedal and the gas pedal.

After he was done he went back outside and looked at the shoes. Thankfully, the right shoe wasn't perpetrated much so he only had to wipe it off a little before putting it back on. He tried his best
with the left but nothing could be done about the bad smell. Sam thought of just leaving it on the side of the road, but it was a nice shoe so instead, he threw it in the trunk with the plan to clean it off later. Then he got back in the car and drove off.

He got home some fifteen minutes later and entered through the kitchen door. As he walked inside he glanced up the stairs and saw his mom looking down like she was gonna call the cops or shoot him or something. "OH MY GOD, WHAT HAPPENED!?" She wailed.

Sam was startled. "What?"

"You wrecked the car! You wrecked it!"

Sam was beyond dumbfounded. "What are you talking about?"

"Your two hours early and you're missing a shoe. You wrecked the car, don't lie to me Samwell!"

"What? No, no. Rosey's mother dropped dead!"

Now she was confused. "What?"

"Rosey's mom, Emma, had a heart attack before the wedding. She died."

She covered her mouth. "Oh... Oh, poor Emma... Poor Rosey. That's horrible... So the car is alright?"

Sam shook his head. "Yes, mom the car is fine. So am I by the way if you care."

His mom sighed and embraced him. "So what happened to your shoe?"

"I stepped in a dog turd when I was leaving the place. I cleaned both of my shoes but the other one still stunk so I threw it in the trunk. It got all over the foot pedals of the car too but I wiped them. I need a shower." Sam began walking upstairs but then paused. "You know thank you, now I know for sure that I need to buy my own car."

Sam was enjoying breaking his fast the noon after a morbid Saturday when the telephone rang.

"I'll get it." His mother said from the living room. "Sam, it's for you. Some guy named Byren," she said a moment later.

Sam rose from the table. "I'm coming."

He took the phone from his mother and answered. "Hello?"

"Sam?"

"Yeah, it's me. How can I help you, Byren?"

"Hey Sam, I'm just calling to ask if you're by any chance missing a wristwatch? Somebody left theirs in the house yesterday and we're trying to find out who it belongs to."
Sam looked down at his watch. "No, I have mine around my wrist."

"Okay then I have some other people to call, I'll let you go."

"Alright...Oh, by the way, can you tell Rosey later that when she does get married, she can count on me being there to take the pictures. I want her to know that."

"Oh, actually after you left they went ahead and got married."

Sam's eyes popped out. "What? Oh, come on. Are you serious?"

"Yeah, well everybody was there and Rosey said her mom would've wanted it that way."

_Wow, so they carded her dead mother out in an ambulance and then they reconvened everybody and got married..._

"So no pictures?" Sam asked.

"Rosey just a had a friend of hers take a couple of pictures."

_Well goddamn...Sam lost a hundred dollars and a good shoe. Weddings are a bitch._

Chapter End Notes

Credits:
1. Dareon is a character inspired by Kenny Bolin, who was Jim Cornette's best friend growing up. And winning that television in Western Auto is something that happened to him.
2. The story on the roof happened to Bolin and Cornette.
4. Beric and Thoros are both sort of based on Randy "Macho Man" Savage. Thoros a little more. Beric is kind of a conglomeration of all the Poffos: Angelo, Lanny, and Randy.
5. The wedding story is based on the first wedding Cornette attended. I only wrote it because I found it hilarious and thought a death at a wedding kind of fit this crossover.
Heart pounding, Jon snapped awake and found himself in bed in a strange room. No, not strange, he could barely conceive having gone to sleep but after thinking on it he remembered he was in the Stark house.

Jon pushed himself up, wincing as his body trembled with pain. He looked down to read his watch. 5:25pm.

*Shit.*

Through effort and struggle, he got out of bed and took a few gulps of air. Thought was still quiet and far away but he could feel a fluttering in his bladder.

*Need bathroom. Didn't someone say something to him about a bathroom...? Catelyn. Where did she say it was?*

Jon scanned the small room but saw no other door than the one he came through. Not seeing a multiple choice, he crossed the room to get to there. As he was about to turn the knob he noticed his gym bag on the ground beside the door.

*How did that get here? He doesn't remember bringing it up with him. Did he even take it out of the den?*

Jon looked down at his body and only then became aware that he was still wearing his grey gym shorts and the plain white t-shirt he put on for training. He gave a sniff.

*A shower may be in order as well.*

He walked lamely out of the room and moved up and down the hallway opening every door until finding the bathroom across the hall.

As he neared the toilet he passed a mirror and did a double take. Staring back at him where two bloodshot eyes.

Jon exhaled. Well, it was hardly his worst temporary tattoo. His mom won't be pleased though.
Oh, shit his mom.

He told her not to wait up for him but he meant it as a jest. Jon may already be a man grown but he’s still living in the nest and the mother bird likes to know where he flies off to.

With thought moving through the present to the future, Jon lifted the toilet seat, pulled his shorts down, aimed his sniper, and began emptying his bladder.

Okay, so he’ll change, go downstairs and ask to use to the phone to call home and a cab, and then...

Why does he feel wet?

Jon's senses were revived and he peered down to see the horror scene below him.

What the fuck.

He stopped peeing midstream with a sting and his body became frozen into immobility. Jon had to shut his eyes for a moment to not go into a faint.

On the floor to his left there were splashes of piss, on his right there was piss, on his shoes, on his shorts, on his bare legs, and on his shirt there was piss. Everywhere there was piss! Everywhere except inside the toilet...

"What the fuck. What the fuck. What the fuck!" Jon repeated, each time louder.

Once he grew calmer he finally noticed something thin and plastic over the underlying bowl. He poked a finger into the toilet. Yup. Saran wrap.

Seven Hells!

Either rich people have quirks that he never imagined, or some rascal in this joint had mischief on his mind. Or rascals...

Those little crumb snatchers!

After further assessment, Jon concluded that it would be wise to start cleaning up his mess, with everybody in the house being none the wiser. So he reached down to get a large piece of a half used roll of toilet paper on top of a roller that was on a wall mounted holder. But when he began to unroll the toilet paper, it fell to the urine soaked floor...

Are you fucking kidding me...

The purpose of using the paper was to absorb the fluid and it did just that, but when Jon rushed to grab the toilet roll from the floor he got piss on his hands and everything just got... ugh.

He delicately removed what paper was wet on the roll until he was able to grasp something dry. And then he unspooled, unspooled, and unspooled.

Jon spread the pieces on the floor and with his foot began carefully drying his surroundings. When he was down to his last piece of toilet roll he went to the sink and tossed some water on the floor to
deal with the odor. He thought of using the bar of soap that was next to the faucet but he didn't think it was necessary. In the end, the floor was still damp and a bit smelly but at least it didn't overexpose his piss-poor performance this afternoon.

Next was his clothes. He walked over to the sink and splashed water on his legs and on the stains, hoping it would help get any of the pee out of the fabric. Then he looked around for some kind of cloth to soak up the moisture but saw nothing dispensable.

Jon then thought of how to clean the urine smell out of his gear. Obviously, he was gonna change back to his civilian clothes, but he didn't want to stink up his gym bag or cause a noticeable smell when he went downstairs.

There was no liquid hand soap so this time he did decide to grab the bar of soap. He planned to rub just a tiny little bit of it into his gear but after a few dabs, a blood red liquid started coming out of the soap further staining his clothes.

*Gods, just make him spontaneously burst into combustion!*

Grr! He should have just used the soap to clean the floor first! Or maybe that would've been worse? "Fuck this." Jon had had enough. He put everything back in place and opened the door.

He leaned out into the hallway to see if the coast was clear and once he felt sure enough, he made his exit. Jon was like an FBI man searching the treetops and corners for the gunman to get back to the guest room.

Once inside he stripped out of his gear and shove it in the gym bag, then changed back to the clothes he put on this morning and left the room with his stuff.

As he was walking down the staircase, he heard excited adolescent voices buzzing like a hive of bees on the third floor. He knew those voices. Those voices were nails on a chalkboard right then. Their anguished cries and screams of terror would be music to his ears.

Feeling bold, Jon stopped on his tracks and searched out the voices. It led him into a room that was strewn with arcade games--there was a pinball machine and cabinets for Pac-Man, Space Invaders, Galaxian, Asteroids, and the game Arya and Bran were playing, Warrior.

*Penurious, my ass.*

"I hate this game, it's too hard," Bran groused.

"Of course it is, for you. I don't think a thought can exist in your brain."

"Shut up, Arya. Even some of dad's students think it's too complicated."

"Yeah, because wrestlers are Mensa-level intelligent," Arya said sarcastically.

"Mensa? What's Mensa?"

She snorted "Gods, you're slow."

Bran snapped. "No, I'm fast!"
"Did you just say you were fast?" Arya said through a fit of giggles.

"Not everyone is so clever as you," Jon piped in, announcing his presence.

The girl was puzzled. "What?"

"I was just saying, the more ingenious and clever people like you are, the more strange things happen. The more principles and codes of conduct, the more jokers and harlequins."

"What are you going on about?"

"Oh, I'm praising you for your peculiar capacity for mischief. I mean wrapping a toilet with plastic cling wrap, making bloody murder come out of a bar of soap, and whatever it is that you did to the toilet roll. The capacity of design in your head is like no other."

Arya wrinkled her brow. "What are you talking about, I didn't..." She paused for a moment and then suddenly threw back her head and roared her laughter.

A perplexed Jon shifted his eyes to Bran. "It sounds like Rickon has laid out the welcome mat."

"Who's Rickon?"

"Our younger brother. He likes to pull pranks, or ribs, as wrestlers call them. You always have to be on your toes when Rickon is around. It doesn't matter who you are. Even mom and dad have fallen victim to his ribs."

"I am partly responsible for the Saran wrap bit, though," Arya said as her laughter receded. "My friend Mycah told me about it and I passed it on to Rickon."

"I taught him to leave the toilet roller on the edge of the designated hole so the toilet paper falls when you unroll it," Bran said proudly.

"Don't act like you came up with it."

"I did."

"No, you didn't."

"I did too!"

"Alright, shut up." Jon was not in the mood. "So what about the bar of soap, what came out of it and how did he do it?"

"I think some wrestler taught him that. You cut out a block at the bottom of it and take some colorful drink powder and dump it into the gap. Then you mold the soap shavings back into the hole. Once it's solid you put it under the water and rub the soap until you get a surface that's smooth like it was in the beginning. And after a few hand washes the poor sap will burst away the thin layer and let the powder come out."

"So what exact powder did he use against me?"

She shrugged. "Who knows, I didn't help him. Sometimes he uses Kool-Aid, but you never know
with Rickon. He always wants to one-up himself." Arya's face changed. "Wait, so what happened, what did you do?" She asked, trying to hold back more laughter.

Jon responded by showing her his back and walking out. "Hey, come on what happened?" She called after him before letting out a bark of laughter.

He continued down the staircase until arriving at the first floor and searching out the patriarch and matriarch of the family.

"You're awake," Catelyn said behind him in the hallway.

Jon turned. "Yeah, I didn't mean to fall asleep," he said with an awkward smile. "Do you mind if I use your phone to call my mom and let her know I'm okay, and then a cab to come pick me up."

"Of course. But you should tell your mother that you're staying for dinner. And for the night if you so wish."

"Oh, no. I'd really rather get going."

"Every Sunday we throw a lavish feast. It's been a tradition for twenty years. We'd be happy to have you."

"I'm honored by the offer, truly. But I prefer my bed at home."

"If you're going to be a wrestler you'd best get used to sleeping in a strange bed."

True. "You're right. But I have some things I have to do tomorrow at the break of dawn and I don't want any more time warps like today," Jon lied.

Catelyn smiled. "Okay, I won't insist. The phone is around the corner."

"Thank you."

Two minutes later.

"What do you mean you want me to stay?"

"It's late, I hate when you take the subway at night."

"It's not even 6 yet."

"But it is already dark out. And the definition of night is time of darkness."

Jon rolled his eyes. "Well, then why don't you come pick me up then?"

"I'm watching the Fugitive."

"Didn't that show come out in the 60s?"

"Yeah, but I never saw it. And I don't want to miss these reruns."

"You know who inspired that story, don't you?"
"Huh?"

"Sam Narbert."

"Who?"

"You don't...the murder case of Dr. Sam Narbert? The guy who was a noted osteopath in the 50s, who's wife was brutally murdered in their home to which he was blamed for and arrested and convicted and spent several years in prison. And then got a new trial and a new lawyer and was acquitted the second time around and was freed. That Sam Narbert."

"I never heard about that."

Jon couldn't believe it. "How? It was one of the most controversial cases ever. How have I heard about it and not you? Anyway, in the process of getting freed, Narbert married the daughter of wrestler Myles Toyne. And since he couldn't go back to osteopathing, Narbert was trained to be a wrestler. He was a novelty in wrestling in the 60s and early 70s before he died."

*Wait, why is he talking about this? This always happens when he talks to his mother.*

"Well, there you go it's a sign. You should stay with the wrestling family tonight."

"Mom..." Jon lowered his voice. "I really can't."

"Why not? Didn't you say this Ned Stark guy was really important? And that he could help your career?"

"What are you trying to say, you want me to be a toady?"

"No, I'm just saying you should accept their hospitality. Or at least stay for dinner. When's the last time you ate? You haven't eaten since this morning, huh?"

Jon must admit he was hungry. "Alright, I'll stay for dinner. But after I grub I'm out of this place. Whether you come for me or not."

"Bye, sweetie!"

"Bye, Ma."

Twenty minutes later Jon was sitting at the end of a table in the family's dining room with all the Starks--minus the two eldest children, of course. As well as four of Ned's students that are living in the mansion--Alyn, Wayn, Hayhead, and Skittrick.

They were all dining on some kind of tri-colored pasta salad dish. It had sliced cherry tomatoes and black olives, parsley, cucumber, etc.

Jon just ate and listened to the trivial conversations between the family until Catelyn got him to talk. "So Jon is anyone in your family in the wrestling business?"

"No, my mom is a horse trainer and my dad was a harpist."
"Do you mind me asking why you want to be wrestler then? I mean you're a handsome young man, like my son Robb, but if you didn't grow up in a wrestling family like he did, where you understood and were brought up into the interest of the business, why on earth would you want to be thrown around in a ring and beat up in your underwear? I just can't fathom it."

Jon chuckled softly and cleared his throat as all eyes turned to him. "Um, well... when I was a kid I'd watch wrestling and see that the special craft of the entertainer provided... very rare pots into which only they could dip, which in turn provides the audience with smiles and shakes of the head." He shrugged. "I want to dip, I guess. Though I must admit I lost my interest in it the first time around after discovering girls. But I got sucked back in a year or so ago, and now that I've actually tried it--I wake up in the morning and I can't wait to get inside a squared circle."

"What does your mom think?" Bran asked curiously. "Mine doesn't want me to wrestle."

"Bran, don't ask such personal questions," Catelyn interjected.

"But you asked personal questions."

"Brandon..." Mr. Stark frowned at his son from his seat at the head of the table.

"It's fine," Jon said calmly. "My mom always wanted me to find out my own talent and stick to that talent, whether I become poor, rich, successful."

"So you don't care if you only end up working for popcorn and hot dogs?" Arya asked.

Jon's mouth curled in a smile. "I'll always insist that I be paid for my work. And if someone with deep pockets thinks I'm worthy of their hire, I'll try to get the highest fee I can get. But if I'm no good and I'm not a draw, yet I still enjoy it, then popcorn and hot dogs are enough because I have something in my self, you know."

"Yeah, a high cholesterol," Skittrick quipped.

"So it's about satisfying your ego then?" Arya continued.

"Uh...I don't know? Maybe? I'm not setting out to be a star if that's what you mean."

"Your lying. If you're not in it for the money and you don't want to be the best and be remembered, then what's your motivation?"

"Arya, that's enough. That's enough from everyone. Is this how we treat a guest? By pestering him at dinner."

"Really it's fine." Jon rubbed his cheek. "Do you like swimming, Arya?"

She gave him a suspicious look. "Yeah, why?"

"When your swimming, are you swimming to get to another side of a river or to swim so many yards, or any competing with yourself or with other people?"

"Well, sometimes I try to hold my breath longer underwater than one of my friends."

"Sure, but you jump in and swim to experience the water rippling past you, right?"
"Yes," she said hesitantly.

"And for the floating sensation. To lie on your back and look at the blue sky and the gulls circling it. You're not going anywhere. There is no good reason for it whatsoever. And that's how I feel about wrestling. It's just... a groovy thing to do."

After dinner, Jon went into the bathroom and carefully used its facilities as he prepared to leave the house. As he entered the hallway he was approached by Arya and Bran who both held out dollar bills at him.

"What's this?" Jon asked.

"You won the bet," Bran said.

Jon half-grinned. "I did? How long did I last?"

"We stopped counting after two minutes."

"I had a stopwatch ready in my head but you kinda lose sense of time when you're in a vice-like grip."

"You were still groaning like a camel, though. So don't drop your pants and start jerking your gherkin, alright," Arya said.

Jon chortled. "Right... Listen, you guys can keep the money, I'll take the bragging rights."

Bran's eyes lit up. "Really?" Jon nodded.

"Bran can keep his money, but your taking mine," Arya declared, taking Jon's hand and shoving the twenty dollar bill. "A bet's a bet."

"I really don't need it."

"Not now but you will. Popcorn and hot dogs, remember?" She said with wry amusement before walking off with her brother at her heels.

Jon smiled to himself and grabbed his gym bag from the hallway before heading to the kitchen where Ned and Catelyn were both washing dishes. Mr. Stark had a half-empty beer mug on his side of the sink.

"Well, I should be going. I just wanted thank you, Mr. Stark, for seeing me and for everything you taught me today, it's been a real honor. And thank you Catelyn for dinner, it was really nice. Thank you both for your hospitality."

"Why are you in such a rush?" Mr. Stark's voice sounded a bit slurred. "What's the first lesson you learned from Rodrik inside the ring?"

Jon grumbled. "To slow down."

"To slow down," Mr. Stark echoed. "One thing that you mustn't do is rush, because rush is a form of hesitation. When a person rushes to get a train he starts rushing over his own feet. So it really
holds him up. It's like trying to drive at high-speed through the water with a blunt-nosed boat. That's rush."

"There are two things that make him vocal, wrestling and alcohol. If you combine them, he'll talk your ear off for hours," Catelyn said with a slight laugh.

Ned ignored her. "So Jon you don't own a car, is that right?"

"No, I don't."

"Good. Whatever you do don't buy one. Because if you do, more will be expected of you. You'll be expected to go to more places faster."

"Uh, okay."

The conversation was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of the youngest Stark child, Rickon. The mischief maker. "Mom, can I have some cookies?"

"You told me you were full, why do you want cookies?"

*Probably needs to increase energy to do more mischief.*

"I thought I was full, by my stomach is very deceiving."

Jon tsked, which won him a bemused glance from Catelyn. "It's almost your bedtime, you can have some cookies tomorrow."

"But it's Saturday!"

"And tomorrow is Sunday, we have to get up early for Sept."

Rickon made an annoyed sound to which Jon's mouth twitched in amusement. "Will Jon be sleeping here tonight?" the boy asked his mother.

"No, he was just saying goodbye."

The boy frowned and ran out of the kitchen. "You can stay the night if you like. Some of the promoters and boys are coming over tomorrow for beer and barbecue and stuff." Mr. Stark said.

"I already offered, Ned. He wants to go home and he has things to do tomorrow."

"If it's things for Rodrik, I can make a call. He owes me a favor." Mr. Stark said with a grin.

Jon was intrigued. "The promoters, as in...?"

"The guys running my towns--Greatjon, Helman, Robett, Rickard, Medger, and others, plus their families."

_Holy shit. Barbecue with Greatjon Umber!? Rickard Karstark!? Talk about a once in a lifetime weekend._

Now Jon had to reconsider. Who's to say he'll ever have another chance to meet any of these
legends. For all he knows he can walk out that door and on the way home some hoodlums might pull his eyeballs out, eat em, skullfuck him and throw his remains in a ditch.

But what about the piss stained clothes in his bag? And the bathroom? He needs an excuse. If he has an excuse he won't regret this later. "I haven't showered and I didn't bring a toothbrush."

"You can shower upstairs, and we have plenty of unopened toothbrushes. As well as other toiletries like deodorant, cologne. We're quite prepared to receive overnight guests," Catelyn said.

*Give him an excuse.*

"I don't have any clothes to change into."

"You can borrow some of Robb's old clothes, he won't mind."

Jon sighed. Fuck it. "I'll need to call my mom and tell her I'm staying."

Catelyn's face cracked into a wide smile. "Excellent."

Jon turned to leave but was halted by Mr. Stark's voice. "Oh, and boy..."

"Yes, sir?"

"Call me Ned."

It was early afternoon on Sunday and the Stark mansion was packed. The living room was filled with some dozen talkative earnest wrestling wives, while the children were split between the game room and the rest of the house where they frolicked, and the men were all down in the den drinking Ned's homemade beer and wrestling--or 'pull-around-pull-necks', as they call it.

Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, Jon was too sore from yesterday's session to participate in the roughhousing, and he wasn't one to drink himself blind, much less in someone else's home, so he was just seeing everything that happened. And listening without judging, evaluating, agreeing, or disagreeing.

How good it was that his mind was quiet because if it was chattering with itself, in the presence of all these stars, he would be stuck in that social game where he's in a dither and doubt about every action he makes and every word that comes out of his mouth.

Of course it wasn't that hard, these guys didn't speak more than a couple words to him and seemed more interested in the beer and grub. But nonetheless, this was gargantuan size treat.

After chowing down some barbecued chicken and rice, Jon was invited to hang out on the back porch by some of the wrestlers closer to his age. Jon gave them a bit of his backstory and then inquired into theirs. "So Daryn, Torren, how was it growing up with your dads' as wrestlers?"

Cley Cerwin gave a sad smile. "It kinda sucked, to be honest, I mean it's cool to brag to the other kids who like wrestling, but my dad wasn't around much. He was always on the move so our relationship was over the phone for most of my childhood."
"Please, you had it easy," Torrhen Karstark said pointedly. "My dad was a heel so I got the shit kicked out of me in school almost every day. That was till I joined the wrestling team when I was thirteen. But man I hated my dad for a good while. Not cuz he wasn't around or cuz I got beat up, but cuz he hadn't smartened me up to the business, yet. In his defense, he couldn't. I mean until I was a certain age he couldn't know that I would not say 'No, my daddy's not really like that, it's all fake.'

Jon has never really thought about having children, and from everything his eyes and ears have picked up this weekend, he won't be thinking about it anytime soon.

"Hey, Snow you've heard of Vicious Varamyr, right?" Roger Ryswell asked him.

"Yeah, of course, they used him here in the late 60s I heard," Jon replied.

"69. Did you know that he lived in this house when he was working the territory?"

" Seriously?"

Roger nodded. "He was living in a cage under these exact porch steps."

"Whoa."

"Yeah. Robb told us that when he was a kid he'd let ice cream drip on his bare toes and dangle his feet between the wooden steps so Varamyr could lick it off."

Jon snickered. "Holy shit."

Vicious Varamyr was a 7 feet tall, 700-pound wrestling bear who had an impressive 20-year wrestling career, stretching from the 1950s into the 1970s, that rivaled his human counterparts.

Bears have long been a part of professional wrestling. It's said it had first been a popular spectacle in Essos in the mid-1800s, and later that century the Westerosi welcomed bears into the ring. The showdowns started in taverns but eventually moved to country fairs and carnivals, where the bears wrestled shoot matches against audience members, offered a cash reward if they could pin the bear. While it was not advertised, the bear would usually be wearing a muzzle and its claws had been removed.

Later the matches became worked. They didn't have competitive matches that looked exactly like the professional adult men wrestling each other, but it was something fun for the audience.

The bear match consisted of the trainer leading the bear into the ring, hopefully by a sturdy leash, and then the heel would run away from the bear. The trainer would cue the bear to charge forward all across the ring, to which the heel would dive out onto the floor, and the people would go crazy. Next, the heel would get back in the ring reluctantly and do the same thing again, and the people would go crazy. Then the heel got back in again reluctantly and complained to the referee, and the ref would go say something to the trainer and the bear chased the referee around the ring, and the people would go crazy. And then depending on the bear, they would do a particular individual spot with the wrestler. For example, most bears if you went around behind it and tried to grab it around the head, would give you a flying mare.

After the heel would be bumped and abused in the ring and the referee would be chased and menaced sufficiently, so as it didn't get old, the bear would back the wrestler into the ropes, corner
him in the corner, shoulder block him a little bit, roll him up some way and then the wrestler would get pinned. Finally, the bear would get a glass bottle of Coca-Cola in the middle of the ring and sit up on its hind legs on a chair and drink the Coca-Cola for all the kids. That was the bear match.

"Whatever happened to Varamyr? Did he die or was he just too old to wrestle anymore?" Jon asked.

Benjicot Branch's brow furrowed. "You don't know the story?" Jon shook his head."There's not much to tell, except that the aggression in man is something we inherited from animals. A beast may react nicely when you pet it, but nothing can prevent the whole violence of its nature from coming out. Not even Jeor Mormont."

Jon's eyebrows crawled up his forehead. "Jeor Mormont? Wait, Varamyr was his bear?"

"Yeah, Mormont adopted him and began training him in the early 50s after the carnival Varamyr traveled with in his early years went bankrupt. His sister Maege was usually the bear's kayfabe trainer, that's probably why you didn't know. But he and that bear were like a happily married couple, Mormont washed, Varamyr dried," Torrhen said.

How didn't Jon know this? Because Rodrik didn't tell him. Why didn't he tell him? "So what happened between Mormont and Varamyr?"

"Mormont and the bear both retired in 71 I think, and Mormont took the beast to Bear Island to live with him and his wife."

"But see he didn't just have Varamyr, Mormont had adopted another bear named Corn several years before," Desmond added. "And in 72, a year into retirement, Mormont accidentally left Corn's cage door open while he answered a phone call." His face grew still. "Corn crawled into Mormont's house and mauled his wife to death."

Jon shot a baffled look at all of them.

"After that, both bears were taken away by the Bear Island Humane Society, and no one has heard anything about them since then. As far I know, anyway."

"I was at his wife's funeral, the man was broken," Torrhen said.

Daryn Hornwood frowned. "And then his son had to go and do what he did."

"That motherfucker...he deserves to be hung in a parking lot," said Donnel Locke.

Jon had an odd reaction to this information. A muscle twitch of the soul.

As Jon gathered his thoughts, Ned came striding from the house to join them. "Alright boys give me a minute with Jon."

Everyone scattered back inside leaving them alone. "I had a feeling you were about to come looking for me to say farewell. And there are some things I wanted to talk to you about before you leave."

"Okay," Jon muttered.
Ned rubbed his hands together. "What do you think about my training methods?"

*Oh fuck*

Jon made himself swallow, took a deep breath. "What do you mean?"

"What do you think of discipline?"

Jon took another breath. "I have no problem with discipline, sir." He saw Ned's face grow stern and instinctively knew he needed to add a but."But... I feel like most people who teach discipline don't teach it very well. They teach it with a kind of violence. As if a discipline was something that is going to be extremely unpleasant, that you're going to have to put up with."

*What are you saying? You're insulting the man. Shut up! Shut up!*

Ned was silent for a moment and Jon was unnerved. After what felt like an eternity he finally responded. "I know the word discipline is not very popular these days. That word means to learn. It comes from the root disciple. One who learns from someone else. Not necessarily from the teacher, they are generally rather stupid. As I am if you still haven't noticed.

"But some may call discipline a terrible thing, and they would be completely in the right to do so. What is generally understood to be discipline is the whole process of control, direction, obedience, and subservience. And training yourself like that creates conflict which numbs the brain and wastes your energy.

"The real secret of discipline is to make it immensely pleasurable to learn the discipline. Because there is great pleasure in learning how to do anything skillfully--to make things out of metal, to paint, to write, to calculate. Anything you want. IF the teacher in the first place gets you fascinated with it."

"Of course there is nothing physically pleasurable in my methods. And there is a reason for this. Wrestling can take you to the top of the mountain, but the climb up AND down must bring pain, frustration, sorrow, and fear. Although we run after pleasure and try to avoid pain, they cannot be separated." Ned gave Jon a long look. "I think maybe you've already learned this lesson with baseball."

That left Jon a bit rattled. It's not like he's trying to keep that part of his past a secret, but it's a bit surreal that Ned Stark knows it.

He looked over at Ned and could tell he was waiting for Jon to speak. But he didn't know what to say. I mean what he can say after that speech. He only felt the urge to lighten the mood. "Can I ask you something?"

"You can ask me anything."

"Why are your kids so...the way they are?"

Ned guffawed. "Wrestling was easier than parenthood. I remember my daughter, two years ago--number one daughter, Sansa--insisted that she had to have a certain number of cashmere sweaters. But this was during the gas crunch so I couldn’t afford them. I said, 'My dear, do you really want these or is it just that you've been reading ads in the magazine or listening to the other children?"
"But anyway, let's get to business."

Oh, Gods.

"I can see what Rodrik sees in you. You have inspiration, drive, and an electrical power surge that's unobtainable. You have heart, heart the size of a pig according to Rodrik and that's important, without heart all your ability amounts to nothing. But I can't just push you to the moon from the jump. The other promoters in the North are very stubborn about paying dues. About showing everybody that you intend to stick with the business and you aren't just coming in to jackoff or make it a lark. In the south, it's either having to get bones broken or driving a car for a thousand miles. But in the North they want bones to be broken. Of course, there are exceptions, if you got a seven-foot monster heel, it's not good business to book him as a jobber." Ned continued. "Rodrik thinks you're a special exception, but these guys in here don't. That's why I asked you to stay, I wanted to see what they thought of you."

Jon felt a knot in his stomach. "What do they think?"

"Nothing. They haven't said a single word about you to me. And believe me, that's worse then them ribbing you for your pretty boy looks or your height. I could hotshot you but the other promoters won't accept it, even if you are that good. And if they don't accept you neither will the boys. I don't want to put that much heat on a nineteen-year-old."

"Rodrik's the one that wants me to be a top guy. And outta respect for everything he's taught me I've let him have say in my booking. But like I said last night I just want to wrestle, I'm not interested in being a star. If it happens it happens."

"Well, then I'd be glad to have you." Ned offered his hand and Jon shook it.

Jon then went back into the house, called a cab, got his belongings, and said his goodbyes.

A few minutes later he was waiting outside the mansion gates, but not alone. He was full of all the memories and mutterings of the last 30 hours. Things to remember and things to never ever speak about.

But if this weekend was an escalation of emotions, the next few days threatened to destroy his whole emotional balance. Decisions would be taken that could make for difficulties and cause problems. Although he was welcomed into the territory of his dreams by his idol, nothing was set in stone today.

As a matter of fact, right before his talk with Ned, Jon had already made a choice about his future...

Chapter End Notes

Credits:
1. Dr. Sam Narbert = Dr. Sam Sheppard. Myles Toyne = George Strickland
3. Just for the sake of the bear story, Jeor Mormont = Dave McKigney.

Next chapter is Sam III.
The end of the 1979 calendar year was looming and Sam was happier than a dog with three tails as he drove his car into the Armory's parking lot. HIS car. HIS.

Last month he took his money to a car salesman and finally bought his 1973 red Pontiac Firebird. It was used, and a week after buying it the air conditioning would turn off every time he hit a pothole and he needed to find another pothole that was equally stiff to get it to turn back on, but it was a nice car, nonetheless.

Of course he would've preferred a brand new car, but wrestling has got its fishhooks in his heart and every time he sees a match in person or on TV it pulls it out. His heart demands more wrestling! So he's desperate to buy a VCR and get in the tape trade so he can find wrestling from other places. And by buying a used car he can have his cake and eat it too.

I mean it's tiring to hunt wrestling programs from the top of his tri-level house. Having to turn an antenna with a ten-foot mast at every direction that goes twelve feet across on a rotor, is too much for a nutritional overachiever like himself.

So it's decided, for an early Christmas present for himself from picture money he's made, he's spending a thousand dollars for a VHS machine and no one can convince him to do otherwise. I mean it even has a remote control that you can plug in the back so you can pause it or unpause it from the bed! How can he not buy that.

As Sam exited his Firebird he was approached by one of Olenna's assistants, Arryk, or Right as she called him. "Hey, Arryk."

"How's it going, Sam. So this is the car you bought, huh. It's nice."

"Yeah, thanks. She's used but I still love her."

Arryk smiled. "How much did it cost you?"

"$2,995."
He snorted. "I think you got taken. It's nice but it's not that nice. Have you put a stereo in it?"

"No, it does have an AM/FM radio though, but you need the cassette. I'll probably hire someone later to install a stereo."

"Why don't you do it yourself?"

"Dear God no. I would electrocute myself or smash the dashboard with a sledgehammer in a fit of pique."

"I thought you'd be good at wiring things into things, especially electrical stuff like car batteries and shit you can blow up."

"Nooo. I'd be more than happy to patch cords into a phone but that's about it. You should see the remains of the robot I tried to build when I was twelve."

"Well, never mind then. Anyway, Lady Olenna wants to see you. She had me out here waiting for you."

"Where is she?"

"In the dressing room area. C'mon."

Sam followed Arryk through the back door that led to the dressing room area. "So how is she? Has she gotten any better?" Sam asked as they walked in.

"She's more of the same."

Sam sighed. For the past month or so Olenna has been unwell. With difficulty completing normal tasks, a decrease in strength and stamina, and balancing issues. Symptoms of old age no doubt, but she refuses to be seen by any medical physicians other than the EMT/paramedic crew on staff at the Armory.

A few minutes later they found her sitting down at the table between the babyface and heel locker room with booker, Paxter Redwyne, and her other assistant, Arryk's twin brother, Erryk, or as Olenna called him Left, standing to her... well left. She was not in a pleasant mood. "The rules of wrestling as governed by the Reach athletic commission are supposed to be whatever we tell them the rules are. I won't let this fool who was appointed by the new governor suspend and fine my wrestlers."
"We need the commision on our side with Dondarrion and his outlaws almost knocking on our doorstep."

"Almost? They have these ridiculous ads in Highgarden's newspaper challenging our guys. And what has the commision done about them? Nothing. We have kept them in business for years. Boxing sure as hell isn't drawing them any money. AND we give them 5% of the house for every show. I won't have this Paxter."

Redwyne had no reply.

Erryk cleared his throat. "Mrs. Tyrell. Sam is here."

She looked up to see him. "Ah good, how are you, Sam?"

"Good Ma'am, how are you?"

"I'm upset because only stupid people are breeding. Is your mother with you?"

"No, she's coming later to help me out in merchandise stand."

Olenna searched through some papers on the desk until pulling out a wrestling news magazine that was folded open to one of the first pages. "Can you explain this to me, Samwell?" Olenna asked as she handed Sam the magazine.

He looked down and saw a picture he took of a match between Baelor Hightower and Warryn Beesbury. "Um, It's a photo I took."

Olena nodded. "And yet the magazine gives credit to Axell Florent. Why is that?"

Sam took a breath. "Well, when I began taking the pictures he just started taking them into the magazines. He told me 'Hey, boy, run some more pictures of our guys so I can sell some more magazines.' Sam said, imitating Axell's gravelly voice.

"These are yours, Sam. Your name should be on this."

"I didn't want to say anything, Mrs. Tyrell. I mean it's Axell Florent. I didn't want to make him mad and..."

"I'll say-I'll say something." Olenna interrupted. "Left, go find Pie Face and bring him here."

"Yes, Ma'am."
Axell Florent was one of the biggest box-office attractions in the Reach in the 40s and 50s, before mostly even television, as a masked main event heel named the Green Shadow. And in the 70s his thing became watching the locker rooms in places like the Reach, the Stormlands, and in Dragonstone Island, as well as selling the wrestling news magazines.

He'd bring a box of magazines and find kids in the crowd and give them two or three and say 'Boy, sell these come back and get some more, you get a quarter a piece.' And kids got in the matches for free by doing that.

He was now 78 years old, and was short and had a round face that won him the nickname Pie Face. And just by looking at him you would never think that this old man was someone not to be trampled with, but in his day he was a noted tough guy. He wasn't a shooter or a collegiate amateur wrestler but he was a salty old guy that would hurt you and hook you.

There was a story Sam heard where a fan got in the ring and cut him with a knife, and Axell got the Barlow knife he always kept in his wrestling boot and chased that guy out of the building. And when he caught up to him, he put him down in the ground out on the street in the parking lot and began to saw him with the Barlow knife to try to cut the guy's head off.

So yeah... Not someone he wants to upset.

A few moments later Eryyk returned with Axell. "You wanted to see me Olenna?"

"Yes. From now on I'm having Sam send all the pictures in directly so you don't have to mess with it, Axell."

"Oh good," he said in his gruff voice. "And boy," He looked at Sam. "Send plenty of pictures that run on the cover."

Sam gulped. "Yes, sir."

The rest of Sam's Tuesday went as planned, he shot the matches at ringside and a few posed photos upstairs. And then after the show, he gathered with his mom and Olenna at the merchandise table.

It touched him to still see his mother coming by every Tuesday to help him sell his photos. Especially considering how she used to feel about wrestling.
"So how are you feeling, Olenna?" His mother asked.

"I'm exasperated by the number of people who keep asking me that."

"They wouldn't ask you so much if you saw a doctor and had some tests done."

Olenna scoffed. "A doctor... someone my family can conspire with to keep from me the knowledge that I am dying, that's what that is."

"Don't say that. You're not dying," his mother replied.

"We're all dying, dear. Don't sweep it under the carpet. And even if my time isn't nearing, I'll suspect that I am dying but I won't want to know for sure. And my family will talk to me in such a way as to say 'Well, you'll probably be getting alright in a few weeks, and won't it be nice to be able to do this that and the other.' Because they'll have this funny feeling that it's important to build up courage and hope. They become liars and mutual mistrust develops.

"How do you feel when Sam lies to you?" She asked his mother, who opened her mouth for a second but said nothing. Olenna shook her head. Many have lied to me in my sixty years, but I won't have it from my own."

Sam's mom wore the defeated face most wear after a back and forth with Olenna, and didn't push any further.

"Now to important things. Since I have you and Sam here, I wanted to ask your permission for something, Melessa."

"Yes?"

"Seeing how he now has his own form of transportation, I was wondering if he could run some errands for me."

"How big are these errands?" His mother asked.

"Two hundred, three hundred, four hundred pounds. He would be picking up and dropping off some of the wrestlers coming in from other places, you know like from the airport and then riding them around to wherever they need to go."

His mother thought about it for a moment then looked at him. "What do you think?"

A chance to ride around with wrestling stars!? Oh, that's a tough one...
"Yeah, I think I'd be okay with that, ma."

"As long as it doesn't interfere with school, then it's fine with me, Olenna."

An hour or so later they were packing things up to leave and Sam was going back to the back area to finish putting his camera equipment stuff together. The whole arena was now empty and right as he was walking underneath the area where this big aluminium sliding door was that separated the arena from the dressing room area and was suspended from the top without a track at the bottom, all of sudden a guy came flying and hit that door and it bowed it out at the bottom. Like a bowling ball, this guy rolled under that door and didn't stop for ten feet until he got to the wall. And seconds later there came the thrower, Axell Florent...

Oh, Gods.

Sam turned around and ran back outside. "Mrs. Tyrell! Mrs. Tyrell!" he shouted before reaching her. "Axell's killing somebody."

She didn't look surprised. "Who?"

"I don't know. Some random guy I think."

"Where is he?"

"By the big aluminum door."

"Right, Left, go!" She commanded.

The twin brothers ran to the back with Sam and Olenna trailing after them. When Sam arrived at the scene Erryk and Arryk were pulling Axell off this guy who was half his age.

When Olenna caught up to them she began asking the questions. "What happened Axell? Who is this guy?"

