A Loyal Subject

by WinterRose527

Summary

This is in the same universe as the original work by the same title "A Loyal Subject", which can be found here: https://winterrose527.tumblr.com/post/175389068350/a-loyal-subject

I decided to make it into a multi-chapter fic, tracing back to when Robb and Myrcella re-meet as a betrothed couple. Unlike many of my other fics, it is not love at first sight.

As I'm sure people will be curious, these are the bullet point events that lead them to this.

- The events of the first book/season are pretty much the same
- Robb never marries Jeyne Westerling/Talisa Maegor, and he does not betray Walder Frey
- Catelyn does free Jaime Lannister and because of this, Robb leaves her 'imprisoned' at a castle belonging to one of the Tully's bannermen, while he is in battle, the Lannister's take a move from his playbook and storm the castle, killing his mother.
- Joffrey was goaded (by Sansa because YAS GIRL) into entering a battle. Robb killed him himself (nobody cried except Cersei) after the death of his mother
- Sansa is married and will not feature prominently in this story, but she is happy and cared for

Everything else will be divulged in time... I hope you enjoy.
The Princess and the King

Myrcella stood on the balcony of her chambers watching the retinue approach. She had overheard that it wasn’t in fact the entire Northern army, which was resting at Riverrun, but it looked impressive enough to her as it’s train spanned as far as the eye could see.

_My husband marches amongst them._

“How many arrive in King’s Landing today, Lord Arys?,” she asked her sworn shield.

“A thousand men, Princess, and a small collection of lords and ladies from the North and the Riverlands,” he answered her.

“Are they still lords and ladies?,” she asked him curiously.

“Of course, Princess, those titles were given in perpetuity, some as ancient as the houses that carry them,” he said proudly, as though reciting for his Maester.

He was a learned young man of twenty five years, who had perhaps missed his calling towards the Citadel. Bravery and a good family name had robbed that destiny from him, and now he spent his days keeping her safe.

“But they were given by the Crown, were they not?,” she asked him, cocking her head to the side, “The southern Crown. If they have declared independence from that Crown, can they still stake claim to them?”

He smiled at her but said simply, “I believe the Northern King honours them.”

_So he honours some things._

She nodded at the practicality of it and said, “Yes I suppose it would not do to have men declare and fight for you only to deny them their birthright.”
She looked back out over the expanse of Northern soldiers. She knew that there were more men amongst them, from the Riverlands even some from the Stormlands. Soldiers who had left their homes to fight for one Baratheon brother or another, only to lose the men they named king.

They, from this vantage point, did not seem as regimented as the Lannister army. They did not have uniforms, nor did they seem to march in any express order. Yet there was a cohesiveness to them, born, she supposed, from a common purpose.

And regimented or no, they had proved far deadlier than the Lannister army, which was why they now entered her city, the capital of the four kingdoms that remained loyal to the crown, without any opposition in their way.

“Princess are you not ready?,” her Septa cried as she entered her room, “The king will expect to see you in the throne room.”

“Which one?,” she asked.

“Both of them, now hurry or your mother will have my head above the city’s gates!”

*You’d be in good company.*

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He should have been relieved to get out of the relentless Southern sun. He and his men were drenched through their clothes, which were road weary to begin with, but the throne room of the Red Keep was not designed to inspire comfort.

*This is where Father was betrayed.*

He found himself wishing he had insisted on a larger retinue, but as it stood, only fifty men entered the throne room with him, the others stationed outside the castle's gates. He at least had Grey Wind by his side. He would not make that mistake again.

"You stand before Tommen Baratheon, first of his name, King of the Andals and the First Men,"
Lord of the...four kingdoms Protector of the Realm," a servant shouted, his voice reverberating off of the stone walls.

A few of his men had tittered at the hesitation at four kingdoms. He wouldn't have been surprised if even days before he had still been named Lord of the Seven Kingdoms, but he could not be so named now, as he sat before the King of the North and the Trident. To claim himself as such would have been a declaration of war.

He nodded at Martin Karstark who cleared his voice and said, "Robb Stark, first of his name, King of the North and the Trident."

"Brother," the boy king said as he stood. The lioness looked like she wanted to tuck him back beneath her skirts but she settled for a mammoth of a guard to follow him as he walked down the steps. "Welcome to King's Landing, Your Grace, while you are in my capital you have my protection and I hope when you leave, I will have your friendship."

It was obvious he had been rehearsing that speech, pretending at an easy grace that he did not possess naturally. His words were kind though and so was the little boy Robb remembered, the little boy this king had once been. Grey Wind did not startle at his side, even though the little boy was no longer, which reassured Robb some.

*Though war and a crown have robbed men of kindness before.*

He couldn't call him brother, not when it was Tommen's actual brother who had ordered his father's death, who had beaten his sister, not when he was the nephew of the man who had crippled Robb's own brother.

Still, they had set down their swords for a reason. Now was the time for the exaggerations of diplomacy.

"That is my dearest hope, your grace, and my profound purpose for being here, I thank you for your welcome," he said with a bow of his head.

Tommen smiled, looking relieved but he didn’t seem to know how best to proceed. Robb offered him his arm and the young king looked down at it in confusion, then back up at him for guidance.
He's young, if we can rid him of his mother's influence he may be an ally yet.

Robb nodded slightly at him, looking down at Tommen's own arm that rested at his side. It was subtle so that no one amassed would notice, it would not do well to embarrass him now. Tommen offered his arm as well and Robb wrapped his hand around his forearm first, encouraging Tommen to do the same.

Tommen let out an excited little sigh, and for a moment he was the little boy who sparred with Bran in the tiltyard with wooden swords. For a moment he wasn't a Lannister king but a Baratheon prince.

The crowd clapped quietly, and he knew they were all wondering how long the peace would last. If it would last long enough to get through winter, to rebuild their armies and their castles. Long enough to reestablish law and order.

There was a commotion at the back of the throne room and he turned to his right to see lords and ladies dropping into bows and curtsies.

"Sister," Tommen said, and if it hadn't been evident that Tommen was playing at comfort with him already, it would have been now as Robb heard what it really sounded like. He gave the newcomer a rueful smile and said, "You're late."

"My deepest apologies, your grace," the girl said and dropped down into an elegant and reverent curtsy.

Tommen took her hand in his and made her stand up. He didn't let her go though and threaded her arm through his. Have they passed their perversions onto their children? he wondered.

The King and Princess could be twins just like their parents. Myrcella, though a head shorter, had a more commanding presence than her younger brother, but they shared their golden hair and green eyes, their aristocratic symmetrical faces and slender forms. He tried to find traces of the young girl that he’d escorted into the feast at Winterfell, but she looked far more like her mother than she had then.

"Save your apologies for your betrothed," Tommen teased, and she looked at him for the first time.

If her brother had seemed overeager, excited, she was staid and cool. Her green eyes appraised him
as though she found him wanting, but her courtesies took control and she fell once again into a deep curtsy, bowing her head.

"Rise Princess," he said.

He didn't hold his hand out for her, which Sansa would have told him was his second mistake. The first of course was not bowing to her first. He was, after all, in her capital city.

She rose as though she had not expected him to offer his hand anyway and settled herself back with her brother, looping her arm once again through his and robbing him of the chance to kiss the back of her hand.

_She will prove me the Northern Barbarian they all believe me to be_, he thought in annoyance, though truly, he should not have hesitated.

"Welcome to King's Landing, Your Grace," she said, with all of the outward courtesy but none of the inner warmth of her brother.

"Thank you. You are as fair as your capital, Princess," he said.

The Lannisters were vain, prideful creatures. He thought to compliment her and her city all at once.

"Thank you, Your Grace. I'm sure you meant that as a compliment so I will take it as such."

"O-of course I did...," he said.

He thought back to the ride through the city. It had been filled with the unwashed masses, starving and sullen. It smelled like hot death and not even Winterfell's sewers smelled as foul as the streets.

He realised his error. Not in what he'd said exactly, but in assuming she would not know the truth of it. This Lannister Princess was the spitting image of her mother, but as she appraised him with her cool green eyes, he wondered if she did not share more with her grandfather.
He had underestimated a Lannister once before and his mother had lost her life for it. He would not make that mistake again.
“What do you think of him?,” her mother asked as her handmaid dabbed lavender oil behind her ears.

Myrcella rubbed her wrists together, spreading the droplet that had been placed there.

“He’s grown,” she said simply.

The Robb Stark she’d remembered had been a hulking youth to be sure, but he had been a bit like a new fawn. She remembered him practicing in the tiltyard with his brother, the broody one with dark brown curls, the way they both always seemed surprise when they made contact with the other. He had been quick to laugh, she remembered, though admittedly less so as her family’s visit went on.

There was nothing delicate in the Northern King now though. He was battle hardened and had the wary mind to match after one too many betrayals.

She’d realised it immediately, the way his cool blue eyes seemed to appraise her. That gaze made her feel like a child, and worse yet, a disappointing one, which made her blood boil. She was a princess of the Iron Throne, its only princess, and she was not such a fool as to not realise that she was a beauty. She had her mother’s look, everyone said so, and yet he, the Northern King had looked at her like she was a mere problem he must overcome.

“He’s a barbarian,” her mother raged, though Myrcella hadn’t asked. “There’s still time, sweetling, I’ll speak to your grandfather. We can still fix this. We’ll get that whore Sansa back here for Tommen if we have to.”

Myrcella clucked her tongue but said nothing. Sansa Stark was many things but a whore was not one of them. She and Tommen would be a fine match, her young brother could learn a thing or two from her natural courtesies. She was smarter than she let on, of that Myrcella had always been sure, and kind though she had no reason to be. Her little brother could have done much worse than the Northern beauty as his bride.

“She’s married, Mother,” Myrcella reminded her, “I hear she is large with child.”

“We were fools to let her go,” her mother said for the thousandth time. “Joffrey never would have
agreed to it.”

No, but then again, Joffrey liked to beat her publicly. He liked to threaten her at knifepoint with rape. Perhaps he was not the beacon of kingly reason you promote him to be.

“Perhaps,” she said diplomatically, “But nevertheless, Sansa Stark can no more be Tommen’s bride than I can get out of being Robb Stark’s. You should resign yourself to it.”

“As you have?,” her mother asked her, her sharp green eyes narrowing at her, “You are not taken by him, are you? I saw the way the other ladies of the court rubbed their legs together when they saw those blue eyes of his.”

“I am not a lady,” Myrcella pointed out proudly, “I am a princess and I will not be taken in by anyone.”

Let alone someone who finds me to be a disappointment.

“And yet you do not fight this match,” her mother said.

Her mother had been the same age as her when she married a warrior King when she’d thought to marry a prince with a love for music. Both Rhaegar and Trystane were dead now, and dreams of happy marriages along with them, but daughters married where they were told.

“You are not the only girl who listened to Grandfather’s lectures when they were meant for her brothers,” Myrcella said standing. She stepped towards the looking glass and straightened the hem of her silken gown. It was a deep burgundy with gold stitching at the belt, and floated over her like a waterfall. “I will marry Robb Stark whether I am resigned to it or not, so I see no point in granting him the satisfaction of seeing me quiver. He will not find me pale with fear, I will not appear before him kicking and screaming, I will not be daunted by him.”

“Very good, sweetling,” her mother said and pressed a solemn kiss to the back of her head. For all her mother’s faults, and they were numerous, there had never been a day that she did not feel her love. “Show him what it is to wed a lion.”

They could be sisters even now. Her mother’s smooth face though had taken on a hardened edge over the years though, while Myrcella’s remained soft and hopeful, in spite of the fate before her.
She turned towards her mother who fixed one of the pins in her hair.

“He will know soon enough,” she said as though it didn’t much matter and then smiled impishly, “But first, wine?”

“Well,” her mother nodded, allowing Myrcella to take her hands in hers.

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He wondered how many people in King’s Landing went hungry while the lords and ladies of the Red Keep gorged themselves on delicacies they did not need and dish after dish that they could not possibly enjoy.

He felt out of place, even in his new clothes that were more suited to the Southern climate. He wore the dark colors of his house though still and he stood out amongst the perfumed and coiffed southern lords in their light silks adorned with jewels.

“My sister looks beautiful this evening, does she not?,” Tommen asked him.

They were sitting on the dais side by side, equals, and Tommen popped a grape in his mouth, chewing happily.

Robb followed his gaze to where the Princess Myrcella was standing with a few southern ladies. Her dress was simpler than some of the others, but clearly better made, the fabric superior, the cut more flattering. The other ladies may use their fathers’ wealth to try and outshine her, but she was not a lady, she was a princess, and there was not sapphire or diamond in the world that could compete with the regality in her every gesture.

“She does, Your Grace,” he nodded, he would be a fool to deny it. “Though I suppose there are not many nights when that could not be said of her.”

Tommen chuckled and nodded, “You’re right of course. Myrcella! Oh Princesss.”
“I do not wish to disturb her,” Robb said, adding silently or talk to her.

“You’re not, I am,” Tommen said impishly and Robb couldn’t help but chuckle.

He may have come to power during war but Tommen was still a green boy of peace. He was one who could still tease his sister, who did not have to fight a war to save her. A summer child, his mother would have called him. If she could still draw breath enough to speak he suddenly thought bitterly, remembering where he was. His smile had died by the time Myrcella stood in front of him, and he knew those appraising green eyes did not fail to note it.

Tommen either had or didn’t care and he clapped his hands for music. Robb knew that he would never recover from his failure of courtesy in the throne room if he did not take that as a cue to ask her to dance.

“Will you do me the honor, Princess?,” he asked.

“The pleasure is mine, Your Grace,” she said, placing her hand lightly in his.

He lead her out into the center of the room. No other couples joined them, they would not until their king willed it and Robb did not have to look at Tommen to know that he had know intention of doing so.

He bowed to her low, for the sake of the watchful eyes upon them. She curtsied even lower, having grown used to the eyes long before.

They began to move, and he did not fail to notice that her fingers hardly touched his as they danced palm to palm. Still though, he followed the steps to the letter as did she, and he was not deterred enough by her reservedness not to spin her when the dance called for it.

“You dance well, Princess,” he told her.

Courtesy demanded it, but that did not make it untrue. She was easy to lead and her body seemed disciplined, every movement was measured, but no less elegant for it.
“Thank you, Your Grace. Do you dance much in the North?,” she asked conversationally.

Had anyone overheard they would have thought she only sought to learn more about him, but he knew what she really meant. He knew that to her he was clumsy and boorish but she would never say it out loud. He wished that she would so that he’d have an excuse to drop the veil of courtesy that surrounded them.

“I have not had much cause to dance these past years, Princess,” he noted.

She bowed her head humbly, “Of course, Your Grace. War is no time for dancing.”

“Your lot managed it,” he said, thinking of how many feasts they must have had exactly like that while he and his men shivered with hunger in their bellies for months at a time.

If he had thought to fluster her, he would have been sorely disappointed.

“We manage with what we are given, Your Grace,” she said simply. “If there is music, we dance, if there is wine, we drink .”

“And if there is war?,” he challenged.

He wanted her to accuse him of starting the whole thing by marching South. He yearned for her to deny the treachery that had befallen his father, and his little brother before him. He wanted her to deny that her grandfather had plotted his mother’s death and that her brother had tortured his sister. He wanted her to tell him that her mother had not murdered his sister’s wolf and that no sellsword had been sent to finish off his brother. He wanted her to deny it, all of it, any of it, even as he knew she was too clever to do so.

“Then we fight,” she said simply instead, with all of her grandfather’s pragmatism, as though it were obvious. She fixed a placid smile on her face though and said, with a delicate tilt of her head, as though she was just a young girl dancing in the arms of her betrothed, “But I for one have always preferred melodies to battle cries.”

She was infuriating with her elegant body completely relaxed in his hands. He had thought she might put up a fight. He knew her mother was still plotting against this marriage, and perhaps it was the similarities in their countenances that made him imagine that she was doing the same.
He had thought that she might be haughty and proud, vicious and dangerous. That she might seek to show him what it would mean to wed a lion, yet she danced lightly as though she might do so for hours, smiling at her people like the pair of them shared a private joke. She was even blushing prettily when she looked up at him, the very image of what a bride was meant to look like on the precipice of her wedding.

“And are you always so perfect, Princess?,” he asked her in a low voice, forcing himself to keep the smile on his face too.

“If you would be so kind as to tell me which flaws you’d find most becoming, I would be happy to develop them, Your Grace,” she said with a demure bow of her head, “I am after all, to be your wife, your most loyal subject.”

They danced in silence after that.
It did not surprise Myrcella that she had little contact with her betrothed in advance of their wedding. Political courtships such as theirs were not designed to allow time for the bride and groom to get to know one another, lest one of them think better of the whole thing.

So it was that she found herself in the Sept, walking towards a man to whom she’d said little else but “And good day to you, Your Grace” since the feast.

She had seen him of course, sparring with his men, the muscles of his sweaty torso positively heaving by the end of it, as though to remind the lords and ladies of the south exactly how the northern king gained his title, she had seen him walking with her brother, his arm around the younger boy’s shoulders as though it was not mere months since they’d called one another enemy, she had even seen him riding out to go meet with the common people, as though it was the sort of thing he did all the time.

Hers had been a heavy escort to the sept, for the last time she’d, anyone, had entered the city had been the day of the riot of King’s Landing. She had already been safely on a ship to Dorne, but that did not mean she did not hear the stories of the minister being torn limb from limb or the poor women who did not have guards of their own that had been raped and bloodied. There had been a few bastards born from that day and Myrcella had seen the unjust way both mother and child were treated at court. The only aid in her power, it had seemed, was to ask Lollys to sit with her while she played the harp, so that she might dull the harsh words of the other ladies of the court, and even that had earned tears of gratitude from the girl everyone called simple.

Though it was years and a king prior, no one would take any chances with her. She was not so vain as to be flattered by it. She was the only princess, her grandfather’s one chance for an easy peace, they could not risk her.

As Myrcella had ridden through the crowds amassed she did not fear them, and she knew that it was not because of the guards amassed to protect her, not even loyal Lord Arys at her side. The fight from that day had been taken out of the people of King’s Landing, that anger had disappeared, replaced by deep wariness caused by hunger and too much death. They did not cheer for her, she, the Baratheon princess whose very green eyes and blonde hair screamed treason, did not expect that they would, but they did not jeer at her either. They had only looked at her with a sort of begrudging interest, as though they knew that years from now they might want to say they had seen the princess on the way to her wedding, even if it held no particular fascination for them now.

I bet the Northern people line the King’s Road just for a mere glimpse of their hero king. I bet just seeing him fills them with pride and a sense of safety that my people have never known.
She had never hated Robb Stark before that moment.

It was not only hate though. She was Tywin Lannister’s granddaughter, she would never entertain an emotion as useless as hate without in the same breath understanding what was to be done about it.

*I will make them love me, even if he will not.*

The common people she knew would be easier than her betrothed. They wanted to love those who ruled them, her father had always said, it made the whole arrangement of lords and ladies, kings and queens, easier to deal with. Her betrothed though, thinking of the way his blue eyes flashed angrily as they danced, had no intention of loving her.

*He will have to spend every day for the rest of his life hearing what a good and loyal Queen he has.*

That determination is how she met her groom with a smile on her face. He seemed surprised to see it and even offered one of his own, but when their hands met in the ceremony his eyes trailed down to them and the smile disappeared. His were cold but hers, she knew, were featherlight and neither could be fooled.

“*Father. Smith. Warrior. Mother. Maiden. Crone. Stranger,***” they recited in unison and it was not lost on her that these were not the gods Robb prayed to.

“I am his and he is mine,” she said as Robb echoed the words back to her.

They were the traditional vows, and she wondered for how many centuries couples had uttered them, how many others had entered their marriages with lies tumbling from their lips like prayers.

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The wedding feast was the grandest one yet, and there was music and jesters and wine, so much wine.
His bride sparkled next to him, demurring the dishes presented to her and always offering it to him instead *Have you ever tried pomegranate mousse, Your Grace, you really must!*, laughing prettily with her brother as the jesters poked fun at them, something, he’d been told, never would have happened under Joffrey’s reign, asking his permission loyally before she danced with her uncle.

The Kingslayer’s presence the evening before had been with much fanfare and he had strode through the throne room like a preening peacock, offering his nephew-son his sword and allegiance. He had merely grinned at Robb, as though the last time they had seen one another he had not been covered in mud and shit. He had not, however, Robb noticed, grinned at Grey Wind, who had nearly made him piss his pants in fear that same night.

He had not asked Robb’s permission, only Myrcella’s, but his perfect new wife had turned and said, *“Would that be alright, Your Grace, I can stay with you and listen to the music if you would prefer.”*

She was clever, too clever for him. She knew that if he told her he’d prefer her company she would turn him further into a liar, into one of the southern nobles with their false courtesies, so he had acquiesced stupidly.

They looked perfect together, as her uncle acted overly chivalrous towards her causing her delighted laugh. He picked her up above his head and she all but threw her arms out, relishing in it. He didn’t care about any of that. He cared about the words shared between them as the song moved slower, the earnestness in the Kingslayer’s gaze as he looked upon his only daughter, as though if she only asked he would steal her away. The shake of her head confirmed it, and the way her green eyes flickered to the dais, to him, offering him a smile only a second too late.

She returned after accepting a kiss to her cheek and sat down, raising a glass of wine to her lips.

“Do you see your Uncle often?,” he asked her.

“No so often, Your Grace, anymore. He has taken up residence at Casterly Rock,” she said, though he knew that already.

“Even still, I’m sure you will miss him,” he said, “When we had North.”

“Such is the fate of all brides,” she said with that placid smile on her face, “It is only husband’s who are encouraged to retain their families.”
He stopped at that, he had never thought of it. He and Sansa exchanged letters, and as the Glovers were his bannerman, he knew he could call her to his side at any moment, but she outranked her husband. She was a princess and he a lord. There were no others in any of the seven kingdoms that could claim that, not even in Dorne.

“You are right, Princess,” he allowed, “But perhaps it will not always be so. Perhaps…,” he thought of Sansa. Sweet Sansa and the joy her letters brought to him, especially those that spoke of her kind husband and how she couldn’t wait to call him Uncle Robb, “Perhaps there is a way to be both the Southern Princess and the Northern Queen.”

The smile died from her face and she looked down at her lap.

“May I ask something of you, Your Grace?,” she asked quietly.

“You may,” he allowed.

“Please do not grant me hope, if it is false,” she said, “I will be your Queen, your loyal Queen until the end of my days, and I only ask in return that you do not lie to me to spare my feelings. It is unsteady ground that we walk upon already, and I fear that empty promises are like hidden holes. It is the uncertainty, you see, that can drive one mad.”

She did not ask that he love her or be kind to her, she did not ask him to be gentle in the marriage bed or ask him to promise to let her see her family. She only asked that he didn’t lie to her.

The Starks had always had honesty in large supply, and yet, he still felt the weight of it when he said, “I promise.”

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She did not think that she could suffer a worse humiliation than the bedding ceremony, but standing before her new husband in her tattered gown, her hair loose from it’s pins, that was worse.

It was an awful tradition, one that robbed girls of any dignity they might hope to bring to the marriage bed. As though the act of the bedding itself was not enough to show the new wife the way of things, they could not even appear before their husbands like a lady, only a whore to be ravaged.
Noble women were told that their virtue was a gift meant only for their husbands since before they knew the difference between girls and boys and yet on the night they were meant to bestow that gift, it was presented without a care.

Myrcella thought of her mother. She wondered how many other women had done the same on their wedding nights, though she knew not many others could imagine a woman as fearsome as Cersei Lannister. She raised herself up to her full height as she stood in front of her new husband and shed, without asking his permission, the remaining bits of her gown.

They were doing nothing to maintain her modesty and she did not like appearing before him like a shipwrecked maiden.

“Come here,” he said to her as he removed the rest of his own garments.

She walked slowly towards him, keeping her eyes on his face. His body was even more impressive than she had thought, youthful and battle-hardened.

“You have asked me not to lie to you,” he told her, when she stood so close that she had to look up at him to meet his eyes. “So I will not,” he assured her, “I do not love you,” he said, though he needn’t have, “But I do not wish you harm. I promised to be honest with you, and I ask that you be honest with me in return. You will tell me if I hurt you.”

It was the first command he’d ever given her and it was not what she expected.

“I will, Your Grace but…,” she said and trailed off.

“Go on,” he said, using that kingly voice.

“Is pain not expected?,” she asked, hating that she had to ask him for guidance, “I have always been told as much.”

“And is that what noble southern ladies often talk of? The marriage bed?,” he teased her. Her green eyes flashed up to his and he answered her, “Some pain. At first is to be expected, but there are ways of easing that pain.”
“Show me,” she said, before remembering to whom she was speaking to. She curtsied and bowed her head, a mistake for it gave her the opportunity to look at his impressive manhood, hard and large and pointing at her. “I…I only meant, I would be grateful if when I feel pain that you be so kind as to show me ways of mitigating it.”