"This drunk mark came and knocked on the back door, I thought it was one of the boys so I opened it, but when I saw him I told him he couldn't come in here. He said 'screw you old man I wanna see Baelor Hightower' and he pushed past me, so I bealed the motherfucker and threw him out."

Olenna could only put her palm on her face and sigh deeply.
Sam drummed his fingers on the roof of his Pontiac as he waited outside in the parking lot of The Red Hotel.

He had been shifting in his driver's seat for almost an hour in wait. Anxious for the person he was gonna carry and because of the amount of time that was being wasted!

Every minute had become precious to Sam since he bought his VHS machine last month. If he wasn't photographing wrestling he was watching and recording wrestling, or he was on the phone trying to get wrestling, or he was at school talking about wrestling. He was in a bubble where everything was wrestling, and he loved it.

Once he bought his Christmas present, he immediately started trying to find wrestling tapes from other places, and fortunately, people gravitated towards him when they found out he had good looking stuff from the Reach because a lot of people had crappy cable systems while Sam's rabbit ears got really nice picture.

One of the key connections he made was with a guy in Harrenhall named Weese who had contacts all over the place. Through him, Sam joined a small group of video freaks that traded back and forth and just tried to get everything possible.

It was like his little starry eyes fell in love with wrestling again. He got the first appearance of the Fabulous Falcons on Stormlands TV, Illyrio Mopatis taking the four pile drivers on Crownlands TV, and some of the most putrid stuff he's ever seen from the Greyjoy's TV.

Wrestling was so over in Westeros that it was even beginning to outstrip the big movie market. If a store in your town carried pre-recorded VHS that wasn't porno, actual movies like Star Wars, Halloween, Alien, etc. They were $99 a piece if you wanted to buy them or twenty dollars a night if you wanted to rent them. And wrestling was becoming more in demand.

Last night he was watching a match between Ulwyck Uller and Oberyn Martell when Olenna called and told him to be at this hotel by 8:00 am to pick up Eon Hunter.

Sam had heard the name in passing and knew Eon carried some weight in the business, specifically in the Vale, but he really had no idea how important this man was until Olenna enlightened him.
Eon Hunter began his career in the 30s as a wrestler for Vale promoter, Jon Brightstone. Eon was endorsed by an early professional wrestling sanctioning body called the Westeros Wrestling Association, and he enjoyed several runs as their World Light Heavyweight and World Junior Heavyweight Champion.

Sadly, his career came to an end in the early 50s. To avoid a collision, his pupil, who was in the driver's seat, suddenly stepped on the car’s brakes and caused Eon to be thrown against the front windshield. The impact broke his tinted glasses and the broken glass cut his good eye, causing severe laceration that left him permanently blind.

Brightstone, however, kept him as a partner in the territory as primary booker and would pass the business down to Eon after deciding to retire in the late 50s. Hunter was even second vice-president and later honorary vice-president of the WWA throughout that decade.

The blind promoter would employ Jon Arryn as his matchmaker in the late 70s and together they made a good amount of spinach. But not but a few months ago, a dispute between the two strained their friendship and led to Arryn buying out the circuit and moving its headquarters to the Eyrie, while Eon stayed promoting wrestling in Longbow Hall City.

To further add to the uncertainty in the Vale, one of Arryn's first acts as owner was to withdraw from the Westeros Wrestling Alliance.

This could be why Eon Hunter is in the Reach to meet with the Tyrell's. Was he desperate, hoping that the Tyrell's would help keep his territory afloat? And if so why the hell are they giving a gopher boy like himself this much responsibility?

Eon didn't like flying and oddly still preferred riding in a car, so he was being driven all the way from the Vale, changing drivers in every city for unexplained reasons. Sam's job was to pick him up at this hotel in Ashford and then take him to the Tyrell's estate in Highgarden.

Sam's thoughts were slapped aside, quite literally, when he felt a hand slightly strike his face. He looked out his window to see the culprit--he was a large man with a mop of white blonde hair pale as wax, blue eyes, and a neatly-trimmed blond beard. "What the fuck fat boy I've been trying to talk to you for almost a minute."

"Oh, um... sorry, I was just thinking."

"Are you Sam Tarly?"
"Yes."

The large man turned to an older man standing behind him who looked to be almost seventy and wore old sansabelt double-knit slacks and dark sunglasses while holding a long white cane. Sam deduced that he was Eon Hunter. "It's him. Follow my voice." The man led Eon around to the passenger's seat of his Pontiac and threw a bag in the back seat.

After guiding him to the seat and buckling the seat belt, he went back around to Sam. "Keep him from lighting anything on fire or setting fire to himself."

Sam lifted an eyebrow "What do you mean?"

"You'll know what I mean." He stuck his head inside the car. "Alright Mr. Hunter, in case I'm not available for the return trip, don't forget that if you need some talent, I'm available. Remember, Justin Massey."

Eon waved a brusque dismissal and Massey sauntered away. "Is he gone?" asked the old man.

"Yes, sir."

"Thank the gods, it was getting to the point where he would've offered to blow me and swallow every drop."

Sam chuckled softly and stuck the key in the ignition to drive out of the parking lot.

"So is there anything you need, sir? We can stop somewhere to eat if you like," Sam said a minute later.

"Don't waste your coin greasing my chassis, boy. Just tell me who trained you and who you've worked with."

"Um, I'm sorry?"

"You have worked before? If you haven't don't even waste your breath."

"Oh... I'm not a wrestler, sir."

"But you're trying to be, right?"

"No, sir. I'm a photographer at the Horn Hill County Armory for Mrs. Tyrell." He
continued. "I'm not physically equipped to be a wrestler. And I couldn't fight my way out of a paper bag."

"Well don't hold that against yourself. There are guys that are all appearance and gimmick and talk, and guys so huge every time they turn around, someone throws them a welcome back party. You're probably too young to know about The Yellow Whale."

"Oh, of course I know of him, sir. When I was younger, every year when a new edition of the Guinness World Records came out, I read it cover to cover and I'd see Yezzan zo Qaggaz aka Yellowbelly aka The Yellow Whale, as the heaviest man who had ever lived."

Eon nodded. "Yes, at one point he was 900 pounds or thereabouts. But after retiring in the 60s I heard he entered a clinic and came out two years later weighing 230 pounds."

"Did you ever wrestle him, sir?"

"No, he got in the business two or three years after I retired. My eyes never got a chance to see him. But I ran into him plenty of times. He was one of the kindest people I ever met. They tell me he took the time to sign an autograph for everyone and to socialize with fans. I never saw anyone else do that." Eon snickered. "Though I haven't seen a lot in the last 30 years."

"He probably wrestled bears too, huh?" Sam asked.

"Oh yeah, that's how he began his career. If you ever get a chance to meet Barristan Selmy he'll tell you endless stories about the Yellow Whale."

Sam almost came in his pants at the thought of meeting Barristan Selmy.

"I didn't know Barristan Selmy had anything to do with him."

"When Barristan was first getting in the business, his first job, at age 17, was to drive the Yellow Whale around because he had a specially designed Cadillac where the front seat was way up and so there was plenty of room in the back seat for Yellowbelly to get in the car." Eon laughed to himself. "After a match, Barristan would have to take him out in the back, help him strip naked, apply liquid soap to his body, scrub him with a mop and then turn the garden hose on him."

_That's a classic piece of wrestling memorabilia that probably does not exist but should._
Eon continued. "And that was before Barristan's first car wreck of a number that almost killed him. All the shit he lived through mentally and physically is why everybody in the business thinks Barristan Selmy is the toughest human being that has ever walked."

A few moments later Eon reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a cigar. Then he went inside his side pant pocket and brought out a cigar cutter. And without fumbling he snipped the end off with a quick, strong motion. He then reached into his other side pant pocket and took out a lighter.

It was then that Justin Massey's words replayed in his head, and Sam knew he had to take action.

"Sir, why don't you let me light that up for you."

"Oh sure, I appreciate it."

With a corner of his eye on the road, Sam took the lighter from Eon and lit up the cigar he had put in his mouth.

The next few minutes went by smoothly as they engaged in idle chit-chat. But they were nearing Cider Hall when suddenly Eon accidentally knocked the cherry off his cigar onto his crotch causing his sansabelt slacks to catch fire.

*OH SHIT!*

With time against him, Sam saw no other alternative but to start bashing Eon in the groin, in the dick, with his hand to try and put the fire out.

His heart was in the right place, I mean his Uncle Alekyne once told him that a man's penis is sacred, like bread. And you should wash your hands BEFORE taking a piss because it's sacrilege to grab your prick with dirty hands. But Gods, he was hitting this old blind man in the dick with his fist!

Thankfully, his efforts to beat out the fire were swiftly successful. But his heart was still beating faster than if he was watching Lynda Carter walking in a leather skirt up a flight of stairs, so he pulled the car over to the side of the road.

"Are you alright, sir?" Sam asked, his breath coming out in panicked pants.

"I think you'd find your way out of that paper bag, son."
Sam exhaled a heavy sigh and threw his head back in the seat. "Seven Hells..."

Chapter End Notes

Credits:
1. Axell Florent = Pat Malone
2. Weese is based on Marty Slobin, (not sure if I spelled it correctly) a tape trader from Detroit.
4. Eon Hunter = Leroy McGuirk. It was Jim Ross who drove him around in the 70s and had to put his enflamed dick out.
5. Jon Arryn is somewhat based on Bill Watts.
6. The Yellow Whale = Happy Humphrey.
"You can't be serious, Jon?"

"I'm really completely serious."

Rodrik paced around the room for the fiftieth time in the last three minutes. "I sent you down there to satisfy your curiosity for different styles of wrestling. So you could get whatever historical wisdom you could get. But it was supposed to be a round trip, Jon. You are not tailor-made for Mormont's territory. He takes what he can get and has a mix of everything, but it's predominantly really tough guys and shooters and legitimate wrestlers and wild fighters and brawlers. And that's not you. That's now how trained you. You're small guy, all action, big bumps."

"First off Rodrik, you know that I don't express myself through a style. I don't want to be boxed in by a certain way of wrestling. Whoever I'm in the ring with, I try to fit in with that person's movements, I adapt to what the situation calls for. But I don't have that down yet and what you just said is the reason I want to wrestle for Mormont. I can learn from these guys who all have different flavors. And second, are you telling me that wrestling in Winterfell or in any part in the North by that matter, is not brutal."

"I respect Jeor and everything he's done. But you can do better than that, Jon. I've been to those venues and let me tell you, I've worked some shitty buildings and facilities in my time, but I've never been to more disreputable locations than those shitholes. The streets leading to some of them are not even paved. The neighborhoods are-are... you fear for your life, you don't want to stop at red lights--a goddamn carjacking can take place at any minute. There the kind of places you see people huddling around with fires going in metal drums."

"I didn't grow up in a castle, Rodrik. And It's not like I'm thinking about staying there forever. I just want to try things out and get some experience."

"Jon... you need to think about this longer."

"I have thought long and hard. I will let my intuition lead me wherever it wants."

"You are being childish, that intuition is the opposite of reason."

Jon sighed, thinking of everything this man has done for him. "I hope you don't regret training me."
I hope you don't feel like I wasted your time. Winterfell is what I ought to want, but I know it's not what I want. At least not now."

Rodrik seated himself in his desk chair. "It doesn't have to be Winterfell boy. If we drive south and the promoters survey what's on offer, they'd claw each other's eyes out just to get you first."

"I'm sorry Rodrik, but I've already made my choice."

Rodrik slammed a fist down on the table. "Dammit, Jon."

For a long moment there is only silence, until Jon finds his courage. "If you wouldn't mind giving me Mormont's number, I'd appreciate it. Yoren was supposed to hand me a paper with it after the show but he never did and I forgot to ask."

"I won't give it to you. And the subways don't go that far North so good luck getting there without a car."

"My mom already agreed to take me. She wants to see my first match."

"Get out! I don't wanna see your face anymore," Rodrik huffed.

"Now who's acting childish." Jon pushed himself to his feet and made for the office exit. But after opening the door he looked back. "If this means I'm not allowed back in the school... thanks for everything, Rodrik," he said softly.

His teacher only turned his face away, so Jon left.

Ugh...

Out of all the conversations he planned to have this week, Jon thought this one would be the least difficult. But he left Rodrik's school with his emotions more stirred than they were yesterday.

For almost two straight hours he rehearsed how he was gonna tell his mother the decision, and though they did have a lengthy discussion about it, she was very responsive and supportive.

Serious talks with Lyanna Snow are always like drinking from a stream of bubbling spring that flows out from the mountains. And last night Jon was nourished by her take on the differences between love and attachment.

Jon doesn't know where his decision came from. It just seemed to pop up like a hiccup. He did try to think of all the variables beyond his control, but I mean the data for a decision in any given situation is infinite. So he's going with his gut. He may make a mistake, he may make a bad gamble, but he's acting on a principle which has the backing of evolution.

Because if he was making a decision on rational grounds, he sure as hell wouldn't have quit his job at the gym.

Mikken seemed a bit disheartened by the news, but he said he kinda saw it coming. And if things didn't work out, he told Jon that he'd always be welcomed back with open arms. What a relief that was.

And now the only person left to tell was Jeor Mormont. He probably should've been the first person he told, but he had no way of contacting him. If it turns out that he doesn't have a spot available for him anymore, Jon's gonna feel like a bloody fool.
He didn't expect Rodrik to be thrilled by the news, but he really thought he would give him Mormont's number by the time all was said and done. But now what? Should he just ask his mom to drive him down there and see what happens? Maybe he should call Ned Stark? And ask him for another promoter's number because he's turning down his offer? Yeah, real smart Jon. But maybe he should call him as a courtesy...?

*Seven Hells!*

Sensing an overload happening upstairs, he let the brain watch over the body again and jogged to the subway station to get back to Winter Town.

When he got back home he found his mother talking on the phone. She hung up a few seconds after he entered. "So how did it go?" She asked him.

"Not good, to be honest. Rodrik didn't want to give me Mormont's number."

"I can drive you to meet with that man if you want."

"I don't know, I'm gonna maybe make some phone calls and see if I can get the number."

"Okay, just let me know. Oh and we were just invited to a wedding next Saturday."

"Who's wedding?"

"Joseth. He's a fellow horse trainer. I think you met him once."

"Oh yeah, the guy that looks like he went to give blood and forgot to say when."

His mother tried to hide a smile. "Yes, he is rather... sticky-thin. But anyway, he's invited me to his wedding. Do you want to be my date?"

Jon made an apologetic face. "You know I don't like wearing suits."

"I know. I don't like wearing dresses and high heels. But since you might be leaving me soon, it could be fun to go out and swing together. You know after every party, there’s always a new story to tell."

"I prefer the Saturday night stories from Creatures Features."

"We've seen all those movies a dozen times. Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman, Curse of the Faceless Man, The Thing from Another World, The Day the Earth Stood Still..."

"But it could be the last time," Jon interrupted, his voice quiet and sad.

"Who's to say that? Try to figure things out first and then we'll talk about the wedding again, okay?" Jon nodded. "Alright. I'm gonna work out a little and watch some tapes. I'll try to keep it down."

"You don't have to for long, I got a horse to see in an hour."

"Okay then check ya later!"

His mom chuckled. "Check you later."

Jon spent the rest of the afternoon in his room in the company of his homemade weight set and some new wrestling tapes he traded for a week before.
Towards the evening his mother came back home and the two made themselves a light dinner. It was during the meal that another one of those light bulbs went off in his head.

Harwin! Why didn't he think of him before? Maybe he has Mormont's number?

Jon suddenly sprang to his feet, startling his mother a bit, and dashed to the telephone.

He was on that motherfucker quicker than a jackrabbit on a hot date. Rotating and rotating until dialing Harwin's number.


Dammit. Busy signal.

He hung up the phone and just stood there waiting for a minute.

"Who are you trynna call?" his mother asked.

"Harwin."

"Who's Harwin?"

"He's a wrestler. Remember I told you about him. I met him at the gym and he got me in contact with Rodrik. I think he might have Mormont's number."

Jon picked up the phone and dialed again.


"Son of a..." He hung up the phone.

"What's wrong?" His mother asked.

"I'm getting a busy signal."

"Well come sit down, you can call back after you finish your dinner."

Jon groaned and turned to walk back to their small kitchen table when suddenly the phone rang.

Harwin can't know that he called him. So there's no way it's him.

He answered it, nonetheless. "Hello?"

"Jon?" a familiar voice asked.

"Yeah, who is this?"

"It's me, Benjen Stark."

Jon's heart stopped for a moment. How did he get his phone number? Did Rodrik call Mormont?

"Jon, you there?"

"Yeah, sorry. I'm really glad you called me I've been trying to get in contact with Mormont."

"Listen, I don't have much time to talk, can you make Castle Black tomorrow?"
Tomorrow? He wasn't expecting anything that soon. But he couldn't let this opportunity slide. "Um, give me a sec."

Jon covered the phone and whipped his head around to look at his mom. "Mom, can you take me tomorrow?"

"What time?"

Jon put the phone back in his ear. "What time?"

"Belltime is 8 o'clock."

He covered the phone again to speak to his mom. "8 o'clock. But you always have to be there an hour early, so 7." She gave a thumbs up.

"Yeah, I can make it."

"That's good. Now can you make the Shadow Arena next Saturday?"

"Next Saturday?"

"Yeah, can you make it?"

That's the day of his mom's friend's wedding. He looked over at her and knew that she overheard the date. She hesitated for a moment but then smiled and gave another thumbs up. But Jon could see that the smile was tinged with disappointment.

"Can you make it?" Benjen repeated.

"No, I'm going to a wedding," Jon replied, and his mother's face cracked into a wide smile.

"Alright, we'll see you tomorrow then. Bye."

"Wait you didn't tell me..." Benjen hung up.

Jon took a deep breath.

Holy shit. This is really happening.

"Are you sure we're going in the right direction?" His mother asked for like the tenth time.

"Yeah, we're coming up on a gas station that's ten minutes from the arena."

"How are you feeling, you nervous?"

"I'm trembling. But it could just be the cold."

"You don't need to be anxious. If you realize that it doesn't really matter if the whole human race blows itself up, there's a chance that it won't do it."

"That's easier said than done."
"Not if you understand."

"My thoughts exactly about your understanding of wrestling."

His mother gave a chuckle. "Am I gonna leave this show understanding this whole wrestling thing?"

Jon laughed a little under his breath. "I doubt it. Unless you grew up with it, you're probably never gonna get it. Though I really don't understand why I mean it's not rocket surgery or brain science."

She chuckled again. "Try one more time. Try to explain it to me."

Jon shook his head. "It's like... like a movie fight scene done in one take before a live audience. Except these guys don't have stunt doubles, they do all the body wearing and tearing "stunts" themselves. Also if they botch a move it could take the air right out of a match, so there's very little room for error. And they don't read off a script, they're told who wins the match and how it should end and sometimes to do certain spots, but they come up with everything else in the ring."

Jon was getting a little hot. "And they don't rehearse beforehand. Hell, Rodrik told me that most opponents don't even meet until they get in the ring together. Yet people have the nerve to call it made up crap! Does anyone ever call television and movie actors fake!? Put on some wrestling boots and take a few bumps in a ring and see how fake it is!" Jon exhaled a heavy breath after his little rant.

"Are you still nervous?"

"No, I'm kinda pissed off now."

"I'd say you're motivated."

Jon rolled his eyes. "Don't tell anyone any of what I just said, by the way, its kinda top secret."

His mother began shaking with laughter.

Jon frowned. 'I'm serious Mom, this business is closed like the mafia.'

She continued laughing herself breathless.

Several minutes later his mom was parking the car in the front entry of the Castle Black Coliseum. Jon wasn't sure if they were allowed to park in the back entry like the first time around with Yoren, so he played it safe.

"I'm gonna go around back and see what happens," Jon told his mother after walking in with her into the lobby.

"Okay, good luck." She pulled him into an embrace. "Hopefully I get a good seat."

"I'll ask someone if they can bump you up to one of the front rows."

"No, you shouldn't ask for any favors on your first day."

"Alright, bye."

"Bye."

Jon went back outside and rushed around to the back entrance door. To show courtesy he knocked.
A moment later a security guard opened the door. "Who are you?" the big man asked.

"I'm a wrestler. My name is Jon Snow. I was booked to be here."

"I don't got a fucking clipboard, how the hell am I supposed to know if you're allowed back here?"

Jon shrugged. Another security guard came up behind him and became his savior. "I remember him, he was here a few weeks ago. He's good."

They let him through the door and Jon slowly made his way through the area.

He pressed on until reaching the intersection leading to the heel and babyface locker rooms.

*Shit.*

Jon was stumped. He had no idea which way he was supposed to go. Benjen didn't tell him. He barely told him anything.

"Hey, who are you?" A man who looked well past fifty and was dressed in a referee uniform approached him.

"I'm Jon Snow. Benjen Stark called me and booked me for tonight."

"Okay, so why are you standing here looking lost?"

"I wasn't told where I'm supposed to go."

The old man looked him over, top to bottom. "Wait here." He turned around and went in the direction of the staging area.

He returned a few minutes later. "Okay, Mormont said to go to the dressing room and wait to see if they need you."

*Wait to see if they need him? They called him to be an understudy, a standby, and alternate, a...whatever the fuck the correct wrestling term is!*?

Jon sighed irritably. What else could he do? "Which dressing room?"

"Babyface," he said pointing to Jon's left.

"Thanks," Jon said before heading that way.

Jon looked down at his watch as he neared the door. 6:46 p.m.

He pushed the dressing room door open and his ears immediately registered the sounds of laughing and squabbling, while his eyes saw men, men they called "the boys" in this world. Beasts seemed more appropriate to him.

Jon did quick scans of the faces, trying not to stare the beasts in the eyes. He counted eleven of them and it wasn't much of a challenge to avoid their notice. Everyone was invested in their own thing.

Conversing while lacing their boots, putting on knee pads, or wrapping tape around their wrists. A particular group was playing a card game--cribbage it looked like. One guy was doing the rubber tube stretching thing, and another guy was putting his hands on a wall and kinda doing pushups against it.
He recognized a few of them from his first trip here. Iron Emmett, Donal Noye, Endrew Tarth, Othell Yarwyck, and Alan of Rosby. The other six faces were foreign to him.

As for the appearance of this room in comparison to the heel locker room he was in a few weeks ago, well...let's just say it makes a mockery of the babyface/heel barrier.

Jon looked around for an empty seat until spotting one near the end of the room. He gave his best attempt at a nonchalant walk and plopped down in the seat.

He dropped the gym bag with his gear to the side and waited and listened. Listened without going through all the process of analysis and knowledge, of thinking--just listened.

The wrestlers jousted, heckled, and verbally browbeat each other like a boys club does.

They told drinking stories, they talked about sports, they talked about matches, about guys in other territories, and about women. Oh did they talk about women.

A young man was speaking. "I met her years ago when I came to the matches. She was 13 and I was 16."

"How old is she now?" A fox-faced man asked.

"19, I'm 22."

"Is she still skinny looking?"

"Yeah, she's still too bony, man. You look at Meliana and see a little girl, man. But Will, Will, in your case you really need to get some nookie, you know. I think it's really a good idea if you go ahead and do your thing. Cuz you know what, I'll tell you one thing, Meliana will give her pussy to you," said a comely young man with grey eyes.

"Naa," Will replied.

"You don't think so?"

"You guys talking about Meliana from Mole's Town?" the man who was doing the pushups chimed in.

"No, not her. Ah man, I got her, did you know that? You know Meliana from Mole's Town? I was with her, man, not sexually, but I was with her. She liked me. I was with her, I kissed her when I was 17, back when I was helping set up the rings. But when I look at her now, she's so fucking ugly, man."

"She is an ugly bitch, man. But when I first seen her I thought she was nice, I wasn't thinking about orally removing her Tampax or anything like that, but I thought she was okay," the pushup man replied.

"Man, that is the exact same reaction that I had. When I first saw her I said ah this chick is pretty good, I'm like she's alright, I didn't say oh man she's violent. But I said hey you know she's pretty good, she's alright looking, you know. And you know, I think it was her hair, man, something about her hair made her look sexy."

"It made her stand out, yeah."

"She looks old, that's the thing," the fox-faced man said.
"Exactly, she has an old lady's face."

The minutes ticked on and people gradually left the room without sparing him a second glance.

At around 8:20 Benjen came into the dressing room. "Snow, I heard you were here. How are you?"
He said with a smile and an extended hand.

Jon shook his hand but didn't return the smile. "I'm fine."

"So does this mean you're accepting the offer Mormont made you?"

"Yes, I was trying to get in contact with him, but Yoren forgot to give me his number."

"Well, you'll get a chance to talk to him after the show is over. Why haven't you laced up your boots?"

Jon's face brightened a smudge. "Am I gonna wrestle, sir?"

"Yeah, we got a no-show so we want you to fill that spot."

"That's great. Um, thank you. Who am I wrestling?"

"Ebben. He's an old-timer. You'll be going thirty minutes and you're going over. He'll attempt his arm-breaker finisher and you'll pin him with a roll-up to end it. Do you have any ideas for a finisher, yet?"

"No."

"Don't worry you'll have time to come up with one. So this is your first real match, huh?"

"Yes, sir."

"All you gotta do is shut up and listen. Ebben will take care of you and lead you through it by the nose. Alright?"

"Alright, got it."

"Get on your gear, when you're done, wait outside in the hallway. Someone will call you to go to the curtain. You guys are on in twenty," Benjen said before walking out of the dressing room.

Jon did as instructed and was wandering the hall some five minutes later. As he waited, some of the boys came passing by. One of them, the grey-eyed man, stopped to speak to him. "Hey, who are you?"

"Jon Snow."

"Jon Snow?" he echoed derisively. "That's a generic ass name if I've ever heard one. Is that your real name? If it is you should adopt a new one."

"I'll think about a new one."

"Yeah, you should. Where you from? You sound like Winterfell but low down and dirty."

"Winter Town. It's a sister city."

"Ah yes, the old eye sour of Winterfell. When a people need to be tidied up you either build a wall
or move them away, and that's what happened."

Jon's mouth twisted into a humorless smile. He had to repeat the group of words his mother told him as a child in his head to calm himself.

Don't store up insults. Don't store up insults.

"We're all singing from the same hymn sheet, Waymar," shouted Iron Emmett as he approached them from down the hall.

"What?"

"I'm saying that we're all in the same place, so you're not better than anyone here."

"You don't even know what we're talking about, Emmett."

"Don't need to. I could see his face. I've seen that look plenty of times on people who talk to you. I can his read his mind like I wrote it. He wants to throttle you like most human beings do. Non-human creatures probably too, if they met you."

Waymar gave a tight smile and went into the locker room. "Let me guess, he was listing all of daddy's achievements and how that somehow makes his superior to you?" Emmett asked Jon.

"No, he never even introduced himself."

"Well, let me make amends for his lack of proper etiquette." He offered his hand. "I'm Emmett."

"Jon Snow."

He accepted Emmet's hand and was taken aback by how firm he was clasping his, and the way he looked him in the eyes.

Wait a minute. Yes. Rodrik told him about this. It's a secret handshake to let the other wrestler know that you're with it, that you're smart to the business.

Jon quickly tightened his grip and gave Emmett a knowing look back. Surely enough, Emmett lightened up his grip and nodded, to which Jon mirrored. "That was Waymar Royce, son of Yohn Royce, a wrestler and promoter famous in the Vale. He was before television so don't worry if you've never heard of him."

"I think I've seen his name mentioned in magazines," Jon replied.

"Is this your first time here?"

"Um, no. I was here a few weeks ago. I filled in for one of the Brazen Beasts."

"That was you? I wondered who that was. So where are you coming from?"

"I'm from Winter Town."

"No, I mean what territory you coming from?"

"Oh, I've never wrestled before. I'm about to have my first match."

"Huh... Who are you working with?"
"Uh... Ebben, I think is his name."

"One punch. He's a good veteran to work your first match with. Just try not to piss him off."

"I'll take that in mind."

"I'm gonna hit the showers. Break a leg out there," Emmet said as he began moving into the locker room.

"Thanks."

About five minutes later.

"Snow!" Someone shouted from down the hall. Jon turned and saw that it was Benjen "It's showtime!"

Here we go.

Unlike the first time, Jon wasn't nervous as he waited for his signal by the curtain. His mind was empty. It wasn't restlessly chattering, it wasn't moving, going from one thing to another. It was quiet, pliable, sensitive, alone.

And he was in a state of complete attention as he made his way down the aisle towards the ring. Aware of how he walked--leisurely but determined, of the expression he wore on his face--serious but composed, of how the crowd reacted to him--quiet but curious.

Ebben was already in the ring so he only had a few seconds to wait. During that time he looked out into the crowd and tried to find his mother, to no avail.

The ring announcer spoke into the microphone. "This event is for one fall with a sixty-minute time limit. In the red corner at 255 pounds from Sentinel Stand, Ebben. And in the blue corner at 175 pounds from Winter Town, Jon Snow."

Ding, ding!

They circled around the ring for a few seconds and locked up. Ebben then put him in a standing headlock with a very tightening grip for almost a minute, until finally releasing Jon and giving him some pretty rough punches on the back.

The next few minutes went by smoothly. Well, at least for the audience it was probably looking like a normal match that was going down smoothly. But in reality, Ebben was still being pretty stiff with Jon and wasn't calling any spots whatsoever!

Thankfully, Rodrik's in-depth training helped him to correctly predict most of the moves Ebben was gonna make, so as to protect himself.

What is going on? Does he not know that he's smart to the business?

The first words uttered by Ebben came after he tied up with Jon and backed him into a corner. "Okay kid, drop your hands."

Jon didn't have to be told twice, and he dropped his hands. Then he found out why they called Ebben "One Punch."

He sucker punched Jon so hard that it felt like his brain exploded. The hit dropped him to the
ground and had him seeing the sparkly things. Jon thought for sure he was out.

But somehow he staggered back to his feet.

It took him a while to get his cobwebs back, but eventually, he straightened everything out in his head and continued the match.

Maybe the punch helped him gain some respect because after the fact, Ebben finally started telling him what to do.

Ebben led Jon into a comeback that won him a few cheers from the crowd, specifically from the female demographic, and then the match became a back and forth contest.

Near the end of the match, Ebben put Jon in a headlock on the ground and started cranking up--in a working way, thank the Gods, and then looked up at the young, small, large-eared referee and said. "Ask him, referee, ask him, referee, can you leapfrog?"

Ah... Jon knew what Ebben was doing. It's a trick that Rodrik taught him in school. Instead of leaning down and whispering in the ear of the wrestler you have in a hold, you talk to the referee and he relays a message to the guy in the hold. Like for example, asking if he knows how to leapfrog. But to the crowd, it looks like the wrestler is asking the referee if the other guy wants to quit.

Ebben spoke to the young referee again, who appeared confused. "Can you leapfrog?"

"Uh... Uh..." He stammered. "I think so," the referee said.

Jon couldn't see Ebben's face but based on how tight his grip became, he could tell he was aggravated with the young ref. Something which Jon was actually glad about because the pressure prevented him from laughing his ass off.

"Yeah, I can leapfrog," Jon muttered to Ebben.

"Rope break, one tackle, leapfrog, dropkick, and finish," he whispered back.

They performed the next four moves as mentioned and then went into the finish--Ebenn tried to put him in an arm-breaker and Jon countered with a roll up to get the win.

Like throughout the whole match the loudest reaction to his victory came from the women in the audience who looked at him like they wanted to milk a cow for all its goodness as he walked back up the aisle.

Jon went through the curtain and kinda looked around to see if he would receive any further instructions. Mormont and Benjen didn't look pleased but they rather ignored Jon so he made for the locker room.

He quickly hit the showers so he could watch the rest of the show, but as he was switching back to his normal clothes, Benjen came into the room. "Hey kid, you alright?"

Jon nodded. "I'm good."

"You sure? We got a doctor here that can look at you?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. I mean I was a little goosy after that punch he gave me, but I recovered after a minute or two."
"I'm surprised you got back up so fast, or even at all. Ebben used to be a pro boxer. He was a great fighter in his time. That's why they call him "One Punch." And apparently, he was none too happy to be told to go out there and put over and take care of a kid who's coming up and gonna get pushed."

Well, Jon can't say that's not understandable. I mean here comes this kid who's greener than a pepper tree, and this veteran who's been at it for years who can easily knock him out in a real fight, has to put him over?

Benjen continued. "But don't worry Mormont and I went off on him. He won't be pulling that kinda shit again."

Jon sighed inwardly. He felt bad for Ebben but knew he couldn't say anything. Like he's gonna tell Jeor Mormont or Benjen Stark what not to do.

"Like I said before, Mormont will talk to you after the show is over, so just hang around."

"Can I watch the rest of the show?" Jon asked.

"Yeah, sure. But you can't watch from the monitor, the heels pass by there. You'll need to go to the first deck and watch through one of the curtains were people walk to their seats."

"Oh, okay."

Benjen gave him a long look. "You did well today, kid. You can only go up from here," he said before leaving the locker room.

When he was done dressing, Jon walked to the door and bumped into the young big eared guy who referred his match. "Sorry," he said to Jon.

"It's cool, man."

He started walking past him but Jon had something he wanted to ask. "Hey." He spun around to look at Jon.

"Did no one teach you that asking for a spot trick?" The ref hung his head. "I'm not trying to be a dick, it's a serious question," Jon added.

"Yeah, I just forgot it. This was only the third match I've referred," he answered in a thin voice.

"This was my first ever match in front of a crowd. How many people are out there tonight? Fifteen thousand? Only two in the building heard what you said. While the rest saw me make a complete fool of myself."

"You were good. It didn't look like you were having your first match. Maybe I'm stupid and deaf, but I don't think I heard Ebben calling any spots for the first ten minutes of the match, and yet everything still looked clean."

"The moves were not anything too complicated, but thanks."

He smiled. "My name is Pyp, by the way."

"Jon Snow. But you already know that."

"So was this a one-time thing or are you gonna be staying around?"
"I wanna stay for a while but I have to talk to Mormont about it."

"Well, I hope you stick around."

"Me too. I'm gonna go watch the rest of the show and wait to speak to him after it's over."

"Alright, see ya."

"See ya."

Jon went to the curtain Benjen told him about and watched the rest of the show. And he returned to the locker room once it was over to await his meeting with Mormont.

Almost half an hour passed until one of the senior referees came to get Jon and led him to a private room to speak to Mormont.

He sat across a desk from him and tried not to fidget in the uncomfortable wooden chair as he waited for him to finish organizing some papers. If he didn't get this over with soon, his mom would probably fight her way through the backstage security to find him.

He was down to the last nail cut by his teeth when Mormont finally spoke. "You are required to be in the arena one hour before belltime, after a 15 minute grace period you will be automatically fined $50. If you have a flat tire or hit traffic, you should have left earlier. The show is not going to be marred nor will the fans not get their money's worth because you couldn't get to work on time. No exceptions.

"There are repercussions as well if your match does anything to mar the believability of the business. For instance, if you do something stupid like fighting outside the ring using a chair in front of the referee.

"You should already know that in no territory in the business is it acceptable for babyfaces and heels to be seen together in public, under any circumstances. If guys supposedly hate each other and are threatening to cripple each other every week on TV, it insults people's intelligence and exposes the sport as a work if they are hanging out in bars or gyms together. But I take it to another level because wrestlers are the biggest sports celebrities in the region. I'll issue fines, even firings for infractions. These are my rules, if you accept them you are welcome, if not you can wrestle wherever the hell you want but not in my territory."

"Those rules are fine with me."

Mormont looked at him with doubt. "We have three venues that we run every week without question--Castle Black, Eastwatch, and Shadow Arena, but they might not always be the same day every week. And the other four days of the week could be a show in anywhere from Hoarfrost to Oakenshield. Most Sundays are "double shots", matinee and evening shows. So sometimes we run more events than there are days in a year. Are you still in?"

"Um... Are there any days off?"

"Well of course, if you work for over a hundred days straight, your immune system will begin shutting down. You have about 30 days off for illness, injury and vacation. But I won't lie, the schedule will kill you and the payoff may not be worth it. It's easy to be an underneath guy and make twenty or thirty or forty thousand dollars a year in wrestling. Everybody in the business is doing in that. But here you'll work more and make less than anybody wrestling at the bottom of the card in the south. I could run eight shows a week but only my three big buildings sometimes draw big houses, so you'll be making about three hundred dollars a week when you should be making..."
six hundred dollars.

"Now if you get over and become a main event guy then you'll make some serious money. Not just from wrestling but merchandise as well."

"Is there any type of contract that I'll have to sign?" Jon asked.

"I don't offer contracts, all my agreements with talent are verbal. It's not a vow for life, you can leave whenever you like, but if you want to come back I'd suggest giving a notice first," Mormont said.

Jon drew a deep breath and rubbed his face. "I'm still in."

"Good. We'll give you a call in the coming weeks to get you officially started." Mormont grabbed a small piece of paper from his desk and a pen. "Write down your number."

Jon furrowed his brow. Don't they already have his number? Through some reason unknown to him.

To avoid prolonging this conversation he took the paper and pen and wrote his number down and handed it to Mormont.

"Do you have a place you can sleep at at night when you make the move?"

"No, this is only my second time here."

"We have flophouses that you can stay at. Let me write down the address for you so you can check it out." He grabbed another small piece of paper from his desk and jotted down the number.

He handed it to Jon who gave it a quick glance before putting it in his pocket. "Thank you."

"Okay, you're free to go."

Jon was halfway to the door when Mormont called him back. "Oh wait... I forgot I have your payoff." He shuffled through some of his papers and brought out an envelope. He tossed it to Jon but the envelope fell to the floor before it reached him. Jon picked up and continued on his way out.

Once out the door, he damn near power walked back to the locker room to get to his things and leave.

He was inches from the back door when he heard someone call his name. Jon looked back and saw Benjen coming up to him. "Hey Snow, the Old Bear gave me the scoop. I'm glad you're gonna be joining us. I know it's kinda sooner than expected but is there any way you can make the Shadow Arena next Saturday?"

"No, I gotta go to a wedding."

"That's a funny thing, Jon O' Nutten is going to a wedding too, that same day."

Wait... What?

"Well anyway, we'll be in contact. See ya kid." Benjen said before walking away.

Jon took a step forward when comprehension came.
Holy shit. He called the wrong number. Benjen called him thinking he was Jon O' Nutten! But how the hell did he get his number?

Fuck it.

He shook his thoughts away and finally left the building.

It was exceptionally cold when he touched the air of the night, which only quickened the pace as he went around the building to get to the front entry parking lot.

He could see his mom's car in the distance when suddenly a group of people approached him. Jon counted nine. A boy and eight girls, including a young one with her mother. "Hey, Jon Snow."

"Yeah?" Jon asked warily.

"Can we get your autograph?" One of the girls asked holding a pen and paper that already had other signatures.

"Um... sure." Jon took the paper and pen and signed. This wasn't the first time he was asked for an autograph, his baseball career looked so promising that he signed at least a half a dozen after each game he pitched. But these people waited outside in the bitter cold for almost an hour just to get his name on a paper?

Driven by sympathy he went to the little girl to get her quickly out of this cold. She looked maybe nine or ten. "Hi," he said with a bright smile.

"Hello," she muttered nervously.

"What would you like me to sign?"

"My baseball cap." She took the cap off her head and handed it to Jon along with a marker.

"Do you like baseball?" He asked.

"A little. I like wrestling much more."

A smile broke across his face. "Me too. But you sure you want me to ruin your hat?"

"You won't ruin it. "You'll make it better."

"Tell him what you told me," her mother said with her mouth twitched in amusement.

"No," her daughter said through gritted teeth.

"She thinks you're really cute," her mother blurted out.

"Mom! Oh, God's." The little girl's cheeks blossomed with color.

Jon let out a breathy laugh while he signed the side of the cap. "I think you're really cute too," he said as he handed it back.

She smiled shyly and looked at him with adoring eyes. "Are you gonna wrestle here again?"

"I think I'll be back soon. But you should get going, it's freezing out."

"Okay, goodbye."
"Bye."

"Thank you," her mother mouthed to him before she and her daughter skipped to the parking lot.

As he watched them leave he noticed his own mother leaning outside of her car with a cheeky smile directing at him.

Jon Snow felt on top of the world.

Chapter End Notes

Credits:
1. Jon's debut is based on Manny Fernandez's first match. Ebben is based on Alex "KO" Perez aka "One Punch".
2. Getting booked by accident happened to Bobby Fulton early in his career.
3. Yohn Royce Is an amalgamation of Jean and Jacques Rougeau Sr.
4. Jeor Mormont's personality and his strict rules are based on Bill Watts.
5. Pyp's hilarious blooper happened to Eric Weingeroff.
6. All the money talk is based on fact. I encourage you to use an inflation calculator to find out how much some of these guys we're making thirty years ago.
"Hello?"
"Is this Sam?"
"Yes, how can I help you?"

"Hey dude, this is Harsley. Do you remember me? I traded you Riverlands wrestling for some of your stuff from the Reach a few months ago. Last night I called the number from last time and your Mom told me to call you at this number."

"Right. What's up, do you wanna make another trade?"

"Yeah, I'll give you Empires Strikes Back."

Sam frowned. "No, just give me more of that Riverlands wrestling."

"Dude, Empire Strikes Back is one of the greatest movies ever made."

"I'm aware of its quality I saw it in theaters two weeks ago. What I haven't seen is Jason Mallister vs the Blackfish in a steel cage match."

"But if you've seen the movie then you've seen the ending. 'I am your father.' Why wouldn't you want to watch that again and again from the comfort of your couch?"

"I can watch it again and again in a few months if I walk into the store five blocks from my house that carries pre-recorded VHS and rent it or buy it. It's wrestling or nothing," Sam stated.

Harsley was silent for a moment and then hung up.

Sam had to squeeze his phone for a second to prevent himself from slamming it down. He just paid to have his very own phone line installed in his room last month and didn't want to scratch his new phone.

\textit{Why do people waste his precious time with folly?}

He went back to staring at the wall and thinking when the phone rang again. He answered.
"Hello?"

"What about Empire Strikes Back and Star Wars?"

"Are you serious right now?" Sam asked incredulously.

"It's a bargain, dude. They're objects of sentimental value to me, do you understand?"

"What part of its wrestling or nothing did you not understand. If you don't have any wrestling to offer don't call me!" This time there was no stopping Sam from slamming down the receiver.

He was being a grumpy gus, he knew. But Sam has been so tense and anxious the last few days that he can't help his exasperated behavior. The only thing that's been able to ease his tension is watching wrestling tapes. But he's already seen every video in his possession and needs new material to melt his anxiety.

About two weeks ago Olenna fainted while on the job at Cider Hall and was taken to a hospital. Thankfully she's fine now and is resting at home, but her family refuses to let her return to work. Or even talk on the phone. At least to him. Sam wants her well-being above everything else but it's nonetheless a change of events that affect Sam greatly because it means that Horn Hill is now being directly run by her son, Mace Tyrell.

You know that sense you get when you're around someone who you think might not be your biggest fan? Well, that's how feels when he's in the presence of his Mace Tyrell. He has never spoken more than a couple words to Sam, but when he has given him any kind of attention, Mace has talked to him like he's the guy who runs the Ferris wheel at the county fair. Which is basically the lowest position you could possibly have, and generally not very respected.

He just knew that Mace tolerated him for the sake of his mother and selfishly Sam couldn't get any sleep thinking about his future after hearing what happened to Olenna. His premeditated anxiety was justified the Monday after the Queen of Thorns' blackout when Paxter Redwyne called and told him that his services weren't needed that Tuesday at the Armory.

Sam still went to the show using his front row reservation, but when he tried to sell some of HIS photos afterward, he was humiliated in front of all the people who have known him since he was nine and forced to pack up the merchandise and leave.

He revived another phone call from Paxter two days ago, making it another week without work. To only increase the anxiety about the future, Sam has only two weeks left before he graduates from high school.

Although wrestling has left him in pure rapture since he first laid his eyes on it, before becoming a photographer he never imagined he could land a job in the business. Well that's not true, he dreamed his whole being into it, but he never actually thought it would happen. He figured he would study for a career in robotics or enter a field to get into the space program or hell maybe even give magic a second chance after his disastrous failure at age seven.

But now he's been allowed to peek behind an iron curtain, and taking that away from Sam is too much for him to bear. He loves being a wrestling photographer and though he never really speculated as to what might happen five years from now or a year or even a month, he saw himself being involved in this business in one fashion or the other. And now what? College? He has the GPA for it and the money, but not the interest.

Sam was getting his PJs out of his drawer to take a late night shower before bed when the phone
rang once again.

Unbelievable.

He picked it up. "Listen, do you need someone to blow in your ear for a refill. Stop calling me!"

"I don't think I've ever heard you angry before, Tarly," a different, more familiar voice came from the other side.

"Mr. Redwyne?"

"Yes, this is he. Did I call at a bad time?"

"No, no. Sorry I was just... I can talk, please."

"I was calling to ask if you were free tomorrow in the morning?"

"Yeah, I'm free," Sam said keenly.

"Are you sure? I thought you were still in school."

"I've practically already graduated. It won't matter if I miss a day. What do you need me for?"

"Do you know who Buford Bulwer is?"

"Yes, of course. He's a wrestling legend."

"Yeah well, we need you to run some errands for him for a few days."

"Okay, no problem."

"But listen, Sam, you have to tread cautiously around him. His mother had a stroke a few days ago and is still seriously ill in the hospital. He's extremely close to her and is more neurotic right now than usual."

"Than usual?"

"Buford has a reputation as a wild man, and believe me it's well-earned. He marches to the beat of his own drummer, and his drummer is off-time sometimes. He has a drinking problem and has had many run-ins with the law. That's why he isn't glued to his mother at the hospital. He was being so disruptive that they had to kick him out. And they needed ten cops and two K9s to do it. So I shouldn't have to mention that he should be nowhere near the hospital, or anywhere public really."

"I'll be very patient with him, Mr. Redwyne."

"You'll need to be. He also has a twelve-year-old son that you might need to drop and pick-up from school tomorrow. Buford's wife or girlfriend or whatever she is, is at the hospital with his mother."

"I can handle it, don't worry."

"I hope so for your sake. You'll need to be at his house before 8 am. Do you have a pen and paper to write down the address?"

"Give me a second." Sam put the phone down and dashed over to his bedroom desk to grab his notepad and a pen. But before Sam took up the phone again, he sighed with relief.
"Can we go to the arcade?"

"Your mom said to take you straight home," Sam replied, looking through the rear-view mirror.

"But I always go to the arcade on Saturday."

"Yes, but you don't want to leave your Dad home alone when he needs you, do you?"

"Help him how? By bringing him another beer from the refrigerator or tossing them out in the backyard?"

"Your dad is suffering, he's just trying not to think about your grandmother."

"If that's why people drink, then I don't think he ever likes to think."

Sam sighed with exasperation and put all his focus back on the road. He knew he was gonna need to be patient, but he didn't know the last 24 hours would take such a toll on him.

He wasn't JUST running basic errands for the Bulwer family such as grocery shopping, picking up dry-cleaning, and attempting to prepare meals, he was practically babysitting two troublesome children.

One was a pre-teen named Humphrey who has tried to hook Sam in a power struggle by being defiant about everything and always complaining about something. While the other was a grown man who made a mess wherever he went. Sam has lost count over how many times he's had to mop up the kitchen or the bathroom floor because of puke or piss. But he does remember that he's had to rub the carpet four times to remove stains. And this morning he had to change Buford's bed sheets and spot clean the mattress because he pissed himself while he slept.

He was parking his Pontiac in the driveway of the Bulwer's tri-state home when suddenly Buford came running out of the house and healed into the passenger's seat. A torrent of tears was streaming down his face. "Take me to the hospital," he cried out.

"I-I can't sir, Mr. Redwyne said I couldn't take you there."

"You're going to take me to the hospital, do you understand!" Buford shouted in his face.

"S-sir, p-please, I can't," Sam stammered.

Buford answered by pulling a hunting knife out of his pocket and flashing it in his face.

"Okay, let's go to the hospital," Sam replied, unable to help the quiver in his voice.

He was backing out of the driveway when Buford stopped him. "No, wait!" Sam quickly stepped on the brakes. Buford reached over and turned off the car, and then took the key out of the ignition cylinder and ran back inside the house.

Sam was unable to think or feel properly. He looked down at his hand and saw that he was trembling with fear. What else could he do? He saw Buford's wild eyes, if he didn't agree to take
him to the hospital he would slice his throat and drive their anyway. Of course he thought about letting that happen but with him instead running for his life, but he wasn't gonna leave this lunatic with his Pontiac.

A minute after going inside, Buford came back out carrying a black bag. He went to the trunk of the car and through the rear-view mirror, Sam saw him open it with the key and shove the bag inside.

He then came back around to the passenger's seat and gave him the keys. "Drive! Drive fast!" Sam stuck the key in the ignition and drove out.

Some five minutes passed before Sam finally became aware that Humphrey was still in the backseat. He saw an opportunity. "Sir, your son. We should go back to the house and drop him off."

Buford only said the same thing he had been uttering throughout the whole drive. "Mama!"

*Oh, Gods. Sam did not have a good feeling about this.*

Ten minutes later they arrived at the Normund Hospital. "Park in front of the hospital," Buford said with tears still rolling down his face.

"I-I can't park there, it's a restricted zone." The middle-aged man gave Sam another piercing look.

Screw it. Let the hospital tell this man no.

He pulled up to the colored curb and let whatever was gonna happen, happen. Buford took the key out of the ignition again and stormed out of the car with his son and Sam exiting as well. He went to open up the trunk and Sam peaked from the side of the car as he opened up his black bag. Buford brought out a sawed-off shotgun...

*Oh shit.*

Buford marched right into the hospital while Sam was frozen where he stood.

*What should he do!? What should he do!? What should he do!?*

Two minutes went by before Sam finally moved his feet. "Wait in the car, Humphrey," Sam told the boy before he rushed into the hospital. To do what? He didn't know.

Sam only waited outside in his car when he brought Humphrey here an hour ago so he had no idea where he was supposed to go. He was about to ask the front desk receptionist when he heard this hoopla and caterwauling coming from the hallway.

He followed the noises until entering the picture. It was a picture he is never gonna forget.

Buford had an old woman draped over his shoulder, whom Sam figured to be his mother while fighting the orderlies...

With his face streaked by tears, Buford shoved down a nurse and tossed a security guard across a hallway. "Buford, STOP! She's dead, there's nothing you can do about it!" His wife shouted at him.

He wouldn't listen and when another security guard rushed forward, Buford knocked him down and dragged him across the floor, while still holding his mother's corpse with his other arm.

He was like a leopard coming out of the bush, looking for something to eat, and Sam knew how
meaty he looked so he turned around to get the hell out of there.

But after a few strides, he found himself face to face with Arryk. "Wha...What are you doing here?" Sam asked.

"What the fuck is going on, Sam?"

Sam ignored the question. "Why are you here?"

"Follow me." Arryk took him by the arm and lead him into one the patient rooms.

Just when Sam thought this day couldn't be any more unpredictable, there laying down on a bed was Olenna Tyrell. "Mrs. Tyrell?" Sam asked, astonished.

"Samwell, what in seven hells is going on out there?" She didn't seem surprised to see him.

"I thought you were resting at home. What happened? Is something wrong?"

"I asked first, Samwell."

"Buford is polishing the floor with anybody who gets in his way, Ma'am. And I think I heard someone say he has a gun." Erryk replied.

"He does, he has a sawed-off shotgun," Sam said.

Olenna shook her head. "I shouldn't have done this."

Sam raised a brow. "What are you mean? Why are you here, ma'am?"

"Right, Left, leave us. Make sure that fool Lomys doesn't interrupt us."

The twin assistants peaked outside the door and tiptoed out of the room.

"Are you okay, ma'am?" Sam asked once again.

"I'm perfectly fine, Samwell. A 65-year-old workaholic woman falls to the ground and everyone thinks something's wrong."

"Then why are you are? I thought you already left the hospital?"

"I did but I had a... second fall," she said with a hint of deceit in her tone.

"Why did you have a... second fall?"

"Well, when I heard that Buford's mother suffered a stroke, I saw an opportunity."

"An opportunity for what? What do you mean?"

"Do you know who owns this private hospital, Samwell?"

Sam shrugged. "I don't know some guy named Normund?"

Olenna nodded with a grin. "Some guy named Normund. Some guy named Normund Tyrell."

"Tyrell? Is he a relative of yours?"

"He's my nephew... cousin? I'm not sure. But he is a Tyrell, that much is beyond dispute."
"Okay, so..." Sam scratched his brow, trying to put the pieces of this puzzle together. "You had Buford's mother brought here, to this hospital, to your hospital, so that you could see... me?

Olenna gave Sam a wrinkled smile. "I knew you were smart. Yes, when I heard what happened to Buford's mother I told my son he should call Normund, I would've done it myself but he won't even let me use the phone. Mace didn't think anything of it and Buford was grateful to have his mother sent to a better hospital. Once it was done I had a secret message sent to Paxter telling him to find a way to convince my son into getting you attached to Buford. My guess is that Mace saw it as a way of torturing you."

*That cruel bastard.*

"Anyway, when I found out he succeed, I took a second bump knowing I would be sent to the same hospital as the Old Ox's mother. I thought my plan was all for not when Right and Left told me you dropped the son off at the hospital and left."

"I didn't leave, I just parked and waited in the back lot."

Olenna snorted irritably. "Those two buffoons."

"Why do so much just to see me? I don't get it?"

"What's to get? I want to see someone I hold in high esteem and it's a mystery?"

Sam half-smiled and narrowed his eyes. "Also I need a favor," she added.

Sam chuckled. "I knew that was coming. What do you need?"

"My son has taken my power away from me and is keeping me hostage. I must admit in a way I'm proud of the oaf. I didn't think he had it in him. His whole life I've been able to easily influence his decisions. But I can't let him flush everything his father and I have worked for down the drain. Mace is owner of the territory only in name, he has sat back and been fed grapes while I and others do all the work. I suspect your father may have something to do with this. Maybe he's trying to get back at me for bringing you in, or he's just more ambitious than I thought, or both. Whatever the case, I won't let what happened to Eon Hunter happen to my blind son.

"I need someone to take the reigns from Mace, and although I hate to admit it, it's not me. I am not ready to get back on the saddle. I need some time before I try to run 150+ shows a year again. My first thought was Paxter, I trust him and his ability to book wrestling, but he doesn't know business. Leyton Hightower would be the ideal choice for such a job but he refuses to leave Oldtown. So I have to take a gamble."

"A gamble?"

"I need you to drive all the way to King's Landing and give this letter," she reached into her pocket and handed him a folded up piece of paper. "To the person who lives in this address," she handed reached into her other pocket and handed him a smaller paper. "Can you do this for me, Samwell?"

"Of course, but why not just call this person?"

"You'll understand later. Whatever she tells you to do, you'll do."

"She? Who is she?"

"You'll find out. If you need motivation, know that you might also have your job back after this
Arryk and Erryk came barging through the door. "Sorry, Mrs. Tyrell, but we thought you should know what was happening out here."

"What's happening?"

"Squad cars were called, they're surrounding the hospital and blocking off the streets nearby. It's almost like a terrorist situation."

"Where is Buford?"

"He's going around the hospital back and forth like a crying madman, carrying his dead mom over his shoulder and holding a shotgun."

"Where is your car?" She asked Sam.

"It's parked in front of the hospital with Buford's son in it. And Buford took the key before he came in here."

Olenna thought for a moment. "You two need to find a way to subdue Buford before he gets himself killed. And you must get that key."

The twins exchanged a doubtful look. "Yes, ma'am," they said at the same time.

The two crept back outside and Sam kept the door slightly open to hear or see whatever he could.

He would hear indistinct shouting for maybe a minute, and then another minute of only silence, the loudest kind. Sam was so relentless that he lost his senses and went into the hallway to edge closer to the noise. He came to a halt when he heard the sounds of a struggle. A few seconds later Arryk and Erryk were running down the hall towards him.

"Go inside!" One of them shouted.

Sam whirled around and went back inside Olenna's room without a second thought. A beat later the brothers joined him. "The cops are storming the hospital!"

"Did you get the key?" Olenna asked.

Erryk raised a hand revealing the key. "I got it." He tossed it to Sam.

"I'm the one who had to tackle that fucking lunatic to the ground," said Arryk bitterly.

"Did you get the shotgun?" Olenna asked.

"I grabbed it after knocking him down. I broke it, took the five rounds, and then tossed it while I ran."

"I'm surprised he didn't try to stab you. He has a hunting knife too," Sam said.

"He was more worried about his mom. But thanks for telling us such important information now," Arryk replied sarcastically.

"What should we do now?"

"We'll wait a while. Then you two will go back outside and find out what's happened. If the coast
is clear, I want you to find Buford's wife Victoria and get the son from Sam's car and bring them both to me. I'll take them off your hands Samwell, then you can get to your car so you can leave."

A few minutes later the twins left to check the situation. "Do you think you can drive to King's Landing tomorrow?" Olenna asked him.

"If you want me to?"

"The sooner you make the trip the better I'll sleep."

"Then I'll be on the road at the break of dawn."

Five minutes later the brothers returned with Buford's wife and son. "Olenna?" Victoria was flummoxed, wiping tears away with the back of her hand.

"What happened to Buford, Victoria?"

She tried a reply but only burst into tears again.

"They arrested him, he was screaming incoherently and pounding on the patrol car doors as he was taken into custody," Erryk answered for her.

"Samwell, you should get going. If everything goes as I hope, we'll be in contact again soon.

Sam nodded. "All the best, Mrs. Tyrell."

"All the best to you. And say hello to your mother for me."

"I will, goodbye." Sam crossed the room and left.

Everyone was still on edge when he walked through the hospital to get back to the main entrance. And a swarm of police officers were in the building searching the grounds and questioning the staff.

Fortunately, his Pontiac was in the same state he left it in and Sam didn't hesitate to get inside and drive off.

*He had a feeling the madness was not just behind him, but on his path.*

Sam had one hand on the steering wheel and the other holding up the paper with the address he was supposed to go to. He was driving through a fifth lot in this cookie-cutter neighborhood, feeling like a complete fool for not being able to find this house.

Maybe it was the exhaustion. After all, he had been driving for ten hours. TEN! He woke up at exactly 6 in the morning, had a quick breakfast, and then hit the road. It was now almost 4:30 in the afternoon.

He was so eager in the first few hours, keen to find out who was the recipient of the letter in his possession, and how all this will help him get his job back. But after about the sixth hour he was just ready to get this over with.
Sam was driving through a sixth lot or block or whatever they're called when he saw a bunch of kids playing on their bikes in the middle of the street. He stopped in front of them and rolled down his window. "Hey! Do you guys know where this house is?" Sam asked holding the paper up.

One of the girls wheeled over to the side of his car and Sam let her read the paper. "You turn left, drive past two blocks and then turn right. I think it's there."

Sam smiled at her. "Thank you." He drove past the children and followed the little girl's instructions.

Sure enough, he found the house and pulled up to the curb. He then reached into the glove compartment, grabbed the envelope, and got out of his Pontiac.

He walked to the front door and knocked. After a few seconds, it swung open and Sam's breath was taken away. Perhaps the most beautiful woman he had ever seen appeared. She was slender of frame with silver-blonde hair and purple eyes.

"Um... Hello?" She said waving a hand close to his face.

"S-sorry?"

"I said hello, how can I help you?"

"Oh, um, sorry. Hello, my-my name is Sam. I drove here from Horn Hill to bring you this letter." Sam offered her the envelope.

She took it and blinked. "From Horn Hill? You know I think this is why there's such a thing as a postal service."

Sam chuckled nervously. "Yes, well Mrs. Tyrell said it was urgent."

Her eyes got bigger than buckwheats. "Olenna? Olenna Tyrell sent you?"

Sam nodded and she responded by roughly pulling him into the house, which was startling considering how heavy-set he is and how small she is.

He followed her as she wandered into the living room swiftly opening the envelope to read the letter.

She plopped herself on the couch and Sam watched her eyes scanning through every line. When she got to the end of the letter she sprang to her feet and began pacing backwards and forwards through the living room, muttering. He couldn't make out the exact words but he could hear she was sort of remonstrating, almost like she was having an argument with herself.

After almost two minutes of going back and forth, she paused, closed her eyes momentarily, opened them again and a bright smile spread across her face. "Sam, are you hungry?"

"I stopped at a Wendy's two hours ago, so... yeah a little."

"Have a seat, make yourself at home," she said gesturing to the couch. "I'll be right back," she added before running into the kitchen.

She came back thirty seconds later with a bowl of chocolate treats, placing it on the coffee table in front of him. "Here, I made these pecan pralines for myself but they're all yours. I'm gonna go upstairs, shower, and pack. I shouldn't be more than an hour. Feel free to watch the television." She
then began dashing up the stairs as if she was microwaving popcorn in her shorts, but suddenly stopped and came back down.

"Oh, by the way, I'm Daenerys. Daenerys Targaryen," she said with a smile and went running up again.

Sam was so transfixed by the scrumptious pralines, thinking how solid they are on the outside and how liquid and sweet they could be on the inside, and how that liquid might trickle round his tongue, that he didn't hear much of what she said, but he definitely heard that last part.

TARGARYEN!?

It can't be the Targaryen's he's thinking about. No, no...

But... when has Sam heard of anyone else having that surname? And in the city of King's Landing of all places. Plus she obviously has a connection to wrestling, so she has to be one of them! Maybe a cousin? Or perhaps she's married to one of them?

The Targaryens are a wrestling family which is arguably the most powerful from the cartels that control the business. The patriarch is Aerys Targaryen, a notorious top heel famous in the 50s and 60s for being a mentally unstable lunatic who was taken out of the nuthouse from time to time to wrestle. Some even called him "Nuthouse Targaryen". In the late 1960s, Aerys became the promoter for the King's Landing territory, effectively overseeing the other Crownlands territories, as well.

From his seed came five sons who all became wrestlers. The “Targaryen boys” are Rhaegar, Daeron, Aegon, Jaehaerys, and Viserys. Rhaegar is the most famous one of the bunch. He is multiple time WWA champion who semi-retired in the plateau his career, preferring instead to begin promoting wrestling shows on behalf of Argilac Durrandon in the Stormlands area. After a dispute with Durrandon in 1977, Rhaegar opted to break away and found his own promotion in the state. With the support of Barristan Selmy, Robert Baratheon, and others, Rhaegar built it into a successful promotion.

Now where does Daenerys fit in that family picture?

As he began gorging himself on the chocolate treats, he really looked around the living room for the first time to find clues. There was an atmosphere of elegance about the whole house. Everything appeared to be the latest collection of furniture--Myrish carpets, drapes, and couch covers, and rosewood and mahogany wood for the tables.

Sam turned his head back and noticed a wedding portrait on the couch side table. He grabbed it to get a better look. It was Daenerys and a much larger fearsome looking foreign man who was clearly not a Targaryen.

He thought about exploring more of the house but didn't want to snoop, so instead, he turned on the television and ate the exquisite pralines.

An hour and a half later Sam heard Daenerys's footsteps and turned off the television and got to his feet. She brought three suitcases down with her. "Sorry I took so long."

"It's fine. The pralines make up for it, they were delicious. I took the liberty of washing the bowl, I hope you don't mind?"

"Do I mind? I think you're the first man to wash anything in this house."
Sam was a bit uncomfortable by that response so he changed the subject. "So... are you ready?"

She gave him a bright smile. "Yes."

"Great... What are we doing, exactly?" Sam asked, scratching his head.

Daenerys giggled. "We're going to Horn Hill."

"Oh, okay. Do you want me to drive you to the airport?"

She giggled louder. "No, I'm driving there with you."

"Oh..."

"Do you want to use the toilet before we leave?"

"That's probably a good idea."

"There's a washroom around the corner," She pointed to where he had to go and Sam went.

When he came back to the living room Daenerys was nowhere in sight. He wandered around and found her in the kitchen by the counter with a paper in her hands. "Daenerys?" She flinched a little.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you."

Daenerys waved it off. "It's fine. Are you ready to go?"

"Yeah, I think so."

Her mouth curled in a small but unsure smile. "Okay then, we should be going." She slowly put the paper on the counter and followed him out of the kitchen.

They were walking out to his car a minute later with Sam carrying two of Daenerys's suitcases and she the other. After putting the luggage in the trunk she looked at him and held out a hand.

Sam's brows pinched in confusion. "What?"

"The keys. I'm driving."

"No, that's alright. You seem to have a lot on your mind."

"Sam you drove all the way to King's Landing from Horn Hill. You should rest. I'll drive for 4 or 5 hours and then we'll stop at a hotel to sleep. We'll get back on the road in the morning."

Well, Sam must admit he was still rather tired. And those fatty, sugary treats probably didn't help.

He looked down at his wristwatch. 6:20 pm.

Dareon once told him that men can't win an argument with a woman, and Sam never likes wasting time or breath, so he handed her the keys and they were off and running.

The road trip back to Horn Hill was mostly quiet, at least in the car anyway, in his head Sam was constantly scolding himself for being unable to start or hold a conversation with a pretty girl.

*He'll walk into a hospital where a madman is wielding a shotgun but he can't talk to a girl...*

Usually, you can't get Sam to shut up about wrestling, but whatever Daenerys asked about his life,
whether it was about wrestling, or wrestling or wrestling, he would always give a short answer.

She probably felt like she was interrogating him, though Daenerys seemed fairly pensive herself. He'd see her head moving slowly from side to side at times for no apparent reason.

It was noon on Monday when they were entering Horn Hill and Sam was behind the wheel again. "So where do you want me to take you? There's a really nice hotel five minute from here," Sam said.

"We're going to your house."

"W-what?"

"I said we're going to your house."

"Oh... Do you-Do you want to stop by to have a proper meal? I don't think my mother would mind whipping something up."

Daenerys smiled as if knowing something he didn't. "Let's just go to your house."

He understood that smile some fifteen minutes later when they got to this house. Much to his surprise after parking in the driveway, Daenerys asked him to pop open the trunk. She grabbed two of her bags and had to ask Sam to carry the other because he was too confused to be a gentleman.

His mother came outside before they could reach the front door. "Samwell, why are you only caring one bag? I taught you better than that," she reproached him. "I apologize for my son's lack of chivalry."

"No, it's fine I can carry them," Daenerys claimed.

Despite her words, his mother took one of the bags from her and roughly pressed it to Sam's chest. Even though they were literally ten feet from the door.

"It's nice to me you, Daenerys. I'm Melessa," said his mother, offering her hand.

"It's nice to meet you, Melessa," Daenerys replied shaking her hand.

"Come on in, please." she ushered her into the house.

"Thank you."

Sam was walking in behind them but came to a stop when he reached the doorway.

_Hold on a second..._

He called his mother from a pay phone at a gas station an hour or so before arriving at Daenerys's house. And then last night from the hotel they stopped to sleep at. Sam mentioned that he was driving with a woman, but he NEVER told his mother her name. He's sure of it.

Sam walked into the house and dropped the bags beside the door. He then took his mother by the arm and led her back outside with him. "Sam, what are you doing?"

"I need to talk to you for a sec. We'll be back in a moment," he said to Daenerys before closing the door.

"Mom, how did you know her name?"
"Who's name?"

"Daenerys, how do you know her name is Daenerys?"

Her mother paused. "Well, you told me."

"No, I didn't. I never said her name."

"Yes, you did. You're just forgetting, that's all."

"Mom, I never told you her name."

"You were tired last night, you don't remember."

"Mom!" Sam raised his voice. "Don't lie to me. What do you know? How are you involved in all of this?"

Her eyes danced anxiously. "You know Sam... you're supposed to be in school right now. Even if you are graduating you shouldn't miss two straight days. You may have already missed half the day, but I think you should go shower and make an appearance."

Sam narrowed his eyes. "How do you know I didn't go to school on Friday? I never told you that. How deep are you in this?"

His mother put her hands on her hips. "So you lied to me?"

"You knew that I lied. Stop avoiding my questions. Why does Daenerys assume that she's staying with us?"

"Samwell, I am too disappointed in you right now to engage in hyperbole. You should do what I said and go to school. And if Daenerys wants to stay with us, I'm not going to shut the door on her face, okay," she said, walking back inside the house without waiting for his reply.

"Mom, get back out here. Mom!"

Sam took a deep breath and followed his mother inside.

"Would you like something to drink, Daenerys?" His mother asked her.

She shrugged. "A glass of water would be nice."

"Perfect. You make yourself comfortable, I'll go get you a glass. Sam why don't you take Daenerys's bags to the guest room." She headed to the kitchen and Daenerys eased herself on the living room couch.

"You know Sam you should listen to your mom and make an appearance at school. You shouldn't miss three straight days."

"I've only missed two days."

She nodded. "And tomorrow will make three."

Sam arched his brow. "Why am I missing school tomorrow?"

"Well, I don't think you'll miss the whole day but definitely the morning."
"Why am I missing school tomorrow morning?"

Her face split into a wide grin. "Because you're coming with me to the County Armory."

Sam blinked. "Why?"

"We're going to get your job back..."

That made his heart race.

"And I'm going to take over the territory."

And that made his heart stop.

Chapter End Notes

Credits:
1. Buford Bulwer is based on Dr. Jerry Graham. His insane hospital story happened in 1969.
2. This Olenna/Mace rift is completely original. It's just a way to bring Daenerys in the picture.
3. Daenerys will be an amalgamation of several female promoters. More about her backstory will be revealed in her POV.
4. The Targaryens are based on the Von Erich family. The three brothers, Daeron, Aegon, and Jaehaerys, actually come from the books. They just died a year or less after being born. If you know the story of the Von Erich's then you know why they are still alive...
5. Aerys's backstory is somewhat based on Sonny Roughhouse Fargo aka Nuthouse Fargo.

Next Chapter is Jon V. Then after is Daenerys I.
Jon V

Chapter Summary

A farewell and a not-so tempting offer... or just exposition.

Chapter Notes

I struggled all last week to write this since nothing really happens in this chapter and I didn't know how to get to where I'm trying to go. But I found my rhythm this week and now I'm really anxious to write Jon's next chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I have heard of people who live in huts made of wood, iron, plastic or whatever they can find to build walls. Some even using bedsprings as a fence. Not all of them have doors or even any furniture inside. They have to sit on the floor to eat and go outside with a bucket to wash their hair. Most of them with no water and no electricity. Poor sanitation. No toilets. And on the outside, garbage. Tons of garbage. EVERYWHERE. With absolutely no empty ground to step on.

"Many of them might literally kill to live here. To not have to worry about their home being bulldozed, to have clean water, sanitation, and furniture for sleep. But Jon... you have the money to afford something more comfortable than this. I'm not saying you have to live in a fancy apartment in a high-rise tower, but something less claustrophobic, where you can fit a bigger bed and walk around with your tallywacker floating in the breeze."

Jon cringed. "Mom, I'm gonna pretend I never heard that last part. And as i've tried to explain it's the principle of the whole thing, okay. This is an experience typical among new kids on the business's ground floor. Financial struggle is sort of a tradition. It would've been the same thing in baseball. Coach Farlen used to tell me stories of how smaller prospects in the minor leagues sometimes climbed into the team bus’s luggage bin to sleep, that a good meal on the road was a jug of peanut butter before flies or sweaty fingers contaminated it. This helps build comradery. Plus, I'll only be sleeping here once or twice a week, the other days I imagine I'll be sleeping in a motel or inside a car. This is more of a cheap storage unit than a living quarter."

"A really small cheap storage unit," his mom corrected.

"Fair enough."

"And who's car will you be sleeping in? You still don't have a driver's license. How are you gonna move around?"

"Benjen told me that most of the boys are willing to give you a ride. You just have to pay five cents per mile."

His mom took a deep breath. "Well, I don't know if I have anything else to say then." She gave him
"I should be worried about you, but no amount of anxiety will make any difference to what's going to happen. So what's the point?"

Jon meekly smiled. "I wish I wasn't worried about you. I doubt I'll have much solitude in this profession, but at least that means I won't be completely alone. You on the other hand will be. Who's gonna be there for you if you slip in the bathtub and bang your head? Or if a burglar breaks into the house in the middle of the night?"

"Jon, I've stood alone on my own two feet since your dad died, and even before that really. I've never needed someone in whom I can rely or find security or in whom there's a sense of comfort or support. Everyone thinks we must have someone with whom we can be at home, but we are never at home with anybody because we are living in our thoughts, ambitions, and problems. Life is very lonely, kid. Don't be frightened to stand alone."

Jon smiled more broadly this time. "I just knew I was gonna hear one last speech before you left. I thought it was gonna be much longer though."

She gave a shrug. "You've always eaten the food that I put before you, you don't need a buffet anymore."

"Hmm... You know when I was younger and kinda chubby, a friend of mine teased me about my weight and said most people stop eating when they get full, but I stop eating when I'm tired."

His mother shook her head humorously. "Come here." She pulled him into a hug and said, "I'll come down to watch you as much as I can. And if you can call me every once in a while to let me know you're alive, I'll appreciate it."

"Pssh, I'm gonna be calling you every day, whether it's from a motel at 3 in the morning or a call box on the side of the freeway," Jon stated. "Ha! That's what you say now, but life will get in the way. You'll only call me for birthdays and holidays and when you think you need advice. Probably about women."

"Don't expect a call like that anytime soon. Not since I broke up with Jez, almost two years ago, have I been bewitched by a female."

His mother pulled back, her face had split into a wide grin. "Did you hear all those girls that cheered for you during your match? And the ones that waited for you after the show? One will arrive soon on a broomstick and perform the hocus pocus, I guarantee it."

A small chuckle escaped from Jon's lips before he forced himself to frown. "I wouldn't be dumb enough to get involved with a fan, alright."

"Really? Do I have to go through all the girls you dated in high school because of baseball."

"Those girls were fans of baseball, not me specifically!" Jon argued.

"Yeah, whatever. Walk me to my car." She took Jon by the hand and began leading him out of the small room. But he had more to say. "And-and just because someone recognizes your talent, doesn't mean they're a fan."

His mother's eyes were bright with amusement. "Sure..."
"I mean can a musician only go out with someone who doesn't like music, or who thinks his music sucks? Gods, his life would be completely disturbed. And sure disturbance perhaps helps artists to write great music, but that's not the point here!"

Jon continued his little rant until they were outside the flophouse approaching his mom's car. "While it's true that some women are nice enough to show up and offer themselves up for a uh... um... you know, a pleasant experience. But I'm not the type that wants to be smothered by devotion, even for only a night. Okay, I don't need that. I can appease myself. No! I mean... That's not what I meant, I mean I can entertain myself. No, dammit! I mean..."

His mother finally shut him up by pulling him into another embrace. This one more fierce. "It is your solemn duty to learn how to enjoy yourself, Jon Snow. And if things don't work out, you just pick up the phone and say Klaatu barada nikto, and I'll be here in a heartbeat to get you."

Jon gave her the brightest smile. "I love you, Mom."

"I love you too my sweetie." She then kissed him once on each cheek and a third time on his forehead.

"Call me when you get home."

His mom climbed into her car. "I will."

"And be careful on the road," Jon added.

She started the engine. "Be careful on your road."

Jon rolled his eyes. "That was cheesy."

"Oh, yeah? What kind of cheese we talking about, Stilton or Muenster?"

"Definitely Stilton."

"Well, then I'm complacent. Bye, kid." She waved as she began driving off.

He waved back. "Bye."

Jon kept watching the car until it made a right turn and disappeared. He took a deep breath as he felt the first pangs of dread. He imagines a lot of sons are in a close relationship with a mother that raised them on their own, but his is really special.

Every parent says he or she loves their children. Unless they're abnormal. But every parent throughout the world says they love their children. But do they? To a lot of parents, their love means kicking the stuffing out of their children to teach them to "know their place" and to behave, telling them what studies they must take, thus encouraging them to become their little image. And they say it's to protect them from any harm, but it's to protect themselves. If they loved their children would they identify themselves with a country or belong to an organized religion which brings on war and divides people into conflicting groups, which kills or maims their children and creates antagonism between human beings?

The love of Lyanna Snow implied great care and concern--to see that Jon did not conform, to see
that he learned instead of imitated. She didn't educate him to become "somebody" in society, leading an utterly miserable useless, futile life, functioning as a machine in a system. She was a teacher that would talk things over and let him listen to intelligent conversation, and encourage the spirit of inquiry and discontent, thereby helping him to discover for himself what is true and what is false.

She has helped him to understand himself without giving him pi-jaw and knocking him down like a domino for thinking or feeling a certain way. How different would the world be if everyone had a mother like his?

Jon has understood a part of everything his mother has taught him, but he doesn't grasp the whole damn thing by any means. He is still a fragmented human being. The continuous reel of remembrance going through his head now is a testament of that. If she knew his thoughts she would advise him that the present is the only time there is. Other times--past times, future times, are abstractions.

*It starts now.*

With that in mind, Jon whirled around and looked at where it was all starting. In this four-story red-brick building they call Hardin's Tower, where the living quarters are cubicles four feet long by six feet wide and they line long narrow hallways in a way that suggests horse stables.

*It's gotta start somewhere...*

"Hey, so is there anything different about this city? You know compared to Castle and the other towns?"

"Uh, not really. Just different roles I guess," Pyp answered with his hands on the steering wheel and his eyes on the road.

"What do you mean different roles?"

"You know, different bagman, different ring crew, different locker room leaders."

"Locker room leaders? What are those?" Jon asked curiously.

"In every territory there's a leader on the babyface side and on the heel side locker room. It's usually a main event top guy who's work and track record and opinion everyone respects, and who everyone respects as a person."

"Okay, but what exactly do they do?"

"They go out of their way to help the boys, either with advise on what they should do or a blistering on what they shouldn't do. If you're having any trouble you can go to them. They have the boys' best interest at heart but also have enough experience and are enough veterans that they know when the boys are fucking up and they can take up for the office too and be that kind of bridge between the promoter and the booker and the rest of the crew."
"Huh... So who are the locker room leaders here?"

"For the heels it's Endrew Tarth and for the babyfaces It's Qhorin Halfhand."

"What about it in Castle Black?"

"It's Benjen for the babyfaces and Alliser Thorne for the heels."

"I haven't met Thorne yet."

"Hope that you don't get too acquainted. That man is always miserable and is never happy about anything. I think he wakes up in the morning and immediately smiles just to get it out of the way."

"What about Tarth and Halfhand? What can you tell me about them?"

"Well, I don't know much about Tarth's career and his past but he's a pretty nice guy. As for Qhorin Halfhand, he's a legend. Or so they tell me. I just know he's one of the best wrestlers in the territory. He's probably second only to Benjen. Oh, and he used to be in a tag team with some guy named Mance Rayder."

Jon's eyes got wide. "Mance Rayder!?"

"Yeah, why? You know him?"

"You don't know 'the most feared man in the sport'?"

"Uh... no, I don't think so. Should I?"

"How do you not know about the guy who mauls his victims, gouges their eyes, and locks on chokeholds until they quit or pass out? And refuses to break the hold, laying out or bloodying up the referee and any other wrestlers trying to stop him. The guy who pulls out his dreaded pencil from his trunks and stabs his opponent's head until the blood is flowing. The genuinely most hated and feared wrestler... EVER. Do you think you should know who he is, Pyp?"

Pyp gave a massive shrug. "What territory is he from?"

"He has his own territory in Skagos. That's what Rodrik told me."

"That place is completely isolated. How do you expect me to know who he is if he's practically on another planet," Pyp retorted.