“I have never seen you flustered,” he said and tilted her chin up, “My perfect, little Queen. I will show you.”

He lead her back to the bed, without touching her as though he had her on a string that he could pull taut at his leisure. He glanced towards the pillows and she knew a command when she saw it, so she eased herself up onto the bed. She laid down against the pillows, willing herself to breathe steadily. I am a lion, I am a lion, I am a lion.

He got on the bed on top of her and took her chin gently in his large hand, “Do you consent?”

“You are my husband,” she said in confusion. Had she not already given her consent in the sept today?

“That is not what I asked,” he said solemnly.

“I do not understand,” she admitted, though it pained her greatly to do so.

“No,” he said, “Perhaps there is one truly innocent Lannister after all.”

“I am a Baratheon,” she pointed out.

“You are a Stark,” he amended, and she did not think she imagined the disappointment in his voice when he did. “And you may not understand yet, but you will.”

With that he rolled off of her, onto the bed on his side. His large hand trailed between her breasts, swiping small purposeful circles on her stomach. She did not know much of the marriage bed but she knew this could not be how babes were made, and she looked at him, a question in her eyes.
His answer was not informative but also not displeasing as his hand wandered up to cup a small breast. His hand was gentle but sure against her and her breath caught when he rolled her nipple with his thumb.

She squeezed her eyes shut. She knew from her mother that the marriage bed gave nothing but pain, knew from the other ladies that only whores felt pleasure with men inside them.

“Did I hurt you?,” he asked, in a low voice he said, “You promised you’d tell me.”

“Do you mean to shame me, Your Grace?,” she asked, her eyes still closed, “Please do not…your…that…I am not meant to feel pleasure.”

“That is exactly what you are meant to feel,” he told her, confirming what she already knew. That he thought of her as a Lannister whore, a royal slattern mean to seal peace with her body. He continued his attentions on her, “Tell me, does that feel good? You have promised me honesty.”

He squeezed her breast gently and she nodded, knowing herself to be a whore indeed, when she said, “Yes.”

“Open your legs,” he commanded.

She did as he asked, though she could not open her eyes. Their was moisture between them and she could not stand to look in his eyes when he found her disappointing.

“You are honest,” he groaned as his hand cupped her, “You did not lie. That is good, my perfect little Queen, it is a great sin to lie to a husband and a king.”

She felt a finger invade her and she bit her lip to keep from crying out, she would not give him the satisfaction of protesting. But then his thumb pressed against the bit of her that had pulsed when he rolled her nipple, and she had no desire to protest at all, and she bit it harder now so that she would not voice her approval.

“You’ll bleed,” he said to her, and she knew that was the case, it was to expect on her first time, so she opened her eyes to tell him so. His other hand came up to her face though and his thumb released her lip from in between her teeth, stroking it gently, “It would not do to punish this lip of yours.”
With his thumb still on her lip there was no barrier when his other pressed against her gently and she let out a sharp cry.

“Forgive me, Your Grace,” she said but he only repeated the gesture and she let out a sigh, her hips rising to meet his hand.

“That’s it, show me what you like,” he commanded with a small smile.

Her eyes looked to his in horror, “You do mean to shame me.”

“I do not,” he said and then gave her a small grin, “Is it such a surprise to you that at this court people lied to you? Anyone who does not find pleasure in bed has the wrong partner.”

“We can never be partners,” she said. She would always be his subject.

“Perhaps not, but I am your husband,” and he said and began pumping his fingers in and out of her, “And your king,” he said, rolling his thumb against her sensitive nub, “And as such you have promised to obey me, is that correct?”

“Yes,” she said, “Yes Your Grace,” she said and could not stop herself from rocking against his hand. She was like a bitch in heat but his fingers were strumming her as though he didn’t much care.

“Then I command you not to hide the way you feel, not in here,” he said, “Out there we will play our parts, you can adopt that placid smile that you seem so fond of, but in here, I do not care for your courtesies, my perfect little Queen.”

His other hand had traveled to her breast as he knelt above her. She moaned and he tweaked her nipple between two fingers. She grasped the bedsheets, needing something to hold onto, but found them weak and wanting. He increased the speed of his fingers and her hand grasped his other forearm. It was hard and strong and it anchored her as her breath became short, her toes curling.

“Do you consent?,” he asked her again, his thumb massaging her nub in rhythm with his fingers.
“Yes, yes yes yes yes,” she cried as her body seemed to lift off the bed in suspension.

***

He hated himself for the victory he felt making Tywin Lannister’s granddaughter peak under his hands.

He had assured her that she was meant to feel pleasure, that she was not meant to be ashamed for it, and he had meant it, but even still he felt himself grow hard at the sight of bringing the perfect Lannister princess to heel.

She had been the exact innocent he’d been promised, despite the perversions of her parents and the court they ruled over. It was like she had bathed in milk her entire life, for how unmarred and perfect her young body was, and she had been so shy and unsure, the maiden made flesh.

Yet he had seen the lionness within her, her determination not to be shamed, the courage it took for her to drop the rest of her gown, and he found himself craving it. It set something off in him, when those green eyes flashed. He had not been lying when he said he cared not for her courtesies, he abhorred them.

She lay panting against the pillows, her eyes closed, her golden hair splayed out, a small smile on her bow lips. *I did that*, he thought, *I made the proud, perfect, princess look like that.*

He was mad with desire and a bit with power if he was being honest with himself, and he forced himself to move slowly as he got between her slender thighs.

“Are you ready, my Queen?,” he asked her formally, utilising the same courtesies he criticised her for.

“Yes, Your Grace,” she said formally as well. Even though he had started it, he cared not for it and sought the girl he’d seen only minutes before.

He positioned himself at her entrance and pushed inside of her slowly.
“You’re…,” she said but stopped immediately.

“Tell me,” he urged her, though he felt himself going blind and he was only halfway in.

“Hurting me…a little,” she said softly, staring at the ceiling.

He nodded and eased himself out of her. She took a few deep breaths and then nodded at him, so he moved back inside of her even slower, inch by inch. He felt her move slightly beneath him and he groaned.

“I’m sorry! Your Grace, forgive me,” she pleaded.

He almost could have kissed her in that moment, with the tears on her eyelashes and the way her hand had gone to his bicep to comfort him without thinking.

“There’s nothing to forgive,” he said instead though, “May I?”

She nodded and he moved further, knowing he was close to claiming her forever.

“Maybe quick would be better,” she suggested.

“Hold onto me,” he suggested back and he felt her small hands on his shoulders.

He looked her in the eye once so that she would know his intention and then he snapped his hips into her harshly. They both let out a cry, she in pain, he in pleasure, and he was not sure who was more ashamed for it. He knew that he should be though.

“Are you alright?,” he asked her, the tenderness in his voice unintentional and unwelcome.

“Yes, Your Grace,” she said and he only noticed that she had been digging her fingernails into his skin when she began to retract them.
He began to move in her slowly, gritting his teeth to keep from moaning the way he had only moments before forbade her from doing. He told himself that he had simply been too long without a woman, but he knew that was a lie, or at least partly one. She was wet and warm and so tight that it felt like she was holding him to her.

His stubborn, selfish cock did not share the same disdain for her golden hair and green eyes that he did. Not even the similarities with her mother seem to deter it and he found himself gazing down at her greedily, his eyes roaming over the perfect supple body that was his for the taking.

She let out a sigh and he forced his eyes back to her face. Her cheeks were still flushed from her orgasm and he watched her as he rolled his hips against her. She let out a small little moan and he did it again.

He took her thigh in his hand and wrapped it around his waist, allowing himself deeper inside of her. If it hurt now she did not protest but he felt her nails digging into the skin of his shoulders once again.

“You have to tell me,” he said, though he did not slow his movements, “You have to tell me if I’m hurting you. I...” he said gritting his teeth, “Will stop if I am.”

“No!,” she protested desperately, she looked like she was going to retreat back into her courtesies but his eyes flashed up to hers in warning, “Don’t stop, Your Grace.”

He grunted as he thrust into her again and she looked so desirous and rumpled that he felt the obnoxious desire to kiss her. He had sworn to himself that he would not, it was too intimate it would confuse to much, but his lips needed purchase so he took sanctuary in her neck.

He nipped and licked the creamy column and he could feel her pulse against him. She smelled like lavender and her hair was soft and warm against his face. She was so feminine, it was intoxicating.

She let out a moan now and it released the animal within him that he had only just been controlling. He rolled his hips against her faster, craving that moan. She was, as she said, a loyal subject and offered it again.

“That’s it, my perfect little Queen,” he said in a voice that might have frightened him if he had any sense at all. “Show your King how good he makes you feel. Show me how loyal you really are.”
“So good, my King,” she cried, holding onto him and letting out a moan. Then as if half to herself she uttered, “My great big powerful King.”

There were whores in every brothel from here to Winterfell who sought the perfect phrase that would make their patron come back again and again for more. She, his perfect, innocent, little Queen, had found it without even trying. It was infuriating.

“Damn you,” he cried, snapping his hips into her now, helpless against her, “You will damn me to every one of your gods’ seven hells.”

“No, no, no,” she cried, “You’ll see,” she promised in the face of the animal before her, “I’ll be your good Queen.”

“Then do as I command,” he growled at her, his hand moving between them so that he could stroke the little pearl that brought her so much pleasure, “Come for me. Now.”

She had been raised accepting the commands of one king and then another. He wondered briefly, too briefly, if she even knew how to refuse. He was grateful, now, that she did not though, as he felt her walls constrict around him, blinding him.

He released inside of her and wondered if any princes or princesses had been created. He was a wedding night baby, after all, it would not be impossible.

He looked down though at his new Queen, his wife, and thought that she looked too young yet to be a mother. More so, he was not entirely sure that he wanted her to be the mother of his children. He would do what he could to make Starks out of them, but he knew from his own childhood that the mother’s influence always crept in.

He knew what could become of their consummation, knew that neither of them were ready for that consequence, and yet, even still, he knew that he could not wait long to consummate again.

Perhaps he was a Northern barbarian after all.
They were making good time towards Riverrun. His Great-Uncle Brynden, the Lord of Riverrun after Edmure's death with his mother, was holding his troops there. Holding and housing and feeding as his letters pointed out.

He would never find a more loyal subject or advisor as his uncle, but the Blackfish had a prickly sense of humor and though he reminded everyone in his vicinity that Robb Stark was the King in the North, behind closed doors he did not hesitate to smack him on the head if he thought his great-nephew was acting incorrectly. That was after all why he was Robb's most trusted advisor.

He was eager to reunite with his men, and felt better with each mile that he put between himself and the capital. They stayed in castles on their way North, while on their way South they had stayed in camps and inns. Every lord and lady was eager to receive his new Queen, hoping that she might mention their kindness to her family.

She was gracious with all of them, as she sat by the lord of the castle. Robb would sit in the place of pride but all conversation was aimed towards his new wife. She constantly brought it around to him, naming a connection between his family and theirs - a marriage, a famous joust, anything, things he didn't even know. She was the picture of courtesy, even throwing in some teasing remarks that suggested a comfort with one another they did not share. Sansa had always guided him when it came to the easy graces of dinner conversation which was why, perhaps, he followed her tune, echoing her gestures and tones. It was frustrating that he found himself turning towards her for clarification on a minor house, or a marriage that had taken place during the war.

Even more infuriating was the way he would smell her lavender perfume as she inclined her head towards him so he could whisper, the way it made him want to bury his face in her neck once again, the way he could not dance with her without remembering their wedding night, the way anytime she answered Yes to anything he remembered her crying her consent over and over again.

In truth he could not remember anything quite so frustrating as desiring his wife.

They never road together, she was often in the company of her sworn shield, Lord Arys, smiling and laughing with the natural ease she had to manufacture with him. After weeks on the road he had
grown used to their laughter, their seemingly never ending chatter. He tried to make that ease clear to his men, though he knew that soon he would need to have another discussion with young Lord Arys. Not that the first had gone so well.

"We will leave tomorrow early," Robb said, "I would ask that you escort us through the city."

"Through the city?" Lord Arys asked.

"Yes, I think my soldiers will be a bit on edge and I'd like you with the Queen until we reach it's gates," he said, surprised by the man's confusion. It was not uncommon for a guard to escort a new bride through her home city.

“But...oo I will be accompanying you,” Lord Arys said, his brow furrowed, "Or was I to come along later with the extra chests? I would prefer to travel with the Pr-Queen."

Robb and Tommen shared a look and it was Tommen who spoke.

"Lord Arys, you are a part of the Kingsguard. My Kingsguard. Your place is here," he said, and Robb noted that he was using the kingly voice that was not dissimilar to his own.

"I am Myrcella's sworn shield," Lord Arys said.

"The Queen," Tommen corrected automatically, before Robb could.

“My apologies, Your Grace, I am the Queen’s sworn shield," Lord Arys said.

Robb was more confused than ever. Had no one thought to mention to Lord Arys that his services were no longer required? And what of Myrcella?

He would have done so himself but he figured Tommen would be speaking with him about his new duties.

"The Queen will have a sworn shield when we arrive in Winterfell. I will choose the man myself, I
can assure you, she will be quite safe,” Robb told him.

“As long as peace remains, Your Grace,” Lord Arys all but sneered, “And what if it does not? Will your guards’ priority be her safety, or will she be a well placed hostage like your own sister was not long ago?”

Robb’s knuckles went white where he gripped the arms of the chair he sat in. It was a foolish man who taunted him with Sansa. The last had died on the field of battle at his own hand.

"Careful, Lord Arys," Tommen said, “You are speaking to a King.”

"Yes but he is not my King," Lord Arys said arrogantly.

“You must be very foolish to argue with a King about the care of his Queen, to remind him of the fate that befell his sister in the court we now stand,” Robb said, and Lord Arys’ jaw set. Robb thought of his father, as he so often did in times such as this and added, "Or failing that, very loyal.”

“My apologies, Your Grace. My sincere apologies. What happened to your sister,” he said and then looked to Tommen. He was not the King who had ordered her treatment, and in fact he was the one who had released her, but even still it was not wise to question the decisions of the Lannisters to a Lannister.

“Was shameful,” Tommen supplied for him. Tommen had said as much to him in one of their meetings, but Robb still looked at him gratefully.

They had made progress on that trip and while there may not be trust between them, the hate that had raged between their families had no place in their discussions.

Arys nodded, “I should not have brought it up. I only want…”

“To protect her,” Robb finished as it was obvious. “I understand, and I will not punish you for the devotion your role demands,” he said with a sigh. He looked at the man before him. He would be a good guard for Myrcella. He was youthful, which meant that failing tragedy he would be with her for years yet, and strong, he had beat some of the Northern soldiers in the tiltyard only the other day. “I understand that you serve the Queen, but you will be in my Kingdom. Can I trust that you will respect what that means?”
“Yes, Your Grace,” Lord Arys confirmed.

“There is one other issue...,” he said and looked warily at Tommen. “I would not embarrass you but I trust you have heard the rumors.”

“The Queen’s honor is above reproach,” Lord Arys said, confirming that he knew the nature of them.

“I agree,” he said honestly. Who could know better than he that his wife had come to him untouched? “But even still... part of protecting the Queen means protecting her reputation. Protecting her future children’s reputations. My future children’s.”

He would not follow the fate of his namesake, a rumored if not confirmed cuckold. He would not have the legitimacy of his heirs questioned, he would not leave his kingdom ripe for civil war as King Robert had done.

“I understand, Your Grace. The Queen’s reputation is dearer to me than my life,” he promised.

Robb had agreed, but not without reservation. He did not fail to note that while Lord Arys had denied the legitimacy of the rumors, he spoke only of the Queen’s honor and not of his own. The devotion he showed in that room, the devotion he had shown on the days since, Robb had not lied when he said that it made him well suited to his role. Even still, devotion such as that had crumbled nations before.

“The Queen looks radiant this evening,” Lady Smallwood said to him, breaking him out of his thoughts.

Robb followed her gaze to his wife, where she was speaking to Lord Smallwood and his daughter Catelyn, so named for his deceased mother. They had finally made their way into the Riverlands and though he yearned for Riverrun, it was a relief to be once again amongst his people, where the Tully name meant as much as the Stark’s did in the North.

“She does, my Lady,” he agreed. She had taken to wearing warmer gowns and the green velvet caught in the light, highlighting all of her natural virtues. He had not decided whether it was intentional or if she was driving him mad by accident. He felt sorry for Catelyn Smallwood, her own green gown paled in comparison and she, he was sorry to note, took after her father’s side of the
family. “Your daughter is charming.”

She gave him a small smile and thanked him, as his wife and Lord Smallwood came back to the dais.

“I didn’t know that, my Queen,” he said with a small chuckle, “Would you be so kind as to share with my wife?”

“Oh, of course, Lord Smallwood,” she said and turned to him and curtsied and he stood and offered his seat to her. She bowed her head humbly and brushed by him and he could smell her lavender perfume and the warmth of her arm as it touched his.

She sat next to Lady Smallwood and soon he heard the lady of the house tittering behind her hand.

“I must thank you, once again, Lord Smallwood,” he turned to his host, “For your hospitality. I know that it is not a small thing to host a King and his retinue.”

“It is an honor, Your Grace,” he said with a chuckle, “That wife of yours is charm itself.”

Robb did not note that he should call her the Queen, and instead said through gritted teeth, “She is at that.” To everyone but me.

“And yet,” his host said, leaning towards him so close that Robb could smell the wine on his breath, “You sleep in your own chambers?”

He would not dishonor his host in his own home, but he felt his knuckles grow white. He knew he was not the first to comment on it, but he was the first to be bold enough to say it to his face. It was not good, not for the alliance nor his position for men to be chuckling behind his back about his inability to bed his wife.

He forced himself to put on a jovial smile and he said, “Only officially, I assure you.”

His host raised his eyebrows, seemingly unconvinced, so he turned to his wife and said, “My Queen I will visit your chambers this evening.”
His breath was hot on her ear and yet it made her shiver.

She had been having a perfectly lovely conversation with Lady Smallwood, who was from a *small* but devoted house in the Riverlands. Her family never would have graced such a castle with a royal visit, but they, like so many others, had proven themselves under the new regime and so it was that the royal party rested their horses there for the evening.

She had been having a nice time. She enjoyed the Riverlands, which in the summer were subject to flooding but in the fall had a lushness to them she’d never seen. Their hosts were charming, the daughter of the house sweet, and the lodgings comfortable. It should have been perfect. It would have been perfect. If not for her husband.

If the King had been a source of interest in the capital, he was a mythical being in the Riverlands. Crowds from every corner of the region lined their path, calling out blessings and well wishes, hoping for a glimpse of their hero King. He was more natural amongst his people, his courtesies less practiced. He was more quick to laugh and drink. He was charm itself, to all but her, with whom he’d maintained a respectful detachment.

He had not visited her bedchamber since their wedding night. She hated herself for her disappointment, for the look her handmaid gave her as she had dabbed on lavender oil the other night noting *We have almost run out, my Queen.* She knew herself to be wanton when she woke up with moisture between her thighs, having dreamt once again of her strong husband claiming her.

If it was not for Lord Arys she was afraid she might go mad from loneliness, but her sworn shield kept her occupied on the road, asking her about the different houses in her new kingdoms, testing her on the sigils of the minor houses of the Riverlands. Speaking to her about the beauty of the landscape, the way she had not been foolish enough to hope that her new husband might.

Even still, it was not entirely with disappointment that she met the news that her husband would be visiting her that evening. Only shame. Their hosts had overheard, and while they were loyal to Robb there were not many that could resist gossip when it came to Kings and Queens.

“Very well, Your Grace,” she said, adopting that placid smile he seemed to have such disdain for, and said, with heavy implication, “As you wish.”
If he observed her frostiness he did not remark upon it, as he turned back to their host, his duty done. She turned back to Lady Smallwood and continued their conversation about the blooms in the Riverlands versus the Reach until she noticed that some of the ladies had started to retire.

She turned to her husband and their host and said, “With your permission, Your Grace, I would retire for the evening.”

Robb’s gaze made her heart beat wildly, but whether it was from fear or desire she could not be entirely sure. Either way, neither suited her and she held his gaze, refusing to be daunted.

He gave her a small grin and said, “I am keen for bed as well, my Queen, I will join you if our hosts would be so kind as to accept our leave.”

Lord Smallwood guffawed and said, “I would not keep any man from his new wife, let alone a King!”

Robb turned away from her and nodded before standing up. He offered her his hand and she took it, hating how warm it felt in juxtaposition to his behavior for the past weeks. She couldn’t look her hosts in the eye, simply bowed her head in acknowledgement as she followed him out.

“‘To bed, Your Grace?,’ a Manderly asked.

“Can one blame me, Hoster?,” the King asked with a grin, earning laughter from his men.

She drew herself up to her full height, her court smile on her face as he lead her out of the great hall.

*Why does he bother leaving the room at all? Why not just mount me in front of gods and men alike?*

She felt like a caged beast and forced herself to calm down. She remembered the bruises on her mother’s face after she had been in moods like this and she fought to control herself.

As they entered her chambers the King let go of her hand and he lost the easy swagger he had
adopted as they walked through the great hall.

“Would you care for wine, my Queen?,” he asked, gesturing to the pitcher that the servants had placed.

_Only if it has poison in it and you drink first!_

“No thank you, Your Grace,” she said.

He nodded and poured himself a glass, and she stood stoically. He could exercise his husbandly rights but she was not about to present herself to him like a Lysean whore. He took a sip and turned to her. She hated that she felt the need to twitch, to rub her legs together just like her mother said when his blue gaze fell upon her.

He walked towards her and she held her chin high. He raised the glass to her lips.

“Drink,” he said, “You are as stiff as a board.”

She opened her mouth and saw his pupils dilate. The wine was sweet on her tongue and she swallowed it, refusing to look away from him. He raised his thumb to her lip and swiped it, bringing it to his own mouth. If they were in love he might have kissed it off of her, but she did not need reminding that they were not. Even still he seemed to enjoy it more from her lips than he had the cup.

“Shall I call for my handmaid, Your Grace?,” she asked, knowing that her handmaid would be asleep within the hour if she thought she had no need for her.

“Your hair looks fine,” he said, picking a chunk of it up in his hand and massaging it gently with his fingers.

“For my gown,” she said, her eyes on the floor.

“I am capable of removing your gown, Myr-my Queen,” he said, his voice low.
She nodded in acknowledgment, which he took as an invitation and he took another sip of wine before stepping behind her.

He moved the rest of her hair to one side and began to undo the laces of her gown. The Northern styles were heavier and more binding and she could not stop the tension from easing in her shoulders as she felt herself released.

She let it pool to the floor and stood before him in her shift.

“It has been some time since our wedding night,” he said.

“Yes, Your Grace,” she said.

“Are you still feeling pain?,” he asked.

“No, Your Grace,” she said.

“Have you thought of it at all?,” he asked.

“Your Grace?,” she evaded.

“Our wedding night,” he clarified, and she noted the tone of annoyance in recognition of the game she was playing. She hesitated and then she felt him at her back. He was hard, every bit of him, and he towered over her, her head back against his chest. “I have… would you like me to show you what I’ve been thinking about, my Queen?”

She yearned to lean back against him, to ask him to tell her all the things he’d thought of, wondering if she had haunted his dreams the way he had ruled over hers, but she played the lady.

“I am your wife, Your Grace,” she said, “I want what you want.”
Her formality was like a bucket of cold water.

He told himself that he should not be surprised. He had done nothing to ease her comfort these past weeks, relying upon their hosts to do that for him as he saw to his men and made plans with his advisors. He hadn’t tried to get to know her, the pair only speaking when conversation with others demanded it.

Even still, he knew that he had not dreamt their wedding night. He knew what he had felt, what he had made her feel. He was simple enough to think that she might still welcome him into her bed.

He really was a Northern fool.

He sighed and backed away from her and she turned towards him. She looked so small in her shift and he could see the outline of her body underneath, beckoning him forward.

“Your Grace?,” she asked.

“Forgive me, my Queen,” he said bitterly, “Had I known your feelings on the matter I would have stayed in my own chambers this evening.”

She opened her mouth to say something and then closed it immediately.

He narrowed his eyes at her, “Speak freely, your silence is deafening.”

“It is not my place,” she said.

“I have just made it your place by requesting it,” he pointed out.

“You lied to me, Your Grace,” she said, “It…you promised you wouldn’t. It is your right, of course but… Starks are so famous for their honesty.”
“When did I lie?,” he asked in confusion.

“You told me that it was not your desire to shame me, Your Grace,” she said.

“I know my title, you need not repeat it so,” he growled at her as he thought about her words. “How did I shame you?”

“Your bawdy joke, You-,” she started but then shook her head, “You announced to the whole castle that you would be… bedding me this evening.”

He closed his eyes. She was right, he had gone too far. He should not have answered Hoster thus but he could not stand the whispers, the looks his men gave the Queen and her sworn shield when the latter helped her dismount.

“You are my wife,” he said, “There is no shame in bedding your husband.”

“I am a Queen,” she said indignantly, looking every bit the Lannister when she said proudly, “My body is meant to be sacred, as is yours.”

“Says who?,” he asked. He knew not the stories of the southern gods and considering the last three kings had been killed prematurely, he did not think the commonfolk could be so simple as to not realise that they were nothing more than men.

“My mother,” she said haughtily.

He could not help but chuckle, “And was King Robert’s body sacred? Did Littlefinger purvey septs instead of brothels?”

She looked down at the floor and his cheeks reddened.

“I’m sorry,” he said, meaning it. “I spoke out of turn.”
“You are a King you-,” she started and he crossed to her.

He tilted her chin up to look at him and he saw tears pooling in her eyes, “I know that I can say whatever I want, but that does not mean that I should. I’m sorry. He was a good man and I should not speak ill of him.”

One tear fell out of her eye yet she kept her gaze on him and said, “He was a lech and a drunk…but he was my father.”

He nodded, not bothering to correct her. It did no good to suggest that he was not in fact her father, knowing the lies her mother had told, the lies he had swallowed for this peace.

“May we start again?,” he asked her.

“Yes, Yo-… yes.”

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Robb removed his leather jerkin, revealing his thin undershirt. She spotted muscles underneath and could not help but pick up the fabric.

“This has holes in it, Your Grace,” she said.

He looked down and said, “There has been no one to repair them when they tear.”

“You are a King,” she pointed out with a small grin on her face, so different than how she’d said it only a moment before. “You have an entire country to repair them.”

“My…,” he started and shook his head.

*His mother used to mend them.*
She looked up at him and said, “With your permission, Your Grace… may I ask the servants to bring them to my chamber when we get to Riverrun? I am not as deft with a needle as Princess Sansa but, it is better than the wind getting through, is it not?”

“As you wish,” he said in a low voice, and removed it, placing it on the chair, “I will leave you this one to get started on, but first…”

With that he undid the strings of his trousers and pulled them down. His smallclothes came next.

“Yes,” she said without thinking.

“Yes what?,” he asked her with a chuckle. It did not sound unkind, just surprised, which was fair given the situation.

She forced herself to look up at him and said, “I wish for you to show me what you’ve thought about.”

He grinned at her and she was on the bed in the next moment. Her shift somehow had not made the journey with her and her hair covered her face as she lay against the pillows.

Robb crawled on top of her and brushed the hair from her face. He looked down at her, at her lips and leaned closer. She could almost feel him against her but he moved and buried his face in her neck.

He groaned against her, though it was she that was being kissed.

“This perfume…,” he said as he nipped her collarbone.

“It is an oil…,” she pointed out uselessly, her hands finding purchase on his shoulders, “I am almost out…”

“Where does it come from?,” he asked her, stopping his attentions.
“Lavender plants…,” she said stupidly, her mind hazy.

He rolled his eyes at her, “Where do they grow?”

He was being stubborn and she wanted his lips against her and she let out a sigh, which revealed her neck ever so subtly. She saw the hint of his grin that told her he knew exactly what she intended but he took pity on her and returned his lips to her.

“Highgarden…,” she answered, and his teeth found her earlobe, “Essos.”

“We will send for more,” he promised her, he said and rolled them over so that she sat astride him as though he were a horse. He sat up and his hands were everywhere, “And we will grow it in the glass gardens, for I want you to smell of this always,” he said, his hand holding her neck gently, “Is that clear?”

“Yes, Your Grace,” she said, so grateful that he had found something in her to like. His eyes got stormy and he tilted her neck back, pulling her closer to him by her butt. His mouth latched onto one of her small breasts and she let out a moan, “Yes I promise.”

She felt him hard and ready against her and she rubbed herself against him. He groaned and she did it again.

“So you already know what I have been thinking about,” he said in his low kingly voice. “You have been improving in the saddle these past weeks, my Queen.”

“T-thank you, Your Grace,” she said in confusion. He never road with her, always with his men.

“But you could use practice yet,” he said with a sinful grin and lifted her as though she weighed nothing and lowered her onto himself.

She gripped onto his shoulders. He was so large, he felt even larger than he had the other night and she could feel herself stretching around him.

“This is not like any saddle I’ve ever sat before,” she said without thinking as their hips met.
He bursted out laughing and she buried her head in shame against his shoulder. The shame only lasted a moment, but his arms wrapped around her, one around her back, holding her to him and the other hand found her hair, stroking it. It felt good to be close to him like this so she stayed a moment longer.

He was already inside of her but when she lifted her head off of his shoulder there was a heat between them that had not been there a moment before. The laughter had died on his lips and his eyes were nearly black and they were so close, it would be so easy to touch her lips to his.

He shook his head, as though banishing something from his mind and when he looked back at her it was once again with blue eyes.

“Sometimes I have to remind myself that you are an innocent,” he said, “For some of the things you say sound so bawdy that only a true sinner or a true saint could utter them.”

“I am not a saint,” she said, and moved to adjust to him inside of her. His hand tightened on her back and she moved again.

“No,” he said, “You are not. But you are not a sinner either,” he said, with solemnity. She understood what he was telling her. He was continuing their conversation, telling her that what happened between a man and his wife could not be a sin. He didn’t realise that she no longer cared, not when he moved her hips on him like that. “You are my Queen,” he said and added darkly, “My perfect little Queen.”

His words oddly soothed her and she felt her body opening up to him. She moved back and forth on him, setting a slow steady pace. It was as though they were trotting, though she would not make the mistake of telling him so.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, and rode him, their cheeks pressed against one another. She felt his lips against her shoulder and she sought an occupation for her own. She pressed a hesitant kiss to his neck.

“Is that alright?,” she asked quietly.

“I will tell you if it is not,” he told her, but it was not in his kingly voice he spoke. “Please.”
It was no small thing for a king to ask something of you, so she placed another kiss to his neck. She peppered a trail of them up and though he did not use perfume of any kind that she could tell, she liked the way he smelled all the same. Like fresh air and salt and inexplicably like snow.

She rocked her hips on him, and she could hear them where their flesh met. It was obscene and primal and so was the moan she let out when he drove her against him at a new angle.

He went to move her again but she sought that angle and pushed him back against the pillows.

“Myr-oh fuck,” he cried when she leaned forward and granted him deeper entry.

He hit her at the exact right spot from this vantage and she sought it again. They moaned together this time and she sought something to hold onto, to hold her steady.

She placed her hands on the muscles of his chest and moved against him again. Now that she had found the angle she wanted, she moved faster and faster, seeking it again and again.

“Fuck fuck fuck,” the king cried and she wondered at the quality of his guards for surely they should have interrupted by now.

“So full,” she marvelled, “So good, my great big king.”

His hands gripped her waist harshly and he thrust up into her.

“Mother, maiden, crone,” she cried.

“I’m the one inside of you,” he growled at her, “Say my name.”

He worked her on him, as though her body was nothing but a flimsy doll, until all she could do was throw her head back and let him.
“Yes, yes Your Grace,” she cried in acquiescence.

“My name,” he ordered. She looked down at him, his entire body was tensed, and somehow she knew he was close.

She felt her own wave building and she’d say whatever he wanted to make him keep moving her on him like that.

“Yes, yes, yes…,” she cried as it started to take over, “Robb! Yesss!”

“Seven fucking hells,” he yelled spasming into her.

***

He had fought three Lannisters, but the one he married was bound to be the one that killed him.

She had collapsed on top of him and he did not have the mental strength to move her. It was entirely possible he did not have the physical strength either.

If there had been any doubts after their wedding night, they were gone now. Regardless of how he felt about her or her family, their icy courtesy had no place in their marital bed.

“Maybe we made a Prince or Princess,” she said sweetly and he closed his eyes, breathing deeply so that he could answer her kindly.

He rolled her gently off of him and said, “There is plenty of time for that, my Queen.”

“O-of course, Your Grace,” she said formally, and he did not fail to notice that she made her body smaller.

He looked down at her and then saw her chest.
“You're bleeding!,” he said in horror, looking at the droplets of blood on her breasts. He did not remember doing anything that would cause that and he felt like a true animal.

“No, Your Grace,” she said, shaking his head and pressed the pad of her index finger to his chest and then showed the droplet of blood on it, “You are.”

He looked down at himself and sighed in relief, seeing the scratches that were there.

“Please forgive me, Your Grace,” she said, getting off the bed. His eyes followed her naked body as she went to her wash basin and buried a strip of fabric in it. She hurried back to the bed and pressed it softly to the scratches. “I can call for the Maester, I am so sorry.”

“Calm down,” he said, looking down at the way her small fingers worked against him deftly, until there was no blood left. “You see? There is no harm done.”

“I…wounded you, Your Grace,” she said, “I understand if I am to be punished.”

He could not help but grin cockily as he took the cloth from her and wiped the blood off of her breasts. “I fought a war, I think I can survive pleasing my wife.”

She blushed and bit her lip and he once again had the overwhelming urge to kiss her. He cleared is throat and moved away from her, getting off of the bed.

“And who knows, perhaps these scratches will stop the whispers for some time,” he said and then closed his eyes in annoyance at himself.

“Whispers, Your Grace?,” she asked.

“There has been some…talk…,” he told her, “Nothing to trouble yourself with.”

“It troubles you, Your Grace, so it troubles me,” she said.

It was a marvel that she could sound so positively regal, sitting naked and properly fucked against
her pillows with her knees tucked up against her and her arms wrapped around them.

“Just some stupid talk about how I have not shared your bedchambers since our wedding night,” he told her. He had after all promised her honesty.

“And that is why you made an exhibition of us?,” she asked.

“I hardly think I made an exhibition of us,” he protested. She said nothing, looking at her knees and he sighed, “Yes.”

She nodded, “You did the right thing, Your Grace. Lords across the country sent their daughters to court as soon as they heard my father didn’t share my mother’s bed.”

“My Queen I…,” he started, but for the first time she interrupted him.

“I do not mean to suggest that you cannot bed others. That is your prerogative as a man and as a King. It is only that if people suspect that we do not share a bed at all, they may think I can be supplanted. Neither of our peoples can suffer another war and survive the Winter,” she said, “For their sake, we must appear unified. You did the right thing, and I will learn to accept their laughter with more grace.”

Uncle Brynden will like her, he thought in mild annoyance.

She truly was Tywin Lannister’s granddaughter, of that it was clear. Shrewd and pragmatic, understanding intrinsically what must be done and not caring for her own personal comfort to see it through. The only thing more dangerous than Tywin Lannister was his mind in her body, that even now called him back to her.

“My Queen,” he said, picking up his smallclothes and pulling them on. He handed her her shift and she pulled it on, looking younger somehow. “I agree with you, we must appear unified, for our people, for our kingdoms. But as your husband, I will never take another into my bed.”

He would not even if their coupling was not what it was. He knew the hidden shame his father felt in siring a bastard, even if he did love Jon as well and true as any of his brothers and sisters. He would not do that to himself. He knew the pain Jon felt from his station in life. He would not do that to a child. And he knew the sorrow it caused his mother. And he found, to his surprise, that he would not
do that to her.

As it stood though, he could not imagine even growing hard for another woman. *Maiden’s magic*, Lord Umber would call it.

“And as your wife, I will never take another man into my bed,” she joked and then her eyes got wide in horror.

“Keep up that cheek and I *will* punish you,” he threatened lightly.

He must have imagined the flash of lightning in her green eyes, or a torch must have flickered behind him.

“I’m sorry, Your Grace,” she said though.

He stood and pulled on his trousers and reached for his small shirt.

“I thought I was mending that for you?,” she asked.

“Do you really wish to?,” he asked, his brows knit in confusion.

She got off the bed and nodded, walking towards him and holding her hand out for it. He handed it to her and she held it up, surveying it and looked at his chest.

“If I don’t, then everyone will see your scratches,” she said.

“I thought that was the plan?,” he teased. He had to get out of there, it was getting too easy to speak with her. He was afraid of what he might say.

“It was a plan,” she teased back, “But then again… if people *don’t* see it, then you may have cause to make an exhibition of us once again…”
His jaw dropped open and she let out an intoxicatingly girlish giggle.

“Is that you want?,” he asked her incredulously.

She climbed back on the bed, lying down and turning her head towards him.

“I’m your wife, Your Grace,” she said, a small smile threatening her lips, “I want what you want.” with that she turned on her side away from him. He could see the outline of her small, round, behind through it and the hem of it was crawling up her legs deliciously, and she called without turning around, “Sleep well, husband.”

Robb pulled on his jerkin. The inside of it scratched his skin without his small shirt, only adding to his discomfort. He bid her a goodnight and left her chambers reluctantly. Grey Wind stood up when he exited and escorted him down the hall.

He tossed and turned for hours that night, and he fell asleep wondering what the fate of the North would have been if Tywin Lannister had let his granddaughter lead his armies.
It is a weariness, not of the body, I fear, but of the heart

Chapter Summary

This chapter is mostly from Robb’s perspective, with a little bit of Myrcella at the beginning. The next chapter will be mostly of Myrcella.

Let me know what you all think! Thank you for all your support thus far, I am really enjoying writing this and hope you are enjoying reading it!

She remembered Riverrun from her last time journeying the King’s Road. Even still, she gasped when she saw it once again. It was a castle from a song, with a large moat and wide towers. It was ancient and unyielding yet beautiful and elegant.

Lord Arys stopped speaking by her side and she turned to him.

“Are you alright, my Lord?,” she asked.

“You should have grown up in a place like this,” he said, his throat thick. As though remembering himself he added, “My Queen.”

She turned away from her sworn shield and back towards the castle, wondering what sort of childhood she might have had if it was within these walls that she grew instead of those of the Red Keep.

In truth, he knew as well as she that the walls mattered not if the people were the same, but the sentiment was a kind one so she merely smiled at him and asked him what beasts he thought might be lurking in the moat and whether or not he thought she could tame them.

“I think you could tame even the most fearsome beast, my Queen,” he said kindly.

*Not a wolf.*

If she had imagined things might have changed between her and her husband after they left Acorn Hall, then she would have been rather disappointed when he offered her a formal greeting as they
broke their fast the next morning and wished her well as the party all mounted their horses for the
day’s travel. She had not imagined it though, had not allowed herself to, so she felt nothing.

Nothing at all.

The castle was even more impressive for the camps of men staked outside of it. The remainder of the
Northern army was still expansive even now after months of peace and stretched as far as the eye
could see. There was no doubt that she was now in wolf country and she knew she did not imagine
the way Lord Arys drew closer to her.

*I am their Queen*, she wanted to tell him, *They will not harm me*, but she could not quite seem to get
the words out so she said nothing and they walked side by side, their horses having long grown used
to one another.

The party stopped sometime before the drawbridge and Lord Arys dismounted. He walked over to
help her do the same but there was a shuffle of men and suddenly a large, imposing older man with
fishscales on his jerkin stood before her.

“My Queen,” he said and bowed low to her, “I am Lord Tully,” he said and the title sounded
awkward on his tongue, “But you may call me Uncle Brynden if you so wish… Welcome to
Riverrun.”

She was still sat astride her horse so it was a bit awkward but she bowed her head in
acknowledgment of him.

“My Lord Uncle,” she said, “It is a true honor to meet such a noble warrior and such an honorable
and trusted advisor to my husband the King,” she had been told that towards the end of the war it
was only he and his most trusted generals that Robb would allow into his strategy sessions, “I thank
you for your kind welcome.”

She did not think it was the dampness in the air that caused his cheeks to flush but he stepped
forward.

“Where is my nephew?,” he asked her.

“Riding with his men,” she answered, then bowed her head, “As he should.”
He made a bit of a face and then said, “May I be so bold as to offer you my help, my Queen?”

“Thank you,” she agreed and she felt his hands on her waist setting her down on the ground without effort.

He towered above her when she was standing, and had he not greeted her so kindly she might have been afraid. As it was though, he was looking down at her and his eyes crinkled and he was offering her his arm, which she took gratefully. She was always a little unsteady after a ride.

She must have gripped him too harshly because he turned to her and said, “Your Grace, you are exhausted.”

“Just a little road weary, I assure you,” she lied.

“It is nearing twilight, when did you set off this morning?,” he asked her.

“After we broke our fast, we were all eager to get here,” she said diplomatically.

Lord Tully mumbled something under his breath and placed his other hand under her arm when he felt her start to sway.

“I will call for servants to carry you to your rooms, or perhaps your guard?,” he offered, looking around for Lord Arys.

“Please do not!,” she said, gripping his forearm. He looked down at her in question and she wondered how to answer. Looking into his kindly face though, she thought he may understand the truth. “I am only newly their Queen, my Lord Uncle, and not the Queen most would have chosen…I would not present myself as the weak child I fear myself to be.”

There was a heaviness in his gaze as he looked down at her, and it looked as though a memory had overcome him, but he shook himself out of it and said, “I will escort you to your chambers and ring for a bath, if it please you. Here my de-my Queen, lean on me, no one will be the wiser I assure you. They will simply think I have charmed you already.”
“Then they will be right,” she said with an impish grin and they entered his ancestral home with his laughter echoing off the ancient walls.

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It took a while for him to find his uncle. There were horses to water and men to settle, Lords who had not accompanied him to the capital to greet.

By the time he got to him in his study, there was a deep tiredness in his bones and an emptiness in his stomach.

“Uncle!,” he greeted, feeling very much the green boy.

“My King,” he bowed formally and then opened his arms wide, “Nephew,” he said in a softer tone when they embraced.

That softer tone was belied by the smack on the head he received as soon as they parted.

“Ow,” Robb grumbled, though it hadn’t hurt.

“Ow,” he mocked, “Says the man who has ridden his young Queen ragged.”

Robb blushed, thinking of the other night. He did not think his uncle would appreciate hearing that it was she who rode him ragged.

“We wanted to get here,” he said in defence.

“So you discussed it with her then?,” his uncle asked.

Robb opened his mouth to say yes and then closed it. In truth he had not, he had merely informed her.
“Do you think your Father would have treated your Mother thus?,” his Uncle asked.

“That was different!,” he argued, “They loved each other.”

“Not in the beginning,” his Uncle said shaking his head. “I was with your Mother, when she only had you. Your Father was not a man of many words but he still wrote to her, to let her know that he was well, inquired after her health and yours. He did not love her, he did not even know her. Theirs was not a love like in the songs, but it was strong like the walls of this castle, fortifying. It grew over time.”

“We have only been married for a few weeks,” he pointed out.

“Actions in the early days can haunt a marriage for years to come,” his uncle said too sagely for a sixty year old bachelor.

“Where is she?,” he grumbled.

“I’ve put her in Lady Lysa’s old rooms,” he said and Robb nodded. “We’ll talk more in the morning. Go and see to your wife’s comfort, I think you’ll find that it may improve your own as well.”

Robb had missed him. He was prickly and blunt and odd if he were being honest, but he was the only Tully who remained to him, the only relation of his generation, and one who had known him since birth. He embraced him once more, for tomorrow when they broke their fast they would be all gruff jokes and planning. His uncle clapped him on the back and then he departed.

He walked through the castle, overwhelmed by how happy he was to be here. He had not been to Winterfell in years and so this had become his home during the war, the safest place he could imagine despite the battles raging on all around it.

He ached for his own bed but he dragged himself through the halls to the chambers where the Queen was placed.

He nodded to Arys who had the good sense to bow and knocked on the door.
“Come in,” he heard through the heavy oak door and entered.

The Queen was sat upon a soft chair in front of the window, her handmaid stood behind her holding a brush to her damp golden hair.

Both women turned and stood, curtsying as soon as they saw him.

“Forgive me, Your Grace,” his wife said, “I did not know it was you.”

“There is nothing to forgive,” he said honestly, “Minna is it?,” he asked her handmaid. The girl nodded happily, “May I have a word with the Queen in private?”

“Yes, Your Grace,” she said curtsying again, “Of course, Your Grace.”

He saw his wife bite the inside of her cheek to keep from laughing and he looked down at his boots to do the same.

“She’ll return, Pr-my Queen?,” Minna asked.

Robb looked up at his wife and she kept her eyes on him when she said, “No Minna, thank you, if you’ll wake me early to break my fast?”

Her handmaid acquiesced and left, shutting the door.

He wondered if this is how she always looked before bed, realising that he had never seen her in her dressing gown. It was a muted purple with lace of an intricate design, wrapped tightly around her slender waist. Her feet were bare and her hair was wet yet she was still the picture of regality. She had no need for a crown the way some queens might. Which was just as well as he had not yet given her one.

“My Uncle says I have mistreated you,” he offered without preamble. He wanted to see if she had complained to him, wanted to see if guilt flashed before her eyes.
“I’ve said nothing of the sort, Your Grace,” she said, with worry but no guilt in her eyes, “I would say nothing of the sort for it would not be true. You are a kind husband, Your Grace.”

“I thought we had agreed not to lie to one another,” he said shaking his head.

He was not a kind husband, of that he was sure. He had never beaten her, nor raped her, but he was not kind. He did not ask her how she was faring or if she liked the landscape, he did not ride with her or try to make her laugh. He did not sit with her in the evenings or ask her to dance for the mere joy of it.

He stepped forward and held his hand out for the brush. She handed it to him slowly and he nodded at her, so she turned around and sat back in the chair. He picked up a section of her hair that still looked unattended and he pulled the brushed through it as gently as he could.

Her hair was soft, though he had known that already, and he liked the color of it when it was damp. It made him wonder if she had ever frolicked on the sand as a child, if she had ever been carefree.

He continued brushing until he could see her shoulders relax. He remembered the way Sansa loved to have her hair brushed, it was one of the ways he could get her to talk to him when she would not otherwise, if she and Arya had a fight or if her Septa had reprimanded her. Thinking of his sister softened him, as it always did.

He took her slender neck in his hand and tilted her chin up.

“Have I misused you?,” he asked.

“No, Your Grace,” she answered.

All thoughts of Sansa were banished as he looked into her pale green eyes. It would be so easy to kiss her. All he would have to do was lean down and press his lips to hers, it would be as simple as breathing. In truth she looked like a girl that wanted to be kissed, and damn every one of the Seven Kingdoms if he didn’t want to feel her lips against his.

“Would you tell me if I had?,” he asked pointedly instead.
She gave him a small smile and said, “Probably not, Your Grace. But you have not.”

He sighed but he did not repeat his request for honesty. He knew the only way to get true honesty out of her was to get her angry and he had no intention of angering her. He was too tired for a battle of wits and he was not in the mood for a defeat this evening.

“Will you stand, my Queen?,” he asked.

She stood and came around to him. She was so small and delicate and he felt ashamed for the way he had treated her. He may not have ridiculed her or beaten her, but she was his Queen and wife, his most esteemed subject, but a subject all the same, reliant on him like any other.

“This is pretty,” he told her, taking a bit of the lace trim in between his thumb and forefinger.

“Thank you, Your Grace,” she said, “A bit impractical, I suppose, once we get further North.”

“Your chambers will be warm, my Queen,” he promised her, knowing the exact ones he could put her in. “For I would like to see you in this again.”

“Then you shall,” she said.

He went to bury his face against her throat but she stepped away. She curtsied and bowed her head, “My apologies, Your Grace, I did not know you would be visiting me this evening and I thought to conserve the lavender oil…”

His first thought was that his Queen was very literal, taking his request that he always wanted her to smell of lavender to heart. To his shame he then realised, Or more likely she is terrified of displeasing you.

He offered her his hand and she rose and he pulled her closer to him. He buried his face in her neck and breathed her in. He could not place her scent, but she was fresh from the bath and whatever it was was no less intoxicating than the lavender oil.
“You still smell sweet, my Queen,” he told her honestly. He felt her hand wander into his hair, her fingernails gently scratching his scalp and he groaned against her, “My perfect little Queen.”

Her body fell against him and he was hard in an instant, helpless against her maiden’s magic, wondering absently if it would fade in time.

He picked her up and carried her to the bed, laying her down against her pillows and undoing the tie of her dressing gown. It fell open and revealed a truly impractical shift of such thin fabric that he could see every inch of her underneath.

He moved his hands up her legs, his grip on the outside of her thighs, his thumbs on the inner. When he neared her apex they both winced, she in pain, he in horror.

He pushed her shift up and it was a testament to what he found that he could look anywhere other than her pretty pink cunt.

“You lied to me!,” he exclaimed stupidly.