"That's where he is now but for some twenty years he was featured everywhere in Westeros. You're from the south, right? I hear it's a lot easier to get a hold of older magazines over there than in the North. Rodrik gave me a bunch of stuff Mance was in, the bloody photos and attention-grabbing headlines are amazing, man. I also got like a dozen tapes that he's in. You can't be in this profession and not know about him."

"Can I... Can I borrow some of that stuff? I won't charge you for the driving."

"Yeah, sure, no problem. But I'm still gonna pay you, man. I have to, you've been driving me around for the past three days."
Pyp shook his head. "We were going to the same places. It didn't cost me anything."

"We'll talk about it when we go back to Castle City."

"Alright... Oh, you know, now that I remember, I did hear that Halfhand and Mance had a falling out. I don't know why, but they're not in good terms anymore."

"Yeah, Rodrik said Mance has been a bit troublesome to be around for the past decade. He even hears that he's been running outlaw wildling shows in Freefort."

Pyp was aghast. "Wildling? Is he mad?"

"Well, being a wildling himself he maybe feels like he should go to bat for them."

Pyp suddenly slammed on the brakes. His eyes nearly fell out of his head. "What!? He's a wildling?"

"Yeah, he was born a wildling but raised by Westerosi parents. That's why they call him the wildman."

His brow wrinkled as if he didn't believe him. "And they just let him wrestle?"

"Well, yeah, I don't know. I don't know the story."

He sighed. "How do I not know about this guy?"

"That's what I'm saying," Jon replied.

Pyp paused for a moment. "You should start looking for someone else to drive you to the towns."

"Why?"

"I'm not gonna last in this job. I stink at it. I stink at everything. When it comes to learning things I just can't do it, you know," said Pyp solemnly.

Jon scratched at his ear. "Do you know who Alyn Ambrose is?"

Pyp looked at him with narrowed eyes. "He's a referee from the south, right?"

"Yeah, he's been doing it for like five to ten years I think. And bear in mind I haven't seen every referee at work and I'm not an expert in what a great referee is, but out of all the refs I've seen, he seems the best at it. I have a bunch of tapes I traded for of him refereeing and... I mean at first I didn't really pay attention to what the referees were doing in the match, but since I tend to re-watch my tapes like a dozen times, I did begin to notice. And Ambrose's facial expressions, his body language, the way he stayed in the match but stayed out of the way. I just think he's what a referee should aspire to. And I think what you need to be a good referee is to know how to act and have a good memory. It doesn't seem like you have to be that bright. Not that I'm agreeing that you aren't, by the way."

"But that's the thing I don't think I have a good memory."
"I think you're just distracted from actuality. You know there's a factual memory that you need for certain activities like driving or laboring, or for your name and address. But there are also memories that we don't need, memories that get you hooked, that hold you to the past and hold you to death. And these cause anxiety and depression. That's your problem, Pyp, you look too anxious out there. Too worried about making a fool of yourself in front of the crowd or the people backstage. Which is probably because you hold on to the memories of looking stupid in front of people in the past, or seeing other people look stupid. You got to live in the moment. Did that make sense? Shit, I don't even know what the hell I'm talking about. I'll lend you some tapes of Ambrose, maybe they to help you."

Pyp half-smiled. "Thanks." He then put his foot on the gas and they were off again.

A half an hour later they were parking in the back lot of the Shadow Arena to begin day 3 in the territory. Or night 3? Whatever. The Shadow Arena is an old building that has a capacity of 9,200. According to Pyp, it's a classic hockey arena that stinks like stale beer, sweat, and smoke.

Apparently, the guys in the audience walk around with buckets of beer on ice in bottles and when they get lit up, they throw them at the heels. As for the smell, well that's obvious. And the smoke is because just about everybody in the crowd smokes cigarettes during the show. So much so that you can only see the second or third row if you're in the ring or watching on tv.

It doesn't sound like a palace but it couldn't be worse than the two previous locations Jon was in...

His first official day in Mormont's territory started in the town of Sable Hall in a shoddy convention center type of place with a seating capacity of 2500. Jon's match lasted only five minutes with him easily beating a guy named... Easy. No joke that's his gimmick name.

Day 2 was in a 1,300 capacity multipurpose indoor arena known as the Black Gate, in a dangerous town called Nightfort. I mean we're talking about a place people get cut and shot. And Jon went over in a twenty-minute match against a guy named Fornio.

Jon and Pyp went through the back entrance of the building and then he let him lead the way to the babyface locker room. Unlike Castle Black, the babyface and heel locker rooms were farther apart in this arena and you couldn't easily go back and forth between them.

They were forty-five minutes early so when they entered the locker room it was completely empty. Still, Jon laced up his wrestling boots while Pyp changed into his referee uniform. Pyp then left to find the senior referee to receive instructions, and Jon went to the staging area looking for the blackboard that shows the card for tonight.

He found it and read that in the fourth match of the card he was facing Small Paul.

Shit.

Don't let the name fool you, Small Paul is far from small. He is a giant of a man at over 6 feet tall and with the strength to twist a man's temple into a pretzel, from what Jon has heard. He'll need to be extra careful not to do anything to piss him off, Jon thought as he walked back to the locker room.

An hour later wrestlers were meandering in and out of the room and warming up and conversing about the most random things.
"My cousin, he's a doctor and he says if you drink more water it flushes toxins out of your body and further helps you lose weight," said a wrestler named Blane to a small group around him.

"I drink plenty of water, it hasn't helped me lose any weight," another wrestler named Tim Stone replied.

"How many times a day you eat?"

"Three."

"How many times a day you shit?"

"One"

"Reverse the procedure."

Jon tried to distract himself by listening to their idle conversations but just couldn't keep his focus off of Qhorin Halfhand. The tall and bearded man with gray eyes who wore a trapper style hat and sat across the room with an empty expression on his face.

He thought of walking up to him and introducing himself but Qhorin seemed to be tuning-out everything happening around him as he put on his gear. And Jon wasn't about to interrupt him to shake his hand and tell him 'Hey, I'm here,' like he's someone important.

So instead he just sat there and stole glances at him like a weirdo. He was about to get up to wait in the hallway for Benjen to come when he saw Qhorin pull a back brace out his bag. He then took the fattest roundest wallet Jon had ever seen from his trousers and put it down--it had to be two or three inches high. And he took a cloth of some kind and wrapped it around the wallet. Then he took these heavy rubber bands and wrapped them around the cloth. Next, he stuck the wallet in the cloth in the lower part of his back brace. And lastly, he pulled his tights over the top of that part of the brace.

That's...odd. Though smart, I guess?

Benjen then came into the locker room and walked straight over to Qhorin to give him his instructions for tonight. Jon has come to know that a booker is like a coach--he assembles a team, constructs the plays, and lets his stars run them.

Like the previous two days, Jon was the last to be spoken to. "Hey, Snow, you and Small Paul are going thirty minutes. Have the match and let him get some heat. The men in this crowd like babyfaces with an aura of violence and ultra-masculinity. They might not want to be like Jon Snow, but they can feel sympathy for Jon Snow, they can cheer for an underdog that's being overwhelmed by greater odds. Do you know what in mean?"

"Yeah, I got the picture."

"Good. The finish will be a count out. You'll clothesline Paul over the top rope after two failed attempts. Then you'll climb to the top rope and crossbody him when he gets back to his feet. You will both struggle to recover and just before the ref counts ten you'll slide in the ring to get the win. Got it?"

"Got it."
"After the match, Cellador, the ring announcer and commentator, will come to you for an interview in the ring."

Jon gulped. "An-an interview?"

"Yeah, you've got two minutes to cut a promo. I want you to introduce yourself and tell them you're story and what you want. You can tell them your true story or make one up, I don't care as long you don't break kayfabe. And you only got one chance because everything is first take. We never redo anything, there are too many things to do and not enough tape."

His story? What he wants?

What does he want?

"Do you want some advice?" Benjen must have noticed the perplexity on his face.

"Sure," Jon said, hoping his eyes weren't begging for it.

"I won't lie to you, it's fucking hard to do a babyface promo. Especially when it's your first time on the mic. You can get people to dislike you a whole lot easier than you can get them to like you. No one is expecting a promo from you that would make the heavens rumble. Everyone needs time to get comfortable on the microphone. So don't sweat it."

Jon nodded, but couldn't stop the sweat. "Alright."

Benjen gave Jon a long look. "Some piece of advice for the future. We don't want you to memorize some cute clever phrase that you've thought of or something like that, if you can do that naturally that's great, but if you memorize a script of exactly what you're gonna say and stand there with the deer caught in the headlights look and say in a monotone voice 'I will beat you on April 15th because I am better.' People won't believe that. They want to hear somebody from the heart say 'I hate your fucking guts and I'm gonna kill you.' That's what they want to hear.

"It's not acting, it's reacting. If you're not listening to someone who's yelling at you, that's getting in your face, that's telling you what's going on, if you're not listening to them, if you're just thinking 'as soon as he stops I'm gonna say this this this and this, and that'll be cool,' you might say something that doesn't make any sense and makes you sound like a complete fool.

"When there's a personality that the people believe in, an issue on television that seems plausible and convincing, that's what talks them into the building, that's what sells tickets. It's emotion, passion, and intensity. Don't script things, don't write things. And if you can't talk from the heart, from emotion and tell a story and explain to the people why they have to see this match worse than they need to see their mother who's hooked up to a machine in the intensive care ward, then you won't be a top guy."

Jon had been holding his breath. He let it out with a sigh. "Thanks, I'll take that all into account."

Benjen nodded and exited the locker room, leaving Jon alone in his peril.

Fuck me.

He has no experience speaking. Shit, Jon struggled to present school projects in front of twenty people. 'Eye contact, eye contact,' one of his teachers would say. And now he has to speak in front
of 2500 people, and Gods know how many will see it on tv, and he only has one take!?

But before Jon would enter panic mode, he had a flashback of his own speech to Pyp in the car.

*Live in the moment.*

Forty minutes later Jon was inside the squared circle standing opposite to a nightmare on two feet. Even if Jon stood on one of the top turnbuckles on his tiptoes, it would still leave him a foot shorter than Small Paul. Most of his face was covered by whiskers, but he could see his eyes, and the gaze he fixed on Jon would make any grown man run for their life.

When the bell rang he almost did just that as Small Paul charged towards him causing Jon to scamper around the ring in a chase. After two failed attempts he finally grabbed him, put him in a headlock, and leaned down to mutter, "Hi, I'm Paul. Thanks for giving me your head."

After the match was over Jon could attest that Small Paul was a safe worker. While he had a body devoid of any muscle definition, it still housed one of the strongest men in the sport, and he could've split the jugular's vein and snatched Jon's Adam's Apple if he felt like it. But he didn't. He took care of him.

As planned a minute after his victory the ring announcer/commentator Cellador, came into the ring with a microphone. "Ladies and gentleman what a victory. What a victory by this young man, right here. Give it up." When the match began his view of the crowd was too obstructed by smoke for Jon to see much, but now it was crystal clear and he saw people on their feet clapping. Cellador moved to stand next to him. "Now I probably should be calling for an oxygen tank for you right now, but I think everyone, including myself, is too anxious to know just who is Jon Snow. Can you talk?"

"I can... I can talk." Jon replied, 'gasping for breath.'

"What can you tell us about yourself? Where are you from?"

*Just talk from the heart.*

"I was... I was born in the snow and sleet of Winter Town, my father died before my mother gave me life, and despite growing up in a house that would make a caveman feel at home and Jed Clampett laugh at us, it was always the happiest house on the street. The pride and the love from my mom was enough. I wasn't a good scholar but the baseball diamond in my high school gave me a feeling of sheer spontaneous jubilation, so I joined the team and worked hard and became a dominant pitching prodigy. It looked like my future was set. It looked like my mother wasn't going to struggle to live day to day with little, any longer.

"But then one fateful night a coward berated an innocent woman in front of me and I instinctively stepped in to defend her. And this coward responded by sucker punching me to the ground. The fall tore a labral in my right shoulder and my baseball career was over before it began. It felt like vinegar was shoved down my throat every day, from that point. I lost my drive, my combativeness, and my purpose. But then I came to a wrestling show just like this one and my inner beast woke up. I see in this sport a lot of obnoxious, dishonest, arrogant, egotistical cheats, con-men, cowards who try to convince YOU that they earned their achievements. I don't see these people as my rivals. No. Rivals are for ballroom dancing, and I came here to wrestle." The crowd cheered as Jon got out of the ring and walked up the aisle with conviction.
His feet didn't stop moving his body when he arrived backstage until he heard the sound of Mormont's voice. "Snow!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Let me tell you something." Jon walked over to him by the table. "It doesn't matter how the crowd reacts to you, you're not ready. I see a ton of talent, but you're not there yet. If we start you on top too early, it's not gonna work and you're stained. And then I'll have to let you go. That would hardly put the kibosh on your career, but I think you can learn a lot of things here quicker than in the south. You're a puppy with big paws. Next year, when you grow into this, you might be great."

"That's fine, I don't mind," Jon said earnestly.

Mormont eyed him thoughtfully for a moment. "Alright, you can go." Jon walked off and made for the locker room.

After a shower, he began to change at a leisurely pace. Seeing as he can't watch the show, he didn't see any point in rushing. All of the boys leave after they've had their match, and he would've left then but he had to wait for Pyp who didn't have permission to leave until the show was over.

He was counting all the scratches on the wall for the dozenth time when a sweaty Qhorin Halfhand entered the room. Jon had read on the card that he was in the main event against Bearded Ben.

Qhorin took his tights down and reached in and got the wallet in the cloth out of his back brace, unwrapped the rubber bands, unwrapped the cloth, opened up the wallet, pulled the money out and began counting it...

Now Jon is not sure who could undo that whole procedure and take his money and then redo it again... Who knows maybe Qhorin thought he was working with David Copperfield. But Jon is pretty sure whatever was in there when it went in was in the same place when it came out.

Qhorin gave Jon a fleeting glance after he was done changing and left. A minute later Pyp came dashing in the locker room already beginning to undress. "Hey, you ready? Of course you're ready that's a stupid question. Do you like pancakes? There's a pancake house a few blocks from here. It closes in fifteen minutes but if we get there before, the manager will let us stay all night if we want. She's a wrestling fan and is quite anxious to please all of the wrestlers and wrestling personnel, let's just put it that way," he commented with a sly grin.

Jon smiled. "Yes, I like pancakes. Did you hear my promo?"

"Yup," Pyp said lazily.

"And... what did you think?"

Pyp shrugged, pursing his lips together. "You pronounced most of the words right."

Jon let out a breathy laugh. "I guess that counts for something."

The pair was walking to the parking lot a couple minutes later when somebody shouted. "Jon Snow!"

Jon glanced over his shoulder and saw a group of girls approaching. He counted seven. "Hey... do
you girls want an autograph?" He asked.

"An autograph? I prefer a tattoo. Your bite mark on my bum," one of them said with her lips curved into a sensual smile.

"Ring rats," Pyp whispered.

Jon laughed nervously. "Thanks for the love, I'll see you girls around."

"Why don't you come to my apartment and we'll really show you our love."

"You can backstab all seven of us with your magic wand," one of the other girls added.

*Gods*

In the past, Jon will admit that the flesh had made it hard to resist girls who flattered him. I mean he's only human. But he's changed a lot since high school and really prefers only platonic love right now. Plus these girls looked kind of... uh... seamy.

"I'm flattered but I can't. My friend and I have to hit the road." Jon started pacing to Pyp's car.

"A rain check then?"

"Uh...we'll see," Jon muddled out.

Pyp stuck his key in the car door and reached over to open the passenger's door. Jon promptly got in and closed and locked the door. "What the fuck, dude."

Pyp erupted in laughter. "You should've... you should've accepted the offer. They seemed like nice ladies."

"Fuck you. Those girls made me think of something I once heard on television."

"What's that?"

"Have sex at any time, at any place. But be careful what you eat."

*Chapter End Notes*

It probably sounds like I'm just rambling sometimes but everything has a purpose. Well except the random locker room talks. Also, Jon might only want platonic love, but he has another thing coming. Spoiler: We're getting closer to the smut.

*Credits:*
1. The first paragraph is a reference to Smokey Mountain in the Philippines. I saw a documentary about that place last week that really frustrated me.
2. Pyp is somewhat based on Brian Hildebrand.
3. Mance Rayder is based on The Original Sheik.
4. Alyn Ambrose is based on Tommy Young.
5. The Shadow Arena = Sam Houston Coliseum.
6. The Mance Rayder wallet thing is something Abdullah the Butcher did back in the day.
7. Small Paul's greeting to Jon is based on a classic line by Eddie Gilbert. When he locked up with somebody that he had never met before, he'd say "Hi, I'm Eddie. Take my head."

Next Chapter is Daenerys I. It's my first time writing from a woman's POV so let's see how that goes.
Daenerys I

Chapter Summary

It's a takeover.

Chapter Notes

So this took me a while. I didn't really know where I was going with Daenerys's storyline when I started writing this chapter, so I went into detail with some things while I figured it out. And I sorta did. Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Everywhere there was darkness and silence. She opened her mouth to speak but words couldn't come out. She opened her mouth again this time wide to scream to no avail. She took a step forward but was blocked by some sort of barrier. As she raised her hands to feel the barrier she became aware that she had a metal object in her left hand. She brought it to her face and shook it causing a ringing noise.

Then suddenly splendid light was alive.

She stood on a grass field under a cloudless sky. On the plain it was crowded--everywhere there were people of all ages and races talking and shouting, with faces closed and sullen. She looked down at her left hand and saw it was a shiny gold bell that she was holding.

Standing four feet from her was a very thin and frail looking man with a long beard and hair of silver-gold color.

"Who are you? Where am I?" She asked warily.

"I am Baelor the Blessed and you are in heaven, child," he said with a reedy voice.

She stammered. "Heaven? I-I...I'm dead?"

"This is true. Now you have lived a fairly good life. You have not cheated too much. But before you enter into this heaven I must tell you one thing. Here we are all bored and we are all awfully serious. The Father never laughs and every angel is moody, depressed, and don't. Unless you want to enter this world, hesitate.

"Before you come in perhaps you would like to go down below and see what it is like to live a second time, and then come tell me. It's up to you. Ring that bell and the lift will come up. You get into it and go down."

She wasn't going to wait to hear a catch so she rang the bell and went down. The gates of the lift opened and she was met with the most beautiful sight. Strong, silent, and perfect men all around her. The creme de la creme of masculine beauty.
Two of these men with bulging biceps approached her carrying a throne. They positioned it down next to her and then one of them effortlessly lifted her off her feet and sat her down on it.

A group of handmaidens then came forward offering her elegant dresses, exquisite platform shoes, and superb jewelry. Everything in the height of fashion.

She smiled broadly. "By God, this is the life. May I go up and tell Baelor?" She rang the bell, got into the lift and went up.

A moment later she stood in front of Baelor again. "Sir, it was very good of you to offer me the choice. I prefer down below."

"I thought so. You know what to do." He gestured to the bell. "Farewell."

She rang it and went down.

She opened the gate and the perfect men and handmaidens met her with clubs and blunt instruments and began beating her up and pushing her around. "Just a minute, please!" She pleaded. They stopped their attack. "A minute ago I came here and you treated me like a Queen, why are you now beating me?"

"Ah... You were a tourist then."

Daenerys awoke with a gasp. She blinked several times as if getting her bearings and then sat up and looked around. Morning light streamed in through the bedroom window illuminating her surroundings. She breathed a deep sigh of relief.

Thank the G... Thank my lucky stars. It was all a dream.

She turned her head to the clock on the bedside table and read 7:25. Daenerys slid out of the bed and walked over to the wall mirror to smooth her hair and rearrange her clothes a bit before leaving the room. She then went down the hall and walked down the stairs to look for Melessa. She found her in the kitchen cluttering around, cooking breakfast. "Good morning."

"Good morning," Melessa replied with a bright smile. "Are you hungry? I hope you like scrambled eggs with smoked salmon?"

"That's fine, but do you mind if I take a shower first?"

"Oh of course. Please, go ahead. Do you need a towel? I have guest towels in the closet."

"No, I brought my own. But thank you. Is Sam awake?" Daenery asked.

"No, do you want me to wake him up?" She asked with an overly serious face.

Daenerys smiled. "No, it's fine. I actually wouldn't mind speaking to you privately after I've showered."

Melessa's face grew curious. "Okay."

Daenerys went back upstairs to the guest bedroom and got her towel and some clothes from her luggage and then entered the bathroom that was in the next door to the left.

She turned on the shower to let the water come up to temperature while she began undressing. A minute later everything was stripped off but one thing. Daenerys looked down at her left hand and paused. Her wedding ring.
Here we go again...

No! Stop! Stop thinking about him!

She shook her head as if to clear it and removed the ring. The warmness of the water felt good on her skin and eased her tension. After a while, however, she became too relaxed.

Whenever Daenerys takes a hot shower it feels like a massage in a plush spa resort. And the relaxation turns her attention inwards. Usually, it's a blessing. She's hit with a flash of brilliance or it triggers a revelation. From answering a vexing problem in life or perhaps just random, yet totally satisfying, insight.

But now it's forcing her to try and solve all the problems she doesn't want to think about right now.

You're supposed to be giving my brain a break! Grr!

Okay, let's solve the easy problems first.

Who is she kidding, there are no easy problems in all this, there are only problems that weigh more on her than the others. On the pan with the less weight on the scale there's her parents and brothers.

Out of all of them, she can only imagine her mother not being indignant with her. Though she may be peeved that Daenerys waited until everything was said and done before telling her. But being her voice of reason, she thought it wiser to inform her mother of everything afterward.

Her eldest brother has been involved in the wrestling business since he was seven years old when he began selling programs for their father. And he was putting on live professional wrestling events at only the age of fourteen! He was renting buildings, advertising shows, constructing the ring, selling tickets, and stocking refreshments.

After enrolling in college and getting his MBA, he was a successful businessman in normal life for a couple of years before he decided to join the family business.

First as an office assistant for their father, and then a referee, and then he decided to become a wrestler. And he was a damn good one too. Rhaegar could make a big building feel small.

And his personal drive didn't switch off there, instead of staying with their dad and waiting to inherit the territory, he moved to the Stormlands and began promoting for Argilac Durrandon, and later buying a portion of it. After finding out that Durrandon had kind of screwed him on ownership, Rhaegar executed one of the biggest coups in wrestling. Taking Argilac's crew and talent and winning Storm's End in less than six weeks.

Rhaegar can't be mad at her! She's just trying to follow in his footsteps.

Well except the wrestling part. Daenerys gave wrestling training a shot when she was sixteen but her body is small and her skin is basically glass. I mean the first day of hitting the ropes she almost passed out and was begging for water and oxygen.

She doesn't have any intention of orchestrating a coup either, she respects Olenna too much to do that and is grateful for the opportunity she's giving her.

Her potential "take over" is for a temporary reign. A try-out of sorts. Rather risky on Olenna's part but she must find her son being in control even riskier.

But back to her family.
Daenerys never felt pressured to work for the business like her brothers maybe did to become wrestlers. In fact, when she was a teenager her parents asked her what she wanted to do in life, and she looked at them like they had three heads. She was always by her father's side from an early age, watching and learning.

Promoting wrestling is basically event planning. You are budgeting, scheduling, advertising, signing contracts, and arranging and coordinating everything related to the events. To most people that probably sounds boring, but Daenerys absolutely LOVES planning events. As a young girl, she couldn't wait for her birthday to arrive. Not for the gifts or the attention that comes with it, but because she loved to plan out her birthday party.

She would brainstorm ideas, check the calendar for a good date, and then pare down all the ideas and schedule things out: *when do the invitations need to go out? So that means they should be done no later than... What supplies are we going to need? We need to make sure we have everything by... so we can make this then;* that kind of thing. She much preferred planning events to the usual interests of a girl her age.

But why wrestling, one may ask. Why not wedding or party planning, or dinners, concerts, festivals, ceremonies, conferences, etc. It's simple, as much as she loves planning and organizing things, she loves wrestling even more. To her, there's no more exciting business in this world than wrestling!

Although Daenerys also got her MBA three years ago, she didn't try to get a job in any business outside the family business like Rhaegar, she immediately began working for her father as an office assistant.

Aaaaand still has the same function 36+ months later... well, had until two days ago. And that's not even counting the three summers she worked as a receptionist for him as a teenager!

Daenerys knows she's gotten an opportunity that she wouldn't have had if not for her family and because she was born into this business, there's no denying that, but that doesn't make it any easier. And she's fine with paying dues and being put to the test every single day and earning her way to the top, but it's not gotten her anywhere with her father.

One theory she's had is that she needed to earn money herself and prove herself to him as Rhaegar did. But she knows for a fact that the reason her dad hasn't given her an opportunity is because she's a woman.

Her father is very old school and conservative, and although he's never outright said it, she knows that he considers wrestling a man's business. While it's true there are not a lot of ladies with high level of power in the business, there are a couple who have proven in history that women can hang.

It was Rohanne Webber in the 1930s who left her chosen vocation as a kindergarten teacher to serve a powerful role in a wrestling promotion in the Westerlands. She was said to be a remarkable woman with a keen nose for business and marketing.

In the 1960s Larra Blackmont took over the presidency of her husband's boxing promotion company and went on to stage more than 10,000 boxing bouts and as many wrestling matches in Dorne.

Agnes Blackwood, a former fashion model, took over from her husband when he died as promoter of Raventree in the Riverlands territory, which ignited a heck of a war in that region in the 70s. It's a long story but basically all the top WWA promoters sent all their top talent in to replace the stars that had walked out and decided instead to work for Agnes. So she basically took on the world.
And despite losing and being forced to sell the company because of declining business two years later, in the end, wrestling in the Riverlands really took off because of the war she started.

Daenerys didn't have any intention to usurp her father or her brothers. She just wanted more responsibility, more trust. She wanted to earn her keep as a valued member of the family team. And if her dad deemed her worthy of running a town or two for him, then she would've been elated.

But instead, she has to go behind his back and work with another family to get her break. And it's incredibly disheartening considering how close they used to be.

Her youngest brother Viserys was nine years old when she was born, so Daenerys couldn't really witness how different her brothers' upbringing was compared to hers. Rhaegar says they had a really happy childhood full of running in the King's Landing sun and being one with nature. And that their dad wasn't really super strict or abusive in any way at all. But she has a strong feeling they grew up in a very tough house, and that dad wasn't the nicest of dads.

It was one of those things where the minute Aerys left the room her brothers turned into different people.

When it comes to wrestling there's no question that her father could be equated as a marine drill sergeant. From what she's been told, wrestling was the only life her brothers knew, and they all could wrestle by the time they were ten. And an increased amount of pressure put on them to be stars has had an effect. They're always trying to impress their dad and are so worried about being perfect inside the ring. His grooming has paid off if you ask her father however because her brothers have become Gods in the Crownlands.

With Daenerys it was different. Her father had always been so affectionate and protective of her. She suspects it's because of what happened to her older sister, Shaena. Shaena was the firstborn of Aerys and Rhaella Targaryen and was accidentally electrocuted by an exposed wire and drowned in a puddle at the age of six. So he was a little overly protective of her.

But their relationship changed after she married Drogo.

She sighed deeply. "Drogo..."

After graduating high school, she, a couple of friends, and a chaperone Viserys went to Essos for the summer to celebrate. And it was there that she met a young Dothraki wrestler who goes by the name of Khal Drogo.

Drogo grew up in the capital city of the kingdom of Vaes Dothrak, and at the age of 15 he was part of a group of six teenagers and young men sent by the King of Vaes Dothrak to Yi-Ti to study a full contact combat sport called Daor Udrázma. It's an unarmed sport where its combatants use techniques from many martial arts. He reached the third highest division but because of the rules and customs of the sport was forced to retire after his stablemaster who recruited him died, and he and the other five Dothraki fighters got entangled in a dispute with his successor.

Under the guidance of two other former combatants who had turned to pro wrestling, Drogo joined their home promotion, All Yi-Ti Pro Wrestling. Which served as a springboard for him to wrestle all over Essos.

Pentos is where their paths crossed. She and her brother and friends attended a wrestling event that Drogo was working in, and when she first laid her eyes upon this tall frightening looking man who physically displayed a lot of what the average man has never heard of, she was intrigued. But the moment their eyes met Daenerys knew she was in trouble.
After the show was over he searched her out and asked her out on a date. Luckily, or maybe unluckily in hindsight, Viserys was distracted hitting on a girl and couldn't stop Daenerys from accepting. Her brothers are also quite protective of her, but the real problem was the age difference between her and Drogo. He was twenty-two and she was only seventeen. In Westeros, the age of consent is eighteen, but in Pentos it's sixteen, so there was nothing legally wrong should their date lead to more. But she knew Viserys wouldn't care about legalities, so their meeting had to go down in secret.

The date led to more.

Up until then, Daenerys was a virgin. And no one knows what troubles virgins have. Her curiosity, as well as Drogo's exotic appeal, masculine behaviors, and sexual energy, made it impossible for her not to be whipped into frenzies of carnality.

At first, it was just his bedroom prowess. His very vibrant, spellbinding, jarring, rocking bedroom prowess. I mean the things he did to her were an all-out assault on today's sexual mores and probably a frontal attack against women's lib. But then she saw his tender side, which he never let anyone see in public. And after two weeks of rendezvous, she became attached.

Despite meeting this softer side of Drogo, Daenerys didn't really think his feelings were mutual. He's not a very vocal person, after all. But the night before she was supposed to fly back to Westeros, he completely swerved her mind around by asking her to marry him, and she impetuously accepted.

However, in Pentos and in almost every location, minors must obtain parental consent before they may legally tie the knot. The only place in the world where you didn't need parental consent to marry, coincidentally was Vaes Dothrak. So Drogo convinced Daenerys to get on a plane with him and fly to his kingdom to wed. Leaving only a letter for Viserys explaining everything.

After a two week honeymoon in Vaes Dothrak, Daenerys returned to King's Landing to face her family with her husband by her side.

They didn't exactly lay out the welcome mat.

Her father refused to speak with her and her mother was disappointed, saying that she acted rashly and without prudence. Other than Viserys throwing a fit for being ditched by her in Essos and getting a tongue lashing from their father because of it, her brothers weren't as cold with her, yet they weren't very supportive about the marriage either.

Thankfully, their dispiritedness didn't last. Daenerys has a talent for making other people happy and it only took a week and a half before they were having a big group hug, her father included. The two sat down and had an emotional one-to-one where he came to terms with her decision. He even asked to meet Drogo by the end of it, and two bonded over their passion for alcohol and wrestling.

But her relationship with her father was different from that point on. She can still see the love in his eyes, but she isn't his little girl anymore.

*And this decision probably won't help.*

Aside from that, Daenerys was on cloud nine after making up with her family. But her joy wouldn't last...

Her husband's personality goes with the Dothraki ideal, the classic outlook of a man. In Vaes
Dothrak, men are strong, proud, and ambitious, and Drogo does not go against all that. He craves recognition both in wrestling and in his kingdom. And he doesn't want to hide away in a neighborhood where the lawns are manicured and the people wear pastel polos and moccasins.

And Daenerys was 100% in his corner. If he wanted to be the Muhammad Ali of wrestling, then she wanted to be his Angelo Dundee. She would've carried his spit bucket.

But the problem was his pride. He was determined to make it on his own without anyone's help. So when her father offered him a spot in their territory, Drogo refused, stating he wouldn't receive a "handout".

Instead, he preferred to climb in his car and drive to the other territories to see the offers he would get and then choose the best one. Unfortunately, his Dothraki race and his personality counted against him in Westeros. And the only offer he received from a promoter was to be a referee. She can imagine how he took that offer.

So Drogo decided he was gonna return to Essos. His goal, to become the biggest star in the business and get so over that all the promoters in the West beg him to return and are willing to go to war to book him.

This was a problem for Daenerys as she was about to begin college and couldn't just apply for a transfer a week before. She contemplated giving up school for him. After all, Rhaegar once said the most valuable lessons in business are learned through experience, and that he sort of regretted going to college himself. But Drogo talked her into staying and trying to transfer to Essos as soon as she could to join him.

Growing up in the business, Daenerys knew that being alone was something a wrestler's wife becomes accustomed to. But knowing did not make it any easier for her. School and friends and family served as a distraction, but there wasn't a day that she didn't think of Drogo. She tried to get on the phone with him almost every day but it was difficult because he was always moving from one town to another and didn't like using phones to begin with, and a lot of times when she could get a hold of him he was too mentally and physically exhausted to talk.

She thought life would be easier once the first semester was over and she could transfer to Essos to live with him, but Daenerys only got more lonely and stressed when she made the move.

Drogo could only spend one day with her in the week, which was better than not being with him at all--just ask her vagina, but she didn't have her family and friends to distract her anymore. And because of the language barrier, she struggled to make new friends in school.

And that's not the end of it. It's difficult to put into words, but the university she transferred to just felt... wrong. She can't say if it was the teachers, the classes, or because she just didn't click with the campus culture the way she'd hoped to, but it didn't feel like a good fit.

All these stressors took such a hold on Daenerys that she lost her talent for making other people happy. Most of her energy went to trying to force herself to be happy.

Her misery was so obvious that Drogo practically put her on a plane back to King's Landing after the academic year was over. Swearing by the horse god his people revere that they would soon be together, and until then he would visit at least once a month.

Once school started again she fell into a pattern that brought a semblance of peace in her life. There were flashes of joy and affection, but without the love of her life, it felt like she was getting used to living with a backache.
If there was anything keeping Daenerys together it was knowing that Drogo would fulfill his promise.

And then life dealt her a heavy blow.

One morning she got up and decided to call Drogo at the apartment he was living in at the time in Lys. It was his day off and she thought maybe she'd get lucky and he would answer.

But instead, a woman answered on the other line...

She asked the women who she was but the line cut off before she could really say anything.

A perturbed Daenerys called again to interrogate Drogo and he claimed she was a morning housekeeper. Knowing how much of a slob he is she found it plausible. And she did want to give him the benefit of the doubt, but her gut told her something was not right.

She didn't want paranoia to consume her and so got in contact with a private investigator in Lys to get to the bottom of everything.

After a week she got the call and then soon after received the photos confirming her suspicions.

Drogo was fucking ring rats left and right before and after almost every show.

She tried to convince herself that those women meant nothing to him, that it was just pleasure. That men having other women on the side is not only common in wrestling culture but also in the Dothraki culture.

At least it wasn't one specific woman he was fucking every day, she had thought.

*How sad and pathetic she was...*

But her Targaryen fiery did win over and she confronted Drogo with all the evidence in hand the next time he visited. She then said she wanted a divorce and he got on his knees and begged for forgiveness.

Daenerys didn't budge... at first. But Drogo stayed camped outside the house for the next three days, completely forgoing his wrestling obligations in Essos.

She was too weak for him.

The thing with Drogo is that he's always been a sweetheart to her. He shows affection often, he's supportive of her career plans, and he buys her thoughtful gifts at special times. He's never been abusive, psychologically much less physically. He's never even raised his booming voice at her.

*He just cheated on her. Many many times.*

Drogo stayed with her for the next two months and they rediscovered the groove they had when they first met. But it wouldn't be a lasting experience, as he announced that he needed to get back to work. For the millionth time she tried to persuade him to accept her father's offer, or to try to find something in Westeros. But he was still stubborn and had a wild hair up his ass about the way the promoters reacted to him. Daenerys would never ask him to give up wrestling for a more stable life, even if that selfish thought did exist in her brain, but she did make little subtle comments about other professions he could think about that are closer to home. Like football, boxing, or maybe try to bring Daor Udräzma to Westeros. Hell, she even brought up bounty hunting. But it didn't work. He only promised to visit more.
Daenerys's emotions and thoughts were different after he left again. In this time alone she reflected. Really reflected. It was like Drogo's betrayal created a streak of clarity in the mental fog that her feelings for him created. She realized that she and Drogo aren't really gonna be together when, or if, he moves to Westeros permanently.

He swears things will change when he does come back, but logistically she doesn't see how. If Daenerys is also working in the business, she can't be following him around as he moves from territory to territory. Unless she gives up and becomes a housewife or he finally accepts to work for her father. Or for her?

Yeah, neither of those things are likely to happen.

And she started to doubt if they'd be together after his career was over, as well.

She couldn't trust Drogo anymore and she wasn't sure how the relationship would work in the distant future. Their main bond was the love of chasing their dream. Of wanting to prove everyone wrong and being successful in their careers. But the way they view life and their interests don't really align.

Knowing that she knew that, she wondered if they should finally split up. Daenerys said as much to Drogo the next time he visited but he was having none of it. In his culture marriage is intended to be unbounded in time, and divorce is frowned upon. She thought of filing for divorce anyway but she didn't want things to get messy. She still loves him and loves their time together, she just can't see herself growing old with him anymore.

She was confused and it was hard to figure out what to do. So she just put all her focus on her career and waited to see what would happen.

It took several years, but something finally happened. Samwell Tarly knocked on her front door and then knocked her for a loop when she read the letter he gave her.

Her relationship with Drogo by this point is purely physical. He exploits her and she exploits him. He sees her as someone on whom he can rely, while she gets a good romp once or twice a month that relieves sexual tension.

It probably sounds quite toxic, but Drogo has given her the power to end things. For the past two years he has repeated that if she's not in their house the next time he visits, he'll take it as a sign that it's over.

And she never left... until now.

She left a note saying she'll always love him, but she's just not in love with him anymore.

These are the tremendous problems Daenerys is battling. Now how does she make all the grounds of anxiety vanish? Going in circles about it for the past two days hasn't gotten her anywhere. She's only worried. Then additionally worried about worrying. And furthermore worried because she worried because she worried.

And now in the shower, she's gone on and on and on getting more meticulous and not arriving either! So it won't be solved by picking everything to pieces like a spoiled child.

Ugh.

She turned the water a little warmer and hissed in pleasure.
She's always been good at solving mathematical problems, scientifical problems, biological problems. But the problems that exist in her relationship with another have always been a real bitch!

Why can't she just refuse to have problems? Challenge the brain and the mind to have no problems. Every problem is like a blanket that smothers. Why can't she just burn the blanket? Burn it and see how high her flame can go.

But how? How does she stop thinking? If she tries to force it, she'll only stir everything up. Can she just leave her mind alone? Not keep it busy, but leave it in silence?

Feels like something you have to learn.

Learning is action.

Time to act.

Daenerys turned off the water, stepped out of the shower, and dried herself off. She then slipped into her bra and panties, put on her blouse, and hopped into some jeans. After sliding her feet into a pair of socks she began to brush her long, wet hair. When she finished she pushed her wedding ring back into her finger and went downstairs to join Melessa.

"Oh, hey, I was about to go up to check on you. Was there anything wrong?"

Daenerys cringed. "No, sorry. I just kinda lost track of time. Rest assure I'll repay you for all the services before I'm out of your hair. And that'll be today, whether things go well or not."

Melessa snorted with amusement. "I only asked because you seemed eager when you first came down. Maybe Olenna didn't clarify in her letter, but you don't have to worry about paying me, and you're welcome to stay here every time you stop by Horn Hill. Whether things go well or not. Which I know they will."

"Thank you, but I'll only be a burden this time around. IF things do go well then I'll just stay in hotels when I pass by Horn Hill."

"You're not a burden. Thanks to you my son is getting his job back. I'm the one repaying you."

Daenerys shook her head. "If he worked for Olenna then he must be excellent at what he does. So it's not like I'm throwing him a bone. Plus, I read somewhere that the Reach is a very friendly city for photographers. He wouldn't have needed to search the want ads for long."

"Sam only takes pictures of wrestling, photography is not really a chosen profession. Wrestling is the only reason he bought camera equipment and studied the craft and subscribes to photography magazines. He taught himself because he had the opportunity."

"Well, the other territories in the south all have their own photographers. But in the North I hear there's a great demand for them right now. If he had gone to one of the northern promoters with Olenna's recommendation, they would've hired him in a heartbeat."