Her thighs were raw with angry tears to her perfect skin.

“I did not, Your Grace,” she said, “You did not misuse me, I am just not used to the saddle.”

He pulled her thighs apart as gently as he could, lifting up her legs. She looked at the ceiling, clearly embarrassed by where his gaze had fallen near, but he cared little for her shame when the proof of her physical neglect stood before him.

“The Maester should look at you,” he said.

She clutched her thighs shut, her eyes wide in horror, but said, “If that is what you command, Your Grace.”

“I am not commanding anything,” he sighed in frustration, “If you would not, I can get your handmaid back. Perhaps she knows a salve…”
“You are kind to suggest it, Your Grace, but I fear she will not. I am perfectly well, you have too many troubles already, please do not give it another thought. I hardly notice it,” she said.

She was like a talking bird from the Summer Isles, filling the silence with useless assurances.

Having been on the field of battle he had seen wounds worse than this, far worse. Wounds that made these seem like mere blemishes. He had seen limbs severed and eyes gouged, he had seen men’s skin burned to seal a wound and he himself had removed far too many heads. Yet there was something about seeing skin as perfect as hers marred that made them seem especially cruel. Made him feel especially cruel.

“We will be resting here for another week,” he said, “But when we head North I suggest you make use of the litter we have provided.”

“If you wish it, of course I will, Your Grace,” she said.

“But?,” he asked. He was a slow learner and not a particularly avid student, but he was beginning to detect when her outward acquiescence suggested inner disagreement.

“I do not wish to slow down our progress,” she said, “The soldiers have been away from home for some time.”

“You are their Queen,” he pointed out stubbornly, “It is your prerogative to slow them down.”

It was infuriating that he had to tell a Lannister Princess what her rights were. She had been giving commands since before she had learned to speak. The very incline of her head could cause a whole slew of servants to reorder an entire feast. Yet she did not wish to slow down soldiers who only months before had been her enemies.

His uncle would point out to him that she was nearly as stubborn as he was.

“You have been gone a long time as well, Your Grace,” she said, “I do not wish to slow you down. Your trip to the capital has already cost you months away from your home.”
He couldn’t look at her he was so angry. How *dare* she pretend to care about his time away? How could she prey on the emotions of being back in his mother’s home? He wanted to growl at her.

He nearly did and said, “If you develop an infection it will slow us down even more.”

She nodded, and said devoutly, “Of course, Your Grace. I will use the litter the next time I feel weary on the road if it please you. You are kind to suggest it.”

He got off the bed and paced. He had to get away from her.

She started to pull her shift down and he snapped, “Stay like that!”

If he frightened her she said nothing, simply moving the shift back and dropping her hand. She looked once again towards the ceiling.

He knew that if he demanded it she would stay exactly like that all night. She wouldn’t even think to question him. The power made him sick to his stomach. She was meant to be a lion and yet she lay before him prostrate and vulnerable. It made him feel more animal than man and he hated her for it.

“Where is your lavender oil?,” he asked her, before he could think better of it.

“It is in the box on the table, Your Grace,” she told him.

The initials *JL* were inlaid in mother-of-pearl and when he opened it he found separate compartments holding different oils and tinctures. He wondered briefly if any of them were poison before he found a bottle with a lavender plant etched in the glass.

He crossed back to the bed and sat down, pulling her legs slightly further apart. He poured a bit of oil on one thigh and her hips rose off the bed the way they had when he had touched her. He knew though, that this was in pain.

“It will feel better in a moment,” he told her and pressed his hand to her thigh as gently as he could.
The skin felt raw but it did not bleed and he spread the oil over her skin. She let out a strangled sigh.

“Does that hurt?,” he asked. He would not stop if it did, knowing that the lavender would soothe her skin and the oil would inspire healing, but he would find a way to be more gentle if it did. He had not lied when he said he did not wish her harm.

“No, Your Grace,” she said and he gave her a look that urged her not to lie. She looked at him and he saw only earnestness and even, to his surprise, a bit of gratitude. “It is helping…the oil…the warmth…the pressure…I don’t know but…”

“Here,” he said and cupped her thigh in his hand, he massaged it gently, making sure not to rub against the scrapes too harshly. “Is that better?”

She nodded at him and a tear ran down her cheek. It was in her gratitude that he truly understood how uncomfortable she had been. He repeated his actions on the other leg and when she winced and bent her leg he stopped her with his lips against her knee.

She looked at him and he saw the desire in her eyes. He knew the same was reflected in his own. He was too close to her centre not to see the way his proximity was affecting her and her want was maddening.

“I will check with the Maester tomorrow to see if he has any ointments he would recommend,” he told her, removing his hands from her.

“Yes, Your Grace,” she nodded, “Thank you.”

“Am I wrong in assuming that you would prefer that he did not examine you?,” he asked her.

“Your instincts do you credit, Your Grace,” she said with a nervous laugh.

He nodded, “Then with your permission I will describe your ailment and will only insist upon him examining you if he feels as though it could lead to worse symptoms. And… I will visit you tomorrow evening and apply whatever salves he can supply.”
“Thank you, Your Grace,” she said, “Truly. I… would prefer you.”

He didn’t like what that confession did to him so he nodded, standing up.

“Then I will bid you goodnight, my Queen and see you when we break our fast,” he said formally.

“Sleep well, Your Grace,” she said formally as well, but then added, “I know that it is not Winterfell, but I do hope you find some comfort in being here.”

He, the Young Wolf, the King in the North, the victor of the Battle of Whispering Wood, fled from his wife at the utterance of that simple wish.

He found his way back to his chambers, removing his jerkin and trousers in a fit of anger and confusion. He was positively mad with desire and regretting his promise to her, to himself, not to warm his bed with another. Angrier still because he knew that no whore could aid the deep want that he felt.

He got into bed and lifted his hand to his forehead to smack some sense into it when he caught a whiff of the lavender oil. Images of his wife suspended in pleasure came forth unwillingly and he groaned inhaling it.

His hands were still smooth from the oil and he kept one under his nose and brought the other to his weeping cock. He tried to think of golden eyes and suntanned skin, or purple eyes and black hair, of brown eyes and blue hair. Nothing worked. He thought of a plump pink lip worried between pearl-like teeth, of a small lithe body with soft skin, and finally of damp golden hair and pale green eyes. He groaned as he took himself hard and rough, inhaling the scent of the oil and the memories of his wedding night it beckoned. He felt himself growing nearer and nearer, until suddenly he was overcome, releasing an ardent war cry that sounded like “Myrcella!”
And it's harder to stand when I'm holding out

Chapter Summary

This was a hard one to write. I hope it turned out okay.

The chapter title comes from the song "Beth" by Kina Grannis which I have basically been listening to on repeat as I write this story, because I think it is really fitting.

Also "Kingdom Fall" which is more obvious I suppose.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Robb was unsure if everyone at Riverrun was as reluctant to leave it as he was, or if this simply was what it meant to be king, the manifestation of your desires in the actions of others. Either way, for one reason or another, their journey North kept being delayed.

It wasn’t that he didn’t want to get home. He did. He was desperate to. It was the month of travel that he was not eager for.

The longer he spent at Riverrun, the more determined he was to have his uncle travel to Winterfell with him. He wanted to make him the Hand of the King, but the old man was stubborn and reticent. I have spent too long away from my home already, I’ll not leave Riverrun without a Tully any sooner than you would leave Winterfell without a Stark.

It was hard to argue with that kind of logic, but Robb tried anyway. He had spent years with the benefit of his uncle’s council, and the idea of living, of ruling without it, terrified hi. Even still, it was moot if his uncle did not wish to go. He would not take him from his home, not after the loyal service and familial devotion he had shown him in the early days of his reign.

His Queen seemed to enjoy Riverrun as well. He did not speak with her often during the day, but he had been visiting her bedchambers each night to check on her marks and had walked in to find her brushing her hair and humming to herself on more than one occasion.

Then last night he had walked in to find her smiling ruthfully.
“You are in good spirits, wife. That must be either very good or very bad for me,” he teased.

In truth he had not been having a joyful evening, having poured over the accounts with his uncle. There was a discrepancy they couldn’t seem to understand, and with Winter coming it was more important than ever to make sure there were no redundancies or foolish spending. He had not failed to notice that his spirits had lifted the closer he got to her room, but he would not dwell upon it either.

“Close your eyes,” she said. It took her a moment longer to remember her courtesies and then curtsied, “If it please you, Your Grace.”

He made a big show of covering his eyes and he heard her rustling around and then she said, “Okay open!”

He opened his eyes and the first thing he saw was her body practically vibrating with excitement and then he looked at what she held in her small hands.

“Is this the same one?,” he asked, stepping forward.

“It is, Your Grace,” she nodded, offering him the small shirt. “I had thought to simply patch it, but thought you might not mind a second layer as we travel further North.”

She had placed a lining underneath the original fabric. He took it in his hands and brought it closer. It originally looked like she had simply mended the tears but he realised upon further inspection that she had embroidered designs to hide the restoration.

“Wolves?,” he asked her, his hands moving gently over the fine light grey thread.

“And fish, Your Grace,” she said, taking the shirt from him and shifting it to show him the other figures. “I know that you are a Stark, and that it is not customary to incorporate the mother’s sigil, but… when I saw how much you loved it here I thought perhaps you wouldn’t mind? I can tear them out though, if you would prefer only Direwolves.”

“No,” he said wrenching the shirt to his chest. “Do not do anything of the kind. Thank you… I… thank you.”
“Of course,” she said, her cheeks pink.

“How are your marks today?,” he asked.

“Healed, Your Grace,” she said, “You may have missed your calling as a Maester.”

He would have joked that if the whole being king thing failed that at least he had an alternative but it would not have been funny to the daughter, sister and niece of failed kings.

“That is good,” he nodded, his stomach churning. “If that is so, then I suppose I should bid you goodnight.”

“Perhaps you should, Your Grace,” she said, nodding as well. “Or…”

She hadn’t made it to the end of her suggestion before he had tackled her to the bed. He took her three times, the first so quick for both of them that it could hardly count.

It was harder, out in the open, to forget that she was a Lannister. Some of her gowns were a proud Lannister burgundy, and though she could not help looking beautiful no matter what she wore, it made his stomach turn to see her in it. It felt, rightly or wrongly, that it was on those nights that she wore such a gown when she would walk most proudly through the Great Hall, his mother’s ancestral home, as though it was her gift to present. She said nothing of the sort, of course, but there was something condescending about perfection such as hers, something more of her mother in the tilt of her head, of her grandfather in the shrewdness in her green eyes.

He preferred her in greens and blues, the former brought out her eyes and the latter made her hair glimmer as it fell against her high cheekbones.

She wore such a gown tonight, a deep midnight blue. On another girl it might have almost seemed a mourning gown, but it was trimmed with ermine and it fit her slim figure elegantly, and there was no mistaking the joy in her eyes as his uncle lead her in a dance.

Yet even the presence of his favourite gown could do nothing to assuage the rumbling anger in his chest that he felt as he looked at her. She looked so carefree and happy, as though she had done
nothing wrong.

He heard her happy laughter and the quickness of her movements and all he could see was Cersei Lannister’s simpering smile and the clashing of swords on the battlefield.

Tonight, his Queen’s gown was the deepest blue, but nothing could hide her coat of red and gold.

***

“So you will?,” the Blackfish asked her.

“Of course I will, my Lord Uncle,” she said happily, “I would so like to be of some use for a change.”

“Give me the name of those who have made you feel useless and they will be dead within the hour,” he vowed as he spun her.

“Myrcella Baratheon,” she teased.

He scrunched his face, “Myrcella Baratheon? I know of no such woman. Now a Myrcella Stark, she I am quite fond of.”

She blushed and nodded in acceptance.

“Are you sure I cannot convince you to travel North with us?,” she asked him, the wine she’d had with dinner had loosened both her tongue and her emotions and she dreaded leaving him. He was the one true friend she had made since she left the Capital.

“I am entirely sure that you could convince me, Your Grace,” he said with a sad smile, “It would not seem such a sacrifice, if it was in your service.”
“You are very clever,” she said, banishing the tears from her eyes, “For how can I ask someone as loyal as you to sacrifice your very happiness?”

“You sound like my nephew,” he said, his eyes crinkling as he smiled, “So I will offer you the same thing I have offered him. A friendship of letters, and aid, should you ever need it.”

“Thank you, Uncle,” she said, forgoing the formality of Lord. She never used it with her Uncle Tyrion or Uncle Jaime or even Uncle Renly, before his death. Only Stannis. And in short time Brynden Tully had proven himself as devoted as they.

The dance ended and he bowed to her as she curtsied low. Lord Arys appeared at her side.

“My Queen I will -,” he started.

“Do nothing,” a kingly voice said from behind her. “I will escort the Queen in the next dance. Unless you had other plans for my wife, Lord Arys?”

Myrcella felt her cheeks turn pink. She had not felt such shame since the night the King had announced to all of Acorn Hall that he would be exercising his husbandly rights. This felt just as embarrassing, and the possessive note had entered his voice once again.

“Of course he doesn’t, Your Grace,” Uncle Brynden said pointedly, though who he was reprimanding she couldn’t quite tell. She was mostly sure that it wasn’t her but would not have bet a kingdom on it. “Come Lord Arys, I’ll tell you all about the time I got your father so drunk he woke up on Pyke.”

She was desperate to follow them. The story sounded interesting of course, but they were men that always had a kind word for her, who had never looked at her the way the King was looking at her now.

The other dancers moved to the sides. They would not join in the dance until they were granted permission by their King, and he seemed to have no intention of doing so. It was so like their first dance in King’s Landing that she felt herself moving as if it had all been predicted.

She curtsied low to him as the first chords started and he bowed to her. He offered her his hand and raised her up, starting the movements of the familiar dance. He was an easy partner to follow. His
disciplined, war earned body did what he told it to and he was so deeply _Kingly_ that his every movement dictated her own.

Dancing in his arms she could not forget the tender way he had held her the night before. It had been the third time they had coupled that evening and whereas before his hands found her thighs or her breasts, he had held her neck so gently, his other hand disappearing into her hair.

“Do you think it is possible to believe that one whose wit is celebrated from here to the Wall has acted out of mere foolishness?,” he asked her conversationally.

He never asked her to weigh in on any aspects of governance and she did not want to fail him now. She answered in a measured tone.

“I suppose even the wisest man is capable of a moment of foolishness, Your Grace,” she allowed.

“And what of the wisest woman?,” he asked her, his breath hot on her cheek, but his next question made her blood run cold, “What of a Queen, Your Grace?”

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Her green eyes flashed up to him and then returned to the floor. He had succeeded in flustering her, which had admittedly been his intention, but he felt no joy in it, only a sick fascination. It was truly like watching a lion be hunted, interesting in a perverse way, while feeling intrinsically wrong.

“They say that women are more feeble minded, Your Grace,” she said, her tone calm, though she would not meet his eyes. “I am sure they are right.”

“Are you?,” he asked her. “Would you say that your mother is more feeble minded than your Uncle Jaime?”

It took every measure of self-control not to name him Kingslayer, or worse, her father.

“I could not say, Your Grace,” she said, “They are both far more intelligent than I. It would take someone of your intellect to determine the victor amongst them.”
She was maddeningly nimble, the compliment rolling off of her tongue as though it was not calculated, as though it was something truthful rather than an empty preening meant to deter his anger.

He chuckled at her, “My perfect little Queen. They raised you well in that Red Keep.”

He saw her flush at that and he was relieved that he too was under her skin. She seemed to be able to crawl under his with such little effort.

“Young Grace, have I done something to anger you?,” she asked him as he spun her.

She did not spare a glance for their people surrounding them. Did not look towards the curious eyes as they moved this way and that. It was undeniably regal, that sort of indifference, and it made him want to conquer her until she was nothing more than the spent girl that fell against her pillows. He growled when he realised that he desired her even now and her green eyes flicked up to his.

“Where did you go today?,” he asked her.

“With a few of the Lords to the orphanage, Your Grace, and then to an inn for luncheon…,” she said and then offered quickly, “I took the litter as you requested…”

“Well I am happy that you at least used my transportation of choice as you committed treason,” he said low in her ear.

She nearly stumbled at the word, gripping onto him. In spite of himself his body reacted to her and held her steady. He should have let her fall, made a fool out of her as she had made a fool out of him.

“I am your most devoted subject, I assure you, Your Grace,” she said, as he led her more forcefully so that they would not make the scene he had only a moment before wished for. “If I have done anything to displease you then that is my greatest failure. Please tell me what I have done and I will never do so again, I will never make you question my loyalty again.”

He almost believed her. She was talented, better than any traveling player. She was no courtier, with
their vacant eyes and preening smiles, she somehow promoted earnestness amongst her lies. She truly was the most dangerous Lannister of them all, the others did not pretend to be anything other than themselves.

“I hear the orphanage received a very sizeable donation,” he told her.

She looked up at him and then down at her feet, “They have doubled in size in the past year, more children from all over the Riverlands have made their way there, Your Grace, there is much need…”

“I am aware of the need,” he said, though he hadn’t in fact realised that the orphanage had doubled in size in a year. That was something he’d have to look into, that did not seem sustainable, “But who made that donation?”

“I-I did…,” she said, “In your name.”

“In my name,” he said with a smile, “That was clever yet. But who do you think the children will remember? The King who did not bother to see them or the Queen who played the harp for them? Who do you think the Lords will remember? Do you think any of them will be fooled into thinking that it was the King who paid in Lannister gold?”

“You are my husband, Your Grace,” she said, “All that is mine is yours. The gold is yours, Lannister or not.”

“Then you should have asked my permission to bestow it, should you not?,” he asked her.

She looked up at him speechless and he fought the urge to pick her up and dance with her. He never got the better of her in a battle of wits, had never seen her at a loss for words. It was glorious and it spurred his anger on like the chase in a hunt.

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She heard him announce them to bed. Felt him lead her up the stairs. She absently understood that they had not gone to her chambers, that they had gone to his. She knew he meant to intimidate her with this, but she was too angry to feel anything as sensible as fear.
She had known before that he did not love her. That he would not make an attempt to love her. She had not realised though, that he wanted to hate her. She had been trying for weeks to be kind and to stay out of his way, she had been fooled into thinking they were making progress this past week, with his nightly visits to her chambers. In truth they had not spoken much as his large hands traced her thighs gently, but the words they had shared had been kind, with even a bit of teasing that suggested an understanding between them.

She was angriest at herself, for believing that her husband might ever grow to care for her.

“I should have asked your permission, Your Grace,” she lied, “It was from my dress allowance, but still, I should not have gifted money that belonged to you without first asking your permission. But -”

“Anything that comes before the word but is horseshit,” he practically spat at her, “Go on, say what you really want to say.”

She did not point out the fact that she would have said what she was about to say if he had not interrupted her.

“Those children need help. The orphanage needs more money to expand their buildings, they need food, and a proper maester. Do you really hate me so much that you would punish them for it? Does it really matter who they remember if they have food in their bellies and a roof over their head?,” she asked back, not trying to keep the horror from her voice.

The King that had fought a war to save his sister back, the man who had traveled through the night weary from battle to make it in time for a friend’s wedding, the one who had sent a quarter of his army back to defend his bannermen’s castles from Wildlings was not the King who stood before her now.

*Have I stolen that from him?*

“You think to lecture me on what those children need?,” he raged, echoing her fears, “You, a Lannister, speak to me of compassion? Do you forget WHY those children do not have parents in the first place?”

“Of course I do not forget, Your Grace,” she said and stepped towards him to implore him. The look in his eyes stopped her though so she backed away and asked, “Why do you think it is so important to me? If my…. despicable brother had heeded council, had heeded *my mother* of all people, then
their parents would still be alive to look out for them. But he did not and they are not. I, a Lannister, speak to you of compassion because I know exactly what happens when a monarch does not possess it! You may hate me, your people may hate me, but I am their Queen, and if going without a new dress or jewels helps them than I am going to do it and if that angers you then I will accept my punishment with as much dignity as I can muster, Your Grace.”

He stared at her, his mouth fixed in a firm line. He opened his mouth to say something and then clearly thought better of it, pacing away from her. He turned towards her and rubbed his face as though a deep tiredness had taken hold of him.

“You are not a child, I have no intention of punishing you. Punishment is meant to be a deterrent and I can see now that you will not be deterred,” he said and if she was not mistaken there was a ghost of a smile on his lips, but then he retreated back into his kingly voice and said, “And you will not be going without gowns or jewels either. The gold you spent will be replaced from the crown’s purse.”

“That is kind of you, Your Grace,” she said, stunned as always by how mercurial he could be. She had been told that Northerners were straightforward, open, simple. The Northern King must be the exception that proved the rule, “The gold was yours,” she continued.

_Everything is his, why can he not see that?_

“Stamped in Lannisport,” he said with a harsh chuckle, “And when those boys grow up, when it is time for them to take a spear in their hands, do you think they will think of me? Or do you think they will remember the beautiful golden Queen who smiled at them ever so sweetly?”

She remembered the vow she’d made herself on the precipice of their nuptials. How she had promised herself that his people’s love for her would haunt him.

_These gods of ours are quick._

She had been such a child then. Angered by his disdain for her, his disapproval. She did not know what it meant to be a wife, beholden to her husband, her entire world rising and falling upon his temper. She did not know what it meant to be a Queen, the way it felt when a Lord swore his allegiance or a blacksmith his protection, she did not know what it was to have a little girl who had lost both parents in the span of a month smile at her when she gifted to the child the ribbon from her hair.
She made a new vow to herself now.

*I will be the Queen he deserves, so that he may be the King that his people do.*

“I am your Queen, every action of mine is taken as an extension of your own. Why does it matter who they remember when it is us they will be fighting for?,” she asked him.

He said nothing but his blue eyes locked onto hers and he almost looked as though he felt sorry for her. She felt faint, the rush of understanding threatening to knock her from her feet.

“Because you think that we will once again be enemies,” she guessed. In even her darkest moments she had not imagined that she would ever be parted from him. That their armies would ever meet on the field of battle. She had thought they might be sulky companions for years yet. She had not imagined, like obviously had, that they may be enemies once again. “Because you do not trust me, a Lannister, not to turn on you.”

“It matters not,” he said. *You matter not,* she heard.

“Of course you’re right, Your Grace,” she said and curtsied to him so low her rear nearly hit the floor.

Her eyes were downcast, not in submission but so that he would not see the moisture pooling in them. She would not grant him the satisfaction of her tears, and worse yet, she would not suffer through his indifference to them.

“Trust does not come easily to people like us, my Queen. Many a marriage has survived without it,” he said, “There are more important things between a husband and wife, I suppose.”

*So I am nothing more than a royal broodmare indeed. At least I know that I please him in one way.*

“Of course you’re right, Your Grace,” she repeated and stood, her fingers moving to the front of her gown to undo the laces.

“What are you doing?,” he asked her.
“Would you prefer to remove my gown, Your Grace?,” she asked, her eyes still on the floor.

This time it was in submission, not to him, but to her fate. She was a woman grown and married, she would resign herself, she would hold onto the last shred of dignity she could.

“I am not going to bed you this evening,” he told her.

“Why not?,” she asked in confusion, looking up at him.

He was like quicksand and every time she felt she’d gotten her bearings she started to sink once again.

“Because you do not want me to,” he told her.

“You are my husband, Your Grace, I want what you want,” she said as if by rote.

“Then it is because I do not want to,” he growled at her with fire once again in his eyes. *He’s lying,* she realised. She could see it, his desire, it was emanating from his every pore. “Your family has turned me into a rebel and a King, an orphan and a killer, I will *not* be turned into a rapist too.”

*You think to lecture me on what those children need?* He’d asked, he who was an orphan too.

“You are my family now, Your Grace,” she said, with more strength than she knew she had, stubbornly caring for him even if he could not care for her. “You may not consider me as such, which is your prerogative but you are my husband,” he started to interrupt but she kept going, “I am not saying it as a talking bird I am saying it as a woman, and as a Queen. You are my *King,* you are the best chance our people have and all I want is to help you take care of them. If I *undermined* you by going to the orphanage on my own, then you have my apologies. I will not pretend that I do not want them to love me, but it is not at your expense. I hope in time that you will come to trust in that.” *In me.*

He was silent for a long while and then said in a calmer, earnest tone, “I hope so too.”
“Then with your permission, Your Grace, I will take my leave,” she said, knowing they would not make any further progress tonight.

He nodded at her and she curtsied and then turned to leave.

“Will you take me back there?,” he asked her as she neared the door, “To the orphanage? Before we head North I would see it for myself.”

“It would be my pleasure, Your Grace,” she said happily, knowing how a visit from their mythic King would carry the children’s spirits through a long winter.