"That's precisely why I owe you. When I cornered Paxter Redwyne outside the Armory he told me the same thing. That's why I pressed him to find a way to get me in the same room as Olenna to hatch a plan. Eventually, Sam was gonna find that out and leave me far behind. Every bird one day leaves the nest, but I don't want him to fly that far."
She gave Melessa a sympathetic smile. "Is Sam still asleep?"

"Yes, he's still in supine bliss. Have a seat, I'll bring you a plate of eggs and salmon." Melessa motioned to the square dining table in the middle of the room and Daenerys took a few steps and sat down on the edge of her seat.

Melessa brought her the plate of eggs and salmon and sat across from her. Daenerys stuck her fork in the food and took a bite. "Mmm...delicious."

"Glad you like it. So what was it that you wanted to talk to me about?"

"Oh, yes. Um... I don't want to intrude into your private life. If I ask this it's strictly for work reasons."

"Go on," she prompted.

"What exactly is the situation with Sam's father, Randyll?"

Melessa cleared her throat and looked uncomfortable.

"Uh...you don't have to answer that if you don't want," Daenerys was quick to add.

There was anxiety and apprehension on her face but she said, "No, it's fine. Sam and I haven't spoken to him since he picked up his marbles and left ten years ago."

"And what about... again you don't have to answer this. What about your other children?"

Melessa made a sullen face. "Randyll has sole custody of all the kids, except Sam. My youngest son Dickon lives with him, and my three daughters are in a boarding school somewhere in Essos."

"You don't have visitation rights? Don't you at least get to speak to them over the phone?"

"No. My parental rights over them were involuntarily terminated by a court. I can't visit them or talk to them, I can't decide how their raised and taken care of. I'm not... I'm not legally their mother anymore." The pain was clear on her face.

"How? Why? Why did the court take your rights away?"

"Randyll has friends in high places. He went to law school before deciding to be a wrestler and built an influential network."

Daenerys scoffed. "Unbelievable. I can't believe the judicial system can be so corrupt... Well, I can but..." She exhaled a sigh. "I'm sorry that happened to you. Is there nothing that can be done?"

"I haven't quit fighting to retain my parental rights, but even with best lawyers money can buy, I've gotten nowhere in all these years. Why do you ask me about Randyll and my children?"

"Olenna gave me a small list of names of people I should be wary of in her letter. He was at the top of the list."

"As he should be. Randyll appears to be loyal, but like respect, that reaction can be won with good deeds. Deep down he's an opportunist. He thinks he deserves far more credit than he gets. If you ask me, he's controlling Olenna's son like a puppet and is the reason she was pushed aside and Sam got fired."

Daenerys paused. "How does Sam feel about him?"
Melessa took a deep breath. "Sam appears indifferent, but like his father, there may be a mask overlying the core. He gets away from himself almost every day with wrestling that he's probably too distracted to think about it."

That sounds familiar.

"What about his siblings? How does Sam feel about them?" Daenerys asked.

"They're a touchy subject for him. Whenever I bring them up he tries to steer the conversation. I think he feels guilty for having me in his life while they don't." Melessa gave a sullen shrug.

"If what you suspect about Randyll is true and he turned Mace against his mother, then he won't be too pleased to hear that I'm in control. He could try to sabotage my run to force me out. If he does..."

"You do what you have to do. I just ask that you look out for Sam. He's all I have."

Daenerys gave her a small smile. "I will try my best."

Melessa smiled back and pushed herself to her feet. "I'm gonna go wake Sam up so he can shower and eat, the more time passes the more he'll be upset with me for not getting him out of bed as soon as you got up like he asked me to."

"You should tell him everything you've done to help him. I don't understand why you wanna keep him in the dark about it."

"A parent is best when their developing children barely know they exist. So when their aim is fulfilled, they will say, we did it ourselves, and thus become more self-reliant. And Sam knows, he's no fool, there's no need to confirm it."

Melessa left the kitchen and went up the stairs to wake up Sam while Daenerys returned to enjoying her breakfast. Once her plate was clean she headed back up to the guest room to get inside her travel makeup case to preen.

She spent twenty minutes staring in the mirror styling her hair some more, applying a bit of eyeshadow, brushing up her eyelashes, and adding color to her lips. Basically trying to make a thirty-year-old out of a girl in her early twenties. Then she completed her outfit by adding shoes, jewelry, and a handbag.

When Daenerys opened the door to leave she was a bit startled to see Sam standing in front of it.

"I was just about to knock, don't think I had my ear to the door or anything weird like that," Sam quickly stated.

"Okay. I believe you," she said with a breathy chuckle. "So are you ready to go? Have you showered and eaten already?"

"Yes. I'm all set."

"Good." Daenerys drew a deep breath. "Let's do this."

Sam was driving them en route to the Armory a few minutes later when she decided to do some reconnaissance. "Hey, Sam?

"Yes?"

"Most people speak highly of Olenna. I don't know her that well but I also think highly of her. But
what about the wrestlers? Is the respect for her universal from all the boys?"

"Well, I don't think most of the boys like her as much as I do because I just... I just love her. I mean she's the reason I got to hang around. I think if they don't love her it's because she's the one preventing them from having fun at her given locations. You know keeping an eye on them so they don't do something they're not supposed to. But Lady Olenna is nice to everyone for the most part, I don't know of anyone that actively hates her."

Daenerys arched her brows. "You seem talkative today. I was expecting a yes or no answer."

Sam's smiled shyly. "Sometimes I need to get comfortable with someone before I can really talk to them."

Her face split into a wide grin. "I'm glad you're getting comfortable around me. You'll be working close to me and it would help if you could speak in complete sentences," she teased.

Sam eyed her. "Can I ask you something?"

"Please do."

He seemed hesitant for a moment. "Why did Mrs. Olenna pick you to run her towns? How do you know her?"

"I first met Olenna when I was a little girl, at my brother Rhaegar's wedding. Then again when I was your age at the WWA annual meeting."

His mouth fell open. "You were at a WWA meeting!?"

"Well I wasn't actually in the meeting, I waited in the lobby. I was just my dad's secretary/assistant."

Sam still looked in awe. "And Mrs. Olenna, she talked to you?"

"Yes, they let me in for the dinner after all the talking was done. I had to sit alone in a table since everything was filled up. And Olenna just came over and sat with me. Maybe it was because we were practically the only two women in the room, I don't know. But we spoke for almost two hours and it was great. But I don't think that was the incentive for this opportunity. Not entirely, anyway. She likely heard what happened last year."

"W-what happened last year?"

Daenerys opened her mouth to speak but then closed it after a supposition suddenly came to mind. She narrowed her eyes on him. "Sam are you... smart?"

He looked at her curiously. "Smart?"

"Yeah, do you know... never mind. Don't let me distract you, keep your eyes on the road," she said trying to drop the subject.

Sam swallowed. "If you mean my knowledge of the inner workings of the business, then it is limited. I've never been allowed in the locker rooms, as no one else is either, but a photographer hears things and sees things."

She smiled. "Then you are smart. Does Olenna know that you're smart?"

"I think it's a tacit understanding with Mrs. Olenna, but I've never actually voiced to her that I
"Well you can speak openly with me... when we're in private of course. And since we are currently in private, I can tell you what happened last year. I'm not sure if you know this Sam but in a lot of parts of the country Thanksgiving is the greatest night of the year for professional wrestling. And in the Crownlands my father's promotion is so big and has so much talent that we actually run two shows on Thanksgiving night. Kingslanding in the Red Keep Arena was the big show, but we would do another show on the island of Dragonstone. Last year we did 18 thousand people in the Red Keep and another 8 thousand in Dragonstone. So between two shows, we did 27,000 people live just on Thanksgiving night."

Sam gaped at her. "Wow."

"And a year ahead of time my dad booked Barristan Selmy, the WWA champion, Oberyn Martell, Victarion Greyjoy, The Blackfish Tully, and Gregor Clegane, for whom there's always a struggle to book on Thanksgiving night. You know all the big attractions."

"Wow," he repeated.

"But the day before the shows, my dad experienced chest pains and was rushed to a hospital where he was treated for a suspected heart attack. He was later diagnosed with hypertension and exhaustion. Very similar to what happened to Olenna. Nevertheless, he spent Thanksgiving night confined to a hospital bed and had to hand power over to his underlings. My dad isn't just the business mind in charge of the territory, he also makes the major decisions when it comes to talent and creative performance. He says yes and no to what his booking committee puts on the table."

"His head booker and second in command is Qarlton Chelsted." Daenerys sighed and continued. "Chelsted reminds me of Buddy Hacket as a booker. He comes off as a simpleton. And that's when he gives a shit. He's lowkey, quiet, and just sits there and talks with his hand covering his mouth."

"But anyway, Thanksgiving started off a disaster. Biter was arrested after a bar fight the night before, Tallad broke his arm practicing by himself a move in the ring he didn't need to do that night a few hours before bell time, and Monford Velaryon and Aurane Waters, who both were supposed to work in Dragonstone, were stranded somewhere in Driftmark. So both cards had to be changed last minute."

"Now the tickets were already sold for the show, so people we're gonna come and money would be made regardless, but by not delivering what was promised we could've fucked up the night and killed Thanksgiving night in the Crownlands forever. None of the glitches were Chelsted's fault, true. But if you put yourself in the line to the golden stable, it's as my brother says, you shouldn't just be prepared to lead the horse to water, but carry the horse on your back. And what Chelsed wanted to do was elementary for our biggest show of the year. So all eyes were on my brothers. Bless them, I love my brothers, all five of them are magical and charismatic. But other than Rhaegar, none of them are really sharp enough to come up with good ideas on the spot. So I took em aside and made some suggestions for both cards which they thought were brilliant and put into effect."

"And how did it go?"

"Well to quote my great uncle Aemon, who we flew down from the North and who has never been shy to call a show of ours crap, we served up delicious wrestling. I didn't really think my changes made the show that much better, but people backstage clapped my brothers in the shoulder for them, so they meant something. I didn't get any credit because they sold the ideas like they were theirs, which I understood and was fine with. They did, however, tell my father, which meant more,
but instead of giving me any type of praise, he reproached my brothers for not telling him about all
the mishaps and needing to fall back on their little sister.

"He didn't want the story to ever get out, but I have brothers who like to drink, and drunk minds
speak sober hearts. And soon the story was spreading into many of the wrestling locker rooms and
offices in Westeros. Olenna maybe was of the people who heard it."

Sam was thoughtful for a moment. "So are you going to be the promoter and booker of this
territory?"

"Gods no. I'll be overseeing everything and setting the pace and administrating, but Paxter
Redwyne will still book all the shows in Olenna's towns."

Daenerys studied Sam and saw a hint of distrust in his eyes. "This is only temporary Sam until
Olenna can muster up enough energy to do this on a regular basis again."

Sam's mouth curled in a small but unsure smile and he focused back on the road.

A few minutes later he pulled them into the Armory parking lot in front of the back entrance.
"Don't turn off the car," Daenerys told Sam. "The office is on the first floor, correct?"

"Yes. But I don't know how we're gonna get even close to that area of the building. They've likely
been told not to let me go backstage, and I don't think anyone knows who you are, do they?"

"I'm not sure, but if they don't they're about to." She said before reaching over and honking the
horn five times.

A few seconds later the back door opened and out came two tall twin brothers who were
indistinguishable.

Just as they described themselves on the phone last night.

Daenerys exited the car with Sam following her out. One of the twins came up to them while the
other was holding the back entrance door. "What are you guys doing here? Shouldn't you be with
Mrs. Olenna?" Sam asked.

"She wanted us here," he replied and then turned his attention to her. "Ma'am I'm Arryk, and that's
my brother Erryk. Our lady has ordered us to do as you bid."

Daenerys smiled. "It's nice to meet you. Are they all upstairs?" She asked.

"Yes, the meeting started about twenty minutes ago."

"Time to act. Lead the way."

Arryk turned and did just that.

They reached the staircase to the first floor when Sam came to a halt. "I'll wait here."

"No, I'd like you to go up with me. I want them to see you," Daenerys replied.

"I can't, I'm not... smart."

"You're smarter than probably most of the people up there. C'mon." Daenerys headed up the stairs
with Sam and the twins trailing behind.
They got to the first floor and she stopped in front of the only door in the hall. "You two wait here by the door," Daenerys instructed the twins. She then reached for the doorknob and slowly turned it to see if it was open. It was. "Do you think we should knock?" She asked Sam.

"It would be rude to come barreling in, and a bad first impression," he replied.

"It would, wouldn't it?" Daenerys turned the knob again and barreled into the room.

The office room was full of men much older than she, sitting around a classic rectangular shaped table that conveyed hierarchy. At the head of the table was Mace Tyrell. Everyone looked at them confused. Mace shot to his feet. "What is the meaning of this? You can't be in here boy, who let you in!?" He shot daggers at Sam with his eyes.

"He's with me," Daenerys replied airily.

Mace looked her up and down. "And just who are you, girl?"

She snorted. "Don't you recognize me, Mace? This is hardly the first time we've met. Thought it is the most of your attention that I've ever had."

Mace was utterly confused.

"Still nothing? No doubt if Aerys had told you I was his daughter you would've also painted my ass red."

He stared at her in stunned disbelief. "Aerys? Y-you're...?"

"I'm Daenerys Targaryen."

"Targaryen... what ...?" Mace blinked vaguely at her, dumbfounded. "To what do we owe the honor of your presence? Has your father sent you?" He asked with a small smile that didn't quite reach his eyes.

She ignored him and turned her attention to the others. "Sirs, it is nice to meet all of you. I apologize for my abrupt entrance but the survival of this territory trumps propriety I think, don't you?"

Mace's brow wrinkled. "What do you mean?"

Daenerys ignored him again and reached into her handbag to bring out a folded piece of paper. This was a second letter by Olenna that she got from Melessa, this one was not so reticent. She unfolded it as she walked towards Paxter Redwyne who sat to Mace's left. She didn't know Paxter personally but she's seen his face a hundred times in the magazines.

Paxter received the letter and scanned it for a moment. He cleared his throat and began to read it. 'I, Olenna Tyrell, name Daenerys Targaryen my interim substitute in my absence. Her functions will be the same as mine. She will promote towns, sign contracts with the buildings, check up on the box office, and place the advertising. I believe Daenerys will be a constructive and effective promoter for Tyrell Promotions and its president, my son, Mace Tyrell. I ask those who have worked with me for almost a decade to abide by my decision and follow her lead.' "signed Olenna Tyrell," Paxter finished.

Mace snatched the letter and read it to himself. He looked up and shook his head in disbelief. Then he read the letter once more, with mounting annoyance visible on his face. "This can't be real," he muttered.
"It's your mother's handwriting and signature. I've seen it a thousand times," Paxter replied.

"The letter says substitute but I prefer to consider myself a proxy. I hope to be in contact with Olenna on a regular basis for counsel and direction. That is after her phone line is fixed?" Daenerys eyed Mace. "For some reason, I haven't been able to get a hold of your mother. I could recommend a technician?"

He huffed. "If your father thinks he can take my territory away from me like he had his son steal Durrandon's, he has another thing coming!"

"My father has nothing to do with this. These are your mother's wishes and my compliance. But I give you my word, I give all of you my word, that I have no intention to take over the territory and keep it. My stead would be only temporary until she is ready to return full-time."

Mace frowned irritably. "This is not a role my mother has the power to give. As this letter says I am the president of Tyrell Promotions! This letter holds no weight."

"Quite right. But you know who holds a lot of weight in the wrestling business as a whole? The president of the WWA. My father."

He let out an angry groan. "Do you all hear? She admits this is the work of her father. Aerys wants to gobble up all the territories to control everything. We cannot allow this!"

"My father doesn't even know I'm here. He'll probably be as pleased as you are when he hears about this. However, he will always do what is best for the business. And keeping the system of co-op that he is president of strong is best for the business. So he will side with the person who lays the law down in the Reach and will respect their decisions. He will side with Olenna Tyrell."

The anger faded from Mace's face, he now looked anxious. "You're just a girl, what would you know about running a promotion?" He sneered.

"I have an MBA from the University of King's Landing. But that brand is not important on my resume. The house I grew up in was my college wrestling knowledge. I have been attached to the hip of my father almost since birth, and by watching him closely I have learned the ins and outs of working in a wrestling office. I can't swear that I won't make mistakes, because everybody has to make mistakes, you can't learn anything unless you do. But if business begins to drastically suffer, or if we don't click in all cylinders, then you are welcome to talk with Olenna and she can dismiss me if so she chooses," Daenerys replied, making eye contact to all the members of the committee but Mace.

The room fell silent for what felt like a whole minute. Everyone looked at each other undecidedly. She glanced at Mace and saw his eyes shining with triumphant.

*Shit.*

But then a silver lining appeared.

"What changes would come under your administration?" An old man with silver hair and a long and distinguished face asked.

"Everything will revert back to what was normal under Olenna's management. Mr. Redwyne will still be creating and the rest of you will have the same tasks. Any raising or lowering of position or rank will not be made without Olenna's approval. Speaking of... As I said I haven't established contact with her yet, but I think you all how highly she thinks of Samwell."
All eyes shifted to Sam who averted his eyes nervously. "I'm confident she'll agree with my decision to rehire Sam as our photographer."

Mace cut his eyes at Sam then glared back at her. "Is this someone you want running the towns? Someone who lets an outsider enter our booking meetings!" He said sharply.

"Don't fool yourself, Mace. You and everyone here knows that Sam is far from an outsider. He knows the business but doesn't admit it. Not even to himself. He can be trusted."

"I think we should let a vote decide," Paxter suggested.

"Vote!? Are you mad? I am the president of this promotion! I will split from the WWA and go to war with all the other promoters if I have to! I am no Agnes Blackwood, I will beat them! There will be no vote! Not now or ever!" Mace was fuming.

Paxter frowned. "If we have no vote or influence in this promotion then why are we even here? And you can prevent us from choosing today Mace but if you really do decide to leave the WWA, then everyone will eventually have to choose between you and Olenna."

"They'll have to choose between Targaryen and Tyrell, not my mother and I."

"I think they will after reading this letter," Paxter pointed to the paper that was still in Mace's hand. Mace smiled and raised the letter high for all to see before tearing it apart. "What letter?"

"You can't do that," Paxter said.

Daenerys beamed with pleasure. "Yes he can, Mr. Redwyne, he do whatever he wants with his copy."

Mace's smile vanished. "Copy?"

"Yes, I made carbon copies for all the talent and staff."

Mace opened his mouth to speak but his voice abandoned him. It was evident in his face that he didn't know what to do or say. Like a puppet without his master.

"You or the Queen of Thorns?" She clicked her tongue. "I'm sure it won't be an easy choice for anyone." Daenerys had one of the biggest fights of her life keeping a straight face.

Mace glanced helplessly around the room.

"Shall we vote then?" Paxter asked the others.

"I'll wait outside until you've come to a decision," Daenerys said before turning to leave with Sam following after her. As she closed the door she saw Mace fall back into his chair, defeated.

"Should I go back to school now?" Sam asked.

Daenerys gave him a wry smile. "Aren't you dying to know what happens?"

Sam nodded.

Five minutes later the door swung open and Mace came storming out. He approached Daenerys. "You will fail, girl. My mother will regret this, I promise you that. And I will have a handkerchief ready for you in my trousers when you get whipped," he said, his voice thick with anger.
Daenerys giggled. "You can wear the trousers Mace, so long as I crack the whip."

He clenched his jaw and walked off and stomped down the stairs.

She turned to Sam. "Now you can go to school. I'll see you back here at 5 o'clock. Don't forget your camera and all your equipment."

A wide smile broke across his face. "Yes, ma'am. Thank you, for everything." Sam said before also making his exit.

Daenerys then strode back into the office room and went around the table to slowly ease herself into the head seat. She took in a deep breath. "Shall we begin?"

Chapter End Notes

Credits:
1. Rohanne Webber = Betty McDonogh, Larra Blackmont = Aileen Eaton, Agnes Blackwood = Ann Gunkel
2. Daor Udrāzma is based on Vale Tudo (the precursor of MMA) and Sumo wrestling.
3. Thanksgiving night really was a tradition back in the day. Except it was Christmas night that was the greatest night of the year for wrestling. Thanksgiving was a close second.

Next Chapter is Jon VI
Didn't really proofread this because I'm a little mentally exhausted. There's ALOT of wrestling information to unpack and I'm still green at this writing thing. But I'm still enjoying doing this and I'm excited about the future!

And now it's tag team action for one fall with a ten-minute time limit. In the red corner at 245 pounds from the Crownlands, Alliser Thorne. And his partner from the Rills, Dywen. And the opponents: At 175 pounds from Winter Town, Jon Snow. And his partner at 210 pounds, from Crofters Village, Grenn.

"Who goes first, I forgot?" Grenn whispered to Jon.

"You do," Jon answered before taking his place outside the ropes on the ring apron in the blue corner.

The referee signaled for the bell to be rung and the match commenced.

Grenn and Dywen locked up and everything started off normally with standard holds and simple moves. Dywen was no spring chicken and didn't look in any way as athletic as Grenn, but the fact that he made the match appear so ordinary to the audience showed just how much talent and veteran experience he had.

Jon's tag team partner for the night was relatively new to the territory and to wrestling like himself, and from the little interaction he had with Grenn before the match he seemed like a cool guy, but Gods was he boring and cumbersome inside a wrestling ring.

It felt wrong to be critiquing another guy's abilities when this was barely Jon's seventh match, but judging from what his memory has gathered in the two times he's seen Grenn in action, he could only feel the way he felt.

And what happened next only proved that his criticism was justified.

Grenn grabbed a headlock on Dywen and Dywen started to kind of back up and shoot him off, but then Grenn held on to the headlock and they kinda circled around the ring a minute.

That was strange.

Dywen looked like he was gonna throw him off again but Grenn kinda stopped and hung on to it again. And then they circled around for a second and third time before Grenn went over and tagged Jon in.

What the fuck was that about?
Jon knew Dywen was calling something for him because Grenn was obviously not calling it. It's the heels calling the match.

But Jon didn't have time to think about it as he was now the legal man in the match and had to get in the ring.

He and Dywen did something for a minute before Dywen tagged Alliser in. Alliser got some heat on him and then Jon mounted a little comeback that led to a near pinfall after he gave the older man a rear mat slam.

"1-2," Alliser called.

Jon knew the spot he was calling for and stood in the middle of the ring with Alliser and began to trade punches.

1-2, 1-2.

He threw one, Alliser threw one, he threw one, Alliser threw one. And the 1-2 spot prolonged for over a minute, much to Jon's dismay because Alliser hits like a wall.

But the crowd got into it so it was worth it.

Alliser began to stagger when Dywen hastily left his corner and ran over to the babyface corner to knock Grenn off the ring apron.

Dywen then attacked Jon before he could take Alliser off his feet and both of them ganged up on him.

The referee warned Dywen to go back to his corner but he ignored him, and so the ref ordered for the bell to be rung giving Jon and Grenn the win via disqualification.

_Just as planned._

After a minute of being stomped on by Alliser and Dywen, Grenn slid into the ring with a chair and ran them off.

As the two heels walked up the aisle, Jon and Grenn had their arms raised by the ref, earning a few cheers, and then also exited the ring. But when Jon was going around ringside to get to the aisle, he looked up at the nosebleed section of the Eastwatch Auditorium and noticed a group of scurvy looking wrestling fans sitting on a balcony, isolated. Which was odd since half the seats on the floor of the venue were empty.

He gave the section a second glance and took in the features of the people—the wild unkempt hair, the big shaggy beards, and the inside-out sheepskin coats.

_Wildlings..._

Virtually all public venues in the North segregate their seats with Wildling attendees placed in a tiny section isolated from the rest. Nothing surprising, but he hadn't spotted a segregated section in any of the other buildings he's worked in this week.

After realizing that Grenn was already half-way up the aisle, Jon casually hastened to rejoin him.
They were walking to the babyface locker room when Jon remembered that strange moment during the match. "Hey, so what happened between you and Dywen?"

"Huh? Oh, uh nothing. Just miscommunication, that's all." Grenn didn't sound very convincing but because of separate locker rooms, Jon didn't think it was a mystery he could solve.

They were changing back to their civilian clothes after a shower when Pyp came into the locker room. "Hey Jon, are you gonna stay until the show is over and ride with me or you gonna find another way back to the motel?"

"You can ride with me," Grenn offered.

"Nah, I wanna watch the rest of the show, but thanks," Jon said to Grenn. "Hey Pyp, do you know why there's a segregated section here but not in the other towns?"

"There used to be," someone else answered. Jon followed the voice to Waymar Royce who sat across the room strapping on his boots. "But the savages kept starting trouble..." He raised his eyes to his. "... and paid for it. Just goes to show, you can't make natural enemies behave as neighbors."

"If that's so then why are they still coming here?" Jon replied.

"Because the ones that come here know their place. They know they're guests so we give them a little nest to watch."

"That's what they call the section, the Crow's Nest," Pyp informed Jon.

"Plus Mormont probably finds it amusing to see a couple of thousand wildlings outside begging to come in and only allowing a few. I know I would," Waymar added snidely.

Jon quirked his head. "It sounds kinda senseless to turn away paying customers. Especially when half the seats in the building are empty."

"We won't have to worry about empty seats for much longer," Alan of Rosby who sat next to Waymar chimed in. "Once the women get a look at you, they'll be the ones in thousands begging to come in." He grinned at Jon.

Waymar scoffed. "Yeah, right."

Alan ignored him. "Have you serviced any of the rats yet, Snow?"

"No, I uh... I don't know. I want to hold out for the A plus, I guess," Jon entertained them.

Alan laughed. "So what are you gonna wait for fucking Morgan Fairchild to walk through. It's bad for business to have a discerning eye for quality. There are some who are a sight for sore eyes, but it shouldn't matter. The rats improve your cash flow by buying a ticket to your show and buying your merchandise. And in return, you help them live their fantasy."

"All you need to give them is hard dick and bubble gum," Waynar added.

"I heard there's another way of earning some money on the side from rats. Timmet in the Vale apparently charges women up to a hundred dollars for a night with him. And if they don't have the
money at the time, then they have to find another way of paying him, like in booze or drugs." Jarman Buckwell said.

This was rapidly becoming a group discussion, which had Jon jumping with joy inwardly since he's kinda been given the silent treatment up until now.

"If we try that the rats will probably wanna vacate their championship," Alan replied to Buckwell.

"Championship?" Jon asked curiously.

"The rats in our territory have a championship. Someone, I think it might have been Mully, made a belt out of scrap metal and painted it for them." Alan said.

"I can imagine what great exploits they are willing to do to win such a prestigious and illustrious belt," Jon said sarcastically.

"Get your head out of the gutter, Snow. The girls shoot fight for the belt and then come to the matches wearing it."

Jon snickered. "That's crazy."

Another wrestler named Rory snorted. "You think that's crazy? I'll tell you a crazy rat story. I once heard that the Targaryens had one of their regulars blow the youngest one... what's his name?" He asked Tom Barleycorn who stood next to him.

"Uh... Varys? Viserys?"

"Whatever his fucking name is. They had a rat give him his first blow job while the brothers and Aerys stood around and watched and commented on the load he shot. And the kid was only twelve!"

Jon was thunderstruck. "That's bullshit. I don't believe that."

"I don't know, everyone I know who's met that family has told me they're weird," Alan said.

"Yeah, I heard one of the brothers killed a cat with a saw blade," Tom said.

"Don't believe everything you hear in a wrestling locker room, Jon," Everyone turned to the new speaker, Iron Emmett, who had walked in after his match without anyone noticing. "It's basically tradition to embellish a story. No one lets you speak in this place if you're not a good storyteller."

"True, but this isn't an isolated incident with these guys, there have been multiple stories. Where there's smoke there's fire, Emmett," Alan stated.

"Are you gonna try to tell me there aren't people actively trying to defraud the Targaryens? That family has many bitter and fearful enemies that would love to spread tales that get them to the point of needing to hang out in Essos for six months to let people calm down about them, if you catch my drift. I'm not saying everyone's wrong, but if there's no video, eyewitness reports, police reports to corroborate a story, then you can't just believe them without question. Or disbelieve them either. I'm not trying to spoil the fun here, if that's all this is, I apologize if it is, but you guys sounded like you were offended by these stories. That's all I got to say."
Emmett's words broke up the group conversation and everyone went back to going about their merry lives. "So Grenn, what the fuck happened out there?" He then asked, apparently as intrigued as Jon was.

Grenn flushed. "Oh, um... nothing. I didn't... me and Dywen just didn't understand each other, that's all," he stammered.

Pyp let out a bark of laughter. "Don't make it sound like it was a joint lack of effort. I was just over at their locker room, I heard what happened."

"Don't you say a word!" Grenn warned him, his face now red with fury.

"As Grenn had the headlock..." Grenn plunged at Pyp but Jon and Emmett restrained him.

Pyp continued. "Dywen said 'I'll shoot you off and drop down, nail Alliser, get it again.' And he starts to shoot him off but then Grenn says 'W-what?' And Dywen repeated, 'I'll shoot you off and drop down, nail Alliser, get it again.' He starts to shoot him off a second time and Grenn goes 'What?' Dywen says 'I will throw you into the ropes, I will fall down in front of you...'

Jon and Emmett began to shake with laughter while Green just stood there with his body almost frozen with embarrassment.

"Let me finish," Pyp said, fighting to hold back his own laughter. 'Jump over me, continue moving, strike Alliser in the face and return to the headlock.' And Grenn says 'I-I can't get it.' So Dywen finally just said 'Fuck it, tag out'.

"My mind was blown, okay. And in my six months wrestling I've never seen anyone do that spot!" Grenn retorted.

Emmett clapped Grenn on the shoulder. "Yeah, its true, that spot is kinda exclusive to this territory. We do it here almost every night. But don't sweat it, kid. That's why you're here, to fuck up and learn. Practice makes perfect."

Once the laughter ebbed, Jon decided to clear some space in the room. "I'm gonna go watch the rest of the show," He said as he made for the door.

"Wait!" Grenn called out. "I'm gonna watch too."

The pair left and went to the back of the arena, where the fans can't go, and saw the rest of the show.

Not even a minute after they returned to the locker room to get their bags, Pyp came rushing in. "Hey, do you guys wanna go to a nightclub? There's a place close to the motel and some of us are going." He said as he began to change out of his uniform.

"None of the heels are going, right?" Grenn asked.

"I wouldn't be asking you guys to come if they were, dumbass. It's not really any of the boys, it's Jeren and Cuger who help set up the ring to get training, Borcas who helps out Harmune with some of the bagman tasks, and Dannel who's another jacket carrier."

"Call me dumb again and I'll break you like a pretzel," Grenn cautioned him.
Pyp snorted. "You're gonna need a manual with pictures in warm pleasing colors to know how to do that."

"Keep talking and you'll be seeing a color without hue that's not so warm and pleasing," Grenn replied hotly.

"Alright, settle down." Jon had to break the tension. "Now why do you guys want to go to a club? I get why you can't go to a bar with the boys, but why do you wanna go somewhere so damn noisy and crowdy."

"Girls, why else. I mean the rats aren't exactly lining up to get with referees and members of the ring crew, and they say this club is a hot spot for hooking up with women."

"And what you want to impress them by trying to dance like Deney Terrio?" Jon quipped.

Pyp shook his head. "No, that's not enough. The club is all about showing off your assets. When girls go to the club their mission is to look their best. They make sure their hair and makeup is perfect and they have on the tightest dresses and shortest skirts. They're not there to socialize, like you said the music is so loud you can barely hear the person standing next to you. They drink and they shake their ass to attract an attractive mate."

Grenn glanced at Jon. "That's probably why he wants us to go. We're the vacuum to pull the girls in."

That made Pyp chuckle. "Grenn, if you're a vacuum it's because you manage to both suck and blow at the same time."

Jon took over the laughter for Pyp as he ran like hell out of the locker room, fleeing from a fuming Grenn.

After getting the envelope with his earnings from Harmune, Jon made his exit from the building and looked around for Pyp in the parking lot. If his car wasn't still there he would've thought he left him behind. But as Jon was roaming by the empty driver's side of the Cutlass Supreme, the car suddenly sprung to life, startling him.

Pyp then rose from the floor of the driver's seat and brusquely gestured for him to get inside the car. Jon shook his head, amused, as he calmly walked around to the passenger's side. He hadn't even strapped on his seat belt before Pyp was already whizzing out.

"Hey, so what's the deal, do you wanna come to the club with us or not?" Pyp asked a few minutes later.

Jon sighed. "Sorry, I only dance by fluctuating my eyebrows."

"Come on, Snow, you made it through your first week in the wrestling business, you need a little... relief. Women who go to a nightclub may be as promiscuous as the arena rats, but at least you know they won't sleep with you because you're someone famous. And that won't last, because by this time next week everyone in these parts will know who you are. Everyone here watches wrestling on TV, and all the wrestlers are famous, even if they're not main event guys."

"Everyone watches wrestling on TV but only a few are willing to pay three dollars to watch it in
person?" Jon questioned.

Pyp shrugged. "It's a lot cozier to watch wrestling from the comfort of your home. Especially if that home has a furnace."

"Maybe they won't fuck me because I'm famous, but they will solely because they find me attractive," Jon argued.

"So? Don't act like we're not all shallow. Men and women both. I mean theoretically we want someone who we can stand to be around, but we also want someone who's nice to look at it. A lot of us can't have both so we compromise. Sure it's hard to find someone with both traits but YOU still have a better chance than most of us.

"And if you're not looking for a serious relationship right now then you don't need to find a girl who's both smoking hot and whose company you enjoy. You can just find the most fit girl in the club, who's not a complete bitch, and fuck her brains out. It's what they want too, so what's wrong with it?"

Jon gave him a look. "How is it that you're smartened up to the dating scene but you're a dunce when it comes to wrestling? You know that thing you do for a living."

Pyp ignored his remark. "I'm surprised you don't already know all of this, you've probably been with more girls than me and all the guys that are going with me combined."

He smiled. "I admit a few girls had their way with me in high school. But I didn't analyze their motives or my motives, I just went with it."

"Good, don't start analyzing now and come to the club with us. Do it for your health. Celibacy addles the brain, you know."

Jon laughed. "I appreciate your concern, but I'd rather soon test out the springs of my room bed."

"By yourself? What are you gonna jump on it?"

"I'm gonna watch some of the wrestling tapes I brought from home that I haven't seen yet, so probably."

"Well, you could test the springs out a little later in the night in a far more pleasing way. But suit yourself."

By the time they got to the motel it was about 9:30 p.m. Jon wished Pyp luck on his night out in the town before going to his room to unwind. He called home to check up on his mom as he had every night so far like he promised, and then he walked to a deli a block away to grab a quick bite.

When he got back to his room he hooked up the VCR he carries around with him to the TV--one of the benefits of a cheap motel, and spent the next two hours zipping through wrestling tapes before calling it a night.

His slumber was interrupted an hour or so later by loud knocking at the door. Jon sat up and reached over and turned on the bedside light. "Jon," he heard Pyp's voice from the other side of the door.
He got out of bed and crossed the room to open the door. "Pyp, what the fuck, it's 1 in the morning."

Pyp shuffled into the room. "My bad." He almost slurped the apology, and Jon realized he was half drunk. "But I need to tell you what happened."

Jon sighed irritably. He didn't appreciate being woken up in the middle of the night. "I'm listening."

"Okay, me and the guys were sitting at a table in the club getting down to the serious business of helping sink hundreds of liters of alcohol. I was having a rum drink that was just..." He smacked his lips. "Smooth to the lips, when this little girlie in my vicinity caught my attention. It was really her fiery red hair, she didn't have a good claim to be considered the most beautiful girl in the world, but I still I thought she'd be a good catch, so I approached her. And you know, I came on to her in my naturally suave and deboner way..."

Jon rolled his eyes.

"But she played hard to get, so I decided to save my breath and tell her just who she was talking to, you know. I told her that every night I dress like a zebra and maintain law and order inside the squared circle. And that I look after the good guys," Pyp said with a chuckle. "And it made her eyes light up because just like I told you, Jon Snow," He pointed a finger at him. "Everyone here is a wrestling fan."

Silence followed. Pyp just stared at him.

The frown that already existed on Jon's face deepened. "So you woke me up in the middle of the night to tell me that you were right about something that I didn't even dispute?"

"No, no no no no. Sorry, I was just preparing mentally to tell you the next part, things are kinda scrambled up here." He gestured to his head. "See we were chatting up about wrestling and somehow the conversation became about wildlings. She asked me if I ever thought wildlings would be allowed to wrestle, and thanks to you, thanks to what you told me a few days ago, I shined like a diamond. I told her all about Mance Rayder--how terrifying he is, how he touches pregnant women and makes them give birth to a dead child, how he runs through sept and pistol-whips the Septon every Sunday, and how he beats people to death with a wooden block, you know... all that shit you said."

"Fucking moron," Jon muttered.

Pyp continued. "AND how he runs his own territory in Skagos and could possibly be running clandestine wildling wrestling shows in Westeros. I had to explain to her the difference between the WWA and unsanctioned wrestling."

Jon blinked. "Hold on... let me get this straight, are you telling me you talked about the inner workings of the wrestling business with a complete stranger at a nightclub? You know I feel like I'm supposed to slap you right now."

"You can slap me after I tell you this. It turns out that this girl has been to one of those secret wildling wrestling shows. No, scratch that. She goes to them almost every week."

Jon's frown flickered. He had to admit that was rather interesting.
"How? Where?"

"She wouldn't say. But..." Pyp reached into his back pocket and pulled out a piece of paper. "She did give me her number, and told me that if I want to go 'beyond the wall', to call her, and she'll get me AND my friends into one of the wildling shows." He offered Jon the paper.

Jon's frown returned. "I don't need to see the number, Pyp. I won't even remember it come the morning."

"Well, I can't keep it i'll probably lose it. And the number is for you, anyway."

Jon's brow creased in confusion. "What? Why?"

"You sounded pretty intrigued when you said all that stuff about Mance Rayder. Today in the locker room too when we talked about the Crow's Nest. You seem pretty interested in the wildlings. Or am I wrong?"

Jon rubbed his cheek. He had no words to say to that.

Pyp continued. "If you should become more interested, just give this back to me and I'll call her and set it up. If not just throw it in the trash." He offered the paper again.

Jon still didn't know what to say or what to think. His body knew what it wanted, however. To go back to sleep. And if taking that paper meant he could rest his head on a pillow again then his body was gonna act. So his hand reached out and took the paper from Pyp.

"Wait, don't you wanna call this girl to hook up?"

"No, that's not gonna happen. She's uh... not single." Pyp looked embarrassed.

Jon half smiled. "You shouldn't feel embarrassed for hitting on a girl that has a boyfriend."

"Yeah? And what if she has a girlfriend."

Jon could not quite suppress the chuckle that escaped from his mouth.

"Yeah, go ahead laugh it up. Because they just walk around with a sign that says they wipe their butt with their left hand!"

"Wh.. what?" Jon asked through a fit of laughter.

"Oh, forget it." Pyp staggered to the door to leave. "You know, a prideful person would've ripped that paper up and never told a soul what happened to avoid public humiliation, but I decided to be a good friend. Sleep on that, Jon Snow!" He finished as he walked away from Jon's room.

He would have gone after Pyp to thank him and swear that he wouldn't tell anyone this story, but it was really late and Pyp was drunk anyway, so it could wait until the morning.

Jon closed and locked the door and walked over to the bedside table where he placed the piece of paper and then jumped back in bed. He reached for the lamp to turn off but stopped. Instead, he decided to grab the piece of paper again and read the name on it.
Ygritte.

Chapter End Notes

I was planning to introduce Ygritte in this chapter but it would've been too long.

1. Eastwatch Auditorium = Ellis Auditorium. The Crow's Nest was really called the Crow's Nest. No lie. If you want to be spoiled you can do a google search and you'll kinda find out where I'm going with all this.
2. Grenn's hilarious botch happened to Rick Rude when he was a rookie.
3. The ring rats having their own championship is a true story. It happened in the Portland territory.
4. The rumored stories about the Targaryens are based on real rumored stories about the Von Erich's. I basically said how I feel about them through Emmett.

Next Chapter is Sam V.
Sam V

Chapter Notes

I'm not pleased with this chapter. I'm sort of mentally constipated right now. I just can't stand the sight or even thought of words for some reason lol.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*Tic tic tic tic tic tic tic tic*

Since Sam left the County Armory and came to school his only concern has been the time. Two minutes haven't passed before he either glanced down at his wristwatch or at the clock in whatever room he was in. He just watches the clock time beat out endlessly and monotonously. He was a slave to that time.

Currently, the hour hand was on 2 and the minute hand was three revolutions away from 12. Three revolutions before his slavery would end.

Well not really actually. That was only when school ended. There will still be two whole hours left before the doors of the Armory open to him.

And come to think of it he wasn't really a slave to time either. I mean when you have a chain and you pick up a link, all the other links come up with it. Time is a link. It is a link in a chain. The source is wrestling. And to be honest, he doesn't want to free himself from that slavery.

Though maybe he isn't bound to time by the chronometer, but time as a psychological movement?

Oh screw it, Sam found a cool way to compare time and slavery and he's gonna go with it!

He looked up at the clock on the wall in his history class and frowned. Still two revolutions left.

He focused to the front of the classroom as Ms. Scolera gave a lecture. "Raymun Redbeard's rebellion in the Last Hearth, in the summer of 1831, threw the North into a panic, and then into a determined effort to bolster the security of the segregation system. Redbeard, claiming religious visions, gathered about seventy wildlings, who went on a rampage from home to home, murdering at least fifty-five Westerosi men, women, and children. They gathered supporters but were captured as their ammunition ran out. Redbeard and perhaps eighteen others were hanged."

Sam didn't see the point of disseminating all this information. Of course these are things you should learn about in history class, but not two days before graduation when they've already taken their exit exams. No one is paying attention! No one feels forced to pay attention.

Why do they still have to come to school? Is it to cherish these last moments with your friends? If so then he has no business being in school.

Friday couldn't come any sooner for Sam. He wasn't one of those kids who saw school as merely a place to play truant from and to leave as soon as one could, he liked to learn and his grades reflected that, but a pallor was put over his experience because of the social aspect of the whole thing. He was an occasional target for bullying by his classmates and as a result, preferred the company of people older than him.
He doesn't know if he'll have a very considerable future in the wrestling business, but he can guarantee you that his academic career will be over come Friday. He can feel it in his bones.

Sam gazed up at the clock again and there was now only one revolution left with the second hand approaching the number six.

30 second left!

He reached around to grab his backpack from the chair without taking his eyes off the clock. After strapping one side to his shoulder there were 15 seconds left.

Sam tore his eyes away to look at the exit. The door was closed.

*Maybe he should let someone else get their first so he doesn't have to stop to pull it open? Nah... he's dashing for it.*

10 seconds.

9,8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1...

*Nothing.*

*What the hell?*

He peered down at his watch and it said there was still twenty seconds left before it turned 3.

*Son of a...*

*Why have clocks in the classrooms if they're not synchronized to the bell time!??*

The second hand on his watch reached 12 and finally the bell rung, signaling their dismissal from school. It was the like the harp music and the trumpets went "*Hallelujah!*" and light opened up from the sky.

Sam sprang to his feet and beat everybody else to the door to make the escape. It was kind of easy since he sat in the front row...

Once in the hallway he moved like an asteroid in space through the school, with no regards for anyone. Including Dareon who he literally ran into when he tried to stop Sam on the hallway before reaching the parking lot.

He got in his car, put on his safety belt, started the engine, and peeled out.

Sam likes to think that he's a thoroughly nice guy when he's on his own two feet, as well as when he's behind the wheel, but his whole personality changed today after leaving the Armory. He was quite unconcerned and quite unaware of any of his inequities.

But hey remember, he's a man who loves wrestling.

He arrived home some ten minutes later and grabbed his Canon AE-1 with the bounce flash attachments and the slave unit, and his photo albums and notebooks, and his boombox and cassette tapes to play everybody's entrance music--he had to carry the twenty-pound $450 worth Sanyo m9998 around to almost every show since he was the only one who could work it.

After loading up his car he made himself a snack to be adequately fueled and abate his hunger--not too much however since eating too close to a vigorous exercise is a recipe for discomfort. And for
a ringside photographer, every day on the job is a workout session.

It was such a disturbance for Sam's weak stomach that he asked Mathis Rowan for advice after a portrait session when he was just starting, and he suggested you eat a mix of carbs, protein, and fat, two or three hours before an activity requiring much physical effort.

*If only he always ate so healthy. He could go swimming without having to be afraid of being harpooned...*

After sufficient fuel, he made a few calls to his old affiliates, like the wrestling magazine, Pylos Mag, and the fotomat he goes to for photo processing, developing, and film, to let them know he was back.

At around 4:30 he finally got in his car and made the fifteen-minute drive to the Armory. Thankfully, they let him in early and he went straight to the third floor of the building to arrange everything.

He set up a backdrop and threw a color backdrop over his poles, and he unpacked his photo albums and got his notebooks out for when the guys were ready to order pictures.

While he waited for the guys to arrive at the arena, Sam went back up to the second floor to find Daenerys and see if she needed help with anything.

As soon as he got up the stairs he saw her scampering from one location to another, constantly in action—walking and talking. If she wasn't talking to another human being she was talking to herself.


"No, no, everything's fine. I got everything ready for when the guys show up. I was just gonna ask if you needed help with anything or if you have any instructions for me."

Daenerys was visibly relieved, yet no less anxious. "Unless you can teach me how to be the leaf and the wind, you can't help me, Sam."

Sam furrowed his brow. "What?"

"Nothing." She waved it off. "So are you and your mom gonna be selling stuff at the merchandise table after the show?"

"No. We don't really have new merchandise to sell. Next week we will, hopefully."

"I know you will. Though I'm slightly glad you don't have anything this week. I haven't been explained percentages split for merchandise sold and I'd like to sit down with you so you can tell me how Olenna did it."

"Sure, whenever you're not too busy."

Daenerys snickered. "If we wait until then I won't find out how it works until I'm back filing papers for my dad in King's Landing. I'll make time to go over it before next week. Now if you'll excuse me I have to return to my agitation," she said as she began walking off."

"Oh, wait!"

She stopped and looked over her shoulder at him. "Yes?"
"Are there any particular action shots you want me to get at ringside?"

She shook her head. "Not today. I trust your eye for photography."

Olenna did too. Sam smiled. "Thank you." Daenerys walked away and he then went back downstairs to wait until he was needed.

Typically as soon as the guys got to the arena he'd start bugging them for poses, which they'd do from 7 o'clock until bell time at 8 o'clock. But seeing as this was the first day of new management, Sam thought it better to give them a little time to process everything and share their thoughts.

That was the plan, but once they noticed that the kid who helps them get some extra money was back, they practically got in a line to take pictures.

This gave Sam an opportunity to strain his ears and hear what the boys thought about Daenerys.

To summarize they were wary because of her blood but uh... titillated by the body containing it.

Some five minutes before bell time, Sam went back up with his boombox and camera to get ready for the really hectic part of the job.

His routine was to run out at 8 o'clock and every match on the card he would shoot, and then as soon as it was over with he'd beat the guys back to the locker room because most of the time he'd want to take a picture of whoever was coming up next. So between every match he'd run back to the locker room and then back out for the entrance and shoot the next match. And at intermission he'd be back there taking photo orders.

He would usually be the last one of the last ones to leave because the guys would still be ordering more pictures or asking him about stuff as they left after the show was over with. And finally his mom would help unpack the merchandise table outside and they'd sell and make notes on if there was anything needed for next week.

Sam was approaching the curtain to the stage when he noticed that the card listed on the whiteboard had changed since he saw it last a few hours ago.

The first match was gonna be Warryn Beesbury versus Tommen Costayne. But now the first match listed on the board was the team of Martyn Mullendore and Hosman Norcross versus the Golden Company, which had previously been the main event.

The Golden Company consists of the two "fun-loving pretty boys" who are hip to the zeitgeist in Westeros. Hyles Hunt and Rolly Duckfield. They were only brought together four months and are already the top babyface tag team of the territory.

How can they not be over? The special method used by the Tyrells to announce their arrival and get them over with the crowd is one Sam has never seen or heard of before. And he had an important role in it.

Video has just very recently killed the radio star, and the Tyrells decided to make music videos to hype the debut of the Golden Company. A concept that is brand new to wrestling television.

And it was Sam who shot all their first photo shoots and videos before being fired by Mace. Including the beefcake stuff at the Tyrell's mansion in Highgarden where they paraded around the house seemingly in the same room but at different times. As well as out by their pool wearing towels, in their horse stable laying in the hay, and in a bathtub with champagne glasses and bubbles around. It was not material that would lead you to believe that the two had notorious appetites for
women, let's just put it that way.

But they didn't complain. Quite the opposite, they were dying laughing. And they reaped the fruits of their labor. Everyone did. The Golden Company became overwhelmingly popular and created the biggest boom at the gimmick table, which Sam capitalized on.

They were so over that shortly before Sam was fired he delivered them two thousand 4x6s and three or four hundred color 8x10s, and they were asking for more two weeks later.

With this new development, Sam had to change the cassette tape he had in his boombox, so he crouched down, opened his cassette tape case bag, and made the switch to the correct tape so it would be ready to play with the press of a couple buttons.

"Hey, Sam. What are you up to? Or down to I should say." Daenerys said as she came up beside him.

He stood up. "Hello. I just noticed that the order of the matches was switched so I had the change the tape in my boombox."

"Yeah, Paxter and I decided to start off with a really ball-buster match instead. We think it'll be a good follow up after my speech."

"Speech?"

Daenerys nodded. "The show will begin with me coming out and talking to the crowd. You know, sort of introducing myself and explaining a bit of the situation."

"Huh... have you ever spoken in front of a wrestling audience before?"

"Uh... no. But I was on the debate team in high school. And that's like... just as good as taking a public speaking course in college if you think about it. I think I can present effective public speeches, with special emphasis on informative and persuasive discourse." She finished with a cheeky smile.

Sam wasn't too sure about this but he forced a smile anyway. "Okay. Do you want me to go out there with you and take pictures."

"That's not necessary. I don't think I need your camera to click with the audience." She giggled.

Sam let out a fake laugh hoping it sounded natural and sighed inwardly.

*Is he that guy now?*

When eight o'clock finally came, someone came over and handed Daenerys a microphone. She took a big breath and then went through the curtain.

There was no monitor to watch since they never televised or recorded any of the shows in the Armory, so Sam and the others backstage had to be all ears.

A few moments passed before they heard her voice. "Dear ladies and gentlemen, children. My name is Daenerys Targaryen and I am very happy to welcome you to tonight's show. I know you slapped your hard earned money down on the turnstiles to be entertained by a sporting event, not to listen to a soliloquython, so I'll be brief. I first want to give you an update on Lady Olenna's current condition. I'm sure you all already know the unfortunate events that prevent her from being here where she belongs. Well I want you to know that I spoke to her on the phone just a mere few hours
ago and she is resting comfortably in her home saving up the energy necessary to return.

"Until that day comes she has trusted me to substitute her as the business mind promoting and publicly representing her towns. I am quite young and don't have a long work history, but age has no bearing on the quality of work one can produce, and even if I did have a long list of accomplishments and a vault of knowledge that others aren’t privy to, it would be irrelevant. Because the people who come to the County Armory every Tuesday night are different. I see a large close-knit family here in this arena. A family with many children's smiles and warmth.

"I can't wait to get to know all of you in the coming weeks and hopefully become a member of this family. Thank you for your attention. Enjoy the show."

Okay, Sam had to admit that went better than he expected. It won't take long for her to win people over.

A minute later Daenerys walked through the curtain to rejoin them. "Alright, let's get this show on the road!"

Sam handed his boombox over to Leo Blackbar, the timekeeper, who then went through the curtain with the boombox in one hand and the ring bell in the other.

"Where are the Golden Company," Daenerys asked Paxter an instant later. "Their song is about to come on, they should be over here."

"I suppose they're still in the locker room. I didn't tell them they were moved up the card. Arthur, can you go get them?" Paxter said to Arthur Ambrose, his assistant booker.

"I'm on it," he replied before sprinting off.

Shortly after, the Golden Company's entrance song "Everybody Wants You" by Billy Squier, began to ring through the building.

When the first twenty seconds of the song played without any sign of the Golden Company or Ambrose, Daenerys began to pace back and forth nervously.

The part that goes 'Get around town, spend your time on the run. You never let down, say you do it for fun' was playing when Ambrose returned.

"I couldn't find them, and none of the boys have seen them for almost half an hour," he said, breathless.

"What!? cried Daenerys. "Where are they? Has anyone seen the Golden Company in the last half hour?" She looked around desperately to the others but was only met with silence and stumped expressions. "Shit!" She ran a hand across her scalp, considering for a moment. "I want everyone looking for them! Check every room on every floor. The bathrooms, the storage closet, even the heel locker room, check everywhere!"

While Sam walked up and down the nearest hallway again and again as if the Golden Company was gonna magically return via the wall through Glinda's three uses of the Golden Cap, everybody else was running around like ducks with hemorrhoids looking for them.

Time ticked on and there was still no sign of the Golden Company. A thought was scratching at Sam's brain trying to get in when he realized that the entrance song was about to draw to an end.

'You can't escape the hours, you lose track of the days. The more you understand, seems the more
He looked around for Daenerys so she could tell him what to do but she was nowhere in sight.

Should he go out there and play it again? Or should he play the music for Mullendore and Norcross to give everyone more time to find the Golden Company? But what if they're not found? Maybe he should play the music for the second match instead?

Damn it!

It's not his job to make these decisions.

Without another thought Sam went through the curtain and rushed down the aisle, ignoring the mild cheers he got from the crowd for his return. He went around ring-side to get to his boombox that sat at the timekeeper's table with the bell and the microphone.

If only Leo would've cared to learn how to work the damn boombox, then he would carry this burden and not Sam.

He decided to start the song again and hope either the Golden Company were found or Daenerys would give him a command.

Sam was running up the aisle to return backstage when the thought he had before crept in.

The van!

About two months ago Rolly Duckfield bought a van that he and Hyles Hunt would ride up to the towns with. If the van is still in the parking lot then they must still be here...

Maybe they're in the van participating in uh... an extracurricular activity.

When he got to the back he sought out Daenerys again, to no avail. So he decided to head for the parking lot to check for the van himself.

He was approaching the door to the back parking lot when he heard Daenerys call out his name from behind. "Where are you going? Did someone tell you something?" She asked as she ran up to him.

"Uh no. I was gonna check the parking lot for Rolly Duckfield's van. I'm not sure if someone hasn't already looked."

"No one said anything to me about it. Do you know what the van looks like?"

"Yes."

"Good. I'll go with you."

They went through the door and Sam surveyed the parking lot.

There were two lights mounted on poles that prevented pitch blackness in the lot, but you could hardly see the color of any of the cars, in spite of that. One didn't need to see color to distinguish Rolly Duckfield's van from the other vehicles, it turned out. At the far left end of the area there was a larger than common car rocking back and forth so much that Sam was surprised it didn't pop the tires.
Well... that is in fact an extracurricular activity going on in there.

"I think that's..." Sam began, but when he turned his head he realized that Daenerys was already marching towards the van.

Sam followed slowly behind as she reached the van and looked in the window. She must have confirmed Sam's suspicions because she started beating on the window and shouting.

The rear door of the van swung open and Hyle and Rolly stuck their heads out. They were informmed of the situation and got out of the van and began running to the back entrance while pulling their pants up.

Daenerys was trailing close behind and Sam started to follow them but hung back. He was distracted by the... armaments of beauty that were on full display from the two women climbing out of the van. It was a refreshing site for a perspiring Sam.

"Sam!" Daenerys shouted from the door, breaking the trance. "Let's go!"

Sam collected himself and ran for the door.

The rest of the night went copacetic for Sam. His lungs probably wouldn't agree but outwardly everything was decent. As for Daenerys, every time he saw her she looked like she was hanging on to the end of a cliff like Wild Coyote. It was like she was waiting for more mishap to occur. But thankfully it never did.

After the show, he and Dareon and a few of the regulars closer to their age went to eat at a place that makes excellent hot browns, and he gave them a short summary of the last four days.

Then Sam went home and spent the rest of the night enduring the fun act of looking through negatives...

He went to sleep at around 4 A.M. and woke up at 7:30 to get ready for school.

Sam left his room to go to the bathroom but he paused at the doorway when he caught sight of Daenerys holding up the upstairs telephone to her ear. "Hello, can I speak to Olenna?" Sam quickly reached for his doorknob and left a slight opening to put his ear against.

Ten shakes of lamb's tail later. "Olenna, the Golden Company have turned your Horn Hill parking lot into a whore house."

Chapter End Notes

Credits:
1. The Golden Company = The Fabolous Ones (Steve Keirn and Stan Lane). The song "Everybody Wants You" didn't actually come out until 82, the same year the Fabs formed, but I really couldn't wait to tell this story so let's just look past that.
2. This story happened in Evansville, Indiana. I'm not sure if it was also in 82 but it did indeed happen.
3. Pylos Mag = Apter Mag aka Pro Wrestling Illustrated.
4. Sam's routine really was Jim Cornette's. I don't know how he did it...
5. The phone call at the end was between Christine Jarrett and her son Jerry. She really
said that lol.

Here's a hilarious music video of the Fabolous Ones's shoot I mentioned in this chapter if you're intrigued. The Fabulous Ones 80s Music Video

Next Chapter is Jon VII.
Two Months Later

Breaking: The National Weather Service has issued a blizzard warning which is in effect from 6 am Friday to 1 pm Saturday. Experts project heavy snow and strong winds, with snow accumulations of fifteen to twenty inches. Winds thirty to forty miles and gusts up to 80 miles per hour are a possibility. Temperatures could drop into the 20s by evening, the strongest winds and heaviest snow occurring Friday evening into Saturday morning. Heavy winds and snow will make for dangerous driving conditions with visibilities near zero and whiteout conditions. And there is concern for scattering power outages. We advise everyone to do their best to get home before the blizzard begins. No matter how well-prepared your car may be, you will be safer in a building. Stay safe!

"See, I told you guys," Pyp said, turning off his portable radio that transmitted the message. "It's gonna be an old-fashioned winter. And before it's over it may put all the old winters to shame."

"The gods be damned. Everything has been a pain in my ass this week. Even nature is trying to stir me up," Grenn huffed.

Pyp's arched an eyebrow at him. "It only now stirs you up?" He scoffed. "I don't know how the people in these towns do it. How they can brave this cold for so long... I swear last week I saw a baby in a pram without socks on, and it was 30 fucking degrees!"

"If they couldn't live in this weather you wouldn't have a job," Jon chimed in. "Speaking of, Mormont can't be too pleased about this blizzard. Though I doubt it'll be the first show he has to cancel because the towns reeled under massive onslaught by mother nature."

"Don't be so sure that tomorrow's show will be canceled. The Old Bear is the kind to make his troops press on regardless of a fucking snowstorm on steroids. You know, so we can prove how
tough we are," Pyp said. "In the south there use to be these comic mud wrestling matches, right, where the guys wrestled in thick mud and just dunked each other in it for like fifteen minutes. Maybe he'll make you guys do the same but in snow."

Grenn frowned. "He's mad if he thinks I'll let myself be buried under snow in my fucking underwear. I've been buried enough in this fucking place. He'll need to hold a gun to me to make me do it."

Pyp snorted with amusement. "You don't think he would?"

Jon rolled his eyes. "Mormont can't be foolish enough to believe that a fresh white blanket of twenty inches won't keep people away from a wrestling show. I mean, literally, the doors to enter the venue are probably gonna be completely obstructed."

Pyp gave Jon a look."With the current state of the territory, you don't think he'll run a show to get those sixty dollars from the rats that come to see you? Cuz best believe..." He cut himself off to swat at a mosquito that neared his face. "Best believe those girls will hijack snowplows if they have to just to get in your vicinity. I don't know why, you never pump buckets into any of them."

"Shut up," Jon said with a breathy chuckle.

Pyp opened his mouth to reply but was interrupted by a firm knock at the door of their motel room. Jon pushed himself to his feet from his bed and opened the door.

It was Edd.

If you've ever wondered if it's too late to change careers, the answer is maybe. Eddison Tollett, for one, thinks he can. A grown man already in his thirties, Edd is trying his luck by navigating onto a new career path. A career as a professional wrestler.

Unfortunately, the gatekeepers into the wrestling industry do think it's too late for him. Wrestlers, bookers, and promoters in the Vale, from where he's from, and all through the south, as well as the north, he went to all of them and they all turned him down. Everyone except Benjen Stark was willing to train him.

You still have to earn the gatekeepers trust, however, so being an automotive enthusiast, Edd works for a car dealership in the morning, and he has an afternoon shift at an auto repair shop. But that's just a means to the end, at night he drives the boys around for the territory in hopes of breaking into the business. For Jon it meant a free ride.

"Hey, Emmett just got the call from Mormont, the next three shows are canceled," Edd notified them.

Jon turned to face Pyp and gave him an 'I told you' look. Then he turned to Edd and thanked him for passing the message.

"I'm heading to Winterfell. Hopefully, it provides a more sanctuous setting. Any of you want to join me? You can finally visit your mom. Surprise her," Edd suggested to Jon.

He was the one that was surprised!

Jon blinked. "What? Whoa, hold up. You-you're thinking of driving when there's a blizzard about to strike? Are you serious?"
Edd shrugged lazily. "It wouldn't be the first time."

"A blizzard warning indicates that conditions pose a threat to life. You-you you're supposed to avoid driving. You shouldn't even be outside. You can freeze to death. People cannot maintain normal body temperatures in extreme cold—especially if they stop moving. And road conditions can deteriorate pretty quickly, leading to unsafe driving conditions and crashes."

"Relax, there's still eight hours left. That's no sweat for me."

"Yeah, man, Edd is a noted wheelman. He drives fast but accurately," Grenn said.

"That's not a guarantee that he won't get caught in the blizzard's icy grip. It's easy to not realize how quickly snow is piling up outside," Jon told Grenn before staring back at Edd. "You shouldn't take any chance. You should go to your apartment and bundle up." He eyed Pyp and Grenn. "And we should go back to the flophouse in Castle Black and do the same. The best way not to die in a snowstorm is to stay inside."

"By the time the blizzard hits I will be inside," Edd asserted. "I'm a big boy, Snow, I can make my own decisions. "So can these two," he said, nodding to Grenn and Pyp. "You guys wanna come with me or not?"

"I'm in." Grenn didn't hesitate long. "Sorry, Jon, but I can't spend three days huddled in that shithole you call a flophouse."

"I'm coming too," Pyp said avoiding the glare Jon gave him in response. Until Jon got in his face and he couldn't anymore. Pyp gulped. "It gives me a chance to see Ned Stark's wrestling in person. All those tapes you lent me got me really interested in the territory, you know."

Jon swallowed a groan."Fine, you guys can do what you want. Enjoy cold feet. Figuratively and literally. I'll get a ride back to the flophouse from one of the boys."

"Actually I'm gonna have to drive you back," Edd said. "The boys are all gone. I mean they heard a fucking blizzard was coming. They weren't gonna wait to hear from Mormont before deciding to fuck off to greener pastures. If they have any sense, they'll never return to this godforsaken place. Anyway, Castle Black is on the way to Winterfell, so it's no problem. It gives you a chance to reconsider. Unless you want to call a cab instead."

"I'm sure there are plenty of homicidal, suicidal...lunacidal people still driving cabs in this town," Jon said thickly. "But I'll take the crackbrained driver that I know." He began packing up his belongings.

"Lunacidal?" Grenn said, braying laughter.

"Whatever, let's just go."

Although the smirk on his face was annoying, Jon was emphatically relieved that Edd hadn't overestimated his driving skills in treacherous winter weather. Before they even left the motel he checked that the tailpipe was clear because according to him if they get clogged up it's pretty easy to suffocate in the car. He even advised them to bring plenty of water because dehydration makes it easier to get hypothermia.
What he didn't need to tell them was how to dress. Despite the heat being blasted inside Edd's car, they all wore three layers of clothing: one that could absorb sweat, a second to serve as insulation, and the last to seal out cold temperatures. And of course hats and gloves. So basically the normal day-to-day attire in that part of the world.

Nothing could calm his nerves when they actually got on the road, however. The only time Jon has been behind the wheel of a car was when he was eight or nine and his mom let him sit on her lap and drive around the parking lot of their apartment complex.

So he's not an expert, but he's pretty sure that in this kind of treacherous weather one should brake slower, accelerate slower, and turn slower. And Edd did the complete opposite. He accelerated whether safety was on his side or not. Even when there was no one else on the road to crash into, Jon was worried. Hell, with how slippery it looked out there they could probably spin out all on their own.

Fortunately, this wasn't the case. They left the motel in Eastwatch at 9:27 pm and it was 11:14 pm when they drove into the Oakenshield district, twenty minutes from Castle Black. It was there that Edd suggested they stop to grab something to eat.

"It looks like there's a diner over there," he pointed to a small establishment that had a food and beverage sign in neon on the window. Edd didn't need to point it out to them, though. If you could get a satellite picture of this area, it would be completely dark except for a tiny dot--this eating place. Every street appeared to be shut down so light seemed shunned this night. "Why don't we grab something to eat before I careen off the road or run into a tree or a highway barrier," he said, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

"Can you not joke about that?" Jon said.

"Can you not put your tail between your ass cheeks?" Edd replied. "Should I stop or no?"

"Yeah, fine, let's just be quick about it."

After pulling into the half-full parking lot of the diner, they got out of the car and hurried to get inside the building. They were ground to a halt at the front entrance, however, by the sight of a policeman arguing with a small group of people. A man who looked to be in his 40s, a similarly aged woman, and two young children--a boy and a girl.

"Please, I don't want trouble. I only want to buy my family a meal. There's no harm in that, sir."

"As I said before, move along. This is no place for you. Your kind belongs elsewhere,"

"There's nowhere else to go to get food, sir. All other eating houses are closed. Even supermarkets. The ones for my kind that are usually open at this time probably closed because of the blizzard warning. Most of yours did as well. We live in Icemark, we drove to Sable Hall to visit my mother but now we're stuck here and hungry."

"If you're from Icemark then you should be more prepared for these type of situations."

"Please, I beg you, sir. I'll pay more than is required. We won't even stay in the diner, we'll get the food and eat in our car. Just let me feed my kids."

"You're asking a man of the law to break his oath?" He bristled. "You're lucky I'm a generous person. I'm gonna give you one more chance, be the happy amenable savage you're supposed to be and walk away."
"Sir..."

The policeman took out his baton.

"See here. There is no need for force. Not in front of my children, please."

"Then you shouldn't bring your wildling children to a diner that doesn't allow wildlings."

"I know the law but this is not fair. All I want..."

"Enough!"

Thump!

The policeman struck the man in the stomach with his baton. He shrieked and fell to one knee holding his stomach in pain. Jon rushed in front of him. "Hey! Stop! What's the matter with you. He didn't do anything wrong. Leave him alo..."

"Police business. This is no concern of yours," he cut him off and brought out his handcuffs. "Now move along and let me do my job."

"Grisella, take the kids back to the car. Go!" The man wailed to his wife. And she did.

"Your job? It's your job to beat a man who wants to feed his family?" Jon lashed out.

The policeman frowned, his face darkening. "You should get your friend out of here before I throw him in a cell with this savage," he said to Grenn, Pyp, and Edd before going around Jon and forcefully beginning to handcuff the wildling.

It was another one of those moments were an analytical process wasn't going on in Jon's head. Instead, his body was going to make an emotional reaction. His friends must have seen the flash of willfulness burning in his eyes because before he could do anything, all three were trying to pull him away from the scene. "Jon, come on, let's go," Pyp said.

It took a while but eventually the three got him back inside the car. But Jon was far from composed. "That's fucking bullshit. That is fucking bullshit," he huffed. "I can't just sit here, I have to do something."

"Jon, calm down, okay. Just be reasonable," Edd said.

"Reasonable? Be reasonable? That was fucked up, man. They just beat that guy and arrested him for trying to buy his starving children something to eat!"

"They're wildlings, Jon. They can't be in there, it's the law," Edd replied.

"There's a fucking blizzard coming and they're stuck here with no food. Unlike you, that man has something to lose if he drives in this fucking weather. How can you guys just turn a blind eye to such an injustice?"

There was a brief pause in the car and then Edd exhaled a heavy sigh. "Alright, so what do you wanna do, fight the cop? I'm sure that'll really help the situation. That'll put food in their stomachs."

Jon looked through the rear glass to see the policeman driving out of the parking lot with the wildling in cuffs in the back seat.
There was nothing Jon could do for him now. At least he'll be indoors when the blizzard hits. Though if all cops are like that one, then they may just end up tossing him out in the sub-zero weather to freeze to death.

He can help the man's family, however.

"Pyp, come with me," Jon said as he exited the car again. Pyp obliged.

"I shouldn't take long. Make sure she doesn't drive off," Jon instructed him, pointing to the car the mother and children went into.

"Wait, what? How am I supposed to do that?"

"Just jabber away, that shouldn't be a challenge for you," Jon said before going inside the diner.

He approached the front counter where a waitress stood. She frowned for a second after seeing him but then put on a smile. "Hi, welcome to Lazy Eel. You can go ahead and sit in one of our open booths if you like. I'll come around with the menu."

"No, I'll just order from here if that's fine." Jon was handed a menu and after looking through it ordered three meals. "If the food could come to me fast that'll be great," Jon added.

The waitress pressed her lips into a thin line. "The sooner this place empties, the sooner our boss will let us go home. Believe me, the cook will be quick."

Five minutes later the waitress came back with the three plates of food. "Thank you," Jon said. "How much for the plates?"

"I'm sorry?"

"How much are the plates? I want to take them with me."

She blinked. "Uh, the plates are not for sale, sir."

Jon ignored that. "I'd say they probably cost five dollars. What do you think?"

She shrugged. "Um, I don't know. Yeah, maybe."

"I'll pay you a hundred for them," Jon said as he took out his wallet.

Her brows lifted with surprise. "What?"

"How much do I owe you in total?" He asked, taking out a fifty and a one hundred dollar bill.

"Wait, wait. I... I can't sell you the plates, sir. I mean... I think I should get my boss, it's-it's really better if you speak to him about this."

"Alright, yeah go fetch him. That's what a good employee would do. But you know, then your boss will get the $85 that are left over for the plates... instead of you." Jon offered her the two bills.

The waitress considered the offer he was hinting at for a moment.

Luckily it was not a long moment before she decided to accept the money, swiftly sliding the hundred dollar bill in her pocket and entering the fifty dollar bill in the cash register. Jon then took the three plates of food and headed out.
He was advancing toward the wildling's car but came to an abrupt stop when he heard Pyp speaking to the mother through the window.

"Baptismal on wheels is a new uh... company, but we've baptized over a thousand people. We have a truck which actually has a baptismal pool on the back of it, and we actually come to your home and we will baptize you in your driveway and uh... you know, make you whole again."

_What the fuck is he telling this lady?_

"My children and I have already been baptized, sir. And me and the lord don't have no problems. I'm sorry, but I really need to get going."

"Pyp, your good. You can stop now," Jon said as he moved beside him.

"Thank God," Pyp muttered.

"Ma'am, this food is for you and your children," Jon said showering her the plates of food.

She was in disbelief for a second but then quickly opened her car door and cautiously took the food. She first gave each of her children a plate, and then she began to shovel the food of the third plate into her mouth quickly, as if afraid they would take it back. The children imitated her. Jon cleared his throat. "I uh, I hope the food is alright for them?"

"It's great. Anything is great," she replied with her mouth full. "Thank you. Thank you guys so much."

"There is no need to thank us. You can keep the plates if you want, or we'll take them."

She paused for a moment. "Do I have to get baptized in your pool for this?"

"No, no, uh... just forget about that. This is completely free. Everyone has a right to eat. Is there anything else we can help you with? Do you guys have somewhere to sleep?"

"Yes, we're staying at a motel nearby. We just needed food. But now I'm worried about my husband. I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I don't know how to free him."

"They'll likely keep him locked up for the night. It may be best if they keep him longer, though. The blizzard will hit at daybreak, they say. If they charge him with something then he should be provided with a public defender. But I'm not sure about the legalities of... of your people. You should try to call the police department in like an hour. Every arrested person has the right to a phone call, but again it might be different in your case. But you should still give it a shot."

She ate the last bit of crumbs on her plate and then set it aside. "I don't have the phone number. I don't even know where the police department is."

Jon turned to Pyp. "Go inside the diner and ask the waitress for the number and address. Write it down on something."

Pyp ran inside the diner and a minute or so later he returned with a napkin that had the information jotted down on it.

"You should go now. It's getting worse out here by the minute," Jon suggested after handing her the napkin.

"Thank you for... for all of this."
Jon shook his head. "Don't worry about it. Bye."

"Bye."

After she drove off, Jon and Pyp took fast strides back to Edd's car. "Baptismal pool?" Jon asked.

"What? I winged it. I think it's an interesting idea. It's you know, more convenient for people."

Twenty minutes later Edd was driving them into the slightly brighter Castle Black district. But instead of going straight to the flophouse, he asked Jon if he didn't mind them stopping at the rental that's on the way to get another car as he preferred to shelter his beloved AMC Gremlin in the garage he works at.

Jon didn't care. He was still back at the diner.

He couldn't stop thinking about what happened. Even the blizzard was an afterthought. It just didn't feel like he did enough. Not necessarily for that family, but he just couldn't help wondering if there were other wildlings being prevented the basic necessities of life in this situation. He knew for a fact there were and it was upsetting.

We can fly to the moon and plant a flag on it, but we can't find food for the starving people? It just doesn't make sense to Jon. These people are forced to suffer indignities day in and day out in this country, but in moments like these you would expect people to have compassion.

But these laws, these so-called "separate but equal" laws, forced wildlings and westerosi to be divided before anyone who's currently alive even came into the world. We are bombarded by things that happened in the past. People society holds in high regard have held our noses and made us swallow it.

Jon is disparaged that these laws still exist, but what could he do? Its crossed his mind before, in theory, a wrestler could attempt to dismantle the north's apartheid system. After all, in the south Tom Leathers broke the baseball segregation line and it has led to social change. A slow pace of change, mind you, but at least the train is moving. No one in the North cares about baseball, however. Plus Jon suspects integration in the majors was more because a loaded sports executive wanted to load up more.

Wrestling, on the other hand, has it's fingers on the pulse of Northern society. It may not be hockey, who's place in the culture is closer to religion than a simple pastime, but the people are deeply connected with the spectacle.

Technically, the wildling barrier has already been broken in wrestling, through Mance Rayder. But he was raised by Westerosi parents and was always portrayed as a heel. And he barely spoke, in and out of the ring, much less about racial issues.

Is that what he's trying to do now? Was Mance trying to use his wrestling celebrity as a platform from which to challenge segregation? Is that why the WWA blackballed him from the business?

"Why do you like coming to these guys? They fucking put their logo all over the cars. It makes them look like moving billboards," Grenn said, pulling Jon from his thoughts.
"That's exactly why. There's a lot of people--no, assholes, a lot of assholes who get a kick out of fucking with people's cars. Assholes who shouldn't be allowed to drive, or own a car for that matter. And the reason for this kick is either because it's personal, you know taking a parking spot or parking too close to their car. Because of jealousy, they see your car as a display of arrogance and by keying it they're punching a smug nob in the face. Or because their just childish or drunk and are doing it for hilarity and yucks all around. Whichever is the case, it all boils down to ego. We are all completely infected by ego. Its ego unchained out there. We feel this urge to strengthen or compensate our egos. And scratching up a rental car does nothing for your ego. Think about it... And even if they still want to vandalize it, this rental agency's inspections are cursory at best."

"What if someone like smashes all the windows?" Grenn asked.

Edd scratched his neck. "Well, then you're fucked. You gotta take it in for repair."

"Or you could just get rental insurance," Pyp suggested. "And what, do you piss people off on a regular basis? Why are you so worried about your car getting banged up?"

"Rental insurance is a scam. And I prefer pessimism to disappointment. Let me tell you a parable my grandfather told me: There was once a pessimist and an optimist, the pessimist was drinking cognac and said 'This smells like bedbugs.' The optimist grabbed a bedbug from the wall, sniffed it and said 'Well this smells a bit like cognac.' Point being, I would rather be a pessimist who drinks cognac, than an optimist who sniffs bedbugs."

Well that explained a lot about Edd...

Edd drove them into the car rental agency and they all chose to follow him inside to use the restroom facilities. Jon went in last. He stayed back for a second to get something out of his bag.

While Edd was at one of the counters with a clerk filling out the necessary paperwork, Jon was leaning on a wall by the front entrance, heavy in thought. He was reconsidering the plan he had just put together a few minutes ago.

He was also a little creeped out by the only other clerk in the agency. He was a paper thin man who stood up straight behind his counter staring at the entrance door with a permanent smile attached to his face.

When Pyp returned from the restroom, Jon's decision was definite. "Hey, come with me to the counter," he said to Pyp.

He gave Jon a suspicious look. "Why?"

"Just follow me."

Pyp did as much when Jon walked over to the counter of the clerk wearing a smile. "Excuse me, would it be alright if I used one of your telephones? I have to make an important call."

"I'm sorry, sir, company policy prohibits customers from using the agency's telephones," he answered, his smile unwavering. "But there is a pay phone right outside the store."

"Thank you," Jon replied before turning and taking hold of Pyp's arm and leading him towards the exit/entrance door. A few inches before getting there, however, Pyp began fighting to get his arm back.

"What the fuck, man? No. I'm not going out there with you again! If you want my balls to implode why don't you just spray some liquid nitrogen down there."
Jon turned his head to the side. "You know I've heard that actually makes sex feel better. You might want to try it."

"I'm serious, Jon. Who-who do you need to call anyway and why the hell do I need to go with you?"

"Hey, where you guys going?" Grenn asked as he returned from the restroom.

"We're gonna go outside and use the payphone. We uh, want to call our moms. You know, let 'em know we're still alive. For the time being, anyway. We won't take long."

"Gods help me," Pyp groaned before Jon led him outside.

Nobody slapped an ice pack on their nether regions, but they're bodies forced them to run to find the pay phone like somebody did.

When they did finally locate it, Jon reached into his pocket and retrieved the fibrous material he took out of his traveling bag before leaving the car. The piece of paper with the phone number of the girl Pyp met at the nightclub.

"Make the call," Jon said, handing him the paper.

Pyp arched his brow before scanning the paper. "You still have this? Man, I forgot all about it. I was able to avoid PTSD about that whole night and now you're bringing back unwanted memories."

"Make the call," Jon repeated himself.

Pyp gave him a look. "Is this because of what happened at the diner? Jon... look, I was drunk when I gave you this, I wasn't thinking. Going to a wildling show is-is crazy. It's walking into the lion's den. And you know, the girl, she was probably just fucking with me. This is probably the number to a Beefsteak Charlie's."

"All I'm asking you to do is make a phone call. Nothing else, you don't have to go anywhere with me. Just call this girl and find out if there are any shows in the next three days that she can get me into. Shows a little more to the south, obviously. If there isn't, then I won't go."

Pyp wouldn't give in. "What do you get from this? I don't understand? I don't understand the point?"

"The more you think the longer we'll be out here stuffing cold. Just do it."

Pyp's face grew thoughtful for a moment and then he let out a long visible breath. "The ten cents are coming out of your pocket."