He nodded at her and the corners of his eyes crinkled and he looked towards the chest in the corner of the room and then back at her. She raised her eyebrows in question and he went to it and retrieved what had obviously come to mind.

He walked towards her, and she realised he was holding a small shirt.

“Do you think it is beyond repair?,” he asked, proffering it to her.

She held it up, taking in the tears in some places and the thinness in others. His washers were using the wrong soap, and she made a mental note to make sure those in Winterfell knew the proper way of caring for his clothes.

“I do not think it is as bad as that,” she said, and folded it. “I will see what I can do.”

“I trust that you will,” he said and then blanched at his own poor phrasing.

“That,” she said with a small smile, “Your Grace, is a start.”

Chapter End Notes

I feel like Robb may get some hate on this one, and he is being stubborn and pigheaded, but his hatred of the Lannisters is justified. His real problem is that he hasn't realised that
she isn't one, not anymore.

Think he'll find out soon??

ps. this may be deviating from the timing I specified in the original one shot a couple months ahead, I don't want it to determine my pacing so I hope people don't mind if I do.
The evening had gotten a little rowdy somehow. Most likely, it was due to the fact that this was their second to last night at Riverrun. It seemed his men had an urge to drink his uncle out of wine and ale and he was doing nothing to deter them from that goal.

There had been dancing and laughter, too many bawdy jokes. He looked towards his Queen, wondering if she would be thinking of them as barbarians yet, but she stood with a few of the Riverlandish ladies, clapping to the beat of the song as the dancers danced.

Her new crown, quickly fashioned as a way of apology for his behaviour a few evenings prior, rested in her golden hair, the gown of deep emerald he favoured seem to beckon all of the light from the torches.

He stood with his Uncle, who had only recently forgiven him, Lord Glover and Lord Corving, a Southern Lord who had been in the Vale for his sister's wedding and was on his way back to the capital.

“And how do you find our Princess?,” Lord Corving asked him.

His Uncle fixed him with a look, though he needn’t have. He may be a Northern barbarian, maybe even a little drunk but he was not a fool, he knew when diplomacy was called for.

“She is everything a Queen ought to be,” he said with an easy smile.

“Submissive and bonny?,” Lord Corving joked.

His Uncle reached for his sword but Robb staid him with a look, and said through gritted teeth, mindful of the trading deal he was negotiating with Lord Corving’s liege lord, “That too, my Lord. A true credit to your country.”

His Uncle was not always a practical man and glared at him as he had the day after his argument with his wife.
“Why did the Queen refuse to look at the accounts with me?,” his Uncle asked.

“Am I her translator?,” he asked petulantly.

“No, but perhaps her puppeteer,” his Uncle grumbled. “Only last night she had been delighted that I asked. Before that…display.”

“Why do you insist on asking me a question when you already know the answer?,” he grumbled back.

“To shame you, obviously,” his Uncle said with a small smile. It fell quickly and he reprimanded, “You terrified her. You accused her of treason!”

“So she told you that then? Not quite as loyal as she claims is she?…,” Robb pronounced childishly.

“No she didn’t. She actually defended you when I asked her about it directly. One of the Lords overheard, and there were a many a servant that heard you two shouting at one another,” he said shaking his head, “Treason, Robb? Who better than she knows the consequence of treason? You threatened her life.”

Robb sighed, burying his face in his hands and tried to rid himself of the headache and the guilt.

“I was angry, I spoke out of turn. She just… irks me,” he said uselessly.

His Uncle smiled at him, “I’ll bet she does. Well while you licked your wounds, your irksome Queen uncovered true treason. Do you remember the discrepancy in the accounts?”

They had noticed it as the poured over the accounts the other day. The small missing payments. It was clever, to take a little from every pot. A large discrepancy would be much easier to notice, to track, but the same sum could be taken from a number of places without attracting much notice.
“Turns out the Boltons have been building their armies,” his Uncle went on, “They have been funnelling the money through grain.”

It was clever, because had they not caught the missing sum the Bolton’s would seem magnanimous. They were a greedy, unsatisfied House and so he could not be wholly surprised.

“How did she find it?,” he asked curiously.

“You speak of her being Tywin Lannister’s granddaughter… is it really such a surprise?”

“I am glad of it,” Lord Corving said, “Would you be so kind as to ask her over? I am to see her brother, the King, in a few weeks time and I am sure he would appreciate my personal account of her welfare.”

“Of course my Lord,” he said with a tight smile.

I can trust her to play her part. She will not betray me.

“My Queen,” he called and she turned from her companions, a light smile still on her lips, “Would you be so kind as to join us?”

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She had been having a marvellous time. There was a hysteria bubbling in the castle and it along with the crates and crates of wine had created a heady atmosphere.

She would miss the ladies of the Riverlands, who had until recently been Southerners themselves. There was something resilient and ancient about them, as though they cared little for the squabbles of their husbands.

“My Queen,” the deep Kingly voice cut into her reverie. She turned, still smiling at a joke from Lady Hartlong, towards her husband, “Would you be so kind as to join us?”
He asked her kindly, but it was a command nonetheless, so she turned to her companions and nodded in acknowledgment. They fell into deep curtsies and she crossed the room to her husband and his party.

“Your Grace,” she said, and sank into a curtsy of her own.

He rose her up, and pulled her to his side.

“Lord Corving is to see your brother in a few weeks,” the King said, “Is there any message you’d like him to deliver to the King?”

She looked into his blue eyes and saw fear in them for the first time.

“Just that I miss him terribly, though not quite as much as I miss Ser Pounce,” she said naming her brother’s cat who had more often than not wandered into her chambers to sleep. She chanced a look at the King and gave him a rueful smile, trying to let him know that he had nothing to fear, and then turned back to Lord Corving, “But that I am perfectly, perfectly well.”

Lord Corving looked warily between her and the King, as though he didn’t quite believe it. Robb must have noticed as well because he took the hand that still rested in his and raised it to his lips.

“We will get you a whole litter of kittens in Winterfell, my Queen,” he said and though she knew he was only playing a part she realised then that he must know who Ser Pounce was and the thought made her giggle, looking up at him.

“And was that your harp that I saw in the hall, Your Grace?,” Lord Corving asked.

“It was,” she nodded, “The King and I are visiting a local orphanage tomorrow, and the children seemed to enjoy the music on my last visit.”

Lord Corving sighed and nodded, “My own daughter plays the harp, Your Grace. I confess I have not seen her in many months. Would you allow me the breach in etiquette to request that you play a song for us now? You played the last time I was in the capital and I should like to hear such sweet music once more in my lifetime.”
She glanced towards the King, “With your permission, Your Grace?”

“Granted,” he said jovially and then stepped away from her, still holding her hand. He turned to the Lords and Ladies amassed, using his Kingly voice and they all stopped their revelling as soon as they heard it, “If you all would follow me. Our Queen has decided to grant us a concert.”

She thought perhaps that she would like Southern Lords to visit more often. Not because she enjoyed their company so, in fact, she preferred the open, more straightforward talk of the Northern Lords as opposed to the preening of the Southern, but she could get used to this kind of marriage. The King was looking at her like it was a gift, and it added to the headiness of the evening.

He lead her into the hall and took the stool a servant held and placed it for her.

“Thank you,” he said, as he helped her settle onto the seat.

“Grey striped, Your Grace,” she chanced at a joke. He looked at her incredulously, “The kittens.”

He chuckled and nodded at her and then stepped away. She waited for everyone to settle around her, but did not wait for silence, knowing that too many glasses of wine had been shared for that to be possible. She granted Lord Corving a smile and then took the strings between her fingers and started to pluck.

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The silence was immediate, as though a spell had been cast over the entire castle.

In all his life he had never heard such sweet music, not even when Sansa would sing on their father’s birthday. The melody from the harp echoed off of the ancient walls, surrounding them all in its embrace.

The Queen closed her eyes as she played, not reliant on any sheet music, and he remembered happening upon her with her damp hair, wondering if she had ever been carefree. Now he need not wonder, being able to picture her at six, barefoot and dancing in the sand.
He had no need to play the part of the devoted husband now, for he could not take his eyes off of her, and he did not even have the strength to be angry about it. She was the picture of innocence, but there was something to her that reminded him of the girl that he met in her bedchambers, when her Queenly mask faded away and left a girl prone to contented sighs and surprised laughter.

The end of the song was not something that he wanted to celebrate, wishing instead for an encore, wishing for it to go on indefinitely. But he knew that others would not clap until he did, so he gave her a thundering applause. Everyone joined in, the wine of the evening encouraging some to hoot and holler.

She stood with a wide smile and curtsied low to them all, as though she were not their Queen but a humble musician, grateful for their kindness.

He stepped towards her and offered her the glass of wine a servant had just handed him. She took it with a smile and took a small sip, handing it back to him. He couldn't seem to stop looking at her and she raised an eyebrow inquisitively.

"That was...lovely," he told her, "I should like to hear you play again."

"Then you shall," she said, as she always did when he told her he wanted something, the shy smile on her face that she gave him whenever he had a kind word for her. It was so beautiful that he cursed his stubbornness that stopped him from seeing it more. Others were coming to offer their best wishes but none would invade the bubble surrounding them and she said to him quietly, "I do so want to be pleasing to you, Your Grace."

"I know, my Queen," he said and reached out to touch the small coronet. It had been quickly fashioned but was small and delicate like her, and of exceptional quality, his finger grazed her silky hair and he could not stop himself from murmuring, "My perfect little Queen."

She blushed and he began to wonder how soon he could excuse them when the joy died from her eyes. That would have been startling enough if not for the thin trail of blood that fell from her nose.

"Myrcella?," he asked, his surprise causing him to forgo his normal formality. He did not have time to think about it when her eyes rolled back into her head, "Myrcella!"

With that, she fell forward into his arms. The goblet of wine crashed to the floor as he knelt to the ground cradling her. Screams erupted throughout the hall and he knew that they would not be the last
to come from this.

Someone would die for this, of that he was sure.

But please not her.

Chapter End Notes

dun dun dunnnnnn
In another lifetime he might be someone worthy of her. A husband that would sit by her bed as the Maester did whatever magic he could, a husband that would dab a cold compress to her temple and whisper words of love as she fought for her life.

He was not such a husband. He was not such a King.

He spurred his horse on, his Uncle, Lord Corving and Lord Arys at his side. Some of the ladies had gotten hysterical, thinking they too had ingested the poison in the wine, all of them having seen the Queen take that fateful sip, and he had left his men behind to comfort and protect them should any of their fears turn true.

A kitchenmaid had come forward and told his Uncle about a man who had slipped through the kitchens during the Queen’s performance, taking off onto a horse towards the town five miles west. They had headed that way, the other men having trouble keeping up with him and his battle-horse.

Lord Arys got to his side, his horse was nowhere near as powerful but it was as if he was an extension of his master who was riding with a purpose Robb hadn’t seen since he’d taken his own horse South before his father’s death.

“Your place is with the Queen,” Robb said as his squire grabbed his sword.

“The Queen is well-tended,” he argued, “I can be of no help to her... I cannot make tinctures or antidotes I,” he broke off and let out a howl, “I can do nothing for her here.”

“It could be a long ride,” Robb warned.
“I would ride to the ends of the earth for her,” Lord Arys vowed. He truly was no help when it came to the rumors, there were not many who could believe that sort of devotion was innocent, “I will ride into the deepest pit of the Seventh Hell and drag this demon out only to send him home once again.”

They road into the town and despite the late hour there seemed to be commotion. A woman with a torn blouse ran out to meet them.

“My Lords, my Lords,” she cried, “Please, please, he will not leave…my daughter…he has her…”

He and Lord Aryas looked at one another and jumped off their horses in tandem. They ran into the small house and found it in shambles, chairs knocked over, signs of the struggle the woman had suggested.

They heard sobbing in a back room and tried to get in but the door seemed barred. Lord Aryas kicked it to no avail and Robb hit it with the base of his sword.

“Together,” Robb commanded and Lord Arys nodded and they both ran into it with their shoulders.

They nearly fell in but nothing could stop them from action now as they saw a man roughly taking a sobbing girl, no older than the Queen they were avenging, her face bloodied and her dress torn.

He was nearest and took his sword and pressed the flat part to the man’s neck, pulling him back harshly. The man let out an inhuman grunt as the force of it brought him back against Robb’s chest.

The man tried to struggle and Lord Arys punched him in the stomach so hard that Robb was now supporting the man, though all he wanted to do was let his own fists turn him into a bloodied carcass.

“Do you recognise him?,” Robb asked him.

No matter what, this man would hang. In the South rapists could choose between castration and the Wall, but in the North and now the Riverlands rape was a capital offence. If he were further North he might consider sending him to Castle Black so that Jon could teach him some lessons of his own, but he would not waste food and men guarding this man as they made their journey.
If he was their man though, he would not hang until he was begging to.

Lord Arys grabbed him by his face and looked at him. He squinted and turned to Robb and nodded, hanging his head.

“You couldn’t have known,” Robb said as gently as he could in the scenario, though he too felt a pit in his stomach.

_He was right there and we did not see and now an innocent girl is being courted by Death for our blindness._

The empty sentiment did nothing to assuage Lord Ary’s anger or guilt and he let out a grunt and then punched the man in the face.

“Is this him?,” his Uncle asked as he and Lord Corving came in.

“Aye,” Robb confirmed, tightening the sword against his throat.

Lord Corving came forward with fire in his eyes, his sword raised.

“No!,” Lord Arys said and brought the base of his own sword into Lord Corving’s chest.

The man struggled as well, probably thinking the commotion would give him a chance to get away, and Robb dug the base of his sword in farther until he felt the man slump against him.

Lord Corving was still struggling, “This man tried to murder the King, has possibly murdered our Princess,” he said to Lord Ary, “He shall not live.”

“He will not live,” Lord Ary vowed, “But first we find out everything he has to tell.”

Lord Corving still struggled, hellbent on plunging his sword into the man’s chest and his Uncle brought the hilt of his sword to the man’s skull and knocked him out. Lord Corving instantly fell to the floor and Robb knew that he and Lord Ary looked at him with identical faces of shock.
“There’s a reason I’m unmarried. I never could stand a wailing woman,” his Uncle said with a shrug.

***

The dungeons of Riverrun had been emptied when the fighting stopped. Prisoners of war had been ransomed and traded, and his Uncle had been happy to have fewer mouths to feed. Crime had once again gone down, and Robb had no small pride in the fact that the Riverlands were now as safe as the North had been when his father was warden. The kind of place where a maid could walk in her shift alone unharmed, the events of this evening notwithstanding.

So it was that the rapist and would-be murderer ended up in a cell all on his own. He lay on a table that had been brought in, strapped and gagged and naked. He had not yet woken and there was a pail of water in the corner waiting for Lord Arys’ return.

It had been the Queen’s sworn shield who had the good sense to check the man’s pockets. They had found a powder and Lord Arys had run to the Queen’s chambers to give it to the Maester, the pair of them hoping it might help him determine the proper antidote.

It took all of his strength not to begin, as he stared at the man who had raped an innocent, the man who could have killed any number in his mother’s ancestral home, the man who made his Queen fight for her very life. He had promised Lord Arys though, and though it was nighttime and there was no approaching army, it was a battle promise, unbreakable and sacred.

His Uncle had left to ensure that no one else in the castle had taken ill and to check on Lord Corving who had not yet woken up from his slumber.

Lord Arys came rushing in.

“How is she?,” he asked him.

“Alive but unconscious,” he said shaking his head. “The Maester nearly fainted when he saw the powder, but he knows what to do now. She…she should be dead… that powder ingested… the Maester said she should have been dead within minutes.”
“Aye but she is not dead,” Robb said, relief flooding his veins, “She will come through this, I know it.”

“I know she will, she has to. By gods the women are the strong ones truly.”

Robb nodded and picked up the pail of water, “Shall we begin?”

***

The man had broken in minutes. Gold could buy murder but not loyalty, and a sell sword at death’s door was not going to withstand torture to protect the name of his employer.

Robb had thought that his reign would not know torture. It was a Southern tradition, only a few houses in the North allowed it and only under the direst circumstances. Robb had thought to set an example for his people. He had thought of what his Father would have wanted him to do.

But then he had thought of what his Father himself would have done if it had been his Mother fighting for her life. He would have torn toenails from the culprit, would have pushed the lever of the rack himself.

Robb had thought that he would not be a King that would condone torture let alone perform it, but that was before someone had nearly murdered his Queen. His beautiful, elegant, Queen who had only tried to please him from the moment they were married. His Queen who stitched his parents’ sigils into his small shirt, where no one else would see them, where only he would know that he wore them close to his heart. His Queen who had bewitched his Uncle and provided for his people. His Queen who lay unconscious even now as the gods decided her fate.

Robb had found himself disappointed that the man broke so easily, all they had to do was show him the shearing blade and he had sung like a bird from the Summer Isles.

“It was clever,” he said to the man before him, “Placing the poison upon the strings of her harp rather than in her glass. Not even the servants touch the strings I am told, only her.”

The man sat silently in front of him, the flames from the torches causing light to flicker over the hard lines of his face.
“Tell me, Lord Corving,” Robb continued, “What exactly did you hope to achieve? The Queen’s death, certainly, but to what end?”

“I have watched for too long unworthy men sit upon the Iron Throne, Your Grace,” he said calmly, “Tommen is not mad like Aerys nor cruel like Joffrey, but he is as ineffective as Robert, as weak, as controlled by a golden cunt.”

“And you sought to what? What would the Queen’s, your Princess’ death earn?”, he asked.

“War,” Lord Corving said simply. “The Lion Cub killed in the Wolf Den? A Queen murdered by her King’s people? That dear boy is what legends are made of. That is the sort of story that the bards sing songs about for centuries. Hers would have been a noble sacrifice.”

He was mad. Of that Robb was sure. Even still, he had to know if there were others, or if this truly was the actions of a lone lunatic.

“And what, in your mind, Lord Covington, would victory in this war look like?”, he asked.

“Is it not obvious, Your Grace?,” he asked, “A King the Seven Kingdoms could believe in once again, a man beloved by the people and the Lords alike, a man who could provide for the Winter and establish law and order. Who but a Stark could achieve such a thing? Who but you, Your Grace?”

It was bad enough learning that his wife was the target of the attack. He had thought she was merely unlucky, he had thought the poison meant for him, a vengeful Southern Lord seeking to end the rebellion and unify the country in a single sip. But when they had heard from the sell sword where he placed the poison that belief had been banished. And now to realise it had been in his name. He fought the urge to keep steady, knowing that he had to keep his head straight so that he did not sever the man’s head here and now.

“You took quite a risk,” he said, “There is no saying that I would have won, Lord Tywin would not forgive the death of his granddaughter. The South would not forgive the murder of their Princess. You would have made me the most hated man in the Seven Kingdoms, they would have named me wife-killer,” he said, thinking of the Kingslayer. And then he thought of the Kingslayer’s daughter, who sighed and called him My great big powerful King. He did not feel big and powerful, but he would be now, if he had the chance. “And you would have stolen her from me. You almost took her away from me, how could you do that? If I am the King you wanted why would you steal my QUEEN, my WIFE?”
“I am your humble servant, my King,” he said solemnly. “I had been assured that you would not care.”

It was this that made Robb double over. *I did this.*

“You were lied to, my Lord,” Robb said, his voice as though from the bottom of a tomb.

“Yes,” Lord Corving said with a sigh, as though Robb merely had mentioned it looked as though it might rain, as though his very life didn’t hang in the balance, “I can see that now. I hope she lives, one who makes music such as that should not die young, but then again, these gods of ours our cruel. She should not die for you, another King ruled by a golden cunt. Such a waste,” he said, and Robb was not sure if he meant his potential or her death. It mattered not, “They should not allow it.”

“It was not the gods that did this,” Robb growled, “It was you-,” he turned to strike the man, anything to make his calm demeanour shake, anything to rid himself of the weight he felt upon him but his squire walked in and whispered into his ear. He turned away from Lord Corving, forcing himself to breath normally, fighting to hold back the tears, the wail that was bubbling inside of him. When he finally had control of himself he turned back to him and said, “You will die tomorrow, Lord Corving. And the Queen…”

“What of the child?,” Lord Corving asked as though he cared. As though he had a right to know.

“The Queen…,” he said and fought for breath, “Will look you in the eyes and hear you beg for her forgiveness before you meet your end. She will live, my Lord, but you will not.”

With that he turned away from him and hurried through the castle towards his wife who, he had been told, had opened her eyes at last.
When will you let me in?

Chapter Summary

I feel like I am writing this for the same four of you and no one else is reading but I don't care because I LOVE YOU ALL and I love this story and I love how much you love it.

Hope this doesn't disappoint :)

When she woke it felt as though she had been trampled by a carriage. She was bleary eyed but she could tell her chambers were full of people and she let out an inelegant cry as she tried to right herself.

“Be still, my Queen, be still,” she heard a strong voice said.

“Lord Arys?,” she asked in a croaked, timid voice.

“I’m here, my Queen, I’m here,” he said and she felt something touch her hand. She grasped for it and she felt his large ones engulf hers. “You are going to be well, my Queen. I promise, I will never let any harm befall you again.”

“The…the King…the wine…,” she said, trying to warn them. She remembered taking a sip and the King’s blue eyes before everything went dark. He had to know, they had to save him.

“He is well,” Lord Arys assured her, “Perfectly well, my Queen. He will be with you soon.”

“Do not trouble him…,” she said, her hand going limp in Lord Arys’ as she collapsed onto the pillows.

“Trust me, my Queen, he will not be troubled,” Lord Arys said and she thought she might have heard his smile but she could not be sure as her world went dark again.

When she opened them again her vision was clearer but the room was darker, the torches waning. She could tell that her chambers were emptier, not hearing the soft voices hovering at all corners.
“Thank the gods,” she heard from her side.

She did not have much strength but she turned to her right and saw the King sitting there in a chair by her side.

“Your grace I-,” she said, trying to get up.

“Peace, peace,” he said, standing up and pressing her gently back against the pillows. He looked at her with a question in his eyes and she furrowed her brow in confusion before he placed one hand under the small of her back and the other at the back of her neck, adjusting her so that she rested more comfortably against the pillows. She let out a sigh of contentment and he brushed the hair from her face, still hovering over her. “How do you feel?”

“I am well, Your Grace,” she managed as though it were any day as they broke their fast. He gave her a stern look so she added, “A bit weak, and -”

“And? Should I fetch the Maester?,” he asked her, a divet appearing between his brow that she wanted to press her finger against.

“No, no I am just… a bit thirsty. Would you be so kind as to ring for Minna?,” she asked pathetically.

He disappeared from her side and returned with a goblet. She looked at it hesitantly, suddenly remembering the last goblet she had drank from and he looked at her with concern and raised it to his lips.

“No!,” she cried but he let out a satisfied ahh and raised it to hers.

“It was not the wine, I will tell you everything, but first drink. I promise you it is safe, Lord Arys fetched it from the well himself,” he said in a kind, patient voice, still holding it to her lips.

She opened her mouth and he tilted the cup lightly until she felt the cold water on her tongue. She let it fall down her throat, soothing the hoarseness and he lifted it away before she had too much.
“Thank you, Your Grace,” she said gratefully, the staleness in her mouth dissipating instantly.

He raised it to her lips again after a moment and she drank, her eyes on his. He opened his mouth as though he might swallow it for her, the way she had seen young mothers watch their young take their first bites of solid food, and only closed it when he had set the goblet down on the table beside her.

“Have I slept for long, Your Grace? I apologise if I have delayed our journey North,” she said. She had no way of knowing for how many hours or days she had slept and she knew that they had dallied in the low country for far too long yet.

“Please do not apologise to me,” he begged, “I cannot bear it. You have only slept for hours, and we will delay our journey for as long as it takes for you to be well.”

“Will you…,” she started and trailed off.

“Yes, my Queen, anything, what can I do?,’’ he asked her, hope in his voice.

“What happened?,’’ she asked, remembering what he had said about the wine.

He looked at her sadly and he sat back in the chair by her bedside. Something told her that she should be more alert for what he had to say so she used what little strength she had to sit up further against the pillows, her hand reaching for the goblet when she felt lightheadedness threaten.

“It was not my wine that was poisoned, it was the strings of your harp,” he said and she felt relief wash over her body.

“Thanks be to the gods,” she said, planning to visit the next Sept she could. He looked at her in shock and she told him honestly, “I had worried that someone might try against you again…it is…”

“Someone tried to kill you,” he said incredulously. “And you are relieved?”
“I was raised a Lannister princess, the daughter of a rebel turned King, Your Grace, I have lived my whole life under the henchman’s blade, but you… your people love you, if you had been the target then it would have only been the South, perhaps even my family. It would have been war… and you would have…,” she trailed off coughing. He handed her the goblet of water and she drank gratefully and then said, “Pardon me, Your Grace.”