Jon smiled slyly, pleased with himself, and then took from his back pocket a dime.

"Hi, I'm looking for Ygritte?" Pyp asked after moving to the pay phone and dialing.

"Oh, hey, um this is Pyp. We met like two months ago at a nightclub. I don't know if you remember," he said into the phone.

"Yeah, the one with the... large ears. Listen, I'm calling to know if the offer you made me is still on the table. You know, about getting me into a wrestling show. A wildling one."

"Well, a friend of mine..." Pyp paused and turned his set of eyes Jon's way. "And me, me and my
friend, we're wondering if you could do that. If you could, you know, get us in?"

"He's uh... a co-worker."

"Well, we're free for the next three days because of the blizzard. Obviously it would need to be something more to the south. But if there's nothing coming up, that's fine. I can call some other time."

"In two days?" Pyp looked at Jon.

"Where?" Jon asked.

"Where?" Pyp echoed on the phone.

"Karhold?" He looked over at Jon again. Jon nodded.

"Uh, hold on." He covered the phone and turned to Jon again. "You got a pen?"

"Just say it out loud. I'll remember it."

After getting all the information they needed, the call was ended and Jon went into his pocket to get another dime."You can go back now. I'll catch up to you," he said as he grabbed the pay phone.

"Who you gonna call?" Pyp asked.

"My mom. Not even a fucking snowstorm is gonna prevent me from keeping my word."

Jon spent about three minutes on the phone with his mom, departing a bit from the truth so she wouldn't worry about him. When he finished he ran back to the rental agency.

"You know for somebody eager to avoid this blizzard, you sure seem to like wasting daylight," Edd commented when he returned.

Jon scrunched his face. "Daylight? It's pitch black out there."

"There's a moon. In a few hours there won't be a moon or a sun. We'll have whiteout conditions. This is daylight. Alright, so here's the plan, I'll drive the rental and Grenn will drive my car. We'll drop Jon off at the flophouse and then go to the garage and..."

"No, wait, wait," Jon interrupted. "I changed my mind. I want to go with you guys to Winterfell."

Edd looked doubtful. "What made you change your mind?"

"Uh, my mom. This is the longest I've gone without seeing her and I just wanna, you know, check up on her."

Edd appeared convinced. "Okay then momma's boy. So Grenn you'll tail me in the rental to the garage where I'll leave my car safe and secured, and then I'll jump in the rental and we'll drive to Winterfell. Any questions?"

"Shouldn't we stop at the flophouse to grab some clothes and you know get our toothbrushes and all that kind of stuff?" Jon asked.

"You can buy some Old Spice in Winterfell, and new toothbrushes too. The toothbrushes are on me as a favor to everyone who cares about oral hygiene. Let's get going."
After three hours of sleep in a motel an hour or so from Winterfell, Jon wasted no time in getting dressed, gathering his belongings, and sliding out of his single room. Then he was practically tip-toeing to the room Pyp was staying in to avoid being seen by Grenn and Edd.

Everything was going as planned. He had convinced his friends to get separate rooms at this shabby motel so he and Pyp could sneak away at the break of dawn while Edd and Grenn were still asleep and none the wiser. Now he and Pyp could get in the rental and drive to Karhold.

Did he feel bad leaving Edd and Grenn stranded behind? A little. But Winterfell is one of the best cities to get around without a car.

Jon was lifting his fist to give the door a soft knock when he gave a quick look to his left and had to do a double take. Standing by the rental car in the parking lot was Pyp...

With Edd and Grenn right beside him.

"What are you guys doing here?" Jon asked when he approached them.

"Pyp told us of the drivel that fills your head and we're here to help you meet reason," Grenn answered.

Jon glared at Pyp who swallowed thickly and lowered his eyes in shame. Edd cleared his throat. "This would be the biggest, most dumbest mistake you ever make in your life, Snow."

Jon sniggered. That was rich coming from him.

Edd continued. “And believe me, I know a thing or two or three about making dumb mistakes. I wouldn't be in this miserable part of the world if I didn't.”

"I'm a big boy, I can make my own decisions." Jon used Edd's own words against him.

The frown already etched on Edd's face deepened. "This is different, Jon. If I dare tempt a storm it's because I'm knowledgeable about my shit. Your going into something with stupidity."

Jon blew out a breath. "Well, I don't know yet how to control myself so as to avoid stupidity, so..."

"This is not something to joke about, Jon," Grenn replied stiffly. "If the Old Bear finds out, he'll fire you. There's bad blood between him and Mance Rayder. There's history. I don't know if it was a personal knife in the back situation or if it was just business. But there's heat. And you're biting the hand that feeds by doing this."

Jon's face scrunched up. "Seven hells, I just wanna see the work in his territory, I don't wanna fuck him."

"It's probably no different than outlaw wrestling, what is there to see?" Grenn argued. "What you wanna see hokey wrestling in parking lots? Or in the fields like a traveling carnival in the 60s? It's a mud show, Jon. Is that worth risking your job? Your life?"

"Look, I've only known you guys for like three months so I can't say I know any of you inside out. From our conversations I've gathered that you guys are primarily in this for the money. And if so
that's perfectly fine, I'm not judging you. I mean it is called the business after all. As for me…” Jon searched for the words to best clarify his perspective to them. "If this was a money-less world where everyone could do what they enjoyed, there's probably only a minute amount of people who would take bumps day in and day out in a hard wrestling ring, and most would probably be mentally or physically challenged. It's easy to say what you would do hypothetically, but I think I would still wrestle. And maybe wildling wrestling is just an outlaw mud show, but I would still value the knowledge I gained from the experience. So yes, I consider this a worthwhile exploration."

"If you really loved the craft then you would care if Mormont’s territory dies," Edd replied after a beat of silence.

Jon's brow furrowed. What is he talking about? "What are you talking about?"

"Oh come on, haven't you noticed? Attendance has ticked up since you joined the territory. In every town."

"30 or 40 more people in the audience isn't really something noteworthy."

"30 or 40 twenty year old girls," Edd specified. "Do you know what that means? That means 50 to 100 twenty year old boys coming to the shows trying to pick those girls up. Maybe 140 more people isn't a lot to you, but to Mormont it is. If i wasn't he wouldn't be considering raising the ticket price to another dollar across the board."

"What? Who told you that?"

"A reliable source. Who also told me that the Old Bear wants to start taping some of the matches and sending them south."

Jon snorted. "I really hope he's not so foolish. If he does all that, he's more likely to burn a record amount of cash than earn."

"That may be so, but that's your fault. If he lost his damn mind it's because you bamboozled him. Because he sees what we all see. He sees what you can be."

Jon looked at him questionably. "What can I be?"

"The guy! You can be the guy."

Jon was still confused.

"You're what we call a rare breed, Jon. You can inject a stimulus into a territory's DNA, that vitalizes it and amps it up. I mean, fuck, you can change everything here. The whole complexion of the paint. You can get Mormont publicity in the national magazines and get the boys from making good money to making a lot of money. Maybe you're not in it for the riches but hey, the laborer is worthy of his wages."

"Sounds more like it's good for everyone's pockets than it is for wrestling. And everyone who comes to Mormont's territory is a potential rental. He knows I'm only here to get my feet wet, then I'm gone. It would be half-witted for him to put all his eggs in one basket."

"Not as half-witted as what you wanna do," Edd countered.

Jon grunted. "Alright, I heard what you guys had to say and I considered it, honestly I did. But my mind hasn't changed. So why don't you guys just go back inside, get some much needed sleep, and
Pyp and I can go. Who knows, we might be back before you two wake up."

Grenn and Edd's faces both changed after Jon said that. They looked at each other curiously for a moment and then turned to Pyp and took hold of his arms.

"You're gonna need to find another driver," Edd said, with both he and Grenn giving him a challenging look.

Depending on others for transportation can be crippling in this world, especially in the profession Jon is in. But thankfully the people who came before him discovered a way to deal with this pickle. "Fine. I'll call a cab then."

He turned and began walking back to his motel room. But before he could get there he was cut off by Edd who moved in front of him. Jon jerked his head back and saw Grenn standing a few feet behind him.

"We can't let you do this. And if words won't work, then we'll have to break through to you through the medium of a clenched fist," said Edd.

Jon gave a shake of his head. Did it really have to come to this? "My brain knows what is violence and can react to that violence. I'm gonna move forward, if you chose to be aggressive, I will mirror that response."

Grenn and Edd both got in a fighting stance and Jon took a deep intake of breath before starting to move forward. But he stopped when Pyp finally spoke up. "Okay, that's enough!". He strode over to them. "If Jon wants to go, let him go. His interest for wildlings didn't just awaken last night. He has the number, if not today he'll just go some other day without anyone knowing. And don't forget what happened the last time Jon got in a shoot fight. One hard fall or blow and you can end his wrestling career like the guy at McDonald's who killed his baseball career. Mormont would have your heads for breaking the egg before the Golden Goose hatched."

Jon knew Pyp was just trying to calm the storm. That argument didn't have a head or legs to stand on. After all, he risks his body on a daily basis by falling on a mat that doesn't exactly have the softness of a pillow.

Edd paused for a moment and then made his decision. "Fine, you can go," he said, with obvious reluctance. Jon let out a sigh of relief. But Edd then killed it. "But we're coming with you. To protect you."

Jon laughed humorlessly. "Protect me? If anything you'll only put me at greater risk. The more people come, the more attention we'll get. And that is not something we want. Pyp can tag along if he wants since he's expected, but no one else. I don't want this girl to get suspicious."

"Either you let us all come with you or I'll call Ygritte as soon you leave and tell her it's off," Pyp said, sounding determined.

_Gods be damned._
Chapter Summary

The Master of Sex Part 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Getting to Karhold from the outskirts of Winterfell meant virtually an all-day drive. Which translated to many hours of boringness and discomfort. It was quiet. Really quiet. Sometimes in silence there is a quality of beauty. But when a car filled with men in the wrestling business was quiet, you knew something was wrong.

This silence was loud. There is the silence when noise stops, and then there is the silence when thought stops. Their minds weren't at all quiet. He could see it in their faces. There was a tremendous amount of chattering going on in that car.

The following day when they finally entered Karhold, nothing had changed. Sleeping was difficult in the very cold conditions, which only made them grumpier, and not even some good snacking was a mood boost.

This gave a bad aura and could draw suspicion amongst the wildlings, Jon thought. He had to do something to help that day come at least a tiny bit leisurely and part the clouds and fill the clear sky with light.

He had a feeling trying to start a psychological revolution to quiet their minds wasn't gonna work, so instead, he decided for something temporary. Something to get their minds thinking about something else.

*Jon knew exactly what that was.*

"Hey, do any of you guys know a good CPA?" He asked.

Grenn looked over his shoulder from the passenger's seat to shoot him a baffled look. "What the fuck is that?"

"A public accountant," Jon answered.

"Why do you need a pubic accountant? All those trips to the wax salon have become a financial burden, huh?" Pyp joked.

"Yeah, well what can I say. I have it shaved and the hair grows back on my balls almost instantly. Sooner or later you'll grow some hair there too, Pyp, don't worry," Jon retorted.

"No, but seriously," Jon carried on. "I need a public accountant to do my taxes."

"Taxes?" Edd asked, astonished. "Ah, no. No, come on... come on... Are you serious?" He sighed.
"You know before today I really thought you were smart. But evidently your ass is retarded."

It is known by everyone in the territory that Edd is passionate about cars and very opinionated about money. Jon isn't completely sure that Edd doesn't deliberately cultivate that gloomy tone of his or he's just naturally like that. Either way, he's always serious with a long and grim face. But when talking about finances, he's lively with earnestness and hilarious animation. And Jon has heard that taxes, in particular, gets his heart pumping like Reeboks.

"What, you don't pay taxes?" Jon asked.

"Fuck no. Why would I?"

"Uh... well, I can't think of any three letters that strike more fear in people's hearts than the letters IRS."

Edd scoffed. "Wealthy business owners aren't shaking with fear, I can tell you that. And neither am I. I won't give them that pleasure."

"Remember last month when I was, according to you, squealing like a pig about being fined by Mormont for violating a dress code that I was never even told about. You remember that? You remember what you said? I'll remind you. You said that I should take laws seriously and obey."

Edd frowned. "That is completely different."

"How?" Pyp asked, clearly not pleased.

"Because there is no law stating that average people have to pay tax on their work money. Only corporations are meant to pay tax."

"What?" Grenn was baffled. He glanced around the car. "There's no law that says we have to pay taxes? Well what the fuck, if that's true then why do so many people in the country pay taxes?"

"Don't listen to him, Grenn. He's a wack job about that shit."

"Fuck you motherfucker. If you want to submerge past common sense that's your problem. Don't drag Grenn down with you. Grenn, listen, the majority of people pay taxes because they let words fool them. They don't understand the language," Edd replied.

"The language?" Grenn blinked. "What is-what is the language?"

"The language, you know, the legal and economic terms and phrases that everyone has a hang-up about. All that mumbo-jumbo. It's like...oh shit, oh, holy shit, I can’t believe I never thought of this." Edd apparently had an epiphany. "It's like carny! It's like carny. It's a way of communicating the hustle privately. Of hiding the scam from the marks. You know how we talk to those outside our club and to them it sounds like we swallowed a wasp. It's just in that way that those thieves in dark suits play with us. They write shit and say shit in an undecipherable language to protect their business. Their scam!

"But when the government comes with guns and suits, they understand what's going down. They don't need a lawyer to translate that shit. Those motherfuckers have them bathing in fear about paying taxes to the point that nobody wants to go up against them about it. People fear losing the argument and having more and more "tax debt" pile up on them and eventually get everything they
own taken away—their house, their car, any properties they own, as well as their rights and their freedom. So instead of losing everything trying to fight it, they shut up and deal with it."

"Okay, okay, so... what you're saying is that I can dodge taxes and I won't go to jail?" Grenn asked.

"No, I didn't say that, that's why I said guns and suits... didn't you...? Nevermind. If you don't let your hard-earned tax dollars get washed and put in the pockets of those screwworm parasites—if you don't let them extort you, shake you down, and you get caught, they'll swarm you and put you in an orange jumpsuit. Because in court you'll be denied the ability to prove to a jury that there is no law requiring Westerosi citizens to file an income tax return. Under our bullshit legal system, there's a general rule that neither side in a civil or criminal case is allowed to try to prove to the jury what the law is.

"So, these juries, that are not smartened up, will think your a lazy, unpatriotic, and unlawful citizen and convict you. Because they think it's law. And even if it was law that doesn't make it right. I mean fucking slavery was once law in Essos."

What about the segregation of wildlings? That's law. Does that make it right? Jon left the question unspoken. It would only remind them of what lay ahead.

"Okay, okay, but answer this, Edd, what do you think pays for the roads, housing, water, infrastructure, the hospitals, public schools and all that type of stuff?" Pyp asked.

"You should be hit over the head with a mallet," Edd scowled. "That's what they tell you comes from your taxes. Where's the proof? The truth is private companies siphon off taxes while government funding is being slashed more every year. Very little actually goes toward government programs. The IRS works for the rich. That's why the rich are above it. They can stash away their treasures like pirates. And we're the expandable powder monkeys. Somebody needs to put a goddamn prick tax or a tax of a motherfucker who just got lucky in the right place tax. Fuck... Tell me this, Pyp, why was the Federal Reserve system created? Was everything just the shits before they came into existence?"

"If you make it in the business are you gonna pay taxes?" Pyp changed the question.

"Fuck no," Edd said slowly and emphatically.

"Don't you realize how risky it is to not pay taxes when you're a wrestler? You can't be a public figure and skip out on taxes."

Edd barked out a laugh. "Gods... it's so obvious you guys are rooks. I wish we were having this conversation in the dressing room with the boys. I would do anything to see the reactions to what you guys are asking. NONE of the boys pays taxes. And not just in our territory, in every territory. Everyone except maybe Oberyn Martell pays taxes. Everyone else... It's enough that they get screwed on the payoff by the promoters, you think they want to get the shaft from the government too?"

"So the IRS don't give a fuck about wrestlers then?" Grenn asked.

"Oh, I'm sure they want every host sucked and accounted for. But the people in this business are always on the move and some of them have more than one name. And I say good on them. Good on me. Because, you know, all wealth comes from labor. Tax is another word for labor. When they take your labor from you and give you nothing back for it, that's called stealing and slavery."
Edd continued ranting about the tax system for the rest of the drive to Karhold with Pyp acting as an opposing force. While Jon sat back with his hands clasped behind his head loving every second of it. He sort of wished he could contribute to the discussion, but honestly, he was as befuddled as Grenn was. I mean the hardest thing in the world to understand is the income tax. But Eddison Tollett had it all figured out. Well, maybe. Who knows?

Before heading to the address Ygritte had given them, they pulled off at a gas station to fill up the tank and empty their bladders and stomachs. And then they filled themselves up again by hitting a Wendy's, where they planned the day ahead.

When they went and found the address, the clock on Jon's wristwatch said there were three minutes left until 2 pm, which was the agreed upon meeting time.

The meeting site was a motel of all places. At this rate Jon will be able to write the location of every motel in the North on a road atlas, he thought as Edd pulled into the parking lot.

Not five seconds after they exited the car did two of the three doors of a blue Chevrolet van that was parked on the aisle in front of them, open.

From the driver's seat came out a tall intimidating man who was built like a football lineman and had a chin full of unruly red hair that matched the strands on his head. Jon did not know yet with any certainty, but there was something about him that said...

Wildling.

Out of the rear side of the van came a short, skinny but well-muscled girl with a round face and fiery red hair that stood out above all else. She's probably not a girl that wins the admiring glances of many men. The people who find appearance important would say she's nothing above the average person you pass in the street. But Jon thought there was something appealing about her.

"That's Ygritte," Pyp muttered as the two approached them.

"That's nice. Who's the guy who looks like he can choke us till our eyes pop out?" Jon asked, gritting his teeth.

"I don't know. He wasn't at the club."

"Remember what I told you guys back at Wendy's," Jon whispered just before the strangers reached them.

"Ygritte, it's so great to see you again." Pyp held out his arms for an embrace but Ygritte awkwardly rejected his hug. "You told me it was just you and a friend," she said.

"Um, yeah... my buddies Grenn and Edd wanted to tag along. They're uh wrestling fans, and are as intrigued in seeing the show as Jon and I are. Is it alright if they join the party?" Pyp asked nervously.

Ygritte hesitated for a moment. Her eyes roam over each one of their faces, giving Jon, specifically, a long, searching look. "It's fine, we have space in the van," she finally said, and Pyp sighed with relief.
"That's not necessary, we can follow you in our own car," said Edd firmly.

Ygritte looked past them to give their car a scan. "That's a rental, isn't?"

*No shit it's a rental. The company logo was branded onto the side of the car.*

"Yeah, so?" Edd asked.

"The free folk can't rent cars. If they see that car in the parking lot of the venue, they'll know you're Westerosi. And your friend led me to believe on the phone that you guys want to do your best to avoid attracting notice. With that, it'll be like walking into a wolf den with chunks of delicious meat."

*Great job Edd...*

Edd tried to hide his frustration but Jon noticed that he balled his hands into fists and ground his teeth in consternation. He pursed his lips and furrowed his brow, contemplating, before releasing a breath. "Fine. We'll ride with you."

"So, your Jon?" Ygritte then asked, looking her fill of him.

"Yeah, hi, nice to meet you," Jon said with a polite smile and an extended hand.

"Hello." She accepted his hand and for a moment didn't make an effort to return it. Jon would've said something but his attention shifted to her large companion who was circling around him and his friends, studying them closely.

Ygritte gave Jon his hand back and introduced him. "This is Tormund Giantsbane. Or Thunderfist, depending on who you ask. He's my inside guy. He hooked me up with my first tickets back in Skagos. That's where he wrestles for Mance. But he's on the disabled list right now and with all the free time he decided to make his first ever trip to these parts. You lot just so happened to show up here the same day he arrived."

"How fortunate for us," Grenn said sarcastically under his breath.

"Wait, Mance Rayder doesn't know that we're here, does he? He won't say anything, right?" Edd asked.

Tormund narrowed his eyes. "Why shouldn't I tell him? Are you lads worthy of notice?" He said, revealing a gruff voice.

His friends were slow to respond but Jon was quick on his feet. "We all somewhat work for Jeor Mormont, so our presence may not be too welcomed."

"Actually, knowing Mance, he'd probably wanna share a beer with ya. Har!"

"Don't worry he doesn't need to know about you boys," said Ygritte. "We should get going, the show starts at three, if we're late they won't let us in." She and Tormund turned and headed for the car. Jon and his friends looked at each other uneasily one last time before following after them.

Ygritte opened the side door to the two back aisles and they were surprised by the presence of a

"Oh, this is Chai Duq," Ygritte said casually. "He's originally from Yi-Ti but he's been gallivanting around the world for some time now. He likes to come to the shows sometimes, but driving demands too much attention for him, so he always finds someone to haul his ass. As you can see I've been pretty charitable today."

"Hey, what's up?" Jon said to the yellow-skinned man with bright eyes.

"Hello," he replied lazily, without sparing them a glance. His nose was deep in a magazine.

Ygritte pushed the front aisle forward and Pyp, Grenn, and Edd quickly jumped into the car to sit in the second aisle. Jon then climbed into the first aisle, putting a certain distance between him and Chai Duq.

But Ygritte had other plans. She cleared her throat to get his attention. "Do you mind scooting over?"

Jon was confused but did as she bid. Ygritte slid right next to him turning personal space into a memory. The uneasiness was too much, he could not hold his tongue. "Can't you ride up front? And if it's his first time here don't you think you should be driving?" he asked her in a low voice.

"Tormund is never in a moving car unless he's behind the wheel. And he never lets anyone sit shotgun," she replied without the same discretion. "You must find that bemusing since only civilized people encroach as little as possible on the personal space of strangers."

"It's like choosing to sit next to the only other person in the theater in an empty cinema," Tormund added to what Ygritte said.

Jon was sitting much closer to Ygritte than Tormund would be up front, so that argument was either self-serving or it made no sense. But he decided to restrain his lips.

"So are you a referee too? Or are you a wrestler?" Ygritte asked him as the car got in motion.

"No, I carry rings, carry jackets, hand out programs, you know that kinda stuff."

Lying is not something Jon is very comfortable with. Not even the polite white lies. If someone has a problem with that then they can to take it up with Lyanna Snow.

When he was younger his mom wouldn't say that lying was bad, as most parents do. Instead, she explained that it makes things complicated. That if you plan to tell lies at all and want to stick to the story, then you can't waver for an instance. So as people check up on you, you'll have to make lies to cover up lies. And you get involved in a very very tricky game. If you play it for long, the contradiction becomes unbearable, and one goes off one's head.

She urged him to test it out one day, and he did.

Mom was right.

If Jon is lying now it's for the benefit of the friends he's leading right into murky waters. He knows this is a wet and wild ride into a storm that can easily spring a leak in the boat and drown him--
professionally and hell, even literally. I mean if he says or does something to offend these people even in the slightest way, they could decide to tie him to a chair and plunge him into the ocean, for all he knows.

He can grasp the possible consequences of his careless behavior, but his friends, on the other hand, are only aboard because of their selfless dedication to him. So if lying can prevent a storm surge from submerging them, then he'll lie.

"And you two?" Ygritte turned her head and asked Grenn and Edd.

"I'm not in the wrestling business. I'm just a fan. I work at a Ford dealership," Edd answered. There's some element of truth to that.

"Uh... I'm a, I'm just a stagehand at Castle Black. But also a fan. A big, big fan of wrestling," said Grenn, not very convincingly.

Ygritte's brow wrinkled. She could smell the bullshit, Jon knew. He had to step in before she broke him. "What about you?" He asked the fiery redhead. "How is it that you can get us into this show? How do you know about them?"

"I'm Free Folk," she faced him and said very bluntly. "Or a wildling as you like to call us."

Jon's heart began pounding. He suspected this from the moment he heard Pyp's story, but since he met her in a nightclub that probably doesn't allow wildlings, he hoped maybe her connection to them was different.

Nothing about this is safe. A rivalry between wrestling territories is one thing. This is a rivalry between two races of people that have been diametrically opposed for hundreds of years, in their social historic cultures--separated by language even. He's had a lot of different scenarios play in his head of how all this might turn out, death by drowning being only one. None of the others end very well either, though. And knowing that the person who arranged all this is on their side, only creates more bleak scenarios in his mind.

Ygritte's gaze met his, her eyes draining of life. She spoke slowly, but clearly. "I'm a wildling." Jon felt a wave of dread wash over him. "Or a Free Folk as you like to call us."

Jon wondered if his friends had some of the same worried thoughts he was having. He glanced over his shoulder at them and all three looked like they needed a change of pants.

"Yup. He was not alone."

After a few minutes of sitting there in silence, Jon for the first time really took notice of the magazine Chai Duq was reading. It was obviously YiTish because the writing was ideographic instead of alphabetic. But those weren't the shapes that caught his attention. What made his eyes practically bug out of his head at first look were the graphic x-rated photos of sexual acts on each page.

He apparently wasn't doing a very good job of hiding his curiosity, because when he shifted his eyes to Chai he saw him looking at Jon with an ear to ear grin. "You want to read?" He asked.

"No, no. Uh... I thought I saw a bug or something." Jon tried to play it off.

He wasn't very convincing apparently since Chai reached behind the seats and brought out a whole stack of YiTish magazines and threw one on Jon's lap. He initially acted as though the magazine wasn't there, until Pyp leaned over from the back seat and tried to take it. "What's this?"
Jon finally grabbed the magazine and sort of shielded himself before he began to flip through it. As he did he discovered that it also had baseball and wrestling content.

*Well at least this guy isn't a complete pervert.*

Jon raised his eyes from the magazine and found Ygritte watching him intently. He blinked vaguely at her and then want back to the reading material.

As for the smutty portions of the magazine, he saw that there were multiple women in the photos being fucked, but it was the same guy doing all the fucking. "Who is this guy?" He heard himself blurt out.

"In Yi-Ti he's the master of sex," Chai answered, too loudly for Jon's comfort.

Tormund's ears pricked up at that. "What? Let me see that." Chai handed him his magazine.

With one hand on the steering wheel and quick glances at the road ahead, he began looking through the magazine.

Tormund snorted. "This is your master of sex? Har! These techniques don't work. See look here, he's trying to modify the 'ride below the crupper' by having her face down on the bed with her hips raised." He shook his head. "What you're supposed to do is have her lie completely on her stomach with her bum only slightly raised. That way she can gently grind herself against the bed as you pistol into her."

He changed the page. "And here he's straddling her left leg with her lying on her left side and she has her right leg wrapped around the right side of his waist, when it's better to lay perpendicular to each other with her on her back and you facing her on your side. Then one of your legs goes between hers and her other leg is draped over your hips. So when your slowly thrusting in, she can grind up against your inner thigh to get the clit stimulation she needs to cum."

Tormund carried on to another page. "And what the fuck is this? It looks like he's trying to give this woman a back-to-belly piledriver. No! The best way to fuck her with your tongue is by having her sit on your face. But not really on your face, there have to be a few inches between your mouth and the honey pot, then you begin to feast. This one is the master of sex for small peckers!" He bellowed. "Har!"

The lesson evoked gales of laughter in the van and it was a battle for Jon to not join everyone in it, but Tormund's wanton disregard for the road took precedent.

Thankfully after the laughter tapered off, he tossed the magazine back their way. But Chai shot back at Tormund's comment. "No, it's not him or cock-size. It's the women you got a problem with. You discriminate, Thunderfist."

"Discriminate? Bugger that! I like women that are yellow as applesauce. And women that are white as milk, brown as a bear, black as a..." He turned to look at Jon. "... crow. I relish every shade of the ass."

Chai laughed. "No, no, I meant you discriminate against spare women. You know, skinny."

"Har! Aye, that's true. I love thick chicks. Never fucked with a thin broad."
For a while they all sat quietly, until Jon noticed that Ygritte's faced seemed to turn confused as she peered out the window. "Tormund, where are we?"

The big wildling didn't answer right away. "I don't know the name of these shitty southern streets. We're on the path you told me," he finally replied, though he did not look or sound very confident.

"I don't recognize any of this... Tormund," she called, staring at his reflection in the rearview mirror. He did not look back at her. "Tormund," she said again a bit louder. No look back. "Tormund!" she shouted.

"What!?" he shouted back at her.

Ygritte contorted her eyes displeased."You're lost, aren't you? You fucking idiot, you went the wrong way when you were looking at that stupid magazine."

"Hey, fuck off! I'm just the wheelman, you're supposed to be the map. Maybe If you weren't staring at pretty boy over here the whole time you would've noticed when I went the wrong way."

Her anger flashed. "Fuck you, dickhead! I gave you basic directions with short phrases so you would understand. And twice I said them. Twice!"

The two began arguing heatedly, each trying to assign blame on the other.

*Why did this feel so familiar?*

"Hey, hey, hey!" Jon cut in. Both their heads turned into his direction questioningly. "Why not, instead of wasting your time and energies quarreling over something that's already happened, you live in the present and concentrate on getting back in the right direction."

"That's what I'm trying to do but she won't let me!" Tormund said.

"Oh shut up you big baby."

Tormund slowed the car down and got as close as possible to the right to make a three-point turn. "So where do I go from here?" he asked Ygritte.

"Just drive back the way you came." She narrowed her eyes on his reflection in the rearview mirror. And once again Tormund didn't look back at her. "You don't remember, do you? Fucking Gods."

"These aren't my fucking roads! I don't know these roads!"

"Neither do I. I know the roads I told you to use," she threw back.

"This is why everyone in the business has a Rand McNally road atlas in their car," Pyp leaned over and whispered in Jon's ear.

"We should stop and ask for directions," Jon suggested.

Ygritte snorted. "He won't. He's too proud."
Jon glanced at Tormund through the rear view mirror and could see him seething. A minute later he drove into a gas station and left the car with his eyes burning, marching inside.

Before Ygritte could see the opportunity to ask his friends more difficult, interrogating, 60 Minutes ass questions, Jon cut through the silence. "So what's wrong with him?" he asked her, referring to Tormund.

"The bear he fucked probably dropped him on his head when she had enough of him."

"No, I mean-" He started, then digested what she said. "He had sex with a bear? I-I meant...you said he was injured, right?"

"Yeah, he broke his collarbone like more than a month ago carrying a bag of venison he got from one of the boys as a gift. He was taking it down a flight of stairs and BAM! He fell."

"Broken collarbone? He has a broken collarbone and-and he's driving?"

Ygritte shrugged her shoulders. "He managed to drive to the hospital to receive treatment after it happened. He was supposed to use a sling for three weeks but he only did for a week. I don't see him in pain and he says he's perfectly fine and even ready to return to the ring. So..."

A few minutes later Tormund came out of the gas station holding a case of beer. "What the fuck," Ygritte said through clenched teeth when she saw him.

Tormund got back in the van. "The guy doesn't know how to get there. I didn't want to come back empty-handed so I bought us some beer. Thought it might lighten the mood," he said glaring at Ygritte.

"You better not drink any of that," she warned him.

"Relax, don't crank up again. It's not time, yet. Today I smell a fight, and a beer after a fight is a sweet taste in my mouth."

Tormund handed the pack to Chai who gladly received it, ripped open the case, and cracked open a bottle.

"You southern boys are welcome to empty those bottles. You drink beer and you are happy, it's done that quick. Har!"

Yes, and it affects the mind, the mind which is the totality of perception, the mind that must see very clearly, unconfusedly.

Something about this didn't sniff right. Was this their plan? Jon wondered. Was all this part of a master plan? Were they really lost? Or were they exactly where they wanted them? Were they being duped? What would they do if he refused to drink?

Chai offered Jon a bottle but he shook his head to decline. "No, thanks." He tried to study Ygritte and Tormund's reaction, but there was none.

Chai then asked Pyp, Edd, and Grenn. "You guys want?"

"Yeah," Grenn said eagerly. Until Jon whipped his head around and gave him a look. "Um,
"Yeah, later," Pyp and Edd agreed.

Jon again paid close attention to how the wildlings reacted. They didn't even flicker. If this was a wrench in their plans, they showed no sign of it.

Tormund drove a little more until he decided to stop by a hotel and walk into the building to ask again where they were.

"I'm gonna get some air," Ygritte said a moment later, before exiting the van.

Jon was still rather suspicious of these people and felt the need to keep a close eye on them. Ygritte most of all. "My feet are asleep, I need to walk it off," he said as an excuse to leave the car.

He found Ygritte leaning by the van and sort of staring off into space. To keep up the ruse of a pins and needles feeling, Jon decided to circle around the vehicle.

"You don't have to do that, you know," she said as he passed by her for the third time.

"My feet are asleep," he replied, stopping next to her.

"Sure they are." She stared at him unblinking, eye to eye. "You know we free folk, if we want to put the hurt on someone and we have them nose to nose." Ygritte got in front of his face. "We just do it. We don't waste our energy toying around with them. We wouldn't fake their parent's suicide and kill them in the orphanage. You know what I mean?"

Jon chortled. "No, I really don't know what you mean. Have you murdered children?"

A faint smile played about her lips."Maybe, I've met a couple of toddlers who should be put in a pillowcase and beaten to death. Only stupid people are breeding today, it seems. So how many kids you got?"

Jon's mouth curled in a small smile. "None, I'm only nineteen."

"So? With that face and physique, a stupid girl can get obsessed and do anything to bind you to her. A word of advice, even if your girlfriend tells you she's on the pill, always put a helmet on your mother fucking soldier."

"I don't have a girlfriend."

Ygritte cocked her head and gave Jon an inquiring stare. "Boyfriend?"

"No! I just, you know, prefer to stay off the market right now. Sex is pretty great but it's not everything."

"Staying single is smart and generous, you'll save money and spare them a ton of pain. But sexual abstinence... I just don't see that working for you," she said with a small laugh. "One of those girls with the cute little skirt and the lollipop will come along and you'll give in and let her give you head and maybe swallow some cum. Just make sure they do actually swallow it and don't rub it in their pussy to try to get themselves pregnant."
Jon chuckled. "Yeah, right... that wouldn't actually work, would it?"

She shrugged. "Anyway, what I was trynna say is that there's no plot to have you guys beaten to a bloody pulp. I'm not saying that won't happen, though. I mean this little adventure is not exactly the smartest decision you and your friends have ever made. Especially you."

"Why especially me?"

"Well if a crowd of free folk wrestling fans found out that Jon Snow, Jeor Mormont's new jewel, was in their midst. The savages would leave the crow's nest and peck out your eyes."

Jon stared at her in stunned disbelief. "How do you... how do you know who I am?"

"Why wouldn't I know? You wrestle every week in the town I live in. There's not much else that goes on in those towns other than wrestling, you know."

"You're right, I should've known you knew who I was. I just didn't want to assume, I guess. Do you come to our shows?"

"I attended one last month. I wanted to check you out so I swallowed my pride and gave that motherfucker Mormont money from my pocket."

Jon blinked. "What do you have against Mormont? Is it because he has heat with Mance?"

"Whatever issues those two have is between them. I have a problem with Mormont, and other wrestling fans in my group have a problem with him because of the wide-scale purge he launched against us. He had us lynched, harassed at almost every one of his venues until we couldn't take it anymore and stopped going to all but one of the towns."

Jon was told about all that. "From what I heard it was the fans who did that. The Westerosi fans. Not Mormont."

"Even if that were so, he did nothing to stop the violence against us. He just stood by and allowed it to happen."

"How do you know that for sure? All that happened, like what ten years ago. You must've been not even a teenager. Were you there?"

Before she could reply they were interrupted by the sound of a siren. They turned their heads and saw a police car pull up behind the van.

*Oh Gods, not another one of these guys.*

The police officer, a man stooped with a grey beard, got out of the car and came up to them. "Hello officer, how can we help you?" Ygritte asked, forcing herself to smile.

"Can you tell me what you're doing? Why are you standing outside this car by a hotel? Is this your vehicle?"

"No, it's not. We're hitchhikers," Ygritte said. "The owner went into the hotel to use the restroom. We're just waiting for him."
"Hitchhikers?"

"Yes, me, my boyfriend here, and his three friends are hitchhiking from the Wall district. We were able to outrun the blizzard, thank the gods, but we lost our car near Winterfell and had to hitchhike from there. We came to Karhold looking for a cousin of mine who could give us shelter until things clear up back home."

"Are these three friends inside the car?"

"Yes, sir. Do you want me to get them out here?" Jon asked.

"I got it," the officer said before knocking on the side window of the van. "Come on out, don't be shy."

The side doors opened and the van was emptied."You said there were three," the officer pointed out once they all line up in front of him. "I'm counting an extra duck in this row."

"Oh, he's not with us," Ygritte replied, referring to Chai. "He's with the guy who owns the car. He doesn't speak the common tongue, so I can't tell you much about him."

The officer stared at them for a moment. "Let me see some identifications."

A chill gripped Jon's spine at that request as some of the segregation laws came to mind. He knows from memory that wildlings and westerosi are not allowed to play cards, baseball, softball, football, basketball, or pool with each other. They must sit in separate sections at any public hall, theater, or place of public entertainment. And they have to take separate public transit.

But he wasn't sure if riding in the same car as wildlings was illegal?

It seemed more than likely.

Maybe Edd knows.

Jon glanced at over him and found that his eyes were already locked on his. Everyone's eyes were. "Huh?" Was all he could think to say.

"You're ID," the officer said sternly. "Now if you're not carrying it I'm gonna have to write you up."

"No, no, I got it, sorry." Jon quickly delved into his back pocket and brought out his wallet. He then took his ID out and handed it to the cop who had everyone else's card already in hand.

The officer held each one up for inspection, reading their personal information out loud and cracking bad jokes. Especially about Chai Duq. The last card he had to examine was Ygritte's.

"Of course."

"Myriame Branch, born in 1960, in Long Barrow City." Instead of telling a joke his brows pinched in confusion. He flipped the card over and back again and gave it a close inspection. Then he took one of the other ID's and looked this way and that, comparing the two.

"Where did you get this ID?" the officer asked Ygritte.
"At the DMV. Why is there somewhere else you can get an ID? If so I feel cheated of two of hours of my life."

The officer looked Ygritte up and down dubiously. "Tell me, where exactly in Karhold does your cousin live? This far in the city he should be able to come and pick you up, no?"

"She," Ygritte corrected, "lives close to the Grey Cliffs. I tried calling but she didn't answer the phone. She's probably at work."

"Where does she work?"

"Last we spoke she was an office secretary. Don't remember where exactly."

The officer nodded, thoughtful. "You know it's funny that you have a cousin who lives here, cuz I actually had a cousin who was born and raised in Long Borrow."

Ygritte gave him a toothless smile. "Is that so?"

"Yeah, we used to talk on the phone all the time. Sadly he died in a car wreck many years ago, he was real young, it was not long after he graduated from high school. Man, he loved telling me school stories. What high school did you go to? Maybe it was the same one."

"Crescent high," Ygritte answered without hesitating.

"Hmm..."

"Is that the same school your cousin went to?" Ygritte asked.

The officer blinked. "Yeah, it is." He paused for a moment. "Tell me, how did you two lovebirds meet?"

"How is that pertinent?" Jon asked.

"It's not. I don't mean to poke you with my finger and invade your personal space. I just enjoy a decent love story. I think we all do, most men are just afraid to admit it. You guys have nothing to hide, right? I mean, you do have the right to remain silent," he said with a laugh.

Ygritte made herself laugh with him. "No, of course we have nothing to hide. We can tell you."

What? Why *not* *just* remain silent?

"Jon and I met--" She started, but was cut off by the officer.

"No, I want *him* to tell me," his eyes went to Jon. "I like to hear the guys side of the story. You might find out if he really loves you by hearing his side," he said to Ygritte.

Fuck me... Why *did* she have to say that they were dating?