“I would have what?,” he asked her.

“Considered yourself my enemy,” she said honestly, recalling the conversation they had a few nights before.

He pushed away from her, out of the chair and she feared she had said something wrong. He had been being so kind to her, she should not have said anything.

“It was the South,” he said to her and her blood ran cold, “Or rather, a Southern Lord.”

“Lord Corving,” she surmised. He was the only true Southern Lord in the castle and it had been he who had requested she play the harp. She felt sick to her stomach, he had looked upon her so kindly, speaking to her of his daughter.

*I am such a fool, how could I, raised in the Red Keep not recognise treachery when it stood right before me?*

“You are too clever for your own good, my Queen,” he said and crossed back to her and sat on the side of her bed. He reached a hand out tentatively and touched her cheek gently with his hand. He murmured, “My perfect little Queen.”

She felt tears spring to her eyes stupidly, the knowledge that her countryman had wanted her dead juxtaposed with the King’s tenderness was overwhelming.

“Forgive me, Your Grace,” she said as a tear fell from her eye.

He brushed it away with his thumb, his other hand stroking her hair and she closed her eyes at his touch. His hands had always had control over her, the slightest touch set her on fire, but this was entirely different. She leaned into him, not caring if it made her foolish, and another tear fell when she felt him press his forehead to hers.
She felt anchored by him, tethered in a way she had never been before, and she surrendered herself to his quiet strength.

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He was the one touching her but she felt like an anchor all the same, tethering him to her, and he gave himself willingly to her gentle need.

He did not want to go on, he simply wanted to hold her like this, where he could be sure that she was safe, where she leaned against him as though he would keep her that way. But he could not. He had promised he would not lie to her and he would not break that promise now.

“It is I who must beg your forgiveness,” he said.

His eyes were closed but he still knew that she had opened hers, still knew she opened her mouth to speak, so he moved his fingers to cover her lips.

“Do not tell me I am beyond reproach, do not waste your grace on me, my Queen, let me tell you what I have to say…,” he pleaded and he felt her nod against him. He could not let go of her, and she stayed with her head leaning against his. “Lord Corving is the one who ordered your poisoning. He has been caught, he and his assassin, and they will both die tomorrow. You are safe, you are safe, I promise… but he sought your death not out of hatred for you but out of love for me. He wanted me on the Iron Throne, he wanted me to supplant your brother, and felt as though war was the best way to achieve that. He knew the South, your grandfather, would never forgive your death. It would be a rallying cry on both sides.”

“He is mad,” she said, “Surely? How could he know that you would win? I mean no offence, Your Grace, you are the best military commander in Westeros, but… Winter is Coming… any number of things could have gone wrong and… would you not be blamed for my death? How could you rule over millions of people that wanted you dead?”

It was so in line with his own questioning that he did not think as he usually did in these moments of her grandfather. He did not see her shrewdness as a familial trait but as something intrinsic to her, a muscle that she stretched effortlessly.

_She would be a wise Queen, a true asset, if you would only let her_, his Uncle had said the other day
as they looked over the evidence she had found against the Bolton’s, *She may have her grandfather’s mind but she has something that all the other Lannister’s lack - a heart. Her grandfather would consider it a hinderance, but it is not. It makes her wiser yet.*

“He is mad,” he confirmed, “He sees as a madman sees, only the reality he has created in his mind. He could not see any outcome other than my victory. But there is more…”

“More of them? Is there a further plot?,” she asked, “Should we… do we… is…?”

“Ask, my Queen, whatever it is,” he said, his stomach tightening as they neared the part of the conversation where she would lose her sweetness, where she would stop looking at him as someone with answers and only as someone to hate.

“My loyalty is to you, Your Grace,” she said, her eyes locked on his, “I am your wife and your Queen, and your people are my people… but… I am still a sister, and I ask this only as such and not as a Princess of the Iron Throne. If there is a larger plot, is Tommen safe?”

The hardest part in all of it was pretending I did not care for you. Pretending that I did not pray for you, hope for you. There were times the blows were a mercy for they wiped the smile from my face upon hearing of your victory.

He remembered Sansa telling him so when they had reunited. Her jailers masquerading as her future family had made her very blood a crime, her Tully blue eyes and fair Northern skin reason enough for her punishment. He had hated Joffrey, *killed* Joffrey, for instilling that fear in her, and here he was, married to Joffrey’s own sister, and intentionally or not he had instilled that same fear in her.

“I cannot promise that he is safe, only that you never need apologise for fearing for him. Tommen is a good brother to you and a good man, there is no shame in wanting him safe. To my knowledge Lord Corving was acting on his own, though, so I should not worry too much, but I will be sending him a raven tomorrow to inform him, and you can send your own note along with mine as I am sure he will want to see for himself that you are well,” he said, knowing how he had always felt upon receiving ravens noting Sansa’s well being, seeing the threat within them.

“Thank you, Your Grace,” she said and took his hands in hers and pressed a kiss to them. She leaned her forehead against them, “Thank you.”

“Please do not thank me,” he said, knowing he could not delay any longer. She looked up at him,
“There is something else you must know.”

She let go of him and leaned against the pillows, nodding her head slightly acquiescing that he could continue. It was an undeniably regal gesture, but it did not grate him as it once may have. Instead he knew that he would employ it, a silent suggestion of power that spoke louder than a hundred commands.

“I have not… when I… Lord Corv…,” he started but could not seem to find the words. She took hold of his hand and held it gently between her two small ones, urging him to continue. “Lord Corving pronounced himself my loyal subject, and when in my anger I asked him how he could think to take you from me he told me that he had been assured I would not care. Because of my….behavior towards you these past weeks… he felt as though I would not mind your death. Had he imagined that I would, he likely would have not proceeded,” he felt her hands go limp and he clutched onto them with both hands. He raised them to his lips, pressing kisses to her fingers.

“Do you believe me now?,“ she asked him quietly. He looked at her questioningly, and she went on, “I told you the other night that everything I am now is an extension of you, but you did not believe me. Do you believe me now?”

“I do,” he nodded with the vehemence of a pious convert. “I know that you are right, I knew then, I was just too stubborn. But Myr-my Queen you have to know, as he now does, that he was wrong. He thought I would not care but he was wrong, do you hear me? Do you believe me?”

Her lower lip trembled and he thought not for the first time how overwhelming all of this must be for her. To have nearly died, to have nearly been murdered, even as someone who had lived her life under the henchman’s blade, it would be too much to handle in an evening.

“I want to…,” she told him and he could tell that she meant it. She was not punishing him, though she had every right to, she was not using vagaries, or stalling. She was speaking honestly as tears pooled in her eyes.

“He was wrong.” Robb went on, “I was wrong, in the way I acted, in the way I have thought… I… you have been swearing your loyalty to me every day since our marriage began, you have been proving it publicly and privately, even when I have not deserved it, and I should have been making a vow to you of my own. From the moment you became my wife I have taken you under my protection. I have not been as kind or as charming as I should have been, I know I haven’t, but there has never been a moment that your safety was not paramount. There has not been a single moment where I would not do everything in my power to protect you.”
“Except care for me,” she pointed out fairly. “He did not question my loyalty, Your Grace, he questioned yours.”

“I know,” he said, closing his eyes, holding her warm hands to his forehead, “But no one ever will again,” he opened his eyes and brought her hands back to his lips, “You never will again.”

“You would try?,” she asked hopefully, tears falling from her eyes, “To care for me? In spite of who I am?”

“I have been trying…not to care for you,” he told her honestly, “Because of who you are, or rather, who your family is. But it has been in vain, it has all been in vain. You are the most dangerous of the Lannisters, of that I have always been sure, my Queen.”

“I am not dangerous,” she promised, “Please,” she cried and he had never seen her like this, had never seen her so vulnerable. It made him want to pick her up in his arms and hold her safe, and so he did, because he was so tired. So terribly tired of not doing the things he wanted to with her. He pulled her into his lap and her arms came around his neck. “It is not just my life that depends upon you caring for me, Your Grace.”

“What else could there be?,” he asked her, pressing kisses to her hair, “What else could matter?”

“My heart,” she whispered and then let out another cry, “It is not my role nor my station that dictates my loyalty, it is my stubborn heart that you have taken from me and I cannot bear it.”

She was holding onto him tightly and trembling and there was not an apology in the world that could encompass all the ways that he had failed her, so he said nothing.

Instead, he lifted her head, wiping the tears from her soft cheeks. She looked up into him with those green eyes that had always affected him so strongly and there was fear and sadness in them but hope as well. They became blurry as he leaned in and pressed a kiss to her lips.

This is why I delayed.

His gravity shifted upon the first touch of her lips. Even in the beginning there had always been a certain rightness when their bodies met. Of all the things they had to overcome, physical indifference was not one of them. The slightest touch had always seemed to affect them but nothing had ever
affected him quite so much as her soft lips against his.

She let out a sigh and he realised then that this could very well be her first kiss. She had come to him an untouched maiden, and he knew that she had never been unguarded for a moment of her young life. He felt an overwhelming need then to do this small thing right, and he brought his hand to the back of her elegant neck, holding her steady against him as he let his lips wander over hers.

“You must bear it,” he told her when they parted. “For I never plan on returning it to you. But I promise you, Myrcella, from this moment on I will keep it safe, and you along with it.”

“I believe you…Robb,” she said and then giggled.

He kissed her again, not being able to stop himself now that he had tasted her, and caught her laughter on his lips. She deepened it, a fast learner, and threaded her hands into his hair. He wanted nothing more than to keep kissing her, to kiss her and take her in all the ways he desired, to communicate with her in the way they’d always seemed to best, but she needed rest, and it felt important that he not do anything further tonight.

“You need to sleep,” he told her and her face fell.

“Is Lord Arys outside?,” she asked.

“He was when I came in, why? Do you need him?,” he asked, knowing that no matter where he’d gone her loyal knight would come the moment she called.

“I know it is foolish but… I… am frightened,” she said as though looking for the words. Fear does not seem like something she would have ever admitted to in the past.

“It is not foolish,” he assured her, “Your calm is…awing actually. Being afraid is perfectly natural… would you… feel better if I stayed with you?”

“The night?,” she asked.

He nodded, “I can keep you safe, I promise. I’ll watch over you.”
“You must be tired as well,” she said, stroking a thumb under his eye, “You need your rest too.”

“If you would prefer Lord Arys…”

“No…no… stay…please, I just think you should sleep as well. Will you?”

He nodded and she crawled off of his lap, getting under the covers. He stood and removed his boots and jerkin, and trousers, and he looked to see her smiling at him.

“You are wearing your small shirt,” she said and he looked down to see the wolves and fish.

“I love it,” he told her honestly, and got into bed next to her, moving her so that he was on the side closer to the door.

“I will make you another,” she promised.

“I’d like that,” he said and pulled her to him, curling on his side so that he blocked her entirely, held her entirely within his grasp as he had feared he might never do again. “But for now, sleep, and trust that you are safe.”
I AM A MONSTER AND I CAN NOT STOP

Thanks for all the love guys, I imagine I will not keep updating with such frequency but who can say, really?

The sunlight felt good upon her cheeks, the cool crisp air coming off the river gave her tired body energy once again as she stood by her Uncle Brynden’s side.

The sellsword had already been hung prior to her emerging that morning. There was no audience for him, he was common, a businessman that merely traded in death as opposed to fruit or jewels.

There was a large crowd now though, the Lords and Ladies of the castle who had all witnessed her fall the night before stood behind her and her uncle. They stood on the wooden structure upon the river’s surface, the dock, Uncle Brynden had called it and the King stood before them.

Lord Corving stood as well, his arms shackled behind him and held by Lord Arys who looked as though he may steal the King’s sword from it’s sheath to expedite things.

The King turned to her and nodded and she stepped forward. He had been adamant that this would happen, that she would look Lord Corving in the eye before he died and hear him beg his forgiveness.

I would have you see that he is no threat to you, my Queen. And… I would have him see that he has failed.

“Lord Corving,” she said stoically, thinking of her mother. She would not cry before this man, she would not give him the satisfaction, she would not let her people see her as weak.

Show him what it is to attack a lion, show them all.

“You look well, child,” Lord Corving said almost kindly.
Lord Arys kicked the back of his knees and Lord Corving hunched forward, “You bow before a Queen, Lord Corving.”

Lord Corving rose once again and said to her simply, “As a man I bear you no ill will, your majesty. I acted as a patriot, it was not personal.”

That enraged her. She had felt fear and sadness but not anger, not until this very moment.

As she stepped forward she saw Lord Arys tighten his hold and the King place his hand on the hilt of his sword but neither man stopped her.

“It was personal to me,” she seethed at him then looked at her husband and said, “It was personal to your King,” Robb nodded at her slightly and she turned back to Lord Corving, pulling herself up to her full height, letting the sunlight bounce off of her coronet, “I am Myrcella Baratheon, the first of my name, Princess of the Iron Throne, Queen of the North and the Trident. I was born the daughter of the rebel King Robert Baratheon and the granddaughter of Lord Tywin Lannister. I have married the warrior King Robb Stark and my sons will rule the North long after your body turns to dust. These are men, Lord Corving. Did you really believe that I would be your collateral damage? Do you really think your opinion of me, your reasons matter? Look me in the eyes and understand that they do not. That is a command, my Lord,” she reminded him when he did not. He was a loyal traitor, for he did not resist a direct order. “You are a failure, my Lord. When you meet the gods and await your judgment you will remember my face but know that I will forget yours before the sun has even set on this day.”

With that she returned to her uncle’s side. He was staring at her and she turned to look at him and he scrunched his nose at her. She gave him a grim look and then turned her attention back on the King where it belonged.

He looked at her, and just as he had a moment before, she nodded to him slightly and he removed his sword from its sheath in one fluid motion. It was almost elegant and he placed the tip to the ground and bent his head over the hilt.

He spoke softly but the sound carried with the wind towards them and he said I, Robb of House Stark, first of my name, King of the North and the Trident, sentence you to die.

“Look away if you have to,” her Uncle said kindly.
“No,” she said stubbornly as her husband lifted his sword, “He will know if I do.”

It was over in an instant, and despite the anger she had felt a moment before she still felt her stomach lurch upon seeing Lord Corving’s head fall to the ground.

“You did well,” her Uncle said and when she started to protest, swiping a stray tear from her eye, he whispered, “Killing is not meant to be easy, even when it is just. That man deserved to die, he was given a cleaner death than I would have delivered, than our King wanted to deliver, but that does not mean it costs us nothing to witness it. Do not antagonise the part of yourself that feels it, for when death becomes easy, we are well and truly lost.”

“No,” she said stubbornly as her husband lifted his sword, “He will know if I do.”

“Do you mean that, Uncle?,” she asked hopefully, “You are not just… saying it for my feminine nerves?”

“I would say anything for those feminine nerves, but no, I do not just say it. I killed the man that took the King’s mother from us. I loved her like she was my own daughter, she was strong, like you, fierce, but good, so very good. I found the man that killed her and when I plunged my sword into his heart it felt like justice but I found no pleasure in it. In truth I wept that night like a babe at his mother’s breast,” he said, his eyes crinkling at her, “It is only tyrants who do not embrace mercy.”

***

It had been his Queen who had insisted upon going.

*We have promised, Your Grace, we should keep our word, should we not?*

*All men should keep their words, Kings most of all. But we take the litter.*

*Even you?*

*Even me, I will not let you out of my sight.*
You would never know that she had stood before a man today and heard his last words. Even less that she had been at Death’s door only the evening before. She sat across from him in the litter, wearing her gown of midnight blue, trimmed in ermine. She had removed her coronet before they left, but she needed it not to look the part.

“Is this what you ladies do in these?,” he asked her curiously as he bit into a honey cake.

“I suppose it is,” she said, sipping her jasmine tea, “Though as you know I have not much experience in one.”

“Whyever not?,” he asked, reclining against the soft pillows.

There was perfume in the air and it was warm in spite of the wind howling outside. The pace was slower, it was true, but much more comfortable. He preferred riding of course, and had no intention of joining his wife in the litter on the journey North unless of course she requested it, but he did not quite understand her disdain for them.

“My father always said that you should let your people see you,” she told him, “That people cannot love someone they do not see and that only a tyrant must hide from his people.”

He smiled, thinking of the stories his father had told him of Robert Baratheon. He had been a mammoth in his time, a great war hero, not the sort of King that would hide from his people. He would have savoured their love, relished in it, confident in his own glorious cause.

“My father said much the same,” he confessed. Her eyes widened and her face was open and smooth in interest. He never spoke of his parents, either of them, to her. He had foolishly held them away from her, as though sharing them with her, a Lannister, may taint their memory. “Every night he would have a different man from the North sit at our table. A blacksmith or a Lord, it mattered not. He would listen to them, my father was not a man of many words, and learn about the plights they and their families faced, he learned which castles had begun fortifying for the Winter and which would need a firmer hand once the cold set in, he learned why a blacksmith might tweak the shape of a shield depending upon the man who used it, and why we inexplicably had a crop of purple potatoes one year…”

“Purple potatoes!,” she said with a smile, “How marvellous.”

He grinned at the memory of Sansa making a big show of eating them to entice Rickon and Bran and
even Jon into trying them. The way his mother had kissed her auburn hair and said *You are a lady beyond your years, my dear.*

“I believe we still grow them in the glass gardens,” he told her, “I will request them for supper one evening, if you should like to try them.”

“I would, Your Grace,” she said with a smile, “And will we continue that tradition? Of your father’s, I mean? I know you have been so long away that you will want time with your brothers but…”

“But what?,” he asked, using that subtle nod she’d taught him to urge her on.

“It seems like a fine tradition,” she said, “And a kind message to your people, that the North is once again safe and in the hands of one who loves it.”

“I believe you’re right,” he nodded, “I have been too long away, they will need to see it, and our people will have to come to know you as well.”

“Your mother sat with you?,” she asked curiously, “Forgive me…it is just that my parents never set with one another at a feast…”

“Aye,” he nodded, “My parents were often together.”

“That is a special thing,” she said, “And it is no wonder, that you hate my family so much. We who stole such rarity.”

“I thought I was your family now?,” he asked her. Her whole face lit up and he could not help smiling back at her. He wanted to get away from the topic of his family though, not sure that he could show up in as good a mood as the children deserved if they continued, “Now what is that?,” he asked pointing to a small pastry.

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She could not help but grin at him as she picked up the delicate pastry.
“You’re going to love it,” she promised and handed it to him. He went to pop it in his mouth and she stopped him saying, “Smell it first.”

“Is that a command?,” he teased her.

“A request, Your Grace,” she said, bowing her head in an ostentatiously demure manner.

He brought it to his nose and smelled and he closed his eyes. When he opened them they were nearly black and they had a glazed quality to them.

“Lavender,” he said. Her mouth had gone dry and she couldn’t speak so she simply nodded at him. He dipped his pinky finger into the mousse and raised it to his lips. He closed his eyes once again and let out a contented sound. “Have you tried this?”

“N-no,” she said.

He stood up as much as he could, which still lead to him hunching half way forward, until he came to sit next to her on the seat. The seat was wide, meant for three ladies on either side, but he was large, and sat close to her.

He dipped his index finger in the mousse and raised it to her lips. She let her tongue flick out to taste it and then closed her own eyes in appreciation, her mouth closing around his digit on its own accord. She lathered the pad of his finger with her tongue, not wanting to miss a bit, which was foolish as there was much more of it.

When she opened her eyes the King dragged his finger out of her mouth, resulting in a popping noise and he made a pained noise. She looked at him though and he did not seem to be in pain. He swiped his thumb across her lip and raised it to his own, licking it clean. All the while their eyes never left one another’s.

“It…is very good, Your Grace,” she said, trying to regain some composure.

“It is, my Queen,” he said, and let the knuckles of his other hand trail down her face, causing her to shiver. “One of the sweetest things I’ve ever tasted.”
“I will ask the cooks for the recipe,” she promised dumbly, leaning against his touch, “For...when we grow lavender in the glass gardens.”

“Please do,” he said, with hearth fires in his eyes, “Such sweetness must be tasted again.”

She let out a little whimper and he moved in closer. She had been craving his lips on hers since they left them last night and it felt so very right when they were so close to one another.

His lips were so near that she could almost feel them and then they came to a stop.

“We are here, Your Graces,” she heard from outside.

Where? she wondered.

The King looked at her reluctantly then placed the rest of the sweet down on the table and left the litter. She was surprised, but not disappointed, that when she reached her hand out for assistance down, that it was the King’s and not Lord Arys’ hand that met hers.

***

She was right, was his first thought upon entering the orphanage.

Though it was a large farmhouse with multiple chimneys and a warm atmosphere, it was not nearly large enough for all of the children amassed. He remembered standing in the courtyard of Winterfell as King Robert arrived, the way he and everyone else in the castle lined up to greet him. The children were not in age order the way he and his siblings had been, there were far too many of them, but they were all lined up in rows, vaguely in order of size. The youngest could not even stand and instead were held by some of the older children who neared seventeen.

He understood immediately why she had looked upon him in such horror, because she had seen. His anger had been entirely misplaced, he had known since that night, but now he saw that he should have been down on his knees thanking her. Her contribution would be added to, and regular reports would be part of the compromise of his Uncle staying in the Riverlands.
He was thankful, at least, that the children did not look malnourished. They were not like the orphans of King’s Landing, they instead looked like the children of the servants at Winterfell. Their clothes plainer but well fitting enough and they lacked the hollowness under their eyes that he knew came with profound hunger. They had clearly been freshly bathed, the hall smelled of soap and their hair shone.

They all bowed as he walked in and it took him a moment too long to find his words, but said as soon as he could, “Please rise.”

“Thank you so much for coming, Your Grace,” an older, sturdy woman said, coming forward with a babe in her arms. She curtsied to him with more elegance than he may have originally suspected.

“It is in thanks to my Queen that I am here,” he told her honestly, “She was very taken with your home and the children, and we both want to see what more we might be able to do for you all.”

The woman turned to Myrcella and took the hand she offered and kissed the ruby ring she wore, “My Queen, the Mother has sent you to us in answer our prayers.”

“Whoever has brought me to you, I thank, Sable,” his wife said, holding her hands out until the woman handed her the babe she held. Myrcella adjusted the child who settled against her breast as though she were very use to trading hands and continued, “It is you who honors the Mother, by caring for her children when she cannot. You have taken care of so many,” she said and turned to him. He nodded at her, agreeing to whatever she asked. The child in her arms opened her eyes and as though sensing it Myrcella cupped the back her of head with her hand, bobbing up and down slightly until the little girl’s eyes closed once again, “And now it is time for us to take care of you.”

“Queen Ella?,” a small voice asked.

“Yes my sweet?,” his wife asked the child, stepping forward and kneeling down so that she might be at eye level. The child looked at him and then whispered something in his wife’s ear causing her to laugh, “Yes, that is really him. I know he’s big, but he’s gentle too. Here I’ll show you.”

With that she stood and turned to him saying, “Your Grace, there are some of your most loyal subjects here who would like to meet you.”

He stepped forward, trying to look, as his wife had just suggested, gentle and smiled at the children
amassed. He looked around at all of them and realised how easily Sansa or Bran or Arya or Rickon could have been amongst them, how scared they would have been, how lonely they would have been for their family. He thought of what he would say to them if he could.

“I’d like to apologise to you all,” he started, “The gods have been unfair to you, but it is not your fault, and it is not because you are unloved by them. They test those they know are strong enough, and you have all proved them right. I cannot promise that war will never again return, I cannot promise a never ending summer. I would like nothing more, but as Queen Ella reminded me today, Kings should always tell the truth. So all I can tell you is that we are going to keep you as safe as we can from all of the gods’ tests. You all have been so brave, so very brave, and I know that your parents would be very proud of you. Just as I am.”

“King Robb?,” a boy no older than six asked.

“Yes?,” he asked, crouching down as the Queen had done.

“If there is another war, I’m going to fight for you like my Papa did,” he vowed and laid down a small wooden sword at his feet.

He felt tears unwillingly swell in his eyes. He thought of the man he had killed today who had been granted every opportunity and how wrong it was that he should have been raised in a castle when this boy had probably never had his own bed. The bravery he saw shining out of the little boy’s eyes reminded him of why the Riverlands had so seamlessly become a part of the North. It was not simply the devotion to the Tully’s but a similarities of the souls of the two regions, where there was honor in sacrifice and love in duty.

“Then I know that my husband will be safe on the battlefield,” Myrcella said, when she seemed to realise that he could not speak, “If he has as brave a soldier as you beside him then I know that no harm could come to him.”

“I’ll protect him too, Queen Ella,” another little boy said, “And you!”

“You will?,” she asked with a smile as though she’d just learned a marvellous secret.

“And me!,” another one called, “Me too!” others chorused.
“Your army, Your Grace,” she said to him with teary smile, gesturing across the room.

A few of the younger children came over to her and Sable came to take the sleeping child from her arms. He saw Myrcella’s eyes follow the little girl before she turned back to the children before her, *oohing* and *aahing* and nodding in agreement as though they were all very wise.

A little boy handed her a bouquet of wildflowers and she clutched them to her chest like treasure. She pressed a kiss to his cheek and the little boy’s face lit up.

*My sons will rule the North long after your body turns to dust,* she had promised only hours before.

She had been as fearsome and majestic as a lion as she stood before Lord Corving. He could not take his eyes off of her as she commanded the respect of a man who only hours before had wanted her dead, as she looked into the eyes of someone who had almost ended her life.

He was ashamed of how he had feared on their wedding night that he might have gotten her with child. He watched as the children fluttered around her, looking at her like a princess from a fairytale, which she may as well have been.

He moved towards the older children, who were more reticent. It was Jon he saw in them, the cynicism in their eyes masking the bitter hope.

“My King,” they bowed as he approached.

“May I ask you something?,” he asked them. They all nodded, “Why do they call her Queen Ella?"

One girl stepped forward. She must have been thirteen the same age Sansa was when she left for the capital. She was a beauty too, and had a bit of the North in her with her grey eyes and dark brown hair. He hoped that Sable would watch the older children carefully, make sure this girl left them as innocent as she had come.

“One of the younger children, little Ed, could not quite say *Myrcella,* my King,” she said, her eyes downcast, a lady despite her station. “And ever since we have been calling her Ella… Good Queen Ella.”
“Good Queen Ella, he thought and smiled. How could he have feared devotion for her?

“And what is your name?,” he asked her.

“Catelyn, my King,” she said, “For-“

“My mother,” he finished, one of the tears finally falling as she nodded. “Well, Catelyn,” he said and offered her his arm. She looked at him in confusion and he took her hand gently and pulled it through his, resting her hand upon his forearm, “Would you be so kind as to show me your home?”

She beamed up at him and he fought the urge to swipe her nose the way he might have done to Arya. She looked more like his rebellious little sister than she did his ladylike one, but one could almost imagine this was her family’s castle for the way she began to lead him through, noting the date of it’s building and offering to show him the gardens or the long hall whichever you prefer, my King.

A few of the boys trailed them, and whether it was for her protection or their curiosity it mattered not. By the time they came to the vegetable garden, he had learned their names and which of them had siblings and what regions they hailed from. There were farmers sons and blacksmiths’, the sons of washerwomen. He learned that Catelyn was the daughter of a handmaid, which explained her courtesies, and that her little brother Robin had made something for the Queen that she was hoping he might pass along.

It was dark by the time he and his wife returned to the litter, and he sat at her side from the start as he had wanted to earlier that day.

“Thank you, Your Grace,” she said, “For agreeing to take me in spite of everything. I am not sure I could have beared to return North without saying goodbye.”

“It is I who should thank you, my Queen,” he said honestly, “It feels as though the afternoon has made my hands clean once again.”

“These hands?,” she asked, taking them in her small ones. He nodded at her and she kissed one set of knuckles and then the other, “Everything they have done was to keep me safe.”

“Not everything, I fear,” he said, and though the words were true, he could not help but murmur
them, taking her cheeks within his palms.

She looked up at him and he felt the same heat sparking between them that had been simmering since earlier that day.

“Am I in danger then?,” she asked softly.

“Are you afraid?,” he asked her.

“No,” his brave Queen said.

“Well I am,” he told her pathetically.

“I will protect you too, my King,” she promised sweetly, “My great big powerful King.”

“My perfect little Queen,” he said in wonder, and then remembered Catelyn’s words, “My good Queen Ella.”

Her lips still tasted of lavender when they met his but there was a sweetness there all her own. He kissed her reverently and she kissed him back devoutly.

As with last night, it would be so easy to lose himself in the kiss, but he forced himself to end it before it could go on too far. He could not quite bear to let her out of his arms though, not when she was safe and warm, not when she was the Queen his people had long deserved, and the wife he knew he didn’t.

He tucked her under his arm and she buried her face in his neck, the way he liked to do with her.

“Today,” he started, “With Lord Corving…,” he said and trailed off when he felt her tense, “You said something.”

“I said many things,” she said, “And if I embarrassed you I-“
“I have never been prouder of anyone than I was of you today,” he told her honestly, “You stood up to a man who wanted you dead, and sent him to his gods with your name like a prayer upon his lips. You were…the kind of Queen the North will rally behind, if anything should happen to me… you will be safe amongst our people.”

“That thought frightened you a few days ago,” she said softly, as though she regretted it already.

“It did, your ability to make people believe in you, love you… it is not just a shield, in the wrong hands it is a weapon as well. But these hands,” he said, picking up one and bringing the palm to his lips, “I see now that they are only fierce when they need to be. It is as you said, you prefer melodies to battle cries, and Westeros is safer for it because know this, my Queen, you can rally armies to your side. I will be but the first in a long line of loyal soldiers.”

“A loyal husband,” she said, looking up at him, “I should prefer that to a soldier.”

“I shall be both, as you deserve,” he promised.

“I interrupted you,” she pointed out. “What did I say to Lord Corving specifically?”

“You said that your sons would rule the North,” he said.

“I meant our sons,” she promised.

“I know,” he assured her. “And I think it is time, perhaps, that we start trying for them in earnest.” He had seen the way she was with the children, the way her eyes followed the little girl that was removed from her arms as though she would have liked nothing more than to hold her for the entire afternoon, as though she ached for her. Even still, he had to ask, so he tilted her chin up so that he could look her in the eyes as he asked, “Do you want that?”

He knew what her answer would be before she said, but while before it had served only to rebuff or grate him, now it seemed like a private joke.

“I am your wife, my King,” she said with tears in her eyes, “I want what you want.”
Love comes in at the eyes

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“The players are talented, are they not, Your Grace?,” Myrcella asked with her placid courtier smile directed at the actors rather than him.

“Aye,” the King agreed gruffly.

With that the young monarchs retreated into silence once again until their hosts rejoined them.

They had been on the road for a week now and had made steady progress each day. At the King’s request she spent half of each day in the litter, and she had taken to having a different lady each day accompany her. They would not be making a court to rival King’s Landing, so there were only a few Riverlandish ladies who would be traveling North with their husbands who had taken posts in the new regime.

Both the Queen and King had slipped into a melancholy upon leaving Lord Tully and the safe walls of Riverrun that not even their most charming companions could pull them out of. They did their duty every evening, sitting next to one Lord or another, asking about his people and his family, but every hall felt silent and dark compared to the lively hall of Riverrun covered in torches.

Myrcella sat, her wine untouched, afraid that with a single sip she would fall asleep. Travel was exhausting and they had risen early that morning in order to make it to their destination before sundown. She waited though, until she had seen a few of the other ladies take their leave before turning to the King.

“With your permission, Your Grace,” she said, “I should like to retire for the evening?”

“Of course, my Queen,” he said, rising along with the Lord of the castle. He took her hand in his and raised it to his lips, remembering his promise to her and said, “Sleep well.”

She curtsied to him and their hosts and began walking through the hall. Lord Arys was by her side in a moment and she kept her placid smile on her face until they had reached the stairs. With that her posture hunched and her weight fell more steadily upon Lord Arys’ arm.
“Come, my Queen,” he said gently, “We are almost there.”

She followed him like a child up the stairs to the large, warm chambers her hosts had chosen for her. She had learned that they were their daughter’s former chambers, who had only recently married a Lord of the Reach, and she thought of the girl now dancing amidst the smell of honeysuckles. She hoped that she was happy and well and that her husband was gentle.

“Will you send for Minna please, Lord Arys?,” she asked before stepping into her chambers.

She went inside and placed her crown upon the vanity. It was a dainty thing, but even still she felt relief upon removing it. She began removing her pins from her hair as well, not being able to wait for Minna to shake out her hair freely.

She heard the door open and close behind her and then the ties of her dress being pulled gently. She sighed in contentment as she felt herself being released.

“Thank you, Minna,” she said, her smile now genuine, “That feels good.”

Her dress was open now in the back and being pulled down her body until it pooled at her feet.

“It will feel better yet, my Queen,” a low voice told her before a pair of lips met the back of her neck.

“Your Grace,” she startled, “I had thought you were still in the hall.”

He chuckled against her, his first true laugh of the evening, pressing kisses to the creamy column of her neck, “You should join the players as they travel South, my Queen, for you are far more talented than they.”

She grinned as she tossed her head back against her husband’s chest, exposing more of her throat to him as his hand wandered into the neckline of her shift, grasping a small breast in his large hand.
She had known it was him but she had learned that he liked these sort of games. His were serious days filled with worries and dangers, it was only here, in whichever chambers she found herself for the evening, where he seemed to cast it aside.

“I was afraid you wouldn’t come,” she told him honestly. “Our host seemed…keen to speak with you.”

“Aye, he was,” he told her, “He wants a position.”

“Don’t we all?,” she asked him, her voice dripping with lust.

He spun her roughly and his lips set upon her with a fury. He picked her up by her butt and she wrapped her legs around him, her nimble fingers going to the laces of her jerkin as he walked them back to the bed.

She kissed his cheek and his temple and his hair, breathing him in. He was road weary and his smell was masculine and intoxicating and she wrapped her arms around him, holding on tightly as though he might let her go, even though all recent experience told her he wouldn’t.

“You hardly looked at me this evening,” he said sternly as he set her upon the bed.

“I couldn’t,” she told him honestly, “Everyone would know.”

He pulled his trousers down and pulled off his small shirt. Her eyes drank in his hard body greedily, having denied herself the pleasure of looking at him all day. He was such a man, with his well defined muscles and broad shoulders. She sat upon her knees and let her fingers trail over his chest, her lips following their path.

His hands were in her hair and she felt his lips pressing into her skull.

“Do you still think it is a sin to desire your husband, my Queen?,” he asked her.

“It must be,” she said as he pulled her shift off her her. He pushed her back gently against the bed and she looked up at him. Her legs fell open and he groaned, “Pleasure such as this can only be a
“Then we are sinners both,” he said as he shoved down his small clothes, revealing his proud hard cock.

He set upon her, pressing kisses to her breasts and abdomen as his hands wandered up her thighs to the apex.

“I am ready now,” she whimpered.

“Oh I know that,” he said, in a low voice, his finger circling her nub, “But I have no intention of stopping until you are well and truly mad.”

With that, to her horror, he pressed his lips to her center, opening her legs wider and letting his tongue lap over her. She let out a guttural moan and he did it again, his hands on her thighs, gripping them harshly and keeping her steady.

Her nipples were peaked and they craved attention and she tried to tug one of his hands but he held firm. She dug her heel into his back and he let out a groan and looked up at her with fire in his eyes, “Yes, my Queen?”

“Your hands… I need them,” she said desperately.

“Where?,” he asked her.

“My breasts…,” she said, arching her back and presenting them to him. Though they were small he had always seemed entranced by them anyway.

“Touch yourself,” he said unhelpfully, his mouth returning to her.

“M-myself?,,” she asked in confusion. He nodded against her, and she looked down at him until his eyes wandered back up to hers. There was curiosity in them and so much desire. “Would you like that?”
In answer he flicked his tongue against her nub and she cried out.

She tried to think of what he would do, and she took a breast in each hand, massaging them gently. His eyes were on her as he continued his attentions and she moaned for him, the sensations overwhelming. She pulled upon her nipples and his ministrations turned vicious and she was crying out as two orgasms overtook her in quick succession.

“Please, please, please,” she cried, tears running down her face, “Please, please.”

“Shhh, shhh,” he said as he crawled up her body, “Our hosts will think I am torturing you.”

“You are,” she protested, wrapping her legs around him stubbornly and taking his cock in her hand. He groaned as she brought him against her folds, “Have mercy, please.”

He shoved inside of her and they cried out together.

“This is not a sin,” he told her as he thrust inside of her, “You are my wife, my Queen, it is your duty to give me an heir.”

“This does not feel like duty,” she said breathlessly.

He groaned and rolled them and she matched the pace he had set, riding him fast.

“There can be joy in duty,” he teased, one hand grasping her waist, the other her breast as she threw her head back and bucked against him.

“And when I have given you an heir, Your Grace,” she said, her hands grasping his strong thighs behind her, exposing herself completely to him, “Will you consider my duty done?”

He sat up, his arm wrapping around her back and his other hand gripping her hair.
“Is that what you fear?,” he asked, a small smile on his face, “That I will tire of you?”

“That is every wife’s fear,” she told him, her pace slowing. “There can be no joy for a wife to a bored husband.”

“I am a lucky man indeed, if that is what you think,” he said, kissing her deeply.

His hand on her waist controlled her movements and he moved her slowly, rocking her on him. He began to thrust into her as well, keeping rhythm with her, until their bodies were working as one.

There was a clarity when they were together like this, when she was surrounded by his smell and his arms and he by her. It had always been so, even when nothing else about them seemed to work, and it had only grown stronger as the words between them seemed more and more to take on the tone of young lovers rather than monarchs.

His hand no longer need to guide her, their bodies moving together effortlessly, but he did not remove it from her, instead it wondered up her back, it’s large area covering so much of her at once, rubbing her and pulling her close at the same time.

She leaned her forehead against his, their noses touching.

She hadn’t realised she’d closed her eyes until he commanded, “Look at me.”

She opened her eyes, looking into his blue that seemed to drink her in. He let out a strangled whimper and she let out one of her own. She felt the warm pressure building where their bodies were joined and her eyes clouded over, holding onto his strong shoulders for support.

“You will give me an heir,” he told her, “And a spare,” he said and let out a groan, “And princesses,” he said and she felt the pressure build, “And when I tire of you it will because Death himself has come for me - and I will beat him back for thinking to part us.”

She came with a silent shudder and he came with a sharp cry, releasing in pulses into her.

Neither moved away from the other and she laid her cheek upon his shoulder, her arms and legs still
wrapped around him. He pressed kisses to her temple and her cheek and she smiled contentedly, the way Ser Pounce always seemed to when he found a beam of sunshine to lay in.

“I do not like it when you will not meet my gaze,” he told her, the softness of his hands telling her that he was not angry with her. “I do not care who knows that we desire one another. Let every grasping Lord who would put his daughter before me in order to supplant you know, and every squire who thinks himself your sweetheart when you grant him a smile know. Someone believing I was indifferent to you put you at risk once before, it will not again.”

“You must stop blaming yourself,” she said, kissing his cheek, “You told me to look him in the eye and know that he was safe,” she said and pulled away from, “Now look upon mine and so you will know that I am.”

His fingers touched her cheeks holding her tenderly as he looked her in the eyes, and then drifted to trail the path of her cheekbone, down to the pronunciation of her lips.

“It is not just that,” he said, and she laid her cheek more solidly against his hand, imploring him to continue. “When we are like that with one another, it makes me fear that we will… go backwards.”

With that he raised up on his knees, his hand wrapping around her back to bring her down to the bed, following her so that he hovered above.

“We shall not go backwards, my King,” she said, her fingers pushing the hair back from his face, and then trailing down his face and arms until she could grasp his hand. She tugged the other as well until he was well and truly on top of her, “We shall only go forward now, you and I. Together.”

He intertwined his fingers with hers, and murmured against her lips, “Together.”

***

They were still miles from the inn where they would spend their evening. As they headed North the castles would grow fewer and farther between so they would make use of the inns that littered the Kingsroad. A few soldiers rode on ahead, different ones each day to alert the innkeepers so that they may make beds ready, others still to set up camp for the army.

“Will you just go?,” he asked her in annoyance.
“By your tone I assume that was not a command so no, I will not,” his wife answered primly, adding humbly, “Your Grace.”

They had been riding side by side for hours. She had hundreds of questions about the land, some of which he knew, others he had to call for the Maester to answer.

They had passed a field of poppies and she told him of a similar one in Dorne where she had brought her sand steed to rest beneath the trees, a respite from the hot summer sun. He could picture her sprawled amongst the flowers, her head against her horse’s belly, reading stories and dreaming of her future with a Dornish prince. The last part would grate him, but as she had been only thirteen when she had returned to the capital, her Dornish prince dead out of love for her, he found he could not hold the boy in disdain. It was only for his bravery and Lord Arys’ quickness that she was alive at all. She had not lied when she told him she had made her home underneath the henchmen’s blade, the story of her escape had reached him all the way at the Twins.

The day had grown darker and the wind harsher, but still his stubborn wife would not make use of the litter. Her cheeks were pink, and he knew that not even her warm fur trimmed gown would do enough to keep her soft skin from chapping.

“Must I command you for you to listen to me?,“ he asked, not being able to keep the teasing lilt from his voice. She beckoned it from him, it was irritating.

“I am listening to you now,” she pointed out, “Which is how I know it was not a command.”

She was so much better at these games than him. It did not grate him as it once did.

“Besides,” she went on, “Was it not you who wanted us to move forward together?”

“I did not mean that literally,” he said with a chuckle.

She smiled at him ruefully but turned serious and said, “Even still. I would be with you, if you will allow it.”

“Of course I will allow it,” he said with a sigh, “But you freezing, that is not something I can allow.”
With that he took hold of her horses reigns, pulling on them gently as he did his own. The horses slowed into a walk and he pulled hers closer to his. He was the same sand steed that Myrcella had been given in Dorne, and though the climate was much changed the proud and beautiful horse showed no signs of being deterred. He was loyal too, he had seen it himself in the way he whinnied when she neared or the way he puffed out his chest when someone approached. Which was why Robb did not hesitate to drop the reigns and in the same motion pick his wife up out of the saddle and draw her in front of him.

“Robb!,” she protested, letting out a surprised laugh.

He felt warmth deep in his body hearing his name upon her lips, he could almost pretend to be any other young man out on a ride with his sweetheart.

“If you insist upon being out here, then I have no choice but to keep you warm,” he murmured in her ear.

He knew that he sounded like a lovesick fool but he didn’t care as she pressed her cold cheek to his, leaning her back against him.

“Do you think we are hurting him?,” she asked, leaning down to rub his horse’s neck.

“No,” he told her honestly, “He is a powerful beast,” he said and pulled her back against him, whispering in her ear, “Should I show you what he can do?”

She nodded and he held her waist tight, nudging his heels into his horse’s sides. His powerful warhorse took off immediately, bypassing trotting all together and going into a canter. He turned to look behind him and saw her sand steed trailing them faithfully, their people following further behind.

He tightened his grip on her and said, “Shall we show them how brave their Queen is?”

She nodded her head vehemently and he nudged his heels into his horse once again and he accelerated into a gallop. Her back was flush against his chest, and she leaned her head back until it rested upon his shoulder. He saw that her eyes were closed, her lips spread in a smile and he could not help but press a kiss to her cold, exposed throat.
“It is bravery or foolishness now that causes you not to hold on?,” he asked her.

She let out a laugh, “It is neither bravery nor foolishness, something simpler still: faith.”

“In the gods?,” he asked.

“In you.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay so I PROMISE not to make every chapter from now on a sappy one, but I felt like they deserved some smut and sweetness after their scare.
The Queen in the North

Chapter Summary

Ahh I've been away from this one for far too long.

The days grew shorter as they travelled further North. At every castle her wardrobe had grown, being gifted with warm furs and soft wool for gowns.

Robb too, always seemed to find something to give her. There was the winter rose he presented to her like an offering to the gods. He’d blushed when she told him it matched his eyes and she couldn’t resist teasing him for it. There were more practical gifts too, like the beautiful but warm calfskin gloves he’d had made for her.

They were at New Castle now in White Harbor and Robb had warned her that they would not see another castle until Winterfell, so she had taken advantage and had accepted a bath as soon as they’d arrived. Lady Manderly had supervised the servants herself, and brought in oils from her own collection.

“Thank you, Lady Manderly,” she smiled at the older woman, “Would one of those happen to be lavender by any chance?”

Lady Manderly looked in the basket and pulled one out, taking off its cap and smelling it. She smiled and handed it to her.

“Is it a favorite scent of yours, Your Grace?,” she asked.

“And the King’s,” Myrcella added.

Her cheeks turned scarlet, she was in uncharted territory, having never been a wife before. She had heard that there were secrets between a husband and wife, secrets that no one should ever know, and she was not sure if she had just given away one.

Lady Manderly looked over her face and smiled sadly, “You are a wise wife, Your Grace, to make such efforts. I should have done as much when I was your age.”
“Lord Manderly spoke very fondly of you, on the journey North,” she told her.

The man had not been effusive in any way, but there was a tenderness in his voice when he spoke of his wife. She had road next to him a time or two and he had told her that Lady Manderly was a fine woman and a good mother, and that he was looking forward to her company. He had gone ahead of the rest of the party once they crossed into the North and had been home for a couple of weeks now.

“Yes, war has a way of making men speak fondly of the things they leave behind,” Lady Manderly nodded, “Even still, my Lord has never once looked at me the way the King looked at you.”

Myrcella blushed deeper, thinking of the moment she knew Lady Manderly would be referring to.

They had come into the courtyard of the castle and Lord Arys had dismounted and stepped forward to help her do the same. Robb had been too quick for him though and came to her side.

“Here my Queen,” he said, offering her his hands.

When she gave hers to him he placed them on his shoulders and pulled her from the saddle. She was pressed between him and the horse as she slid down and he made no move to step away.

“Thank you, Your Grace,” she said when her feet touched the ground, looking up into his heat filled blue eyes.

“Our hosts have been gracious enough to grant us each a bedchamber while we are here,” he informed her.

“That is very kind of them…,” she suggested, her eyes downcast. “But there must be many in want of a featherbed…”

“Shall I tell them to offer your chamber to someone else?,” he asked her in a low voice.

“If it please you, Your Grace. After all…,” she teased, looking up at him, “I do so want to be
pleasing to you.”

He looked as though he might say something but he raised his hand to her cheek. In spite of being very careful with her warmth, he never seemed bothered by the cold even as they headed farther and farther north. She was surprised to find it warm, though she shouldn’t have been.

“You please me,” he said softly.

Though she had been teasing him, it warmed her all the same. She knew they had grown closer, that he desired her and that he was even growing fond of her, but even still when she thought of the very early days she could not help but be grateful for any sign he gave her.

“Of course,” Lady Manderly went on with a smile, “I never looked like you.”

Myrcella thanked the older woman who took her leave and she undressed. She poured some of the oil into the steaming bath and climbed in, all but moaning as she did. Her body was more used to the saddle now than it ever had been, and she had been given a special undergarment by Lady Reed that stopped her thighs from chapping, but even still she felt her muscles uncoiling.

The warmth, as well, was welcome and she washed her hair and her body quickly but made no move to leave.

“Myrcella, is that you?,” a voice said from behind her as the door closed, “Or has a water goddess been brought to me instead?”

“If I were a goddess,” she told him, “Then you would be here for my pleasure and not the other way around.”

She heard him chuckle and take off his boots. She turned in the tub and rested her arms on its rim, her chin upon her arms.

He sat in one of the chairs by the fire. Grey Wind had come in with him and rested at his master’s feet. She had not spent much time with the wolf, but she had been surprised to learn that when she lay unconscious, fighting the poison, it had been he that guarded her body while Robb and Lord Arys pursued the criminal. She did not fear him, the way the others did, especially now when he curled up like Ser Pounce might and let out a contented sigh.
“Are you tired, my king?,” she wondered.

“A bit,” he admitted, “I have not been sleeping much these past few nights.”

Her brow furrowed as she thought about it. He had not come to her in a few nights, claiming that she would be tired from the long days of riding and that he had matters to discuss with his men.

“I’m sorry to hear it, husband, perhaps I can speak with the maester and see if he has some essence of nightshade,” she suggested.

In truth, she had been meaning to speak with the maester anyway. She was unaccustomed to the northern food and had grown sick a few times in the past week. She had not wanted to slow progress but had taken Robb up on his offer on the litter more in recent days.

“I do not like potions,” he said stubbornly.

She bit the inside of her cheek to keep from reminding him that he had used a potion every night for a week when her legs had been marred from the saddle. That he had not seemed to mind them then, commenting each night on the strength of the balm.

“Of course, Your Grace,” she nodded, turning back around and lowering her head into the water once again.

She lifted her head out and stood up. She let the water fall off of her in droplets and she wrung her hair, letting as much moisture leave it as possible.

She felt a warm sheet wrapping around her from behind, swaddling her, and suddenly she was being picked up out of the tub and set down on the planks of the floor.

“Thank you, Robb,” she smiled up at him.

“Better,” he nodded, pulling her hair out from the sheet and tugging the sheet more firmly around
her, “In here, I prefer my name upon your lips.”