Jon cleared his throat nervously. "It's not really the, you know, mushy story that you've built it up
"Doesn't matter. Go on."

Jon was struck by a sudden memory. "Well... we met almost a year ago at a hockey game," he said slowly.

"Hockey? I love hockey."

"Oh, then you must remember the playoff series between the Cobblecats and the Sparrowhawks."

"Of course, yeah."

"Well, we were both there. And the interesting tidbit is that she's a fan of the Cobblecats and I'm a fan of the Sparrowhawks."

The officer's expression was blank and Jon inwardly smiled.

Jon continued. "And of course there's no bigger rivalry in hockey than the eternal uncivil war between the Cobblecats and the Sparrowhawks."

"Right, of course, of course. What a rivalry. Go on," the officer said trying to disguise his ignorance.

"It was game 7 in our arena but their fans tried to swarm the stands, which only whipped up the atmosphere before the game. And I mean everyone on both sides was screaming with purple faces and veins popping from their necks. The series up until then had been a showdown that made... Dirty Harry look like Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, right. Every game was a nail-biter."

"Yeah, yeah."

"But my team was choking on their own shit for the majority of that game 7. The Cobblecats scored two in the first and another in the third and we couldn't muster a response. And with only twelve minutes left in the game, everyone in the building thought they had sent us to the golf course.

"So naturally, the Cobblecats fans began to taunt us with full-throated passion, right. And one of the most vocal of the cheap-shot artists was Ms. Branch over here and her friends who sat three rows behind me. Fueled up on overpriced and bad tasting beer, she let out free-floating ridicule just looking for a target."

"And she found one." The officer grinned at Jon.

"Yeah, no, but it wasn't me. It was actually a guy who sat in the row in front of us who got really riled up by her taunting. And this guy was rip-roaring drunk, I mean he was incoherent and barely able to walk. But he seemed harmless for the most part. Until this heckler over here got to him," Jon said, smiling at Ygritte.

"They started jawing and he tried to get to her, you know, in a physical way. So his friends had to hold him back and it turned into a big scene. Security came and they were cooling him down when suddenly a female fan of the Sparrowhawks sitting close by, lunged at one of Myriame's friends and all hell broke loose. And the stumbling, sloppy fight steered everyone, including the security
guards, away from the drunk guy and with no one to contain him, he promptly stumbled over my row to go after Myriame. I was apparently the only one who still had eyes on him and seeing a damsel in distress, I stopped him by knocking him out cold."

Jon eye's locked onto Ygritte's and he could sense that she was resisting the urge to move her eyes round in a circle.

"But my heroics came at a cost," Jon went on. "Because a flash later I was being restrained by a security guard and they hauled me out the building along with the real perpetrators, and soon enough I found myself in the backseat of a squad car.

"It wasn't until the next morning, after spending the rest of the night in jail, that I found out that the Sparrowhawks mounted a miraculous comeback and scored three goals in ten minutes and then won in overtime.

"Oh, yeah, that game was incredible. I was-I was speechless," the officer said.

"Yeah... anyway, it was actually Myriame that told me. We met, formally, outside of the police station, where she was waiting for a couple of her friends who also were arrested. And she came up to me and questioned my actions. You know, basically calling me dumb and saying she didn't need my help. Not at all appreciating my valor. And when she told me about the game I was elated for the win but kinda angry at her because she was the reason I missed it.

"It started an argument about hockey trivia, which led to her betting me that the Sparrowhawks would lose in the finals. And so we exchanged numbers, you know, to set up a meeting place when the finals were over and the winner could get his due, and you can imagine the rest."

"It doesn't bother you that she's the enemy?" The officer asked.

Jon's eyes met Ygritte's again. "No, you know, sports is one of life's greatest treasures. It's an unmatched outlet for drama, storytelling, heroism, satisfaction. To some it's part of their identity, community, social life, and even mental health. But we're smart enough not to associate the teams we support with our own self-worth or identity. It's just a game."

The officer grew pensive, scratching at his chin. "Wait here, I'll be right back," he finally said before walking to his cop car.

"Fuck. What do you think he's doing?" Pyp asked, a stab of panic clearly going through him.

"How the fuck should I know?" Grenn answered.

"Shh!" Ygritte quieted them. "What is he doing, Chai?" she asked him, keeping her voice low so only they could hear.

Chai's face screwed up with concentration. "He's talking to walkie talkie. He wants someone to come here. Someone with ID barcode scanner."

"Shit," Ygritte muttered.

"What? How does he know that? How do you know that?" Edd asked.

"I have golden ears. Can hear really good," Chai replied.
"Oh fuck, we're fucked," Pyp said, breathing hard, shaking.

"I told you, Jon. I told you this was a stupid idea. I told you," said Edd bitterly.

Jon opened his mouth to speak and try to calm the situation, though he had no idea what words would come out. It didn't matter. A second later his mouth was attacked.

Without any warning, Ygritte cupped his face and pressed her lips into his.

After a moment of shock he came to his senses and tried to pull away from the lip lock, but she wouldn't let him.

"Kiss me back," she whispered after he used his strength to break off. "Kiss me back if you want to save us."

Before he could question what she meant, her mouth was on his again. Jon was so confused but he felt his body relax and he started kissing Ygritte back. Then her tongue joined the party.

After nearly a minute of tonsil hockey, he heard Chai's voice. "He said never mind to walkie talkie. He's coming back."

Ygritte pulled away from the kiss and stood there as if nothing out of the normal had just happened.

"Alright, you guys are free to go," the officer said when he returned. "Karhold can't sell you much history, but it can sell you peaceful surprises. Enjoy yourselves." His smile cut.

"Thank you, officer. We will try," Ygritte replied, grinning.

When the officer said they were good, a race seemingly started between Pyp, Grenn, and Edd to get back inside the van first. Chai was getting in his seat when the officer gave them one last scare. "Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. Who's beer is that?" he asked pointing at the beer case that was placed on the floor of the second row.

"The guy who went to the hotel," Ygritte said pointing to the hotel.

"What does the owner of the car look like?"

Ygritte gave the police officer Tormund's description and in a flash he was marching into the hotel.

"Fucking pig," Ygritte spat once he was gone. "He was just trying to make a quota. A person isn't even required to carry an ID."

"Yeah, well the man is getting away with a lot of unlawful things, apparently," Jon said.

Ygritte was moving to get inside the van but Jon took her wrist to stop her and closed the door. Her brows knitted together. "What?"

"Why did you kiss me?"

Ygritte's mouth twitched in amusement. "What you didn't like it? Your tongue said otherwise."
He ignored her comment. "You said it would save us. And evidently, it did. Why?"

"That story you concocted tells me you can think fairly quick. You can figure it out."

"I didn't concoct anything. That story is how my parents met," Jon revealed.

Her face split into a wide grin. "Seriously?" Jon nodded. "So you get your punch from your papa, then?"

"Actually, I switched the roles. My mom was the one saved my dad from a beating by punching a drunk guy. But answer my question, why did you kiss me?"

"Because that city kitty suspected something that was true. He knew I was freefolk. That's why he asked all those questions. We free folk have an air about us. It's the freedom, probably. It irritates your people. Real freedom. Not the freedom your politicians want to lecture everyone about."

"Yeah, I got that, I realized he was suspicious of you. What I don't understand is how making out defused the situation."

"Because he didn't believe that we're a couple. And by devouring each other's mouths it made it look real."

Jon was still stumped. "How does that convince him that you're not a wildling? I mean, uh, freefolk. Maybe we can't go out together in public, but I'm pretty sure intimacy exists between our races that the world doesn't see."

Ygritte sighed and shook her head. "To your people, it doesn't matter how much we want to dye our hair or put fake eyes in or follow an anorexic standard of beauty, no matter what kind of car we drive or what kind of fancy clothes we put on, we will never be them. They're always gonna look at us as nothing but a little monkey. Of course we fuck behind closed doors. Everyone fucks everyone. But a privileged guy like you..."

"Privileged? Hah!" Jon interrupted. "You should see the apartment I was raised in."

"It's probably a palace compared to where I grew up. But that's not what I meant. I meant pretty privileged."

Jon wrinkled his brow. "Pretty privileged?"

"Yes, you're the kind that walks into a room and shifts the gaze of the majority without effort. You're of the ones who win class elections, are crowned Prom King and voted Most, and who seem to collect all the trophies and Valentines..."

Jon was outraged. "Okay, okay, I'll admit I did get a fair share of cards and gifts from girls around Valentines and I've earned several trophies in baseball. But I was not prom King and I would never run for any type of election! And-and I'll have you know, I was basically an ugly duckling up until high school, okay. One time in sixth grade a girl said that I was so ugly when I was a baby that they had put tinted windows on my incubator. She said it in front of the whole class, it was very hurtful!"

"My asshole bleeds for you. Maybe you didn't grow up privileged but you are now. You get the
societal advantages that benefit people who are are perceived as pretty or considered beautiful, whether you truly earned them or not. And people who are considered beautiful are more likely to be hired for a job and have higher salaries, they're perceived as smarter, healthier and more competent, and people treat pretty people better.

Jon stifled a groan. "What is your point?"

"My point is someone will all those advantages, someone who is pretty privileged would never kiss a monkey in public. He would never risk it all for a monkey."

At that moment Jon didn't know how to respond to what she said, so instead, he took a breath and looked into something else he was curious about. "Pyp said that you're... he said that you have a girlfriend. Is that not true?"

Ygritte slid open the van door. "Yeah, I do. So? That kiss was to keep me out of jail. She won't mind." She put a foot inside the van, but then craned her neck and leaned over to whisper in Jon's ear. "Besides, we have an open relationship."

A few seconds after they got inside, Tormund finally came back but did not look very pleased. He got into the car, slammed the door, and screamed, "That cop fined me $200 for having an open bottle in the car and picking up hitchhikers!"

"Why'd you take so bloody long? You saw the cop from the inside and decided to save your own ass, didn't you?" Ygritte questioned him.

"No, I had to take a shit!" he shouted back.

She snorted with amusement. "Right... did you at least get the directions?"

Tormund's only answer was a grunting sound that sounded akin to displeasure and a piercing stare from the rearview mirror. He then started the engine and peeled out.

Chapter End Notes

Credits:
1. It's true that most wrestlers didn't pay taxes back in the day. Sorry if I bored you with the long tax conversation, I just wanted to get it out of the way so I don't have to write about it again.
2. The getting lost, pretending to be hitchhikers, $200 ticket story is based on a real story. It happened between Bobby Heenan, Wally Karbo, and Ray Stevens.
"Well, here we are!" Ygritte announced. They all halted beside her. "That's it right there," she pointed ahead.

"Fucking finally," Tormund muttered in response.

"Wait a minute. Just-just wait a second. Is this a joke?" Grenn was in disbelief.

Edd shared the feeling. "No, this isn't... this can't be the place. It can't..."

"It isn't," Jon said as his vision clicked into focus and he registered where their attention was directed towards to. "This is the Sunburst Arena. It was closed like four years ago. It used to be the home base for the Karstarks and the wrestling promoters that came before them. Hundreds of shows were headlined here. Not just wrestling. It also hosted hockey and college basketball games, and concerts. I think the Beatles even played here once. But a larger arena was built across town, one that can seat more people, and now everything is over there."

Ygritte eyed him. "You've been here before?"

Jon shook his head. "No, I never came here. I didn't gain interest in wrestling until last year. Well again, I was a fan when I was a kid. But no, I've only been to the other arena."

"No, I meant here in Karhold."

"Shit."

He gulped against her gaze. "Uh, yeah, a couple of times."

She squinted suspiciously at him. "Did you know where we were when we got lost?"

Jon shook his head again. "No, of course not. I've never been around, you know, this part of town. I only know about this arena because of, you know, other wrestling junkies," he lied.

The truth was Jon knew the city of Karhold fairly well. The owner of one of the barns his mother trains out of comes to Karhold a few times a year to showcase his horses in exhibitions that take place in an indoor riding arena a few blocks from the Sunburst Arena. And since it's his mother's job to coach the gentle giants before an event, she would sometimes bring Jon along to watch, and then take him sightseeing around the city after.

He did, in fact, know where they were before but decided to keep it to himself, as sort of an ace up his sleeve, just in case.
"Well you're right," Ygritte continued. "The arena was mothballed. The city doesn't want to spend any money, not even a dollar, on refurbishing the building."

"Have you boys every smelled moth balls?" Tormund asked Jon and his friends, smiling through his beard.

The four looked at each other, bewildered. "No," Jon responded for all of them. "Is it something you should experience?"

Tormund's smile vanished and he proceeded towards the arena.

"It's an old joke," Ygritte informed them as they caught up to Tormund. "You were supposed to say yes and then he would respond by asking how you got the little legs apart."

Grenn rubbed his temple. "I don't get it."

Pyp chuckled. "Of course you don't."

"So if this place was mothballed then why are we here?" Jon asked.

Ygritte smirked. "I said the arena was mothballed."

She was leading them towards a back door of the building, Jon realized. It was maybe 70 or 80 feet from the park and ride lot where they left the car. It was obvious that some secrecy was being practiced here.

They reached the door and Ygritte knocked... in a rather strange fashion.

She did it rhythmically. As if conveying a song. As if giving a code.

A man's voice came through the door when she stopped. "How many hearts beat when the squid meets the jellyfish?"

"Three. Three hearts beat as one," Ygritte answered.

"How many people?" He followed up.

"Seven. One of which is Tormund Giantsbane."

"You're lying!"

"The girl does not lie. The Speaker to Gods is here!" Tormund declared. "Tell Mance the man who can outdrink, outfight, and has a cock thrice the size of his, is here. Har!"

The door opened a beat later. The man who opened it was plump and had a chunky red face. "Welcome, sir. They call me Toefinger. It's great to have you here. Come on in, Mance will be happy to see you."

"He'll be happy very little and welcome me even less. Har!" Tormund strode through the door.

"Are you gonna let us in, Toefinger?" Ygritte asked, with a twenty dollar bill now in hand being offered.

"Huh? Oh, yes." He took the money and quickly joined them outside, closing the door behind him. Toefinger said, "Let's hurry up," and walked off with Ygritte and Chai beside him.
Wait, what?

After exchanging uncertain looks, Jon and his friends dogged their steps as they went around the corner to the left side of the building, stopped half-way, and turned to face the wall.

Toefinger scanned the surrounding area and then stuck his hand out and appeared to remove a part of the wall. A round portion of it, revealing a keyhole.

He reached into his pocket and brought out a key chain that held at least a dozen keys. He picked one out and looked around for a second time before sticking the key in, turning it, and uncovering an eight-foot-tall entrance to the arena that wasn't there a second before.

"Go on," Ygritte instructed them.

Edd frowned suspiciously. "Why can't we go through the other door?"

"Only a certain group of people can use that door. We're not cool enough," she replied with a dry smile.

"This door closes in five seconds, Ygritte," Toefinger warned.

The redhead rolled her eyes and slid inside with Chai, Jon, Pyp, Edd, and Grenn following her in and Toefinger closing the door.

Ygritte led them through a narrow dimly lit hallway for about a minute, until they were met by a large muscular man who stood guard in front of a stage curtain.

"Hey, Chai, Ygritte, what's new?" The man asked.

"Well, Val finally figured out I've been drinking her bath water. She says it's weird but I'm not gonna stop though, it's just too good," Ygritte jested.

He smiled and shook his head. "Who are your friends? I don't recognize them."

"No? Get a closer look, their pictures are what police use for on air escort busts."

The man snickered and opened the curtain. "Try to stay out of trouble, kid."

"I always try my darnedest," she said, walking past him.

Going through the curtain brought Jon and his friends to the main arena where the seats, the stage, and the ring were. The place looked crowded, mostly males in their same age group mingling freely, half of them standing-- scattered around, and the other half seated.

They scrambled through people until Ygritte guided them to where there were two sides of stairs that took you to the balcony seats.

"Finally, you're here," said a young man who stood between the two staircases wearing all black.

"What's up, Lenyl," said Ygritte. "Guys, this is Lenyl, he's an usher. Did you do what I asked?"

"Yes, and I'm gonna get in a lot of trouble if anyone finds out. No, not if, when, when somebody finds out."

"Nothing bad will happen to you, relax. If Mance or one of his ass kissers ask, just tell them I put a gun to you. And if they fire you, I'll get you a job somewhere else."
"It's not just Mance I'm afraid of, how do you think these people are gonna react when they find out I lied to them. You know how ass over tea kettle they get about seating, especially when they're drunk. You're gonna get me stabbed!"

Ygritte gave a mischievous look. "What excuse did you come up with?"

He let out a deep sigh. "I said some fans pinched loaves all over that balcony after the last show and it still smells like shit."

Ygritte let out a huff of laughter. "If they come at you, just tell them we didn't care about the smell. And if they still bitch, then come get me, I'll take care of them."

"Yeah, yeah, just go before I change my mind."

The group followed Ygritte as she went up the staircase on the right. Jon quickly noted that the balcony was empty, while the balcony to the left was packed, which explained the conversation between Ygritte and Lenyl.

"Hey, wait a minute, where's Chai?" Pyp asked, drawing attention to the foreigner's sudden disappearance.

"He must have found pootang pie in this sausage fest," said Ygritte.

"Why do you want us to be so isolated from everyone else?" Jon asked her as they took their seats in the metal folding chairs strewn in the balcony.

"It's for my own safety. Maybe you guys have a death wish but I would rather stay alive for a little bit longer. Be grateful, I considered having this balcony all to myself."

"Okay, but doesn't this draw MORE attention to ourselves?"

"Everyone's attention will be occupied when the show starts. Don't worry."

"How long until the show starts?" Pyp asked, worried.

Ygritte took Jon's arm and read the time on his wristwatch. "About ten minutes."

Pyp sunk slowly in his chair.

Now with the benefit of an aerial view, the arena appeared to be 70-80% full. If Jon remembered correctly, someone told him that the capacity of this building was 5,000 seats. So there must have been at least 3,500 people.

Jon also noticed how different the setting was compared to other wrestling venues he's been at. Words from his former mentor, Rodrik Cassel, came to mind.

'It's hard to explain but when you go to wrestling at other territories, everything seems different. It isn't the same kind of wrestling show. The ring looks different, the arena looks different, the talent is different, the ring announcer is different, the style of wrestling in the ring is kinda different. And you can do this in twenty other places around the country.'

Although things seemed a bit disorderly at the moment, with some fans standing around randomly, overall this place appeared more professional than any of the buildings he's worked at for Mormont. Their programs looked primitive compared to this.

That feeling completely changed when the show actually started, however. To call this wrestling
style gritty would be an understatement. It was brutal as hell. There was next to no rules, it seemed, and Jon wondered if the wrestlers gave a fuck about what pain they endured.

There was one match where they threw broken glass in the ring and guys were being slammed into it. "I told you, Jon, mud show wrestling," Grenn said when it happened.

As stupid as he considered this reckless self-abuse to be, the wrestlers were far from mediocre. As amateur athletes, none of them were really standouts, but they were solid workers who were fundamentally sound and had good timing in the ring. Some of them also had a freaky ability to fall on hard surfaces and not kill themselves.

And the aggressive presentation evidently meant something to these fans. Or why else would the three thousand of them be so engaged and rowdy as they were. There must have been history encoded in the violence.

There was definitely history in the main event match that was fought between Alfyn Crowkiller, a veteran badass babyface, and a heat magnet named Jax, who portrayed a turncoat wildling and Westerosi sympathizer.

To up the ante, the match was held in a ten-foot high cage.

Now Jon has seen some pretty bloody, nasty, and hard to watch wrestling matches before. In person and on television. But this match could make a person gag or feel physically ill.

The ring turned into what looked like a crime scene, and at one point he thought the two guys were gonna bleed out.

It looked like Alfyn was building up to score the win when three men came running from the stage and began climbing up the cage.

"Who are those guys?" Grenn asked. He now sounded enthusiastic.

"They're uh... turncoats just like Jax," Ygritte replied. She sounded pretty calm.

Was she smart to the business? Jon wondered.

The three men entered the cage and started pounding on Alfyn. It was a hot deal, as they say in the business, and the crowd was not happy. They looked ready to set shit on fire.

The match was no disqualification but after being smacked around for trying to stop the assault, the referee decided to declare it a draw. A smart move by the booker as his ref was probably gonna be ripped to shreds if he gave Jax the pin.

Jon was gonna suggest they head for the exit when a voice made itself heard on the microphone. "Listen up you bums!" Jax said. "Listen you little basset hound lookin', crankled up donut wrapper lickin', cheese ball suckin', fart pebble gurglin' monkeys. Nothing brings us greater joy than beating down a septic tank bread savage like Alfyn Crowkiller."

A loud chorus of boos ensued.

Jax continued. "But tonight this wasn't for our enjoyment. No, this was for our special guests. This was for a couple of our buddies who came to the show tonight and were promised a bloody mask for the Crowkiller. This was for you, boys." He said extending his finger to the audience.

It sort of looked like he was pointing in their direction at the balcony.
"For Jon Snow and the other Mormont boys! Haha!"

Jon felt a cold hand on his heart.

"Oh, fuck," he said.

"Oh, shit," Ygritte said.

"Seven bloody buggering hells," Edd said.

"Fuck me," Pyp said.

And Grenn said, "The other Mormont boys? That's all I am? For fuck's sake, I've been wrestling for the Old Bear longer than Jon has."

Jon glared at Ygritte. "It was you, you told them. You set us up!"

She chuckled, humorless. "Oh yeah, I planned to stand right next to you when 3,000 pissed off wrestling fans found out you work for the enemy!"

"Then how do they know? How do they know who we are?"

Ygritte was pensive for a second. "Tormund. It had to be Tormund, that motherfucker!"

"You told him who I was?"

"No, I didn't tell anyone. I don't know how he knew."

Jon's mind was in a fumbling panic, trying to figure out the correct course of action, coming up blank every time he thought of a scenario to get out of this.

He did know that whatever they were gonna decide to do had to be done in two shakes of a lamb's tail. Six thousand eyeballs were shooting daggers at them, and what felt like a hundred hands were tossing anything they could in their vicinity--popcorn, drink cups, toilet paper, etc.

They were crouched down behind the solid front wall of the balcony to avoid being hit when Ygritte quickly stood up and folded up one of the metal chairs and then got on her knees beside them again. "Come on, grab a chair. We're fighting our way out of here."

Edd's lips parted in surprise. "You want to leave? Are you mad? We can't escape this mob, they'll rip us apart. No, we need to stay here. This is a siege, and this balcony is our castle. It protects us. We need to stage a standoff until help comes."

"Standoff? Help?" Ygritte snorted. "I wouldn't count on anyone coming to help us if I were you. And this 'castle' doesn't have any fortification, how are you gonna fight them off?"

"We're trained wrestlers, we have a higher pain tolerance. Their hardest punch is a papercut for us," Edd said, trying to sound confident.

"Then it's death by a thousand papercuts for you. You all can stay in this castle if you want, I'm out." Ygritte clutched the folded up chair to her side and began crawling to get to the staircase.

It took long enough but Jon was finally able to collect himself and took action.

He reached for a chair, folded it up, and started crawling after Ygritte.
Edd seized him by the wrist. "Jon, what are you doing?"

"She's right, we need to make a break for it."

"Don't let that girl stupify you, man. We need to hold the fort."

"Edd, this isn't a fucking action movie where the enemies only attack one at a time. We need to use all our energy in trying to escape." Jon shook off Edd's hand and continued his crawl.

"I knew you weren't completely dumb," Ygritte commented when he reached her by the staircase where she tried to peek below. "I still hope you're more brawn than brains, though. If you're just a discount Ned Stark, we're fucked."

"Don't worry, I'm a triple threat," Pyp said as he came up behind Jon. "Brains, brawn, and blazing."

Jon turned and found not just Pyp behind him, but also Grenn and Edd.

"You abandoning the castle?" Ygritte asked Edd teasingly.

He frowned irritably. "I'm starving. They say sleep stimulates the appetite, so death doesn't sound that terrible right now."

"Let me go, let me go!" a man's voice shouted.

They peered down and saw someone go flying down the stairs. A second later a figure could be seen walking up the stairs, but the face was hard to make out.

The five shared a look before rising to their feet and holding their chairs in a defensive stance. They were prepared to strike but froze when the person reached the balcony.

It was a young woman.

Ygritte sagged with relief. "Squirrel!"

The young woman who was apparently named Squirrel sighed. "You're just never gonna quit starting trouble are you, Ygritte?"

Ygritte gave her a crooked smile. "This isn't entirely my fault. It all could've been avoided if that bastard Tormund hadn't opened his big mouth."

A puzzled expression pulled at Squirrel's brows. "Tormund? No, I doubt that. He's the one that got me, and Holly and Rowan and the other girls to come out with him to help you. He's with them right now fighting people off from coming to kill you guys."

"If not him then who? Who told Jax?"

"You can put your detective hat on later. Right now we need to move," Squirrel said. She then gave Jon and his friends a measuring look. "You boys ever been in a riot?"

"Not on this side," replied Edd.

"We'll try to hold them off by forming a circle around you as you move, but if they break us, you guys need to run as fast as your little legs can carry you, using these chairs to fight them off. Hopefully then we'll be able to empty out this building. Got it?"

They nodded in understanding and heaved a breath for courage before following Squirrel down the
stairs.

Below the scene was just as she had described it, Tormund and about ten women were pushing and shoving people away from the staircases. It was only then that Jon really grasped that their lives were in doubt.

No words needed to be said before they carried out the plan that Squirrel had drawn up. Ten people formed a circle around him, Edd, Pyp, Grenn, and Ygritte, and helped them cut through the rip-roaring crowd towards the exit. It didn't look like everyone was actually that invested in seeing them dead, but that did nothing to disabuse their fear.

Thankfully, they were able to escape the arena relatively untouched and ran to the park and ride lot to get inside the car and haul ass.

Maybe forty or forty-five minutes out of Karhold they felt comfortable enough to stop at a service station to get gas. There was also like a Subway inside of it so they decided to all go in to get sandwiches.

Edd was whinging about what happened, blaming Jon and calling him an idiot, when a small group of young men approached them. "Hey, are you Jon Snow?" one of them asked.

Jon looked them up and down.

They looked to be around his age but were not as short, and they wore inside-out sheepskin coats. The sign of a proud wildling.

Hmm... Let's see, they were just in a riot where several hundred wildlings wanted to either punch his mouth in or stab him in the bladder and watch him die in piss. And now forty minutes later a couple of wildlings are walking up to him asking if he's that person.

*What should he say?*

Jon cleared his throat. "Nah, man, I'm the Master of Sex." And then he walked off.

Chapter End Notes

Credits:
1. This little adventure was inspired by Fanweek 1995 in Louisville where there was a United States Wrestling Association vs Smoky Mountain Wrestling show in which fans nearly caused a riot. Credit to Brian Last for the story.

Next Chapter: Arya I
Arya finally tells someone her secret.

This chapter is really dialogue driven. The next Arya chapter will go a little more inside her head.

Arya's POV is a different timeline from the others. Here it's about 1985. I haven't really emphasized it, but most of the POV's are in different timelines. The timeline of events for the whole story is sometimes different from real history.

"Robb, you're such a nice, level headed, pleasant, reasonable fella, so I know you'll understand," Arya started, hoping to sound convincing. "I've thought this over long enough, and I've really thought it through okay so please don't mimic dad by telling me that I should think it through, cuz I have. This isn't a snap judgment, I've been sitting on this for so damn long I think I'm getting ass amnesia, and I want my ass to wake up, Robb, I really want my ass to wake up. My ass feels like..."

"Arya," Robb cringed. "For Gods sake just spit out."

Arya heaved a breath for courage.

Here we go.

"I've decided that I want to be a wrestler."

Robb was stunned for a moment, completely speechless, and then his face fell in dismay. "Oh, Gods..." He hung his head and covered his entire face with his hands for a long moment.

"Robb?"

He finally dropped his hands and raised his head. "This is a joke, right? Please tell me this is a bad joke, please, please say it is."

"Would I wake you up in the middle of the night to joke about something this serious?"

"Yes!"

Fair enough.

"I'm not joking. I really seriously want to be a wrestler."

Rob fell back in his bed and stared at the ceiling. Again with disregard for time.
"Robb?"

Nothing.

"Robb!"

He sat up again. "Mom is gonna kill dad, you do realize that, don't you? When I told her I wanted to be a wrestler she had tears stinging her eyes, it killed her. With Bran she's in denial, she thinks something will happen in the next two years that will change his mind. But with you...she's gonna bring the hammer of the Gods down on dad."

"You're not helping, Robb."

"How long? For how long have you been wanting to wrestle?"

She shrugged. "Since... forever. I mean you remember when I was six and I dropkicked Bran in the middle of the living room. Wrestling is all I know, I've been surrounded by it my entire life--the people going in and out of our house most of the time are wrestlers, I eat breakfast and dinner on the same table as wrestlers, we have birthday parties and holiday parties that are attended by wrestlers. Greatjon Umber taught me how to ride a bike, for crying out loud. Is it really that surprising that I want to be a wrestler?"

Robb shook his head and reflected for a moment. "What about...what about roller derby? No, Roller Games, that's what they called it. You loved that shit, you once said you wanted to do it when you grew up, I remember. I remember you had this big poster of Raquel Welch in your room."

"It was Joan Weston. You had a poster in your room of Raquel Welch in the movie Bitterbridge City Bomber, which was about Roller Games."

"Oh, yeah..." Robb's lips pulled up in a sly grin. "Man... Raquel Welch sparked my sexual awakening."

Arya frowned. "Robb..."

"Sorry. But yeah, uh... Roller Games. It's a sister of professional wrestling, you know. It's basically uh wrestling but on skates. Wasn't there this mean angry heel manager who always lost her mind and like wanted to grab the evil referee and throw him through the penalty box? Crap, what was her name?"

"Georgia Hase?"

"Georgia Hase! I remember you used to imitate her all the time when you were little. Why not give Roller Games a try? An elbow to the face is just as good as a dropkick."

"Roller Games is dead--it's comatose. The gas crisis in the 70s almost beat it senseless. I think they still have shows but they don't tour anymore. The girls are not on the bank track, they're not in a big arena, they're in rec centers making popcorn and hot dogs. And anyway, Roller Games was just a phase, I never had any real serious, you know, fervor or interest in it."

Robb let out a breathy laugh. "And what you think the girls in wrestling are on the bank track? Women are not a top feature attraction in wrestling, Arya. Maybe on the undercard or something to spruce up a holiday show or whatever, just the traveling thing, you know. But they're not a main event attraction that draws serious money and is treated as big news like the Nymeria Sar era in the 50s and all those top girls that worked with her. They might sell a few tickets today but it's just
something to vary up the cards."

"Well, maybe if another Nymeria Sar comes along, things would change," Arya replied.

A smile broke around his face. "Arya, I know firsthand that your punch has plenty of meat and potatoes behind it, but that doesn't mean you can be Nymeria Sar."

"She wrestled men. I can wrestle men," she argued.

"Yeah, but she didn't get in the ring with trained male wrestlers. She could beat men somewhere around her size. Guys that were barely five feet tall. Basically midgets. And honestly, that's how everybody would look at you today--the fans, the promoters, the boys. Women have the same stature in the business right now as midgets. And no territory keeps girls or midgets, they're only special attractions. They go two weeks in this territory and a week in this territory, or whatever. You know what I'm saying?"

"You don't think dad would give me a shot? A chance to get a foothold and make a difference. To present women's wrestling in a more serious and compelling way? I mean I can work hard, I can learn all of his moves just like you and be transgressive."

Robb sighed deeply. "First off, just because your his daughter doesn't mean dad is gonna entertain your whim and risk jackknifing the family business."

Arya blinked. "Whim?"

Robb ignored her. "Second, it's not all about work rate, you can't build around work rate. It's not just about executing a series of moves at a high level. Sure it's gotta be athletic, but it's gotta be with wrestlers you can buy in those spots and have star power and charisma that you wanna see. A guy that you've never heard of can go out to the ring and do everything Oberyn Martell does in his match--exactly the same and maybe even better, and the fans won't give a shit. But they give a shit when its Martell. You remember that show..."

"Robb, are you really gonna give me a wrestling lecture at 1 o'clock in the morning?" She cut him off.

"Hey, you're the one who woke me up. And if you were serious about this, if your little starry eyes were really in love with the profession, you would want to learn about the intricacies of the sport from a wrestling savant like myself. I'm dropping knowledge on you right now."

Arya tsked at him. "You're trying to get me to change my mind."

"Maybe that too, but none of what I said is a lie. If you want smoke to be blown up your ass go wake up Zig Ziglar. I just don't want my little sister to get her hopes up, that's all."

"I appreciate it, but I've been forcing Bran to tell me everything you and dad tell him about wrestling for years, so it's really not necessary."

"Oh yeah... so you understand why it wouldn't be smart for dad to put you over like the guys then?"

"I understand you're telling me that our father is either a coward or he's sexist."

"Whoa, relax. Don't be disrespectful. Dad isn't some kind of patriarchal oppressor. The whole thing is uh... you know, a conventional thing. A social thing. There isn't like a sexist conspiracy in the wrestling business driving the discrepancy between men and women, females just aren't a big deal in people's eyes when it comes to sports."
Arya gave her brother an incredulous look. "I'm sorry?"

"Tell me, have you ever heard of a women's league for hockey or basketball or baseball or football? I sure haven't. I haven't seen it on tv, at least. And if it's not on tv than it doesn't have much in terms of widespread appeal. Or else the television stations would jump on it to pump up their revenue."

"How do you know it's not on television somewhere in Dorne or the Reach? Maybe it's not on tv in the North where men think some supreme being just waved his hands and there was a guy and then he said 'Oh wait a minute, we need another one but a little different so I'm just gonna pluck a rib out of this guy's stomach and I'm gonna create another human being but with different genitalia.' Maybe it's not on tv in a place where men think their smarter than every scientist of the past several hundred years, but it could be somewhere else in Westeros." Arya retorted, her voice thick with anger.

"Name a sport where women command fame and popularity that equals men's sporting counterparts."

She threw him a hard look. "There's... gymnastics. Last summer Mary Lou Retton was being talked about just as much as Carl Lewis and Edwin Moses."

"That's the Olympics, people only care because of the whole national pride thing. They don't care about Olympic sports after the Olympics are over."

Arya's nostrils flared. "So women should be in the kitchen rattling the pots and pans around, is what you saying. You don't think there should be change? Women should just accept a small role in wrestling?"

"How could things be changed exactly? I'm not asking why I'm seriously asking how."

"Dad is the biggest promoter in the North, he exerts influence in this business. If he takes women's wrestling seriously and he tells the other Northern promoters to take it seriously, then the fans will begin to take it seriously. Maybe not right away, but you gotta start somewhere, right? Dad could start a revolution!"

"I think he would need to start a psychological revolution for that," Robb said with a slight laugh. "And as I tried to explain, it's not just about the in-ring action, a box office wrestler needs to have a certain "It" factor that you just don't see in any of the girls in the business today. The job of a promoter is to sell the most tickets. If women's wrestling sells tickets they promote it, if it doesn't, they won't promote it."

"Maybe I have this "It" factor."

"Maybe," Robb said, his eyes bright with amusement. "You kind of have a spirit and character that I think would endear you to people. At the same time you can be as annoying as a gnat, so you'd be easy to hate. Which means you could alternate between babyface and a heel. But..."

"But what?"

Robb took a deep intake of breath. "I'm not trying to shatter your dreams, but I think a promoter would have reason to believe that you'd have durability issues."

"And why the hell would they think that?" Arya asked him pointedly.

"Well, don't get me wrong, personally I think you're a petite powerhouse, but I mean, come on, you
don't have enough fat on you to be doing the things wrestlers are supposed to do on a daily basis. You were born with glass bones and paper skin."

Anger flashed in her eyes. "Oh, yes, every morning I break my legs and every afternoon I break my arms. And at night, I lie awake in agony until my heart attacks put me to sleep," she said sarcastically. "I'm not a weakling, Robb! I can start concentrating on my body and get in really good shape. And I can gain muscle mass, I read how in a magazine, I just need to eat for muscle and figure out a workout plan."

"I don't think it would make much of a difference. Women's bodies are not built to handle the physicality that happens in a wrestling ring. They don't have a man's biology, anatomy... one of those college subjects. And I'm not being misogynist, I mean there are certain things women can do but men can't do in the same genre."

"Robb shut the..." She bit her tongue. "I swear you can be such a know it all sometimes! It's like you have the need to be at the head of the pack and think your way is the way to do it."

"Hey look, if you don't want to be enlightened, then what is it exactly that you want from me?"

"I need your help with mom and dad."

"How so?"

Arya exhaled a heavy sigh. "Mom keeps bugging me about college applications and the SAT and all this other stuff and it's very stressful. And you know how she is if I keep avoiding the conversation she's gonna lock us together in some room until I spill my guts."

"Well you're gonna have to tell her and dad sooner or later, anyway." A note of doubt crept into Robb's voice. "Right?"

"I don't know, it's just like you said, mom is gonna freak out. She's gonna disown me. She'll hate dad. I mean what if she leaves him and takes Bran and Rickon with her. Our family would be torn apart and it would be all my fault."

"Mom wouldn't do that... well, probably not. Is college completely out of the equation?"

"Yes," Arya said without hesitation.

"Oh, come on, the college experience can be filled with opportunities for more exploration."

Arya frowned irritably. "How would you know you didn't go to college."

"I heard it in a commercial," Robb shrugged. "You're only seventeen, Arya, you shouldn't rush. Hey, here's an idea, why not join Sansa in Highgarden? Mom would love that."

"Robb, you once said that college wasn't for everybody. Well college isn't for me. So just drop it, please."

"Okay If you could not remind mom and dad that i said that when they bring you in for questioning, I would appreciate it. But I didn't mean Highgarden University, I meant just the city, you know where Sans has an apartment."

_He can't be serious._

"You can't be serious."
"It's like you said, wrestling is all you know, if you get out of this house, far away from this city for like a year after you graduate, you can know other things. You can meet people who don't know your Ned Stark's daughter and won't always bring up wrestling. If after finding out what it's like to not have wrestling in your life, you still want to do it, then I'll train you myself, how about that?"

"Wait, are you saying you're not willing to train me anyway?"

"Hell no, mom would kill me. Don't expect dad to volunteer either. Get ready cuz mom is gonna dedicate all her time and energy, every minute, every second of the day to squashing your dream."

"What a lovely mother I have."

"She would just be trying to protect you. Professional wrestling is brutal, not just physically, but mentally too. It's a ridiculously stressful and pressure-filled business. And there's a lot of bullshit that happens behind the scenes. It's madness. That's why I came back home for the weekend, to escape the madness. And you decide to put this shit on me..."

Arya snorted. "Madness would be me living with Sansa. We butted heads in this big ass house where we tried to stay out of each other’s way and you think we could share smaller living quarters?"

"Well if your mind is really set then there's nothing I can say to help you. You're just gonna have to bite the bullet. Because there is no easy way to tell mom and dad this. None."

"Wow, you suck at giving advice."

Her brother smiled. "Here's a good one..." He paused a moment. "You should really think this through," he said in their father's voice.

Arya rolled her eyes and leaped up from the bed to scurry off while Robb chuckled.

"Hey, Arya," he called after her as she pulled open the door. She looked back and saw his face now serious. "I hope you prove me wrong and make me eat a bag of shit."

Arya half-smiled. "You're gonna gargle it."

Chapter End Notes

It was fun writing this considering how a women's match was the main event last weekend at Wrestlemania, which is like the Superbowl of wrestling. And since women's wrestling is the best thing the WWE and other promotions have going right now.

1. Arya will be slightly based on Wendi Richter, as well as other female wrestlers.
2. Roller Games was a real thing, and it really was like a sister of pro wrestling. Bitterbridge City Bomber = Kansas City Bomber.

The next chapter will be either Jon or Sam. Not sure yet which I should write first?
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!