He had said as much before, but courtesy was a hard habit to break. She stood on her tiptoes and wrapped her arms around his neck.

“If you ever wish to hear your name upon my lips, you know exactly how to beckon it,” she murmured.

She had grown more confident as well. Her desire never seemed to make him think less of her, and instead it stoked his own.

His strong hands wandered down her back, scrunching the sheet in them.

“My queen,” he murmured against her lips, “My perfect little queen. You could tempt a dead man, but I have some matters to attend to before supper.”

“A dead man,” she smiled, stroking his cheek, “But not a good king. Go attend to these matters, my great, big king.”

He touched his lips to hers, and even though he had great matters to attend to, both of them seemed to forget about the sheet around her and let it drop.

“The men will still be settling in,” he told her, and her fingers were already undoing the ties of his doublet.

He pulled it off of himself and she was pleased to see that he was wearing one of her small shirts. It was the first one she had made for him, with the Stark direwolves and the Tully fish and soon it was on the floor.

He picked her up, cradling her and brought her over to the bed. Sometimes he would toss her on it, but now he lowered her gently, his lips never leaving hers.

“I will get you all dirty,” he warned her.
“I don’t care,” she told him honestly.

Her hands wandered the hard muscles of his back, down to his trousers. She began to push them down as he settled between her legs.

He kissed under her ear and she felt him smile against her skin.

“You have taken my order far too seriously, Myrcella,” he reprimanded her softly.

“I meant what I said,” she whimpered as his thumb found her nipple and he sucked blooms upon her neck, “I want to please you.”

He pulled away from her and stroked her cheek. His blue eyes softened at the corners and he pressed a soft kiss to her lips.

“And I meant what I said, you do please me. More than you know, more than I ever thought possible,” he said, kissing her again. “But right now, you are not my obedient wife, you are my water goddess… and it is my holy purpose to please you…”

With that he started kissing down her body. She knew what was coming and she was wantonly eager for it. He never failed to make her crumble but there was something so intimate about his tongue against her most secret part.

He sucked on one of her nipple and she cried out. He looked up at her in surprise before doing it again. She was dripping for him now, she knew he’d comment on it and she didn’t care. She no longer feared that this was a sin, that only whores took pleasure in the bed. *Only happy wives take pleasure in the bed,* she thought instead.

He was nipping at her belly button when there was a knock on the door.

“What is it?,” Robb called out harshly.
“My apologies, Your Graces,” they heard a voice all but shouting, “There’s been a raven, from Castle Black.”

Robb sighed, pressing his face against her stomach. She stroked his curls and whispered, “Go, my King. There will be time later for prayer.”

He let out a surprised chuckle and kissed her stomach before getting up. He went and opened the door a crack and accepted the scroll.

She got out of bed and grabbed her light purple robe and went to draw it around herself.

“Wait,” he commanded. She looked over at him in surprise and he crossed to her. He placed one hand upon her breast and she bit her lip to keep from crying out. “You’ve become more of a woman these past months.”

“You have had something to do with that,” she pointed out.

He smiled at her, but it didn’t reach his eyes, and he drew the robe around her, tying it for her.

“What news from the wall?,” she glanced at the scroll in his hands.

“My mother always said, dark wings, dark words,” he sighed as he broke the seal.

He read it once, and then twice, and then a third time.

_Mothers always know._

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“My lords,” he said, using the kingly voice that still felt false even now after all this time. “I’ve had a raven from Castle Black.”
There was an appropriate amount of apprehension at those words. Northmen valued the wall and the Night’s Watch in a way that the southerners never could. It was not southern farmlands that were raided when wildlings got through. It was not southern women who were raped or southern children who were murdered - and eaten, if some of the stories were true.

Even still, Northern lords did not hear from the Wall when all was fine.

“My brother, Jon Snow, has been named Lord Commander,” he said, and despite everything, could not hide his pride in that. He still remembered the day that Jon had left for the wall. He had been all steely resolve, swearing to protect him as he sat by the fires of Winterfell. “But he has seen many things beyond the wall, and they have lost many men. At Castle Black there remain only fifty fighting men. Not nearly enough for summer, and certainly not enough for winter. He needs more men, and supplies.”

He did not tell them everything that the scroll contained. He would be laughed out of the hall if he did. It was impossible - utterly impossible. Even still, there was no man alive that he trusted more than Jon Snow.

“Our men have too long been at war already, Your Grace,” Lord Umber guffawed, “And now you ask us to march them North, to give up their families and their freedom and take the black?”

“It’s unfair, I know,” he nodded, “But sacrifices will have to be made if we want to survive this winter.”

“Sacrifices?,” Lord Glover, Sansa’s good-father, sighed, “You’re askin’ them to give up their lives. Again.”

There were murmurs of agreement and then they all stopped suddenly as Myrcella walked into the room.

She wore the dark blue dress that he loved with the fur trim, her hair down in the simple northern styles that she’d adopted ever since they left her brother’s capital.

“Forgive me, Your Grace, my lords,” she said with a curtsey, “I had not meant to interrupt. I will leave you to your discussions.”
“Stay,” he ordered, to his surprise.

She already knew what the scroll had contained. He had not hidden the worst from her, in his shock he had asked her to read it, which she had done without question.

She had her mother’s poise and her grandfather’s pragmatism as she read it, the color draining from her cheeks was the only sign that she was afraid.

“Your Grace, these are northern matters…,” Lord Umber said.

A hot rage curdled in his stomach as he turned back to him, “Aye and she is the north’s Queen. This concerns her as much as any man in this room.”

Myrcella came to his side and Lord Glover brought a chair for her. She thanked him graciously and took her seat beside him.

“My Lords,” he continued, “I know what I’m asking. After everything our men have been through, I wouldn’t ask if I didn’t think it was necessary. But this isn’t like when we marched south, this isn’t about avenging my family, this is about protecting their own. My father always used to say that in winter we must protect ourselves - look after one another.”

There was more murmuring, though he could tell this was not in agreement.

“My lords,” Myrcella said. She had never addressed them as a group and he was surprised that her voice did not shake. It was soft, but all the men turned to listen. “When my Uncle Tyrion returned from the wall, he noted how under provisioned it was. He made it his mission to clear the prisons of King’s Landing and send men north, to fight. But then the wars came.”

“Wars started by your family,” one man shouted from the back.

“Wars started by my family,” Myrcella agreed, “And all the fighting men took up for Lannister or Stark or Baratheon or Greyjoy. All the men fought against one another instead of for one another. And during autumn, when we all should have been provisioning for the hard winter ahead, this country bled, fields of food were trampled, and we grew further divided when we should have been banding together. When the real cold comes it won’t matter which banner anyone road under, it doesn’t matter who was right and who was wrong. Death does not care to make the distinction
between good and evil, it will come for us all if we don’t have the courage to defy it.”

The room was silent, all the men glancing at one another. He knew it would not sit well with any of them to be reprimanded by a girl of eighteen, a southern princess as so many of them still thought of her, especially when she was right.

“It is an easy enough thing to say,” Lord Karstark said, “When it is not your men who’ll be doing the fighting.”

“She is your Queen,” he growled.

He felt her hand on his arm, cautioning him, and he settled back in his seat.

“My Lords,” she said again, “It is my most sincere wish that there will come a day when you understand that though the north has no love for me, that I have great love for it. This is my husband’s home and if the gods are kind, it will be our children’s home before too long. This is my home, now, and though I cannot pick up a spear - I will always fight for it. My marriage to your king has done more than put an end to the fighting, it has created an alliance. An alliance that may be distasteful to you all but nevertheless will help us in the fight to come. I have already sent a raven south, to my brother, King Tommen. I have asked that he sends fifty fighting men from every castle in the south, a hundred from the Red Keep. The wall does not just protect the north, it protects each of the Seven Kingdoms and it is high time that each of the Seven Kingdoms do their part to protect it. The time of the south reaping the benefits of the north’s sacrifice is over. If they want peace, then they will contribute to it, and if not, my lords, I swear to you, that when the snows melt we will march south once again and show them what it means to betray us. I swear to you, by the old gods and the new that they will know once and for all that the North remembers.”

The sound of metal sliding was the only sound as Lord Glover stepped forward.

He knelt before her and bowed his head, “My Queen.”

Lord Umber came forward next and knelt as well, “The Queen in the North!”

He remembered a night, so different from this one, when the cries of his northern brothers cut through the military encampment. When the shouts of The King in the North reverberated through the fields, when it all felt to so possible.
He remembered the pride that had coursed through his veins upon hearing it and it was with surprise that that pride felt dull now in comparison to what he felt as they all shouted *The Queen in the North*.

“The Queen in the North,” he murmured.
And what of your daughter's life, is that a precious thing to you?

He walked into the chambers that he and Myrcella had been sharing at New Castle. The whole castle was alight with activity, as the royal train, and army, was moving onwards today.

It was the last castle they would see before Winterfell and they were arming themselves with provisions in case the inns had fared worse than they thought. He could not say that he would miss New Castle, he was tired of being a guest in other people’s homes, but he knew that they were all leaving a far superior place than they would rest that evening.

He found Myrcella standing by the window, Grey Wind sitting beside her. His wolf nuzzled his snout against her hip and she scratched his head absentmindedly as she looked out across the land.

His wife had never been afraid of the beast, but as Grey Wind was so often at his side, it was not until recent weeks that he was at hers as well. It had been him who guarded her while she lay unconscious, fighting the poison, and whether it was Robb’s shift in demeanour towards her or his own, he had been far more mindful of her since.

For her part, he had seen her sneaking bacon to him, as Sansa used to do with Lady. She’d blushed when he’d caught her but he’d simply looked away, leaving them to their secrets.

He had not happened upon them like this though before and the sight of the proud beast of the north and the royal daughter of the south affected him more than he thought it might.

Grey Wind ignored his arrival, though he’d definitely sensed him, and nudged his snout into Myrcella’s hand. She scratched underneath his chin, looking down at him with a small smile as he let out a woodsy hum that Robb could hear from the doorway.

“You will spoil him,” he warned.

She turned at the sound of his voice and her hair caught in the grey morning light, making it shine in a hundred different shades of gold. She smiled now, when she saw him, and it was not the placid, courtly smile he had always hated, but the real one that had to be earned.

“He is royalty, oughtn’t he be spoiled?,” she challenged.
“Royalty? Shall we fashion him a crown?,” he wondered.

“Perhaps one made of bones, though he might prefer to chew on it, wouldn’t you, you handsome fellow?,” she asked, scratching Grey Wind under his chin again.

He could not help but smile at the pair of them, and he found that he had no desire to resist smiling around her anymore. She was clever and brave and kind. So beautiful it threatened reason itself.

In truth, he found her wholly enchanting.

He was not the only one who found her so either. It was not just at the orphanage that people called her **Good Queen Ella**, the title had followed her north and now the Kingsroad was lined with well wishers to them both, little girls and boys who wanted to catch a glimpse of him and his young queen.

“Will you ride with me this morning?,” he requested, “There’s thought to be a storm coming this afternoon - I might be hopping in the litter along with you.”

She giggled at that and told him graciously, “You are always welcome in the litter, you know that, even if you are too big for it….” She placed her hands behind back, which always made her look younger, as though she were crossing her fingers as she agreed to something she had no intention of doing, but she said, “I am sorry though, Your Grace, I cannot ride with you this morning.”

“Oh?,” he wondered, only slightly surprised at the disappointment he felt.

He was curious too, she never refused him anything.

“I…,” she started, looking down as though trying to find the words. She let out a small sigh and looked up at him, the placid mask on her face, which frightened him a little. Her posture changed as well, and she looked once again more like a princess of the Iron Throne than the Queen in the North. She spoke with conviction when she told him, “I will be utilising the litter for the rest of our journey north, Your Grace. I have been ordered to do so.”

He balked at that. No one could order her to do anything except for him.
“Who dared order my perfect little Queen to do anything?,” he teased, stepping forward, desperate to rid her of her courtesies once again until she was his smiling golden girl, “Tell me and their head shall rest on a spike before the day is done.”

She looked at him in horror and then let out a surprised burst of laughter.

“Well now I can’t tell you, I will not have the murder of an innocent on my conscience,” she evaded stubbornly, lifting her chin high, only the smallest of smirks resting on her lips.

*There she is.*

“I have ways of making you confess,” he warned as he stalked towards her.

“You would torture your wife?,” she asked him coyly, stepping backwards, “You are a cruel king indeed.”

She had so little distance to go back to and his large strides were equal to at least twice of her own and so he caught her easily, pressing her gently to the window. The glass was cool under his finger tips but her slight body was warm against his and he would risk frostbite for her to keep looking up at him the way she was.

“Terrible,” he agreed, pressing a kiss to her neck, “Abhorrent,” he offered, nuzzling against her hair. He went to kiss her lips but she turned away from him, grinning when he pressed a kiss to her cheek instead, “Ah but it is you who are cruel, denying me.”

“Deny you?,” she asked, her voice low with desire, “Never my lo- never my great, big, powerful, terrible,” she pulled him to her and pressed a kiss to his lips, “Abhorent,” she kissed him again, “Cruel… King.”

“So many titles,” he sighed, as though it were a great burden. He pulled her more firmly against him, running his hands over the soft velvet of her gown. “Too many. None of which are my favourite.”

She wrapped her arms around his neck and stood on her tiptoes, “Husband,” she murmured against his lips. She moved her head back and looked at him quizzically, “Have I found it?”
“Clever girl,” he murmured against hers before kissing her deeply.

“Do you think that there is any title that might supplant it?,” she asked him curiously when they parted, still holding onto one another.

“Hmm?,” he asked lazily, his eyes closed and his lips against her warm temple.

“It was the maester,” she told him. His eyes opened and his heart started beating wildly, “Who ordered me to use the litter. He would not do so lightly, it is just that I may have the heir to the Winter Throne in my belly.”

He felt his heart near to bursting but he pulled away from her, lifting her chin so that her gaze would meet his.

“May?,” he wanted to clarify.

“Well we do not know if the babe will be a boy or girl,” she explained softly, her eyes wide.

“But there is a babe?,” he pressed, “You are carrying our child?”

She nodded and he grabbed her face and kissed her again.

He hadn’t realised how much he wanted his suspicions to be right until she confirmed them. He had noticed some changes in her body. Though still impossibly slender he had thought her breasts had grown fuller, her hips ever so subtly wider.

You’ve become more of a woman these past months.

You have had something to do with that.

“Good Queen Ella,” he murmured, his forehead resting against hers. “They will drink toasts to you
from Last Hearth to Acorn Hall.”

“But what if…,” she started and then trailed off. He looked into her eyes, silently asking her to continue. Her voice was softer still when she went on, “What if it is not a boy?”

No amount of tenderness between a man and wife can steal away a Queen’s worry.

“Then the North will welcome its princess with open arms,” he told her honestly. He stroked his finger down her soft cheek, “And all I hope is that she is happy, and healthy, and that she has all of her mother’s goodness, and some of her strength, and a bit of her beauty.”

There were tears pooling in her beautiful green eyes and he kissed her forehead, wrapping her in his arms. She lay her cheek against his chest and her slender arms came around him, and he could not help but smile because their child was between them, gods willing growing strong and healthy. Whether it was a boy or girl it mattered not to him, truly. They were young, there was time enough for heirs and spares and all the rest, and though he’d like a little boy of his own, when he closed his eyes he saw a beautiful little girl who looked just like like his wife.

“They will sing songs of her,” he promised, stroking her soft hair, “The beautiful northern princess with kindness in her bones and sunlight in her hair.”

“And you will love her.”

She didn’t ask it as a question, she said it like it was the truest thing she’d ever said, like it was something etched in her bones.

“And I will love her,” he answered anyway, “Because before I am her king, I will always be her father - and no Stark man has ever loved anyone the way he loved his daughters.”

Father, yes that might just supplant husband as my favourite title.

It would have been the right time to tell her what he’d been thinking for a while. That he was starting to think he might just love her. That he had long been ashamed of how miserable he had been at the prospect of this match but he had now begun to think that the gods could not have planned a better one for him.
“Then she will be the luckiest princess that has ever lived,” she said softly, tightening her grip on him, “But for now I hold that honor.”
A Doting Wife

Chapter Summary

helloooo it's meeeeee

sorry, I know it's been a minute. This is just a short one to get me back into things, hope

to update more this week/weekend.

Thanks for all your kind words and patience

Even after being home for a week, he couldn’t quite believe that he was here. He had been gone for
so many years, he was surprised to see it largely unchanged. The stable boys had grown up and the
bakers had new children, but on the whole, his home had somehow come out of the wars unscathed.

If only his family had.

*If the Old Gods are just, Winterfell will survive this new war, too.*

He knew that it would be the worst by far. His brother Jon was not prone to grand declarations, and
was one of the bravest men he’d ever known, yet Robb could feel the fear in his words.


It was as though he had been reading one of Old Nan’s bedtime stories. He had read it once, then
twice, and then again. He had handed the scroll to Myrcella and watched her read it.

A part of him had hoped that she’d laugh, but she was a Princess born and a Queen made, and this
was a threat to their country. To their people. And now, to their child.

He had told his brothers when he’d arrived. They had grown in the time he was gone, and though he
held them close and ruffled their hair, he knew that their childhoods had been stolen, just as his had,
and Sansa’s. Arya’s too, wherever she was. Jon’s most of all probably.

In spite of it all, he was glad to be home. He had missed Bran and Rickon terribly, and he had felt a
lump in his throat as he gazed at them, seeing the years splayed across their young faces.

Bran was much changed, still as somber as the quiet boy he’d left after his accident. Gone was the boy who used to climb towers and wanted to be a knight. He had a Lord’s disposition though, and Robb noted with pride how much everyone in the castle respected him.

Rickon, for his part, had grown too. Though Bran was his older brother, Rickon had trained since the moment Robb left, determined to protect Bran should the need arise. Thankfully so far it hadn’t.

With him though, he was still just a younger brother, and had been his constant shadow these past days. He followed him to the stables and the armoury, to the glass gardens and sat at his side at council meetings, his wolf Shaggydog prowling back and forth behind them.

He was on his own now though and his feet dragged with every step. All too soon he ended up outside the door he’d been dreading coming to all day. He knocked on it with as much strength as he could muster.

“Come in,” he heard.

He entered and found his wife sitting as her handmaid brushed her hair.

“Your Grace,” her handmaid said, bobbing into a curtsy. Minna was no longer prone to nervous chatter when he arrived, she was far too used to his presence by now. Even still, her loyalty was all to Myrcella, so she asked his wife, “Shall I finish?”

“No, thank you,” Myrcella said and Minna left without another word.

He closed the door behind her and Myrcella turned to look at him. She was wearing that dusky purple robe of hers that he liked. As he promised, he had given her the warmest chambers in the castle, and as she promised, she wore the robe for him.

He took off his cloak and hung it on a rack by the fire so that it would dry.

“I did not think they’d ever let you leave,” she teased.
A smile appeared on his face in spite of himself. She had a talent for beckoning it, unlike the fools they had down south she never worked too hard for it. It came when she entered a room and her eyes found his, when she whispered an inappropriate comment in his ear during a feast, when she teased him, proving that she was finally comfortable in his presence.

“Nor did I,” he agreed and he sat down in one of the chairs facing the fire so that he could take off his boots.

Instead he leaned his head back against it and sighed.

They’d had a dinner. All of the Northern lords that had remained with him had been in jovial moods, glad to be home once again as he was. It had been rowdy, and though they had already begun rationing food in preparation for winter, they had not taken the same approach with the ale and wine.

Myrcella had excused herself only half an hour before. She was a good sport, but he knew she did not care for overt displays of drunkenness. Not after being raised in her father’s court.

She got up from where she had been sitting at her mirror and knelt down in front of him. She picked up one foot and removed the boot, and then the other. She removed the wool socks he’d been wearing as well and stood up once again and placed them by the fire.

She went to her wash basin and dipped a cloth into it and came back and knelt down, picking up his foot and rubbing it with the warm, wet cloth. Her hands kneaded at his heels and the pads of his feet and he moaned.

“I have servants for this,” he said though.

She smiled and shook her head, “This is a wife’s business. Besides, I’d rather you be here with me.”

“Shouldn’t I be rubbing your feet?,” he asked in the cadence he had found he often used with her now. It was little more than a murmur.

“Don’t think you won’t,” she grinned, “When my belly is round I intend on being very demanding.”
He chuckled, though he didn’t quite believe her. He quite liked the idea of fetching her things from the kitchens though, and he certainly liked the idea of her round belly.

She worked his feet deftly and he leaned his head back against the chair, relishing in his only quiet moment of the day. His wife had a calmness that soothed him in times such as this, and she seemed to understand when he did not want to share the burdens of his seat and rather preferred to escape them.

All he heard was the crackling of the fire and the whipping of the wind outside, and after a little while, her soft humming.

She had not played the harp once since the attempt on her life, he had seen it unloaded along with the rest of her things but it had stayed hidden. He sorely wished to hear the music again but he would not push her. They would need someone to restring the instrument for her as well, and he was not aware of anyone in town who did so. So he contented himself in her lilting hum. He recognised the tune but could not say from where.

She stood up and placed the rag next to the fire as well and rinsed her hands in the basin before returning to him. He opened his legs so that she might stand between them, his hand moving to her still flat abdomen, splaying his hand wide across it.

She reached her small, soft hand out and stroked his cheek, “You have been burning the candle at both ends since we’ve arrived.”

“Aye,” he nodded. He would not deny it. His work as a king was never done, but there seemed to be so much more to do here. So many more people to see. Preparations to be made. And on top of it all, his people needed to be reassured. It had left him no time for her, unlike on the road when they had hours together each day. He kissed her palm. “I’ve neglected you.”

“Hardly that,” and placed her hands on his shoulders and sat on one of his legs, “But if you were going to make it up to me…”

He chuckled and pulled her face to his and kissed her softly. She stroked her hands gently through his hair and all he wanted was stay in the safety of the warmest room in the castle, in the arms of his doting wife. He remembered though why he had been dreading coming here, so he stopped the kiss long before he wanted to. He wrapped his arms around her and leaned his forehead against hers.
“There’s something I need to tell you,” he said with a heavy heart.

“No,” she shook her head, “There isn’t.”

“Unfortunately evasion won’t work,” he lamented.

She stroked his cheek once again and said, “You don’t have to tell me, because I already know. You’re going… North.”

She was too clever for him by half. He had shared his plans with no one, not even his generals. Not even his brothers.

“How did you know?,” he asked in bewilderment.

She smiled sadly and shrugged, “Because you are an honourable man, and a good King, you would never ask your people to face a foe that you yourself would not.”

She was right, he would not ask his people to do that. Even still, it was not the whole story.

“My brother is there,” he reminded her, “Jon, he’ll… well you don’t know him, but he isn’t the sort to hang back. He’ll be on the front lines.”

He would not abandon him to such a fate. It was one thing when he thought he’d merely be battling wildlings, but White Walkers were something different entirely.

“And you’ll be there, by his side,” she said stoically.

“Are you angry with me?,” he wondered.

He was abandoning her in a new place while she was pregnant to go off and fight in another man’s war. Just like his father had done to his mother.
He only prayed that he would return with Jon, just like his father had.

“Being angry with you for being brave and noble would be like being angry at the sun for rising. Futile and foolish,” she said in her intoxicating mixture of sweetness and pragmatism. “But,” she went on with a sad smile, “I will miss you, and worry for you, and pray for you, every moment that you are parted from me.”

He pulled her to him once again and kissed her. This time it was not quick, he took his time with her, trying to commit it all to memory. Her subtle weight against him and the smell of lavender, the feel of her damp clean hair in his grasp and the way her breath hitched when he sucked on her bottom lip.

The truth was, he did not want to leave her. When he’d last been at war, he had entered every battle knowing that his family depended on his survival, that his home depended on it, that the North depended on it. Now though, he felt something different. He needed to return as the head of his family, as a Stark, as a King, but he wanted to return as a man. To her.

“Myrcella…I…,” he started, unsure of how to tell her the thing he’d been thinking, feeling, for so long now. “There’s something that I want to tell you, that I should have told you…there’s.”

“Tell me when you return to me,” she pleaded, with tears in her eyes, “Don’t tell me anything now because you are afraid that you won’t have the chance later. Tell me when you return, because you will,” she nodded bravely, the tears falling down her cheeks, “You are my King, Robb Stark, and my husband, and the father of this little life growing inside of me. And you will return to us, to me. Is that clear?”

“Yes,” he choked out, standing up and carrying her with him to the bed.

He took her slowly, savouring every moment of it, of her. And afterwards, once she was satiated and exhausted, he stroked her hair as she fell asleep, her cheek resting on his heart.

And it was only then that he whispered I love you, in case he did not get the chance to do so again.